ON JOANNE KESELMAN’S FIRST DAY ON CAMPUS, a member of the University of Manitoba’s boisterous engineering band scooped her up, tucked her under his arm and carried her around while he sang. She was just a student then, trying to find her way from Tier Building to St. John’s College.

“Needless to say, I was late for my class,” Keselman jokes.

Fast-forward nearly five decades and Keselman is about to step down as the university’s Provost & Vice-President (Academic). TeachingLIFE asked the long-time academic administrator and psychology professor to reflect on the evolving education experience.

How has teaching changed at the U of M?
When I first started as a professor [in 1978], teaching was very trial-by-fire. You had your courses that were assigned to you and you hopefully learned by doing. Today, we have the Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning. It’s a multi-faceted support area for all instructors who want to improve their skills and incorporate active learning into their teaching. I am also very pleased that during my term as Provost I have been able to support the introduction of a multi-year teaching and learning certificate program available for untenured faculty members who want to learn about teaching and the construction of courses. The program is in its pilot phase now but we hope to eventually have it available to all faculty members before they come up for tenure.

The diversity of our student body is also something that we pay more attention to in our teaching and curriculum development. We have more international students, more mature students, more Indigenous students as well as students with disabilities who require accommodations. We want to ensure that we retain these students and enhance their learning experiences.

What role has technology played?
Technology has gone through a substantial change since I started on campus. How students connect with their studies has changed with the creation of Facebook and other social media tools. Most of the instruction back when I was a student was all face-to-face, in the classroom, and mostly lecture-style. Now, we have courses offered fully online and a blend of both. This provides more flexibility for students whether they take them at a distance or not.

What will teaching and learning look like in another 30 years?
I predict there will be big changes—perhaps injected by technology—especially when you think of how far it has come in the past 30 years. I suspect it will change significantly and that some things will remain the same. Yet there is still strong evidence to suggest that no matter what happens, the student-professor relationship remains critical. When I talk with students, what they really remember the most are some of the moments they’ve had with their professors—some of which may have been life-changing. I’m pretty sure that technology will never be able to replace that impact.

What will you miss most when you step down in June?
The people. The greatest thing about being in this role is all the wonderful people you get to interact with. I’ve had a chance to get to know a lot of individuals and the work they do—I think they’re first-rate. It will be a big change not to walk into the Administration Building on July 1.
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TeachingLIFE

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Member of the University Research Magazine Association: www.urma.org

ISSN 2368-318X
When Mark Torchia was trying to develop a device that could do the impossible—operate on an inoperable brain tumour—he was challenged again and again by fellow experts and grant review panels. Unfazed, the U of M scientist headed back to the lab, making his first prototype out of bits and pieces (even a cassette tape). Today, neurosurgeons use NeuroBlate in more than 35 hospitals across North America, giving new hope to some of the 100,000 patients diagnosed with malignant brain tumours. Last year, Torchia (who is also executive director of the university’s Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning) and collaborator Richard Tyc, an alumnus and engineer, received the prestigious Ernest C. Manning Foundation Principle Award.

And I’ve learned it’s important to share more than just research successes. The negative outcomes are particularly fascinating to students and generate considerable discussion. Maybe we need to open this door more often. Because when we do, students often open up about their own struggles in learning. Suddenly, we’re connected on another level and I seem more like a person to them and less like a knowledge transmitter.

As researchers, we spend a considerable amount of time creating and submitting grant applications. SSHRC, CIHR, NSERC deadlines—who needs them marked in a calendar? They’re seared into memory. Why not turn this frustration into an active learning opportunity? How about an open grant competition for the class?

One year, with the support of the Heart and Stroke Foundation, I divided my class of
If students believe they can solve or discover or cure then their coursework has greater meaning.

115 students into 10 groups, narrowed the topic down (Primary Prevention of Heart Disease in Manitoba: A Community-Based Approach) and had them work together to create a grant application, complete with a budget and knowledge translation plan. For this final assignment, grades were handed out and a review panel ‘awarded’ three grants. In our reviews, we didn’t focus heavily on research methodology but rather on novelty, engagement, and realistic chances for implementation. I have never seen a class work so hard to ‘win’ the grant. Not only did they enjoy the competition, they learned beyond conventional coursework and better understood what we do as researchers.

For many of us, our path into research comes from our desire to make a difference. If students believe they can solve or discover or cure, then their coursework has greater meaning. It’s difficult for students sitting in a classroom to feel they’re making an impact through their learning. Yet research shows intrinsic motivation is a key factor of student engagement and success. Service-learning opportunities are a great way to empower students and have them learn beyond the class and campus. Experiences like these help students connect what they learn in their textbook or in a lecture or PowerPoint slideshow with the needs of the real world.

Or how about turning your classroom into one of your own research projects? Even a project that could receive funding, produce strong evidence and result in meaningful publications. As teachers, who among us hasn’t asked: “Why are the students not grasping this concept?”, “How can I make this more engaging?”, “Why do students feel so angry about the exam or assignment?”

Turning your classroom into a research environment through action research not only allows you to generate new knowledge and add evidence to your teaching portfolio, but if the design allows, you can also engage students in the research process. They become partners in the inquiry. They’ll experience the ups and downs of research and the excitement of discovery. Best of all—they’ll begin to understand that no one can stop them.
A PATH FORWARD

A NEW WAY FOR STUDENTS TO LEARN ABOUT OUR SHARED HISTORY

BY RUTH SHEAD
Here are 23 red dresses hanging on trees and in the windows at the school where Heather Ragot teaches Grades 9-12. When explaining why, the U of M alumna talks excitedly about how she and another teacher attended the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation's (NCTR) Education Day with some of their students last November. That’s when the NCTR launched its online database on the Residential School System. The students from Ragot’s school were so taken by the event, she says they came back to school and wanted to do some sort of “reconcili-ACTION.”

It was their idea to bring The REDress project, which was started by Métis artist and former U of M student Jaime Black, to St. John’s-Ravenscourt School. The red dresses were hung to draw attention to Canada’s missing and murdered Indigenous women.

The students said it was important to them because learning about the mistreatment of others helps prevent it from happening again.

Ragot is impressed by the depth of conversations that the dresses have sparked, not only between students and staff, but with parents and the community. It’s a far cry from what was taught in schools when she was their age.

“When I was in Grade 9, I took British history,” she says. “Residential Schools? There was never any mention of those.

“It just wasn’t part of any dialogue. My family had a cottage in The Pas. We drove by a Residential School all the time. I asked my parents, ‘What is that school? Why is it out here in the middle of nowhere?’ And they would say, ‘Well that’s Guy [Hill] Residential School.’ That was the only experience I had with Residential Schools.

“It wasn’t until it started to come up in the media when I said, ‘What the heck? This is not something that I know anything about.’ I had no idea about the pain and the hurt and the terror these young children went through.”

It was 25 years ago when then-Grand Chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs Phil Fontaine brought the issue to the public’s attention during an interview with CBC TV. He spoke about the physical and psychological abuse, deprivation, and sexual abuse that he and others experienced at Residential Schools.
He said it was time to “document this collective experience so that we never forget about it and so that others as well will understand what we are talking about. And as well, to undertake a healing process to make our people whole.” During the interview he wondered if enough people would come forward to talk about their experiences at Residential School.

At the time there were still 15 Residential Schools in operation across Canada. Since then, the remainder of the schools closed; the Indian Residential Schools Agreement was signed; the government of Canada delivered an apology to Residential School Survivors; the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada was established; and more than 6,750 statements from Survivors, members of their families, and others affected by Residential Schools were gathered.

RY Moran is the Director of the NCTR, which is located on the U of M campus on Treaty One Territory and the homeland of the Métis nation. The NCTR is the permanent home for all statements, documents and other materials gathered by the TRC. “It is an incredible and invaluable resource for educators or anybody looking to understand the history and impact of Residential Schools,” says Moran.

In January, the NCTR brought together education ministries and teachers from across the country to come up with a five-year blueprint for reconciliation education in Canada. In the meantime, educators are already bringing their students to the Centre.

“We’ve seen that translate into really positive initiatives,” Moran says. “I think certainly at the Education Day events it was a very transformational experience for a lot of the students. They had the opportunity to hear from Survivors first-hand. We went through a variety of youth-oriented and focused activities and exercises that allowed them to choose how they wanted to interact with this history because there’s not one way to interact with it.”

That is a message that Moran emphasizes—that there is no one-size-fits-all lesson on Residential Schools. “I don’t think it’s going to be good for the Centre to create products that we impose upon regions. That’s not a successful model,” he says. “We’re going to be partnering with educators and giving them the tools and information that they need to create amazing curriculum.

“One of the most powerful elements about the database is that they are able to get information now at the local level, which represents the first time in history that that’s been possible.”

The database is a resource that Ragot and her colleague and U of M alumnus Matt Henderson look forward to using in their classes. The
pair team-teach humanities, with Ragot focusing on language arts and English, while Henderson focuses on history and social sciences.

“What we're trying to do on the history side is teaching six historical thinking concepts so that students can generate research questions and strong arguments about history,” says Henderson. “In order to do that you need primary sources. What this database does is that it allows students greater access to the perspective of survivors.

“I think what we're going to do this year with this resource is allow students to explore it and then say ‘Can you develop a historical perspective in order to develop a historical fiction that really explores not only events, but emotions?’”

Ragot agrees that access to those primary sources is key. “Because I'm an English teacher, the way into this issue is through literature, backed up with historical context. How are we going to use this database? In the language arts it might be to do the research and then write in the voice of. Rather than do analytical or argumentative writing, we would do some journal writing.”

The database contains photographs of students working on farms, sewing or doing other types of labour. There are class photos, images of the dining halls and residences. There are also shots of kids playing with dolls, and other recreational events like picnics and parades. There are many photos of the schools and the teaching and administrative staff, along with scanned images of administration records, school histories and death records.

The footage from the TRC public events is available in the database, including thousands of hours of personal testimonies from Survivors and inter-generational Survivors talking about losing their languages, cultures and families; about never having received hugs or love and how that affected their families in the future; and about the physical, emotional and sexual abuse that occurred. Many also talk about the healing process, resiliency, and the path to reconciliation.

Both Ragot and Henderson are hyper-conscious about ensuring that any interaction with the NCTR and its database is done with the utmost respect. “The humanities really are about trying to figure out human existence. Why do we exist on this planet? Part of that is to make sure that we’re empathetic and that we’re able to imagine either presently or historically what it must have been like to live a particular experience,” says Henderson.

“At this point we're being cautious about not overloading students. You still have to prepare them for accessing the stories of people who have been—and this is an understatement—marginalized and oppressed. How do we do this in a responsible and safe way so that our students are able to create coherent histories that are respectful and that are designed to promote reconciliation, as opposed to well, there’s this database here so we might as well use it and here you go kids, good luck.”

“That's very true. It's sort of like teaching students to write obituaries using real obituaries,” adds Ragot. “What I find is that students respond very empathetically to peoples' personal experiences. When you use the history of real people that have suffered, you have to approach it with a fair amount of respect. It's not something we use because we're looking for a lesson plan. There's got to be a greater purpose here. It has to be about reconciliation.”

Both Ragot and Henderson are still teaching themselves how to best navigate the database, absorb the wealth of information that it contains, and determine what is appropriate to incorporate into their lesson plans.

Staff at the NCTR is there for teachers like them who have questions. “We have a 1-800 number and a general request inbox where people can reach us,” says Moran.

He also stresses that the NCTR and its database is intended for education beyond K-12 classrooms. “The information has been collected for the benefit of all Canadians,” he says. “Certainly what can happen at the university level is a much deeper exploration of the history and the context.”

No matter what profession university students are training for—be it psychology, social work, law, education, political science, business, or something else—Moran sees the NCTR as having a vital role in their education. “They need to be deeply aware of the cultural environment that they will be working in with Indigenous people,” he says.

For Moran, this especially rings true for teachers.

“We are teaching teachers at the University of Manitoba. It’s critical that those teachers are equipped with the tools that they need to teach this information because teaching this information and this history is actually hard. Many people that will be teachers actually aren't that familiar with this history and this legacy and it’s incumbent upon us as an institution and upon those young teachers to learn this history and to be comfortable in the discomfort of teaching it.”
ASKEL GREENFIELD, an archaeologist fascinated with ancient history, has a captivating history of his own. With a Jewish rabbi and U.S. air force chaplain for a father and an artist, filmmaker and educator for a mother, young Greenfield lived in five cities by age six—from San Antonio to Pittsburgh—before arriving in New York’s Greenwich Village as a teen.

In his apartment, you’d find his mom Rita Fecher (by then a single parent), his two brothers, five monkeys, and a collection of pythons and boa constrictors. Fecher shared with her kids the neighbourhood’s avant-garde art, music and theatre scene of the 1960s and 70s. (Greenfield was 15 when he was fetching drinks for Janis Joplin and other stars backstage at concerts.) From a childhood peppered with eclectic characters—army brats, his orthodox Jewish grandparents, famous folks like Doors frontman Jim Morrison—grew a curiosity about who we are and where we come from.

Today, Greenfield explores the beginnings of humans in Europe and the earliest civilizations in the Middle East and Africa. He helps us better understand the origins of societies from the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages of thousands of years ago and champions the relevance of ancient cultures in modern times. Greenfield insists: We need to know where we come from in order to know where we’re going.

He leads the archaeological excavations of the Early Bronze Age layers at the famous site of Tel es-Safi/Gath in Israel (in partnership with Prof. Aren Maeir of Bar Ilan University). An international team of more than 100 professors and students is uncovering architecture and artefacts—animal bones, plant remains and pottery shards—that allow them to piece together what life was like for the early Canaanite residents of what is believed to be the hometown of the famous Philistine giant, Goliath.
And so I bring that exarchs, Moses and King David, and the Bible and the people of the Bible back. He was there for the men. There was a wonderful part of having a squadron had the go-ahead to penetrate Soviet airspace, a chaplain should father had to learn to parachute at 10,000 feet. It was understood that if the often on B-52 squadrons if they were going to the Soviet border. My

You get treated very differently. You get taken everywhere, get taken to see women. The large headlights were their breasts. The police used to regularly throw out. Needless to say, they never found any.

We as children had access to worlds that included many famous people, such as Janice Joplin. At 15, I was bartending backstage, serving her drinks. We would see Grace Slick or Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix and many others—but I was a child moving through those worlds. I was like background noise to them. It was a great, exotic, exciting and vibrant time but it took a terrific toll on people. Many that I knew from that generation died of AIDS or drugs overdoses. At times, I feel like a survivor, with all the questions that come with it.

We had five monkeys—two squirrel, two capuchins and one spider. Filthy animals, they are. My two brothers and I would sleep on a loft bed that was built over their cage. If we did not keep it clean, it stunk to high heaven. And we also had a number of snakes, such as boa constrictors and pythons, and of course we were raising rats in the basement of the apartment complex to feed them. You can imagine the fright when one day we came home and found that the snakes had escaped. My mother found one in the bathtub as she was sitting on the toilet. I never saw her run so fast. The upstairs neighbour [nearly] had a heart attack when she found another in her bed. Our life was never boring.

My mother brought the family to Woodstock in 1969. We didn’t have to wait to get into the event; we went in with musician groups. We had a Hell’s Angel motorcycle escort, going down the back lane. We drove in my mother’s VW Beetle that was painted in psychedelic colours with naked women. The large headlights were their breasts. The police used to regularly pull us over to search for drugs. Needless to say, they never found any.

It was really special being the son of an officer in the U.S. air force. You get treated very differently. You get taken everywhere, get taken to see airplanes—I remember being brought on fighter jets as a small child.

In those days, at the height of the Cold War, they would put a chaplain often on B-52 squadrons if they were going to the Soviet border. My father had to learn to parachute at 10,000 feet. It was understood that if the squadron had the go-ahead to penetrate Soviet airspace, a chaplain should go with the squadron because it was expected that nobody would come back. He was there for the men. There was a wonderful part of [having a chaplain for a dad] and also terrifying because you understood that he was at the forefront of what could be a nuclear war.

The religious, Jewish world—we grew up in that world—where there is timelessness and the lessons of antiquities, the patriarchs and matriarchs, Moses and King David, and the Bible and the people of the Bible and their messages still transmit down to modern times. You have a sense that antiquity and the ancient world is real, it’s tangible, it’s relevant. It’s not ancient history. It is part of the present. Our ancestors are real people and they are talking to you from the past and if you open your ears and open your eyes, the messages they transmit, you can absorb.

In the first year of university, I didn’t have a plan. I was going into business at that point. I was poor; I had been working since I was 14 and left home at 16. Since then, I was living on my own. I needed to make a living. I thought business—math—would be good, but I hated it. I took an ancient history course as a lark and just fell in love with it. I decided that’s what I wanted to do. The professor was magnificent (Tom Logan, an Egyptologist). He understood it wasn’t just about dry texts, it wasn’t about just reading ancient manuscripts, but going to the field and making exciting discoveries and finding ancient artefacts—the entire package of excitement and of discovery.

The best way to define archaeology is the study of ancient peoples and cultures through their material remains or their garbage—the destroyed remnants of their house or stuff they’ve thrown out. We’re trying to define and understand ancient behaviours from those tiny things that are left over. Imagine what it would be like reconstructing your behaviour at home from the garbage that you throw out.

My mom said that as a child I was always digging up my backyard. I hoped to find dinosaur bones. She never discouraged me. She said that if you follow your dreams, you will be happiest. I try to do the same thing with my children (Rachael, Channah, Noah and Boaz). My wife (U of M zooarchaeologist Tina Jongsmaga-Greenfeld) and I bring them along on our excavations [to places like] Serbia, Bosnia, South Africa and Israel.

My colleagues, and my youngest son Boaz, helped find the Philistine gateway of ancient Gath (Tell es-Saf) last year—this is the gate that Goliath walked out of. He would have walked out of this gate, turned right, walked up the valley and about 10 kilometres in the valley to where David and Goliath did their famous battle.

I’m excited about what I’m studying. And so I bring that excitement into the classroom."

“I’m excited about what I’m studying. And so I bring that excitement into the classroom.”

As told to Katie Chalmers-Brooks
When Alex sat down with 200 other linear algebra students in class he saw his name projected onto the overhead screen with instructions to meet with the professor after class. “My stomach just dropped,” Alex says. “It’s the worst feeling.”

A week earlier he cheated on a quiz, and now he was caught and he knew it. The quiz was worth one per cent of the final grade and students were required to take 10 of them. Alex, not his real name, says he forgot about the quiz and when he arrived to school he asked to copy a friend’s sheet.

The two students got all the same answers wrong, in the same fashion. This caught the professor’s attention. “The [disciplinary] process began when the professor told us we were out,” recalls Alex, now 16 years removed from the ordeal. “He said, ‘This is what you get kicked out of university for,’” He didn’t care the quiz was worth only one per cent, we broke the ethical code and you don’t do that.”

Alex met with a student disciplinary counsellor, a fellow student who would advocate on his behalf. Alex explained the context of his actions—his grandpa had just died and his “first real girlfriend” had broke up with him—and the advocate said she would try to help keep him from getting expelled.

“She told me to be open and honest and tell the tribunal I was under duress from all these other things going on in my life. That it was a weak moment but in general I’m a good student.”

Alex went in front of a committee and read from a two-page statement he wrote. The committee put him on probation and left the incident off his record.

“I came away from all of this somewhat unscathed other than really realizing the magnitude of academic dishonesty. It gave me a new appreciation, which I definitely didn’t have before,” he says. “I didn’t see the negative side of academic dishonesty, that you could get expelled and banished from all universities forever. Maybe it was told to me in my orientation package, but never did the gravity of something as simple as that hit me. It clearly didn’t get to me in that medium, but had the university had someone tell me, face to face, that such minor things can end my academic career, maybe that would have resonated.”

Universities strive—and struggle—to make sure students understand what seems obvious: dishonesty is not only wrong, but punishable. In surveys, 66 per cent of post-secondary students report cheating at least once during their schooling, according to the 2010 study Identifying and Profiling Scholastic Cheaters: Their Personality, Cognitive Ability and Motivation.

To help curb these numbers, the University of Manitoba’s Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning equips instructors with tools to both engage students so they are less likely to cheat, and to inform them of the importance of academic integrity.
Academic integrity is, in short, the moral code of universities—one founded on honesty and the commitment to truth: do not plagiarise, do not cheat, and undertake research with rigour.

“There is a misconception,” the Centre website reads, “that academic dishonesty is largely a student responsibility... Cheating and other dishonest behaviours are serious problems, but when we focus more on the activities and assessments that encourage deep learning, we will find that students will have fewer reasons to cheat and will cheat less often. Moreover, students are less likely to cheat if they are invested in the course material and if they feel that they will be successful.”

To help spread these messages the Centre hired Brenda Stoesz, an academic integrity/copyright specialist, in July of last year. She develops and provides supports for faculty and instructors on academic integrity—resources that promote learning and encourage integrity.

“It’s more of a proactive approach,” Stoesz says. “We focus less on what not to do, and switch that around to be much more positive and engage students more.”

Methods include inviting students to discuss academic integrity in classes or seminars so they can understand why it’s important and how their efforts fit into the wider academic community; defining cheating and plagiarism on the syllabus and explicitly stating the punishments; providing access to course materials on UM Learn or other online forums; ensuring assessments are reasonable since, as the Centre website notes, “students may also rationalize cheating if their understanding is that the instructor’s intention is to fail as many students as possible”; and using various assessment strategies to allow students to showcase what they learned.

“Essentially, there is no reason to cheat if you’re learning what you’re supposed to be learning,” Stoesz says.

Yet, Stoesz and many others admit there will always be cheaters. Finding exploitable opportunities, after all, is part of what makes us human. Writing in Scientific America, microbiologists Arturo Casadevall and Ferric Fang note that cheating evolved as “a way for organisms to gain advantage over others without incurring the cost of effort.”

Cheaters abound in nature.

Bacteria cheat: to survive in harsh environments bacteria cooperate by releasing a molecule that others detect to coordinate behaviour, Asher Mullard writes in Nature. But, “sneakily, some bacteria don’t produce these molecules but can still detect their presence and gain the benefits of cooperation without paying any of the costs.”
Birds cheat: the brown-headed cowbird and cuckoo both dupe other species by laying their eggs in other species’ nests without the host knowing. In the cuckoo’s case, the cuckoo egg hatches first and the chick secretly pushes the other eggs out of the nest when the mother is away. It alone remains and is reared by an unknowing mother.

We cheat. “Manipulation and deceit are part and parcel of being a social species, and indeed, the highest payoff of all comes from a strategy of ‘cheat if you can get away with it,’” says James Hare, associate head and professor of biological sciences at the U of M. “Fortunately, at least to a moralist, [natural] selection has favoured the evolution of mechanisms that allow the detection of defectors in most social species.”

Universities are primed to catch cheaters—last year the U of M reported 352 incidences of academic dishonesty. Cheating in university carries a high risk of getting caught and the penalty is potentially disastrous: course failure and suspension is the most common punishment for cheating at the U of M, and expulsion is always a possibility. But the reward may be nothing more than a few marks. So why are there so many cheaters?

Rabbi Shmuley Boteach often speaks about parenting issues to media and in the CBC documentary Faking the Grade he argued, “kids cheat when they believe only success will get them love. And kids are honest when they believe morality will get them love.”

This may be a welcome message at a parenting workshop but does it apply entirely to the 66 per cent of students who report cheating at least once during university? (Although, to be fair, in the study Unable to resist temptation: How self-control depletion promotes unethical behaviour, Harvard Business School professor Francesca Gino and her colleagues report that people with high moral identities were indeed less likely to be tempted to deviant behaviour.)

One of the better predictors of cheating behavior is personality, U of M psychology professor Katherine Starzyk says.

“There’s a set of personality characteristics that all predict cheating, but the best predictor is psychopathy. One defining feature of psychopathy is that these people are less sensitive to punishment…. You’ll find people on every campus who fit that prototype. And unless they are very intelligent and otherwise doing well, they will be motivated to cheat because they have this tendency to think that they are owed things irrespective of what they put in.”

Did Alex cheat again after being disciplined?

“I probably did for sure,” he admits.

Obviously not every cheater is a psychopath, Starzyk says. Another motivator, she said, is poor academic achievement, combined with opportunity brought on by lax exam policies—virtually any student in the right circumstances could become a cheater.

This is why groups like the Centre try so hard—much of cheating can be avoided.

“I think about cheating a lot when I teach and how to prevent it,” Starzyk says.

She shares her ideas with other U of M professors in online discussion threads. One tactic Starzyk likes is having lots of proctors in the room. Other professors distribute two versions of the exam, so it’s the same questions but in different orders.

“The last thing I do is have people sign out of the exam and show their ID,” Starzyk says. “I have had outsiders come and write exams or students from another section write it, I guess so they can get a sense of what will be on their exam.”

Why does Starzyk try so hard to catch or deter cheaters?

“Because it’s unfair that people who worked hard in the course and got a good grade because of that have the same outcome as people who cheated. It’s a fairness thing for me,” Starzyk says.

The university is also, of course, an educational institute. Academic dishonesty rots the university’s core value and purpose. “Academic integrity is the cornerstone of what we do here at the university,” Brandy Usick, director of student advocacy at the U of M, told Doc Zone.

“Often times, though, for students, it’s hard for them to make the connection between deciding to take a short cut and how that undercuts the reputation of the university.”

Alex didn’t make this connection. He admits he was apathetic towards the course, which he needed to get into the Faculty of Management (now the Asper School of Business). So, why didn’t he just forgo the assignment he wasn’t prepared for?

“The idea of not turning in a quiz didn’t cross my mind at all,” he says.

As one of dozens of students in the class, the thought of talking to the professor didn’t occur to him either. “Are they going to [care] about the personal lives of each of the 250 students?”

This attitude doesn’t surprise Stoesz.

“I get how you can feel like one little person in this big crowd and that a mistake isn’t going to have an impact. And that comes from how classrooms are structured. We feel anonymous.”

Faculty can combat this, Stoesz says, by doing small, easy things. She informs instructors that simply sending out a weekly email recapping the week, or pointing things out in the syllabus, can build relationships and engage students—and engaged students are more likely to come for help before the temptation to cheat overwhelms them.

Alex did get into the Faculty of Management and has since used his degree to lead development projects both in Manitoba and across the globe.

What does he think about the Centre’s academic integrity strategy?

“This sounds like a great program,” Alex says. “Maybe it would have helped me.”
How did you end up teaching about the supernatural?

In a sense, I was led into the field by my students. After my course ‘Evil in World Religions’ I asked what they would like to see covered in the course that wasn’t in the required readings. The supernatural and pop culture were among the most common responses. The course looks at the way in which supernatural, superhuman and paranormal representations change the way we think about our relationships with one another and with the world.

Why are so many people interested in this stuff?

I’d turn the question on its head: why aren’t more people interested in the supernatural? If we browse bookstore shelves for young readers it’s all vampires and ghosts and demons and apocalypses and zombies and aliens and magical swords and sorcery. Movies and TV shows for young people are filled with faeries and imaginary royalty, talking animals, superheroes and superspies. I’d say it’s difficult to avoid the supernatural.

These kinds of stories are popular with adults as well and have been for as long as we’ve had history. I suspect [the appeal] is the contrast between imagined worlds we know to be magical and fantastic, and the less fantastic world we call reality.

What do they do for us?

Stories about the supernatural help us stabilize our otherwise confusing natural world. But I don’t see these narratives as escapism. They provide an opportunity to blur boundaries, to be absorbed, to venture forth and experiment and then return with new insights. Even the most escapist literature contributes to the forming of one culture or another.

The cognitive scientist might say we like the supernatural because of the kind of minds we have. The sociologist might say because of our need for social cohesion. The anthropologist might say that the supernatural helps us stay connected to our past. I’d say all of the above.

The Walking Dead is a huge TV hit. What is it about apocalyptic plots and zombies in particular that we can’t get enough of?

It’s an interesting phenomenon. Pop culture was all vampires, but is now all zombies. Certainly the gore and the violence are attractive because we flirt with disgust and terror. Zombies are cast not as supernatural agents but as possessed by some sort of virus or parasite. This taps into our concerns about the danger of diseases and disorder.

In class, do you explore whether zombies, vampires and apocalyptic scenarios could actually happen?

For some, it makes no sense not to deal with existential questions like: ‘Do ghosts exist? Could zombies exist? Are aliens real?’ But I’m more interested in how narratives work: how they create, maintain, challenge or contest social relations. Good stories—good rituals—can be used to do all kinds of things.

A superhero can be used to gather political support for a Cold War or be used to criticize a war on terror, as the new Captain America movies intend to do.

With all its ghoulish and make-believe, Halloween must be your favorite time of year. What did the McKendrick family dress up as last October?

Comic book characters. We had the Black Bat (a superhero my elder daughter invented), Marvel Girl, Captain Marvel and Cyclops—we were a domestic version of the Uncanny Avengers.

As told to Chris Rutkowski
BREAKING IT DOWN

THE PROFESSOR WHO PUTS THE PHAT IN FATS

BY SHAMONA HARNETT
When Michael Eskin wants to make a point about his favourite subject, lectures, overhead projectors and handouts aren’t enough.

Like Eminem, Snoop Dogg and Ice-T, the University of Manitoba nutrition chemistry professor breaks into rap. Eskin’s masterpiece? A little ditty called Lipids Get a Real Bad Rap.

Not only does the professor and researcher rap for his students a cappella, he has a beat-heavy music video to accompany his song. It features graphics, special effects—and the 74-year-old grandfather’s formidable dance moves.

“My son did the music and we recorded it…. It was quite a hit,” says Eskin, a YouTube star.

His fans include students and colleagues at the U of M and around the world.

“Cholesterol, cholesterol gets all that bad attention. Without you there would be no lipid digestion. They are needed in the bile to emulsify the fats so the body gets all those polyunsaturates,” chants Eskin in his English accent while wearing a wool cap.

Later in the song: “Cholesterol, cholesterol we need you real bad. Without you we wouldn’t be a mom or dad. You make those sex hormones we can’t do without so civilization continues when we seniors all die out.”

Eskin’s goal? To simplify complex nutrition chemistry concepts and make them fun for his students. “Science can be very dull…. You almost have to be a bit of an entertainer,” says Eskin, who is the associate dean of human nutritional sciences.

He is thrilled when his students get a kick out of his humorous classroom quips. The professor’s office, located on the fourth floor of the Human Ecology Building, is lined with nutrition books and packed with piles of papers, many of which are nutrition-themed cartoons—and one-liners that he might deliver in class.

“The omelet trap: to eat or not to eat,” he recites, in a Shakespearean tone.

“Then there was another one which was called ‘Is this a hot dog I see before me?’”

Eskin grew up in Second World War Birmingham, England. (He says rationing was commonplace.) His father, who immigrated to England from Russia, was a cantor. His mother was a teacher. Teaching is a family tradition; one of his three sisters is a teacher as are his two sons.

Eskin graduated with a biochemistry doctorate from the University of Birmingham and eventually went on to teach in London. That’s when he saw an advertisement for a position at the U of M.

“I applied for the job. The dean of the faculty came to London and interviewed me. Before I knew it, I was on the plane to Winnipeg. I had never heard of Winnipeg before,” he says. Four decades later, Eskin is happy to call the city his home.

Why his fascination with food chemistry? “I really like to know what is going on beyond the superficial level,” says the professor, who has spent years researching canola oil. He was one of the first to measure its shelf life and explore its capability to lower blood cholesterol. He is also co-editor of the journal, Lipid Technology, and has written 13 books, including one that is considered a classic food biochemistry text.

He discovered his love for rapping a few years ago when he recorded Passover Rap in his kitchen. It’s a song he created to entertain and educate Jewish kids with learning disabilities. The rap number is on his CD, Mostly Genesis with A Little Exodus.

Writing lyrics comes easily for Eskin who wrote the draft for his lipids rap in under two hours. Perhaps it’s his musical education; he’s a classically trained singer who studied at the Birmingham School of Music. The award-winning chemist even wrote a spot for Sesame Street 15 years ago.

He says an attention-getting first sentence is the key to any rap song. “In any of [my raps], the opening statement is really crucial.”

What’s next for Eskin? A rap on saturated fatty acids—a once villainized substance he says scientists are touting as beneficial to health. He says while folk and classical are his favourite, he has a certain respect for rappers and their music.

“I listen to some. I mean it is a sort of poetry really. Much of that, particularly, [is] very much about protest and about inequity and frustration that unfortunately is in society,” says Eskin.

While his lipid rap isn’t exactly a protest about social injustice, he says it is intended to de-stigmatize the bad reputation some nutrition experts—and governments— have given dietary fats.

“They were so paranoid about lipids. [Yet] they never had such obesity ever.”

“Science can be very dull…. You almost have to be a bit of an entertainer.”
How did you end up playing the flute?
My first instrument is actually piano. I started when I was three because my brother was playing it and I wanted to be just like him.

So what is it about the flute you love?
I like that it’s so versatile. Last year, and this year as well, I’m playing sonatas that were written for violin, but there are transcriptions made for the flute. So you can take all these concepts from different instruments and apply them to flute. And all the modern techniques on the flute are interesting—like singing while you play or beat boxing or stuff like that—different effects or bending pitches. There are just so many endless possibilities.

Do you ever carry around your flute like actor Will Ferrell does as his character in Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy and hope you get called on stage?
[Laughing] I mean, I usually have it with me and I get comments on my interesting ‘purse’.

Have you ever travelled? Because you could always just bust out your flute and make some money busking?
…. I have never had the guts to do any busking, probably because I’m too much of a perfectionist.

What did you want to be as a kid?
I wanted to be a teacher…. But after I did my third-year performance recital, which is a requirement of the degree—you have to play a 45-minute solo recital—after that experience, I started to kind of shift. I realized I’m not ready to give up my performance side yet.

What is your favourite type of music?
My favourite singer is actually James Vincent McMorrow. I don’t know if you’ve heard of him. He’s kind of alternative, very folky. I don’t think a lot of people would expect that of me but it’s something I like to relax to. Sometimes listening to classical music can be stressful because I think about the form of the piece or what kind of instruments are playing, that kind of thing—too many music theory and music history classes under my belt.

Do you play the flute every day?
Yes.

All year?
I tend to take the summers off. I think I played maybe twice a week this summer and not for very long. I like to give myself a break because it’s nice to rework my skills at the beginning of the year and to bring everything back. So I’m continuously growing, but I’m not getting tired of it. During the year it’s every day and my teachers like me to do at least three or four hours a day.

Do you have any jokes?
You have to know about Beethoven’s 5th Symphony for this to be funny. What’s Beethoven favourite fruit? Ba-na-na-naaaaaaa. 🥭

As told to Sean Moore
What makes a good teacher?

WE POSED THIS QUESTION to four U of M professors who were celebrated at convocation last fall for their scholarship and teaching excellence: a law professor who fights for what’s right, an entrepreneur who believes in the power of creativity, an educator who’s taught generations of teachers, and a researcher who’s training the next cancer fighters.

BY KATIE CHALMERS-BROOKS
LEIGH MURPHY

A GOOD TEACHER SHARES THE WONDER OF RESEARCH WITH STUDENTS

Leigh Murphy is persistent. She has to be in order to uncover new ways to go after an equally dogged enemy: breast cancer.

It’s the most common form of cancer to strike women worldwide. And as chair of the Breast Cancer Research Group at the University of Manitoba, and director of the Manitoba Breast Tumour Bank, Murphy has spent four decades trying to help more women win their battle (and along the way has secured $11 million in funding).

What began as scientific curiosity about disease at the molecular level grew into something more meaningful once cancer struck those close to her.

“Over the years as you get older, it becomes more personal when friends and family members develop cancer. And I’ve had too many instances happening over the last 10 years,” says Murphy.

In 2006 she lost her husband, fellow scientist Liam Murphy, to stomach cancer—a form of the disease that gets just a fraction of the research funding that breast cancer does, which means less treatment options for those diagnosed.

“What opened my eyes when I had that personal interaction with a cancer journey was the fact that research brought a lot of hope,” she says.

Murphy zeroes in on the role of the estrogen hormone, which is a key player in the development of breast cancer. In 1997, her team was the first to show that some types of breast cancer contain two estrogen receptors and not just one as previously thought. She was also among the first to identify the presence of this second receptor on its own in some forms of cancer, and to realize that breast tumours contain unique chemical changes within the estrogen receptor that affect their behaviour.

These findings could help remove the guesswork for physicians on the frontlines. Doctors can better determine the best treatment for a specific patient, begin the process earlier, and increase the odds of survival.

Her passion for science first took root in her homeland of Australia, where as a child she would search for bugs and worms in nearby ponds and put them under her toy microscope.

As a professor in the department of biochemistry and medical genetics, she tries to share this wonder with the next generation, offering her guidance to high school students, undergraduate and graduate students and post-doctoral fellows. In turn, students share their enthusiasm with her.

“It’s very inspiring,” says the long-time teacher. “I’m always so impressed with how energetic our students are, how they absorb knowledge, how they use it, and how creative they can be. And they’re coming from a relatively unbiased, somewhat naïve point of view, and the questions they ask are just refreshing in terms of new ways of looking at a problem.”

IN HER OWN WORDS

My advice for students: Love what you do, know your strengths and weaknesses and never be afraid to ask questions and learn from others.

The most important lesson I’ve learned: You can think of hundreds of reasons why an experiment may not work but you will never know until you have done the experiment. Let the data lead you, if you have designed the experiment well with good controls even a so-called failed experiment can give you really important information.

The best teachers know: Each student or trainee is different. Teach how to learn and encourage critical thinking and discussion.

Students have taught me: To be precise and listen carefully.

The worst thing about cancer: That it’s biologically and clinically not one disease but many and these many diseases use the mechanisms of evolution, which are poorly understood.

My hope for the future: That education and the results of research are available to all.
NE OF KAREN BUSBY’S EARLIEST memories of standing up for someone happened in her Grade 5 classroom. Busby’s classmates were giving a substitute teacher a hard time so she came to the woman’s defence, in dramatic form. “Afterwards I thought, ‘Wow, I just swore in class,’” Busby recalls. “As a kid, I was always the one who would stand up and say when I thought things were wrong.”

It’s a trait the law professor hopes to instil in her students. She sees her role as developing “citizen lawyers” who defend human rights and democratic values.

She made a rule for herself when she started teaching nearly three decades ago: Don’t lecture. Instead, use active learning methods like in-class group activities and problem-solving tutorials. (Her approach was novel enough then that she was invited to join the faculty of the Canadian Law Teaching Clinic.)

Her advice for new teachers? Become a student again, take a course in something you know nothing about. Studying French in France after finishing her first degree reminded the seasoned academic how tough it is to navigate new information. “I had a terrible time,” Busby says. “Studying something that you’re not good at helps you remember that you can be a smart person and still struggle.”

She encourages her students to research topics they care about. Students have learned about Indigenous laws from Elders, analysed their own experiences of sexual violence and considered the career impact of gender transitioning.

She connects each lesson with something making headlines—like how new laws will cover the sale of edible pot products once marijuana becomes legal under the new government. “I always tie it to something new that’s in the community today. And they get really excited about that,” says Busby.

But first she has to be excited; Busby regularly adds her voice to human-rights-related issues. She was instrumental in bringing the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation to the University of Manitoba, creating opportunities for students across the country to learn about the impact of Residential Schools on Indigenous peoples. She also played a lead role in launching the Centre for Human Rights Research and hopes to develop an inter-disciplinary Master in Human Rights degree program.

Busby regularly invites students to her meetings off-campus with community groups. Up next is one with Elders at Peguis First Nation to discuss water concerns. “I hope to take three students—because that’s how many I can fit in my car,” Busby says. “It just brings the problems so much more alive.”

BUSBY SPEAKS OUT

About the exploitation of sex workers: If we want to get serious about helping those who are exploited, we would develop more primary services, including safe places to eat and sleep, better access to job training and addiction services. Finding out from sex workers what they need is the conversation we should be having.

About the Safe Drinking Water for First Nations Act: This goal is a laudable one, but the way the federal government has gone about it in this bill not only lacks substance and principle, but is doomed to failure without First Nations involvement, infrastructure support and access to capital. First Nations organizations are right to be concerned.

About Quebec Judge Eliana Marengo’s decision to refuse to hear Rania El-Alloul’s case on the ground that the headscarf worn by this Muslim woman was not “suitable” attire in a courtroom: It is hard to imagine a judge telling a Catholic nun or Hutterite woman that she cannot testify because she is wearing a habit or a bonnet. Jewish and Sikh men have not faced challenges about the suitability of wearing the yarmulkes and turbans in court. The Supreme Court of Canada has been clear that witnesses are not required to park their religion at the courtroom door.

(Excerpts from the Winnipeg Free Press)
At 18, John Wiens stepped into his first homeroom. Teaching art, English, history, French and phys-ed in a four-room high school in small-town Holland, Man., Wiens was nervous—and a year or two younger than a few of the students.

“I remember being really excited and really scared,” says the recently retired education professor. “Scared because I wasn’t sure what to expect.”

But he soon figured out that he wanted to be the type of teacher who doesn’t just teach, but also educates. “Educating them is focused on helping them to become good people...the kind of people who will engage with others and engage their world in such a way that the world and other people can become better people as well,” says Wiens.

“That’s what I call the difference between educating and teaching. I’ve always thought the facts were less important than the kind of personal attributes and moral attributes that people learned and achieved.”

Wiens gets to know his students as people. And he encourages them to do the same with their own charges, given that many are already working as teachers or administrators.

He’ll have them write a letter to a young person they know, outlining their wishes for their educational journey, and suggest they share the letter with the child. “When that happens, just amazing, amazing things happen,” Wiens says. “They could in fact write a letter to every child in their classroom, which some teachers go on to do.”

Over five decades, Wiens has held many posts: teacher (Grades 7 to 12), school counsellor, principal, superintendent, consultant, and for 10 years dean of education at the U of M. He’s taught three generations and with his wife raised two kids of their own (who both went on to become teachers).

Wiens says he’s always felt a big responsibility to the students in his classes, not unlike the sense of duty he grew up with on the family farm. At age 10 he not only drove the grain truck into town seven miles away but helped care for the horses, cows, chickens and pigs.

“I was taught early in life that since the animals are totally dependent on us and beholden to us for their well-being, that they get looked after first,” Wiens says. “That’s kind of how I feel about teaching young children. We have to look at their needs before our own.”

**Wiens’ Advice for Teachers**

- Help students become better people. “You’re not just having people collect information and facts—you’re actually building people.”
- Make sure students know their ideas matter.
- Keep promises. Return assignments on time. And always be transparent. “A good teacher makes it very clear why they’re doing what they’re doing.”
- Treat students with the same respect you would your colleagues.
- Find the best in technology. “Technology has changed teaching an awful lot and it brings as many challenges as it does advantages.”
- Pay extra care to disadvantaged students. Make sure they know their situation isn’t their fault. “Many disadvantaged children feel guilty about their situations. They feel like they’re somewhat to blame for it. All people must have a place in the world and all people must have a chance.”
- Remember: Each student has a unique gift. Support their journey to share that gift with the world.
NATHAN GREIDANUS ADMITS he skipped class in his student days if the person standing at the front of the room didn’t hold his attention.

The assistant professor, in the Asper School of Business, describes a bad teacher as someone who doesn’t care enough to engage students.

“I always ask myself, ‘What’s the benefit of having this room full of students in front of me now that they couldn’t get from just watching a video of me presenting a lecture?’,” says Greidanus, 44. “I hope that I’m someone who can translate theory into something my students can apply to their lives.”

He puts careful thought into developing curriculum for his entrepreneurship and sustainable development courses. (It’s typical for entrepreneurs to include a social component in their business model, benefitting either people in need or the planet.)

Greidanus tries to keep class fun so his teachings resonate. He challenges students to create a winning elevator pitch, seek out a seasoned entrepreneur to interview, or come up with a design for an app that no one has thought of yet.

Thinking ahead is key. What kind of off-shoot opportunities will come out of the 3-D printing movement? How can we bring to market an eco-friendly product like biofuels made from cattails?

“A lot of problems facing us require more out-of-the-box-type thinking,” says Greidanus, who’s launched his own businesses in energy technology and Internet consulting.

He also led the redesign of the undergraduate entrepreneurship major and played a key role in the redesign of the Asper MBA program, which has since doubled its applicants.

Greidanus shares with his students leading research—his own studies look at sustainable development entrepreneurship and failure in entrepreneurship—but insists they learn by doing. He likens his lectures to round-table discussions, mixed with real-world exercises.

For one course, he gives students $30 worth of random products—like pens or candies—and directs them to sell the items for charity.

In no time they’ve learned about fundraising, wholesale, retail, cash flow, the importance of having a business plan and knowing when to deviate from it.

“Thirty bucks turns into $300 within 30 minutes,” Greidanus says.

“I HOPE THAT I’M SOMEONE WHO CAN TRANSLATE THEORY INTO SOMETHING MY STUDENTS CAN APPLY TO THEIR LIVES.”

HIS FAVORITE

TV shows: Shark Tank, Dragons’ Den and the occasional binge-watching of Breaking Bad and House of Cards

Restaurant: Swiss Chalet (with kids), Chew (without)

Magazines: The Economist, Wired

Entrepreneur: Elon Musk, the CEO of Tesla Motors.

“What he’s doing to the electric car industry and the way he went about it I think is just brilliant. He’s a game-changer. He helped invent PayPal which changed the credit card industry, which everyone would think you’re crazy doing. And then he started SpaceX—building and launching advanced spacecraft. He has so many ideas he executes and none are marginal.”

Music: From classical to Metallica. “And just this summer my niece got us onto a bit of country.”

App: Twitter

Teacher: Heather Loy, his psychology professor at King’s University College when he was an undergrad. “What was neat was we got to work with rats in Skinner boxes, take all the concepts of behavioural psychology and apply them in a lab setting. She was someone who took a keen interest in her students.”

Movies: Lord of the Rings, Shawshank Redemption, Good Will Hunting, The Matrix, Gladiator

Advice: “Go with the golden rules—for everything. Treat others how you would want to be treated. Teach others how you would want to be taught.”

NATHAN GREIDANUS
A GOOD TEACHER KEEPS IT INTERESTING

TeachingLIFE 22
HOPE AFTER HEARTACHE

NEW TUITION GRANTS OPEN DOORS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WHO’VE BEEN IN THE CARE OF CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

BY KATIE CHALMERS-BROOKS
Riel Presma has a confession. She once sneak inside a lecture hall and sat in on a psychology class she wasn't registered for.

She had only been on campus for a couple of months and was curious what the professor was talking about.

“It’s kind of interesting...knowing that behind each mysterious door, there is something new to learn,” says the 18-year-old, sitting in a study carrel in her usual Machray Hall hangout. “This place is great.”

Enrolled in three first-year courses and an aspiring food scientist, Presma speaks enthusiastically about the intricacies of jellies and the magic of yeast.

“Cheese is also very interesting,” she notes.

Presma didn’t always think she’d make it to university. She is one of 14 students who have received a Youth-in-Care tuition grant to study at the U of M. Created in 2014, the grants are funded by the University and private donors to support young people who have been—or who still are—in the care of Child and Family Services, and who can’t afford to pursue post-secondary education.

Presma’s childhood was tough. She’d hear gunshots or booze-fuelled brawls outside her North End apartment. Her family lived off social assistance and her meals came from food banks. Her mom dropped out of high school in Grade 11, her brother by Grade 10.

Presma says she grew up in an unloving home. Her only steady support came in the form of pets: the neighbourhood cats she took in and her German shepherd, Shadow. She says she also turned to her stuffed animals. Simba from the Lion King and a pink rabbit she named Roberto Benigni (after the Italian director) became her confidants.

“They were just always there,” she says.

Presma’s vivid imagination allowed her to escape to the magical lands she created in her head—but it also made her a target for school-yard bullies. She called herself Super Girl and would pretend she had special powers that could save the school. “They thought it was weird,” Presma says. “They didn’t really get my imagination.”

She remembers wanting to take her own life as far back as Grade 3.

“That’s when bullying really started to come about,” she says. “During recess, I’d keep trying to sneak back in and hide in the bathroom. I didn’t want to be around the other kids.”

She lived with a feeling of helplessness—at school and at home. It wasn’t until age 13 that everything came to a head and she was placed into the care of Child and Family Services. She moved in with her half-sister, Shalla Dorey, who has been her foster parent ever since. Presma calls her “Smother.”

“Because she smothers me with affection,” she jokes.

It was Dorey who nurtured Presma’s love of food science. The two cook up exotic dishes together, mixing flavours from one of their three spice cabinets.

The new bursary program will help Presma transform this passion into a career. Students receive up to $5,000 annually for a maximum of four years. The fund will support up to 10 students each year.

Dorey says she’s proud of her little sister for persevering through the challenges of first-year university. She has high hopes for Presma, who is 20 years her junior.

“I hope that, like most human beings, she learns to forgive herself when she stumbles, which is always hard,” Dorey says.

“I sincerely hope that she finds great joy in her second year and third year and fourth year, that it becomes the experience she’s hoping it will be and the opportunities she’s seeking post-university manifest whether here in Manitoba or abroad. I hope she just takes [her success] and runs with it and doesn’t look back.”

By creating grants instead of tuition waivers—as is typically done at other universities—recipients can use surpluses for other expenses. The Province of Manitoba and Child and Family Services offers additional funding for living expenses, including housing, laptop computers, textbooks and meal plans.

Recipients will also have access to mentorship programs and tutoring to help them stay in university and succeed.

Manitoba has among the highest rates of children in care in the country. In 2014, more than 10,000 kids were in the Manitoba Child Welfare System, according to the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy. The majority of them—87 per cent—are Indigenous.

Fewer than 10 per cent of permanent wards of the system finish high school. And a mere 5 per cent—go on to college or university, says a report by the Office of the Children’s Advocate.

Statistics show the factors that lead to a child going into care—like neglect, abuse and parental addictions—are associated with poorer educational outcomes. They also suggest that young people coming out of foster care at age 18 tend to fare poorly as adults: dropping out of school, becoming parents too early, relying on social assistance, and failing to establish a stable home of their own.

Presma is trying to beat the odds. She remembers well what it’s like to feel “distant and disconnected.”

Now, she wants to see if there is an improv group on campus she could join. Or maybe a club that enjoys the role-playing game Dungeons and Dragons.

Presma doesn’t mince words: she wouldn’t be here if it weren’t for the $5,000 grant.

“It’s worth a lot more to me than $5,000 because it provides me with opportunity. It provides me with a chance to be more than I would have been.”

“It provides me with opportunity. It provides me with a chance to be more than I would have been.”
#lifeofastudent

HE JUMPS AS FAR AS 7 METRES, 19 CENTIMETRES.
HE SPRINTS 100 METRES IN A MERE 10.7 SECONDS.

He cares deeply about his home country, Sierra Leone. And he’ll give you a killer haircut at his home barbershop business. Meet 23-year-old Faculty of Arts student, Bison track and field team captain, and aspiring entrepreneur Wilfred Sam-King (via Instagram).

Sprinting is tough because it’s such a huge mental battle. You’ll hear that sprinters are cold or cocky or this or that, but you literally have to walk on the track and think or feel like you’re the fastest one there or—before the gun has gone off—you have already lost.

[Sprinting] is a race against your competitor but it’s also a race against the clock and yourself. You can see where you’re ranked in your country and in the world. I remember when I came to Canada-West [varsity sports] and people were like ‘Wow, you ran such a great time.’ I was happy about the time but also extremely ticked off at myself that I didn’t win. You’re always trying to find a balance.

I was only [in Sierra-Leone] for four and half years, but my early childhood years were very happy. It was a fun, loving environment. I had a lot of family around me. But when the war broke out and the rebels hit the capital—the memories I have of that aren’t as friendly or fun.

The photographer who shot this, Amanda Gundrum, said we should do a smiling one and all of the sprinters said, ‘No, that doesn’t make any sense. You’re not going to be smiling coming out of the blocks.’
I went to Chicago, where Michael Jordan and Nike made basketball one of the biggest sports in the world. That photo took about 20 takes to do…. In sprinting, it was Usain Bolt who put the sport back on the map. He’s the fastest man of all time, and he’s incredible because for a while they said no sprinter over 6-feet-tall could run the 100 metres under 10 seconds and he’s 6-foot-5 so he’s an anomaly, running the distance in a time of 9.58 seconds. It just goes to show you can’t listen to what people say to you and you should just follow your dreams and persevere through adversity and that’s exactly what he did. And he’s clean. He’s not doping like a lot of other sprinters who’ve been caught.

I remember one morning my mom pulling me down to the ground and hearing the ricochet of automatic guns, saying the rebels are in the city and you have to seek refuge. Then I remember a few days later, when the shooting had died down, my dad arranging for us to leave the capital city to go on a refugee boat. And when we were driving, at first I thought, ‘These roads are especially bad today’, but in fact we were driving over cadavers.

We have Alhaji Mansaray (known as Alfred) there and Aoun Muhammad. He is an international student from Pakistan. He’s become one of my best friends. He’s hilarious. He’s also on the track team. If you ever meet him, you’ll know how much of a character he is. Canada is funny because it’s a melting pot so whenever a whole bunch of cultures are put together you can really see the differences and how to embrace those differences.

Lindon Kade Atten, in the red, is my other best friend. He reminds me to always be bold, speak your mind, be honest, and never to apologize for being yourself. Him and his family have become my family and I am truly blessed.

This is my sister and I on her 28th birthday and two weeks prior to her wedding day. I bought her floor seats to her favourite artist, Beyoncé. The On the Run Tour alongside Jay Z was amazing and sharing that experience with my sister was unbelievable.
That's at the White Sox game. When we went there, we took an Uber. Everyone said be careful going into South Chicago. When we arrived we bolted out of the Uber and ran as fast as we could to the ballpark and we were so scared. And after the game, the same thing, we ran and jumped into the cab because of all of the scary things people were saying. Thinking back to it, it's the same reputation that Winnipeg has had. It doesn't mean it's dangerous but if you want to find trouble, you'll find trouble. I think that's the same thing with South Chicago but we didn't stick around long enough to find out.

If you're not confident in your ability, all the training in the world will not get you to the line faster than anyone else. If you're doubting yourself, you've fallen victim to it. Friends have fallen victim to it. People surprisingly try to throw you off by making noises or staring you down.

In this photo, it shows that I'm happy to be comfortable in my own skin. I was under 5-foot-3 until Grade 9 and I was bullied a little bit. Then I grew up and I got a little more athletic and got some bass in my voice and I was able to laugh at the bullies because I felt that I had overcome them. And I made it to university when some teachers in elementary school thought I was a little too slow because it took me until Grade 6 to really learn to read and write. It wasn't my intellectual capabilities—in Africa I could speak five languages. But for me to put the English words from my mind on to paper was very difficult.
This is one of my oldest friends, Anu Sidhu. He’s my academic inspiration. He’s graduated from Asper School of Business and is now working on his Chartered Professional Accountants certification. This photo is of us as children, wrestling and planning all our mischief—the trampoline was our oval office.

I’m inspired by all fashion. I love street style. I love urban and I love prep and I love formal. Most times I end up incorporating more than one style. Sometimes people are like ‘What are you wearing?’ and sometime it actually looks good.

That was the first time I ran a time that put me in contention to make a senior national team. I was about a tenth off but that was a turning point where I thought, ‘I can make a national team now. I can represent Canada if I put hard work into it.’ And that was my first year as captain of the team so it has a lot of sentimental value.

I have my own not-for-profit called Free the Kings (a nod to the charity Free the Children and a play on my last name) and our motto is: from the community to the world. I try to raise funds for different organizations. Last year we donated $1,150 to the Red Cross for Ebola relief funds. The wager was if I could raise more than $500 for Ebola relief I would walk in University Centre in a bikini. Fortunately none of my family members were affected by Ebola but there were definitely friends of friends and small villages that were affected and I was just happy that I could try to make a contribution from all the way on the other side of the world.

I’m not the biggest dog lover but there’s something about those three dogs (who belong to my friend’s father). I’ve never seen dogs that look like wolves. They’re Samoyeds I think they’re called, and they are so cool. We were eating—that’s why they were all around me. They thought I was going to give them treats. I guess I fell in love with these dogs. They looked like really big pillows.
Andy Fenwick, an advocate for students, says his disability made him a stronger person.
Andy Fenwick lay motionless in the intensive care unit, staring at a screen over his bed that for hours taunted him to make a move.

The DVD player was stuck on the intro screen—the opening graphic that asks the viewer to press play to launch the movie.

Ten-year-old Fenwick just wanted to watch the super-hero blockbuster Hulk. Paralyzed and unable to speak or breathe on his own, he couldn’t budge or call out to the nurse who hadn’t realized her oversight.

“At the time I remember being super mad because I couldn’t move. It was just the play screen over and over,” says Fenwick, now a third-year arts student at the University of Manitoba. “That is one of the worst things I remember from the hospital.”

His new reality hit hard. A doctor at a walk-in clinic had mistaken Fenwick’s appendicitis for constipation so he was rushed to the E.R. only once his body had gone into septic shock, his ruptured appendix spreading toxins from head to toe.

Fenwick remembers little about those first moments in hospital. He was put in a wheelchair. He was brought into a room. And then, everything went black.

A month later, he awoke from a coma. In order to survive, his body had essentially eaten up its muscle and fat. He weighed less than a kindergartener. Fenwick had to re-learn everything his parents taught him as a toddler: how to talk, how to eat, how to move.

Gone was the kid who’d just run a 30-kilometre relay race for his elementary school track team. The kid who had aspirations of joining a football team—maybe even getting a football scholarship. The kid who cheekily declared: When I grow up I’m going to be a rich lawyer.

After a decade of surgeries, physical therapy sessions and hard work, Fenwick gets around in a wheelchair and is intent on practicing law.

“I still want to be a lawyer,” he says, “but now I know why I want to fight—not for the prestige—but by being a lawyer, hopefully in the future, I can help out people who are oppressed or put down by society, who don’t live equally.”

Fenwick says an initiative recently launched by the University of Manitoba to improve accessibility for students with disabilities is a move in the right direction.

The U of M is set to become one of the first universities in Canada to outline Bona Fide Academic Requirements (BFAR) for its programs. These are the minimum academic requirements—in terms of skills, abilities, knowledge and attitude—that students must demonstrate in order to graduate with a given degree.

BFARs could relate to motor or perceptual abilities, and technical, lab or computer skills. They might also speak to whether a student can show professionalism, empathy, or collaborate face-to-face.

“Hopefully in the future, I can help out people who are oppressed or put down by society, who don’t live equally.”
If a program’s must-haves are identified up front, then students can make more informed decisions when planning their educational path. A student with a physical disability, for example, doesn’t want to find out in the third year of a program that they are required to lift 50 pounds in order to graduate. “BFARs help make essential elements—that might be common sense for the professors in a program—explicitly known to students,” says Laurie Anne Vermette, a faculty specialist in educational innovation at the U of M’s Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning.

Exploring these requirements opens the door to a discussion about possible accommodations available for students while still protecting the academic integrity of the program.

The ultimate goal is to create a more inclusive environment, says Vermette. “A defense of a thesis is typically done orally but it doesn’t mean that is the only way it can be done,” she notes. “A student with a hearing impairment can successfully defend a thesis with the use of an authorized and appropriate aid—in this case, a sign language interpreter.”

The university began planning the BFAR initiative in 2012, in anticipation of the provincial government’s Accessibility for Manitobans Act, which outlines mandatory accessibility standards and became regulation in December 2013.

An accommodation could be something as simple as reserving a particular seat in class. A student with an anxiety disorder may need to sit near a window, or a student with poor vision might require a spot up front.

At the U of M, there are academic attendants on hand to guide students—including those on the autism spectrum—and help them stay on track, keep deadlines and interact effectively with their instructors. Special consideration is also given to students living with conditions like multiple sclerosis, bipolar disorder and fibromyalgia.

There are voice recognition systems for students who need to recite rather than write, and resources to turn conventional texts into large-print or braille. Ten sign language interpreters and about 50 note-takers are at the ready for students with limited use of their hands—like Fenwick—and for those who are hearing impaired.

In 2013, the U of M graduated Manitoba’s first deaf doctor. As a student, Megan Jack used a special stethoscope that provided a visual to show a patient’s heart rate and used an interpreter in the classroom and the operating room.

Students who are not only deaf but also blind participate by touching the hands of interpreters as they sign. Or a note-taker will type what’s happening in class and the transcription pops up on a refreshable braille screen for the student to read.

When Christie started at the U of M, the department was just two people and there were about two dozen contracted staff to help meet accommodations. In 15 years the team has grown to more than 100. The number of students registered with SAS now tops 2,000. About half are considered active users. “Not only are students coming to university and expecting a certain level of service, but they’re also feeling more comfortable to talk about why they might need support,” she says.

Fenwick sees himself as an advocate. A councillor for the University of Manitoba’s Students’ Union representing students living with disabilities, he’s often wheeling around campus tunnels testing elevators to make sure they’re in working order and checking inclines on ramps to make sure they’re easily navigable.

Fenwick does what he can to achieve equality but cautions about labelling people with disabilities as inspirational. He got a kick out of a TedTalk in which a woman in a powered wheelchair spoke about her life experiences. “I think that’s a little unfair,” he says. “It’s not that they’re inspirational, it’s that they wanted to achieve something else.”

Carolyn Christie, a coordinator with Student Accessibility Services, helps students with disabilities navigate their educational journey.
chair called out people who see her in a classroom and assume she must be a motivational speaker, rather than her actual role of substitute teacher. Fenwick says it similarly irks him when he gets high praise for simply living his life.

“I am still pretty young, so I do go to bars and I do party, and I have lots of people come up to me all the time and say ‘Oh man, you’re so inspirational for coming to a bar in your wheelchair,’” Fenwick says. “I don’t think I’m inspirational. I’m just doing whatever any other 20-year-old would do.”

Vermette welcomes student voices like Fenwick’s to inform the BFAR process. Deans and BFAR liaisons within some of the university’s 145 graduate studies programs are already drafting these requirements (undergrad programs will eventually follow). In addition to students and professors, the nine-step process involves representatives from the Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning, Student Advocacy and Accessibility, the Office of Human Rights and Conflict Management, and the Office of Fair Practice and Legal Affairs.

“The more creative voices that are at the table, the more ways we can find accessible practices that include as many students as possible,” says Vermette. “A creative student might say, ‘Have you heard of this new assistive technology? Or this new software that gives students a new way to access course material so that they can fully participate?’”

Through workshops, Fenwick hopes to teach other students how to be advocates, too. He agrees with Vermette that levelling the playing field is key.

“We’re people living our lives like anyone else,” he says. “It’s not negative. It’s not positive. It’s what we have to deal with.”
LAST SPRING, University of Manitoba atmospheric science student Keane Kokolsky chased down a tornado on his own—a birthday present to himself.

While it was an awesome experience, nothing compares to what he saw during a class fieldtrip last summer. With winds as high as 100 km/h, he and a few vans full of U of M students, along with instructors, drove across six states in search of spectacular storms. They ended up seeing four.

One looked like a giant elephant trunk—grey and elongated. Another was like a swirling sculpture of white fluff and light.

“The sun was kind of shining from the west. It kind of lit up the side of the storm. You can see it...as this white cloud coming down to the ground—just kind of spinning in the field. Just the way the light was shining out of it was really spectacular,” says Kokolsky, who is gearing up for a career in meteorology. “This one topped off the year. I’ll tell you that.”

Storms, as well as the science and art of chasing them, are Kokolsky’s passion. He and others like him have found a way to do it safely—in Canada’s only storm-chasing course, Severe Thunderstorms: Storm Chasing and Field Techniques. The highlight of the summer offering is a week-long field trip in which the class travels within one mile of any particular storm.

The cross-continent journey takes approximately 14 U of M students and four meteorologists wherever the storm is—from the Canadian prairies to the Midwestern United States and as far south as Oklahoma. The group is armed with cameras, computers, mobile Internet sticks and the bare essentials, stopping in hotels after long days. Storm-tracking radar, available on websites, is essential for the team to follow a storm and stay a safe distance away.

John Hanesiak created the class with a team of colleagues. The professor and storm chaser says the average field trip includes driving 6,000 kilometres and has taken students to eight states in one week. Hanesiak says his happiest moments are when the skies are grey and a storm is brewing. “I’m outside watching and taking pictures...because...you don’t even know what you’re going to see a lot of times,” says Hanesiak, who teaches in U of M’s department of environment and geography. “There’s never one storm that’s identical. There’s always something different or something you learn.”

Storm chasing is usually a pursuit by meteorologists and other weather professionals who are interested in gathering data about extreme weather. But Hanesiak says Twister—the 1996 Helen Hunt action film about tornado-chasing scientists—created a new wave of hobby storm chasers.

“I think the movie had a good influence on people’s awareness—and the storm-chasing thing in general,” says Hanesiak, noting Internet connectivity was inconsistent when he introduced his course a decade ago. That meant storm chasers had only intermittent access to storm radar and other online information when on the road, except for when they stopped into a McDonald’s or Starbucks. “There’s a lot of chasers out there now just because it’s relatively easy to do now just because of the technology that’s out there and the information you get off the Internet.”
Hanesiak says the goal of professional storm chasers involves more than just capturing a cool-looking storm on camera. It’s also to learn more about the nature of storms, how they form and change. He says the Prairies are ideal for people like him; the province tends to draw storm chasers from around the United States since our air is clean, making storms easy to view from open fields. Winnipeg is also a relatively short drive to the so-called “tornado alley” regions around South Dakota and Kansas.

Tornadoes can happen anywhere there’s hot, humid air, atmospheric instability and wind. Hanesiak says people in Manitoba tend to be more “weather savvy” than in other regions since we’re used to organizing our lives around weather extremes. That could explain the growing number of amateur storm chasers in the province.

Hanesiak says growing up on the Prairies is what shaped his interest in storms. He recalls seeing a tornado in

the distance during a family trip to a farm. “That’s what sort of sparked my interest in it,” says the self-professed “weather geek” who lived in East Kildonan as a kid. “I’ve always been interested in weather but that sort of just enhanced it... The structure of [a storm] is amazing and just knowing what’s going on in there.”

Hanesiak hopes the information he gathers when chasing storms can help the scientific community better understand how storms form and how to prepare for them. The highlight of his research: A large field project he’s working on with a network of American universities. (U of M is the only Canadian university involved with the research). It’s called PECAN, or Plains Elevated Convection At Night.

PECAN has researchers studying severe nighttime weather and why many storms begin and tend to get bigger overnight. “There can be [no storm] going on and all of a sudden—bang,” says Hanesiak. “We know less about nighttime storms than we do about daytime storms.”

He admits that storm chasing is dangerous and must be pursued carefully. “Sure, it’s not a 100 per cent given that you’re going to be safe all the time, so there’s always that risk. But we try to minimize the risk by being smart and not getting too close to things,” says Hanesiak, emphasizing the one-mile policy.

The key to getting out of a storm in one piece? Making sure there are “escape routes”—roads that run in different directions. “We never put the students or anybody else in danger. We’re never that close—or at least we try not to get that close. There are always things that [can go wrong],” he says.

In 2013, well-known American tornado researcher Tim Samaras, 55, and his son Paul, 24, were killed in Oklahoma during a storm-chasing mission, along with their crew member. Hanesiak and other faculty at U of M knew Samaras.

“It can certainly happen if you get caught off guard,” says Hanesiak.

Despite the dangers, Hanesiak still can’t wait to wake up every morning and check the weather radar. He finds joy and beauty in a storm. Hanesiak peruses photos of storms as if he’s admiring pictures of his family.

“It’s just nature at work. Just to think the atmosphere could produce that kind of feature is amazing.”

Meanwhile, Kokolsky will never forget the week he spent in the field with his class.

“When you’re with a bunch of students and your professors and you’re doing things that you wouldn’t normally do on your own...it’s kind of spectacular to have these memories,” says the student, who hopes to volunteer as a mentor for the class.

“In the future, we can talk about this. It’s one of those things that you’ll always remember.”

Pat McCarthy

The 2015 storm chasing field trip south of the border

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“Science can be very dull.... You almost have to be a bit of an entertainer.”
—Prof. Michael Eskin.
See page 15.