



Western



Annual
IMPACT

A brighter future made possible by donor support

The Western community is committed to ensuring current students have an exceptional learning experience where they can grow and flourish.

The collective contribution donors make through Western enables students, researchers and faculty to tackle some of the greatest challenges of our lifetime.

As a donor, you are making a difference in the lives of others. Your support ensures students have access to the highest quality education, which allows them to thrive on campus and graduate career-ready.

Our sincerest gratitude to you – our donors. Thank you for improving the lives of our students, increasing opportunities for our faculty and researchers and making the world a markedly better place for all.



Read more about how donors are changing the future by scanning the QR code.

Leaving a legacy

Catherine Ross's passing in the fall of 2021 was a tremendous loss for the Faculty of Information and Media Studies (FIMS) and the larger Western community. A much-loved professor and dean, she cared deeply about students and their efforts to create a better and more equitable world. Catherine left a gift to Western in her will to ensure students can continue to enrich themselves and society through books, literature, and media.



A clear focus

Legacy gift makes a difference for FIMS student Santasil Mallik

When a friend invited Santasil Mallik to view some old photographs from her family's shuttered photo studio, he never dreamed the experience would alter his life's trajectory and take him across the globe. Opening a trunk belonging to his friend's late grandfather – a photographer during British colonial rule – Santasil discovered a lost piece of India's history.

"Inside were photographs of people who were protesting, some of them even killed during the uprising," Santasil recalls. "I was struck by the politics of the images – who was being photographed, how they were framed, the scenarios behind the taking of the photographs and the family's decision to keep the trunk locked up for generations."

Santasil became motivated to explore photography in his doctoral research and will investigate the role of cameras in humanitarian crises. His goal is to discover how imagery can position viewers as active participants in media by inviting them to engage with geopolitical events in a more humanitarian way.

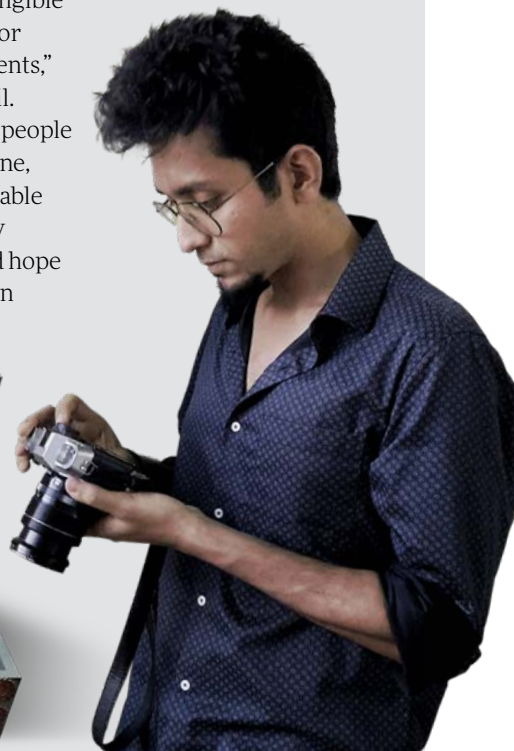
"Audiences are often desensitized to the atrocities of conflict and wars. We need to reconceptualize the role of the camera during a crisis," says Santasil.

"It's not just what's seen through a lens or in a photograph. There is so much more happening that is not visible."

Managing various expenses as an international student, Santasil was able to make ends meet thanks to a scholarship made possible by Catherine Ross's legacy gift.

Legacy donations like Catherine's provide vital funding opportunities for students, faculty and researchers. For Santasil, the scholarship has enabled him to pursue his passions and balance his budget.

"A legacy gift means someone's positive influence will extend beyond their life, making a tangible difference for future students," says Santasil. "Because of people like Catherine, I have been able to follow my dreams, and hope to become an educator."



Peace & Purpose

Vanessa Ambtman-Smith gives back to the Indigenous community that healed her

“Donors gave me financial stability so that I didn’t have to fight to be a student.”

Vanessa Ambtman-Smith, PhD’23
Faculty of Social Science

The word that can perhaps best describe Vanessa Ambtman-Smith, PhD’23, and newly appointed faculty member at Western, is *survivor*. Weathering a storm that enveloped her in darkness, Vanessa found peace and purpose advocating health equity for Indigenous Peoples.

“My doctoral research shows that Canada’s health-care system must incorporate Indigenous healing practices and spaces into patient care. With the mental health-care system in crisis, lives are hanging in the balance,” says Vanessa.

Vanessa (Niizhobinesiiik, Thunderbird Clan) is of Nêhiyaw-Métis ancestry. In a decades-long journey battling racism, poverty and addiction, Vanessa has emerged strong in her mission to make change for Indigenous communities.

As part of the Sixties Scoop, which saw the removal of Indigenous children from their families, Vanessa grew up in Winnipeg (Treaty 1 Territory) with an adoptive family. Growing up, she observed Indigenous relatives living in poverty and suffering from addictions, mental health challenges and intergenerational trauma. In her schooling, she learned an iteration

of Canadian history that largely excluded Indigenous Peoples and ignored the tragic consequences of colonialism and the residential school system.

“I want people to know they can overcome their circumstances and know they are valuable and worthy.”

“Without knowledge of why the inequities were so pervasive, I grew up disconnected from my culture and had no sense of belonging.”

Struggling with addictions in her twenties, Vanessa was repeatedly denied access to safe, culturally appropriate patient care in hospitals. “The stereotypes allotted to Indigenous Peoples deny access to the care we need,” says Vanessa. “It reinforces a harmful cycle.”

For Vanessa, academic and cultural education saved her life. Moving to Ontario

to attend university as an Indigenous studies student, she started to make sense of her negative experiences. Connecting with her culture through Knowledge Keepers, she was invigorated by a journey of self-discovery, including recovery from addictions.

After working for two decades in Indigenous health care, Vanessa pursued graduate studies at Western so she could confront inequities and conduct respectful research that identifies the importance of incorporating Indigenous healing in conventional medicine.

Donors contribute to a more equitable world

Donor-funded awards are vitally important for students like Vanessa. Last year, donors generously provided financial support for 4,600 students, greatly easing their financial burden, and enabling them to focus on their studies and follow their dreams.

Vanessa was a recipient of the Dr. Valio Markkanen Indigenous Graduate Award of Excellence. The award is bestowed to an Indigenous graduate student who has achieved excellence in academics and

actively contributes to the Indigenous community.

The award couldn’t have come at a better time for Vanessa and her family.

“I left my career and returned to school as a mother of two young children. It feels so important that donors are invested in my success.”

Additionally, Vanessa has received coveted provincial and national graduate and research scholarships for her work.

“I would say to anyone who supports scholars how profoundly grateful I am. It has given me a deep sense of respect and dignity, and it reminds me that my work is a shared collective responsibility because there’s a stake in it for others.”

Vanessa sees sharing her story as key to connecting with others to show them that hope exists and looks forward to developing as a mentor for future students. Her role as a mother is also integral in her drive to make the world a better place. “I want my children to know that everything is possible.”



Drs. Chandy and Leligdowicz, a highly sought-after pair of research scientists, could feel the excitement as they set up their laboratory at Robarts Research Institute.

A dynamic duo

Thanks to donors, Robarts continues to push the boundaries of research

Donors who support Robarts Research Institute at Western University help fund initiatives that make a lasting difference in the lives of patients. Robarts is a leader in finding solutions for debilitating diseases and accelerating medical discovery, and is home to some of the best researchers.

A recent addition to Robarts' impressive clinician-scientist roster, Drs. Mark Chandy and Aleksandra Leligdowicz are a husband and wife team who are merging their research interests into a single lab.

Dr. Chandy's work is inspired by a family history of heart disease and diabetes. For Dr. Leligdowicz, her experience as a critical care physician motivated her to investigate treatment options for infectious diseases like sepsis and COVID-19.

The new shared laboratory is a "dream come true," enabling the pair to further their research on induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs) and their use in understanding and treating chronic disease and severe infection. As physician-scientists, they are uniquely positioned to translate their scientific discoveries into patient care that benefits Canadians and people worldwide.



"Finding new treatments for devastating diseases starts with research. It simply wouldn't be possible without donor support."

Rob Bartha, Vice-Dean, Research and Innovation, at Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry.

Rowing the distance

Western donors support an Olympic hopeful

Western psychology graduate Karissa Riley has entered international waters, trading her Mustangs purple uniform for Rowing Canada red. Cautiously optimistic about the opportunity to compete at the Olympic Games in Paris, France, next summer, the accomplished athlete says racing with Canada's national team has exceeded her highest expectations.

In a turbulent journey that involved mental health struggles and switching her major from biochemistry and medical science to psychology, Karissa found her clarity and plans to become a mental performance consultant for athletes. "I understand the pressures that high-achieving athletes face, and I want to use my own experience to support them," she says.

Karissa praises the support she received from coaches, mentors, volunteers, and donors as a rower at Western. "The rowing program's donors truly understand the value of investing in student-athletes," says Karissa. "They fuel our success and motivate us to push ourselves further than we thought possible."

Women's rowing head coach Matt Waddell believes donors are the key to the team's success. "Thanks to generous donors, student-athletes can channel their work ethic in an environment that supports them with proper equipment, funding for training and coaching support."

After graduation, Karissa admits leaving Western is bittersweet –but beyond Fanshawe Lake, her future is bright and boundless. There is no limit to how fast and far she will go.

A faithful community of donors

Donors like Carolyn Clark make chasing dreams possible. The rowing alum, who spent just a year with the team in 1971, felt such a connection to



the rowing community that she and her husband Greig have faithfully supported Western's rowing program since the 1980s. Drawing on her experience as an undergraduate student in the early 1970s, Carolyn is inspired to give back.

"I received a fifty-dollar bursary at the end of my fourth year at Western which allowed me to finish my degree. I was nearly broke. I remember what it feels like to struggle financially, and that's why supporting students is so important to me."



*Thank you to our donors.
We are profoundly grateful
for your generosity.*



Every donation counts



As a monthly and legacy donor, Don Payne (HBA'69, MA'71) is the perfect example of the difference donors make. Loyal contributors like Don support a variety of priorities and projects by helping Western react quickly to changing needs on campus.

Don was inspired to give back more than 20 years ago after reflecting on his experience as a graduate student in the early 1970s. A strong believer in the value of education, Don says that he “learned how to learn” while studying for his master’s degree.

“I started donating to Western because I wanted to support the place that had a profound affect on me personally and professionally,” shares Don. “I remember what it feels like to be a student, juggling studies with working and funding my education. With the rising cost of living, I’m certain that many students today are feeling that burden even more so, and I think it’s worthy to help in any way that I can.”

Don says that it’s also important to understand that every donation makes a difference. “It’s great if you can contribute a large gift to support the university, but if you aren’t able to, there’s a place for everyone to make an impact. If we put a bunch of drops together, soon, we’ll have a bucket full of water!”

Don is just one example of the countless ways that Western’s community of donors make a lasting difference in the lives of students, faculty and researchers.

Thank you for your continued support.

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