



UNIVERSITY
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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR, MURRAY GINGRAS

A December Reflection: Christmas, Community, and the Joy of Working in EAS

I grew up in a rural family in the 1970s, surrounded by a large number of relatives. My mom had five brothers and sisters; my dad had six. They all had children. By the time I was old enough to pay attention, I had at least thirty-odd cousins. Now, with spouses and their kids, we've expanded into a genuine clan. By any Darwinian measure, my grandparents on both sides were unequivocal successes.

Some of my best Christmas memories come from those years. We lived on my grandparents' farm near High Prairie, Alberta, in a homemade trailer built on the metal frame of one that had burned to the axle. It was tiny, 14 by 60 feet, less than 900 square feet, and when it was our turn to host Christmas, all of my aunts, uncles, and cousins packed into that little space. I remember one year in particular: sixteen kids under twelve, my cousin Karen and I being the "oldest" at ten and eleven, all of us perched in hallways, bedrooms, and anywhere a plate of turkey could be balanced. It was crowded, chaotic, loud, and absolutely wonderful. Those Christmases defined joy for me.

And every December, working in the Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, I feel echoes of that same warmth. We're a large department, but we're also a close one. My calendar tells me the holiday season is underway: the Atlas Holiday Party on December 12, Mike and Amber Caldwell's legendary Christmas party on December 6 (a tradition going back nearly twenty-five years) and the front office Christmas lunch and gift exchange is coming up. My research group is preparing for our annual "Thriftmas," where we draw names and scour a thrift store with a strict \$10 limit, then gather with fake champagne and treats for an afternoon of fun. These small celebrations, scattered through December, add up to something meaningful. If you stop by the front office, you'll see the projector fireplace flickering away, decorations and lights everywhere and a great tree (none of which I can take credit for). These all make me smile every time I walk in. It's a joyful space, and it reminds me of the simple happiness of coming in from the snow to a warm house in the 1970s.

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR, MURRAY GINGRAS CONT'D...

Even now, the things I treasure most about this time of year haven't changed: being warm inside while it snows outside, spending quiet time with the people (and cats) I love, and feeling gratitude for what I have. And as I look around the department, I realize how lucky we are to work in a community where kindness, generosity, support, and genuine camaraderie are part of everyday life. That sense of belonging is a real gift, and the holiday season has a way of bringing it to the forefront.

To our undergraduate students: I wish you the very best on your exams. May you exceed your expectations.

To our graduate students: please take a real break over the holidays. Don't spend every day reading or writing. Give yourselves the time you've earned to rest and reset.

And to my colleagues, faculty and support staff alike, I hope you'll do what I intend to do: enjoy time with the people who matter most and rediscover the things that make the season special.

Merry Christmas to all. May the warmth of the season carry you well into the new year.

- Murray



**“Maybe Christmas,” he thought,
“doesn’t come from a store.**

**Maybe Christmas... perhaps...
means a little bit more!”**

- Dr. Seuss, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!*

HEALTH, SAFETY & ENVIRONMENT (HSE) COMMITTEE

Campus Winter Closure

University buildings will be closed from **December 25th, to January 1st, inclusive**. With campus being quieter during the closure, there are a couple of key items that your groups can consider when winding down for the break:

Preparing your space:

- Clear out any trash from your office and take it to the nearest Zero Waste sorting station
- Take home or dispose of all food items from personal space and refrigerators
- Secure or take home personal items
- Turn off or unplug all electronic devices including heaters, coffee makers, photocopiers and computers
- Put away and lock up portable items of value (e.g. laptops, cameras) and do not leave them in the open
- Where possible, remove computer equipment and small property from the floor and place it in a higher area in case of water escape
- Close and lock all windows and doors on your way out
- Do a final walkthrough of your space before leaving

Building access and working alone:

- Check that you have building access and carry your ONEcard
- Brush up on your working alone policy and have a check-in partner ready
- Consider the Lone Worker program, or contacting UAPS to book an escort across campus
- For urgent maintenance issues call 780-492-4833
- For health and safety concerns call UCC at 780-492-5555 and ask for a callback from the HSE person on call
- For security concerns call UAPS at 780-492-5050
- For emergencies call 911

Safeguard your research:

- Shut down equipment and lower fumehood sashes
- Check lab signage is accurate (in the case that you must be contacted in an emergency)
- Check freezers and consider adding a contact number
- Check all shutoffs have been engaged
- Close and lock doors/windows
- Ensure hazardous products are stored securely
- Decide if there are checks that must occur over the break

WELLNESS COMMITTEE

Cookie Day

Drop in the EAS office (ESB 1-26) on **Friday December 5th between 9am and 3pm** for some coffee, tea, and holidays treats!

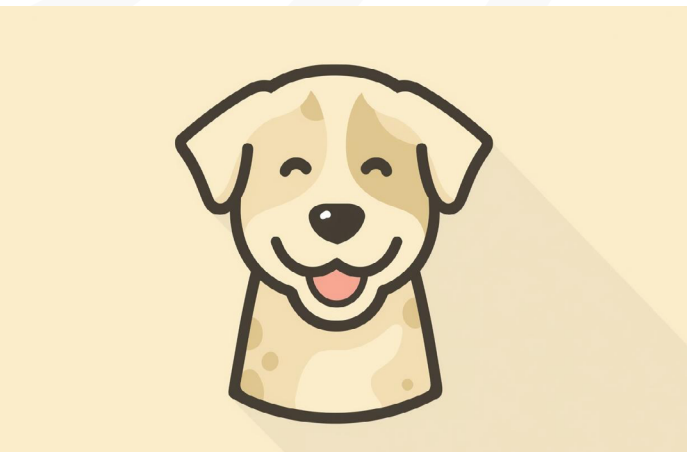


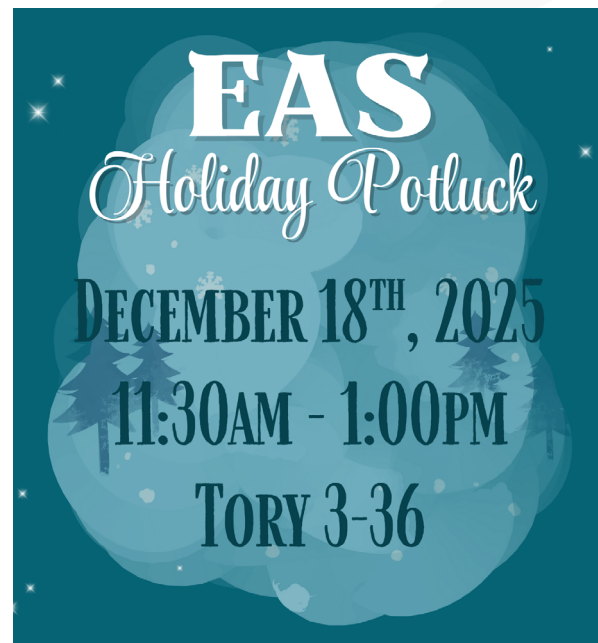
Winter Gear Donations

Donated clothing is now available in the grad lounge (ESB 3-01A). Please take what you need!

Stress Buster Event

EAS will be getting a special visit from Jessie Davis and her dog, Bayer, from the Pet Therapy Society of Northern Alberta, on **Monday December 8th, from 10am - 12pm**. If you need a break from studying, come by ESB 1-26 to visit our furry friend!





EAS Holiday Potluck

Join us for a lunchtime potluck and celebrate the holiday season with fellow students, staff, and faculty.

Sign-up [here](#).

*2nd year students and up

Lunchtime Yoga

Yoga is ongoing until the winter break. Come for a lunchtime stretch **Wednesdays from 12:05 - 12:55pm** in ESB 2-18.



Kawakib al Sharq | Stars of the East

EAS Professor, Chris Schneider, along with the rest of the Middle Eastern and North African Music Ensemble, will be performing on **December 5th at 7:30pm** at Convocation Hall. See details [here](#).



Have you met...

[Kathleen North]

What do you do in the department?

I am currently a fifth-year undergraduate student in Honours Geology, working on my undergraduate thesis under the supervision of Dr. Britta Jensen and the Volcanic Ash Research Group (VARG). For my thesis, I am attempting to find tephra in a sediment core from Kluachon Lake, British Columbia, using cryptotephra techniques. I am also very lucky to be the president of the P.S. Warren Geoscience Society for this academic year.

FACULTY AND STAFF EVENTS, RESOURCES, & ANNOUNCEMENTS CONT'D...

What's something your coworkers might not know about you?

I have been dancing since I was 5 years old and have trained in ballet, jazz, contemporary, and hip hop! I currently teach recreational and competitive hip hop to kids and adults as my part-time job. (Let me know if anyone wants hip hop lessons...)

What's your favourite distraction?

I've gotten really into junk journaling the past couple of years. All you have to do is collect little scraps from your day (receipts, labels, brochures) and stick them in a journal with lots of fun decorative tape and stickers. It's a less stressful version of scrapbooking and a nice way to remember fun things you did that day.

If you were enrolling in one course, program or degree right now, what would it be?

I would likely be pursuing a degree in printmaking. I took a few classes earlier in my degree, loved them, and was very close to switching into the program.

If you could see any live performance tomorrow, what would it be?

I would love to go to Folk Fest. It is my favourite weekend of the year.

What's one thing you can't live without?

For lack of a more insightful answer: Coca-Cola! It is my go-to study beverage. It has the perfect amount of caffeine and sugar to help me focus.

What's something that makes you happy to come to campus?

Spending time with my friends always makes coming to campus worthwhile. We are fortunate in geology to have field schools that help us form strong relationships with our peers. I don't know how I would survive this program without that support system.

DEPARTMENT ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

AASUA retroactive pay and implementation of the new collective agreement

As part of the implementation of the renewal agreement with AASUA, retroactive payments of 2024 and 2025 salary increases will be issued starting this week, across two pay periods. Eligible employees (active and on paid leave) will receive the retroactive salary increase from July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025 in the November 1-30 pay period (November 27 pay date) and for July 1, 2025 - October 31, 2025 in the December 1-31 pay period (December 30 pay date). The new updated salary scales will be applied effective the November 1-30 pay period.

This information will also be shared with employees and the community this week. Employees with further questions are being encouraged to contact the [Staff Service Centre](#). You may also refer to this update on the [UofA Bargaining page](#).

STUDENT EVENTS, RESOURCES, & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Graduate Student Peer Support Program

The Graduate Student Peer Support program (GSPS) is a support network for graduate students as they navigate challenges and opportunities during their educational journey at the U of A.

Any graduate student who is seeking advice, guidance and support during their time at the U of A is encouraged to access the program. Managed by the university's Health Safety + Environment team and in partnership with the [Graduate Students' Association](#), the [Office of Student Success and Experience](#), and the [Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies](#), the program is designed to champion students' academic, mental and physical well-being, build community, as well as foster a sense of belonging in a supportive, inclusive and empathetic environment.

Please see [here](#) for additional details.



STUDENT EVENTS, RESOURCES, & ANNOUNCEMENTS CONT'D...

EAS Holiday Party

A reminder that the EAS Holiday Party will be on **December 12th** at the University Club. **Doors will open at 5:30pm**, with the program starting at 7:15pm, followed by a buffet dinner at 7:30pm. The celebration is semi-formal. Tickets are \$40 for students and \$55 for non-students, and can be purchased [here](#). Don't wait! We anticipate selling out, so get them while you can! Official ticket sales will close on Friday December 5th. Looking forward to seeing you all there!



ATLAS Holiday Bake Sale

ATLAS will be hosting a holiday bake sale on **December 2nd, from 11am - 3pm** in the grad lounge (ESB 3-01A). Come down and get your holiday treats!

ATLAS Social - Hockey Night

Join us to watch the UofA Golden Bears take on the Macewan Griffins on **Saturday December 6th**. [Tickets are free for UofA students](#). The game starts at 7pm, we will be sitting behind the penalty box!



RESEARCH FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

UofA - Alberta Land Institute: Research Grant

Project funding is dependent on the potential policy implications and the proposed approach. See full description [here](#).

RAS Full Application Deadline: January 9, 2026

Sponsor Deadline: January 16, 2026

Be sure to check out the [database](#) for the full list of funding opportunities.

Call for Submissions

If you would like to submit an event or information to be included in next month's issue, please email s.hemrick@ualberta.ca by **January 7, 2026**.



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