

2026 Scandinavian Studies Association Newsletter



NOTICE

The Scandinavian Studies Association AGM On Sunday May 3 - 2 to 4 p.m.

At the Greenfield Community Hall located at 3803 114 St. NW in Edmonton.

Guest Speaker - Dr. John Eason, Lecturer of Scandinavian Studies at the University of Alberta, will make a presentation on Norwegian Cinema: A Cultural History on Screen.

ALL ARE WELCOME

The Scandinavian Studies Association's by-laws define Association membership on being 18 years of age or older and having completed volunteer service (such as being a casino volunteer) or having made other contributions to the Association.

Understanding Health and Welfare Through Study of Icelandic Sagas

Kylee Schmitt currently is completing a Master's Degree under the supervision of Dr. Natalie Van Deusen, Henry Cabot and Linnea Lodge Professor of Scandinavian Studies at the University of Alberta. Kylee's graduate studies combine two of her areas of undergraduate studies at the U of A, namely Old Norse Culture and Psychology. For outsiders, the two areas of study may appear to be quite distinct and separate. The Scandinavian Scan posed some questions to Kylee, asking her to explain her interests and reasons for study and connecting the two fields.

Q. Before discussing your graduate work, readers might appreciate knowing a bit about your pre-university days - notably where you were raised and went to school?

A. I was born and raised in Edmonton, where I attended Jasper Place High School.

Q. What brought you to the University

of Alberta and what prompted you to enroll in undergraduate Psychology and Scandinavian Studies courses? For instance, are there any family or personal connections with Scandinavia?

A. I chose the University of Alberta to stay close to home, initially enrolling in Psychology out of a fascination with human behaviour. Although I have no family ties to Scandinavia, I decided to take a Scandinavian Studies course on mythology as my very first university class. I enjoyed the subject matter so much that I continued to take all of the courses alongside my Psychology degree.

Q. What ignited your desire to pursue these fields at the graduate level?

A. My graduate project is the culmination of a deep academic interest in Old Norse culture, sparked by the extensive coursework I completed with Professor Van Deusen, and it was also informed by my undergraduate work in psychology.



Backed by the University of Alberta's Visionaries, Kylee Schmitt has her own vision for exploring links between Norse Sagas and Psychology.

Q. Could you explain your current research in a bit more detail?

A. My current research explores the representation of women's health and illness within the Sagas of Icelanders. This interdisciplinary approach allows me to analyze saga narratives, not just as historical or literary artifacts, but as case studies in human behaviour and mental health. I am particularly interested in how "illness" is coded in

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Kylee Schmitt, continued from page 1

the sagas when it pertains to female characters. While male mental states are often tied to honour or battle-fury, women's psychological struggles frequently manifest in domestic and social spheres. By analyzing these depictions, I aim to clarify the Icelandic vocabulary for psychological suffering and determine how gender influenced the perception of mental instability in the Middle Ages. My work seeks to channel the traditional dichotomy between the "physical" and "spiritual" in medieval literature by identifying behavioral markers in the text - such as social withdrawal, psychosomatic ailments, or disordered mourning.

Q. Is your research breaking new ground or have other researchers also sought similar insight through their investigations?

A. While existing scholarship has explored physical disability in the Sagas of Icelanders, my research breaks new ground by specifically focusing on mental health and gender. I am investigating how "illness" was coded differently for women - often manifesting through social withdrawal or disordered mourning - compared to the honour-based psychological states of men. By identifying these behavioural markers, I aim to be among the first to formally discuss how gender influenced the medieval perception of mental instability.

Q. To what extent are you relying upon undergraduate studies of Old Norse and/or modern Scandinavian languages?

"My research breaks new ground by specifically focusing on mental health and gender."

A. I am relying heavily on my undergraduate training. Since Old Norse language courses are primarily offered at the undergraduate level, those studies provided the essential linguistic toolkit I need to engage with the primary texts. Without that specific foundation, I wouldn't be able to conduct this level of deep, original analysis of the sagas.

Q. In conducting your research, do you utilize Old Norse texts as well as translations?

A. I am fortunate to have access to the Sagas in translation, which provides a comprehensive overview of the narratives. However, I am sure at some point I will have to consult literature in the original language.



"I hope to show that the roots of our modern understanding of mental health lie deep in our medieval past."

Q. Do your investigations involve any travel - possibly to Iceland?

A. I am actually traveling to Iceland this year to attend a manuscript summer school, which will be an incredible opportunity to work directly with primary source materials! Looking ahead, I hope to incorporate more research-oriented travel into my studies.

Q. How far along are you in your graduate program?

A. I am currently completing my course-based MA, with plans to finalize my Capstone project on this topic by the end of the calendar year (December 2026). While a Capstone is similar to a thesis in its focus on original research, it serves as a focused, integrative project that allows me to synthesize my studies in Psychology and Scandinavian literature into a final, comprehensive report.

Q. What do you see as the wider goals of your research findings?

A. By mapping these historical depictions of female health, I hope to show that the roots of our modern understanding of mental health lie deep in our medieval past.

Q. How do you see yourself personally applying your findings professionally in an academic, clinical or possibly another setting?

A. I am planning to move forward with a second Master's in Library and Information Studies. Professionally, I plan to bridge my academic background in mythology and psychology by working in a setting where I can foster a love for reading and help others navigate complex information. My goal is to use my graduate work to make specialized knowledge more accessible to the community.



President's Message

By Patrick Erickson

This past year has been a whirlwind for the Scandinavian Studies Association. Firstly, Nordahl Flakstad stepped back as President, after nearly a decade in the role, and I succeeded him. The SSA, and the Scandinavian community at-large, would like to recognize and thank Nordahl for all that he has accomplished and appreciates that he will remain on the Board of Directors for another two years. Avery Young, who stepped up last year on an interim basis, was formally elected to a two-year term and continues as Vice President.

Engagements With University

Huge efforts have been made engaging with the University of Alberta, as the SSA is endeavoring to implement an official governing document for the Henry Cabot and Linnea Lodge Professorship, currently held by Dr. Natalie Van Deusen, to ensure the efforts and generous donations of the community are adhered to in perpetuity. To this end, Patrick Erickson, Nordahl Flakstad, Avery Young and Leanne Boraas met with leadership in the Faculty of Arts and the Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies in June, where we identified the lack of a formalized agreement and deficiencies in how the endowment fund was

being administered. Fortunately, there is a thorough record of correspondence over many years that has aided us. Much thanks to Nordahl, the late Carl Sorensen and other past leaders for their meticulous recordkeeping.

Draft Endowment Agreement

After several meetings we have a draft endowment agreement undergoing legal review before a formal presentation to the university. We hope to have this endowment agreement signed before the beginning of the 2026-27 academic year in September. A formalized agreement, which would adhere to the intention of our generous donors, would fully safeguard the continued teaching of second-year Norwegian and Swedish at the University of Alberta, exempting the courses from ever-increasing class enrollment minimums in the face of the continued budget constraints process. Additional thanks to Natalie Van Deusen and John Eason, who have been tireless in communicating their needs and providing valuable information on the history of the program.

Scandinavian Program Active

The Scandinavian program continued to instruct in first and second-year

Norwegian and Swedish this past year. Content courses included Old Norse Mythology and Legends and Scandinavia Through Folklore in the winter; Scandinavian Cinema and the ever-popular Vikings in the winter. The Vikings course has an enrollment of 300. No other course in the department has enrollment over 60 this term, which is a major credit to Dr. Van Deusen and the Scandinavian Studies program.

Finally, in the face of increasing scrutiny on minors courses at the University of Alberta, the Scandinavian Studies minor has been broadened to increase interest and enrollment. Students will now be able to complete the minor taking entirely content-based courses or a combination of content and language. It is the belief of the SSA that this will significantly enhance appeal and enrollment.

Thank you to everyone for your attention, patience and generosity over the past year. It has been trying at times, but the board believes we are in a good place and will be set up especially well once the endowment agreement is formalized and signed. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at ptericks@ualberta.ca

About Our Board

The Scandinavian Studies Association has nine board members, who are voted in for two-year terms. Four, and then five directors are voted in at consecutive annual meetings. At the 2025 annual meeting, the following four board members were elected: Avery Young, Trevor Nyroos, Valerie Vale and Nordahl Flakstad. The following five were elected for two-year terms at the 2024 annual meeting: Patrick Erickson, Kaare Boraas, Pat Dunn, Ruth Sjoberg and Leanne Boraas. These terms will be up at the upcoming 2026 annual meeting but they are eligible for re-election. Some of these directors may wish not to seek re-election and nominations for joining the board are welcome.

The current SSA board executive members are: President Patrick Erickson; Vice-President Avery Young; Secretary Valery Vale and Treasurer Leanne Boraas. The executive for the following year is selected by the nine-member board.



Remembering Carl Sorensen

Submitted by Nordahl Flakstad

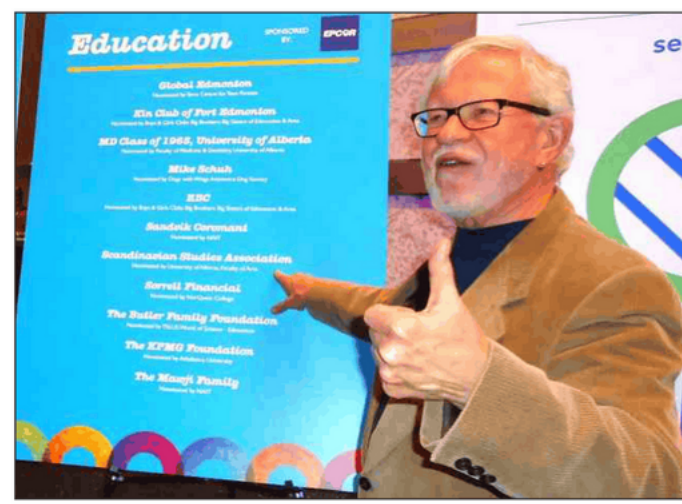
Current and past directors and members of the Scandinavian Studies Association (SSA) were shocked and saddened by the sudden passing of former SSA Board member Carl Sorensen on December 10, following surgery.

Carl was born in Medicine Hat in 1942 and raised on a farm in Tilley, AB.

Beside his valued contributions to SSA and its objectives, Carl, who stepped down from the board in 2024, was a mainstay of the Danish-Canadian community in

self-described "details" person. He was ever aware of the importance of staying within proper bounds when it came to procedures and protocol. With Carl present, there was no need to carry a Robert's Rules of Order to board and annual meetings, or for other tasks requiring detailed attention to rules and process. That came to the fore, in two particular cases where Carl and I worked together on SSA matters. One was a few years ago, when Carl and I were tasked with reviewing and overseeing an extensive rewrite of the Association's bylaws. Carl would be the first to suggest: "Is this what we want to say or could we do it better?"

He brought the same approach when we went through a "to keep, or not to keep" review of Scandinavian Studies Association documents prior to submission to the University of Alberta Archives for safe keeping. I must admit there were times when I did query Carl's suggestions. But, almost without exception, I



The late Carl Sorensen - always pointing in the right direction.

would realize: "Yes, Carl is right!"

Those privileged to know Carl and work with him, will hope he still is looking over our shoulder, whenever attention to detail is required.

A celebration of Carl's life, held at Holy Spirit Lutheran Church in Edmonton on March 7, was very well attended by former professional colleagues, friends and by many fellow volunteers from various groups, including the Scandinavian Studies Association. Our condolences are extended to his children Kristopher and Karl (TJ) and other family members.

Kristian Nyhus

As this newsletter was finalized, we learned that Kristian Nyhus died on March 23 at age 95. A native of Geilo, Norway, Kris was long a pillar of Edmonton's Scandinavian community. That included support of SSA and numerous other organizations. He is survived by his wife Bernice and extended family.

"Hvil i fred Kris."

Eight Second-Level Scholarships Given

The Scandinavian Studies Association (SSA) congratulates the eight students who last fall received scholarship supporting their second-level language studies in Swedish and Norwegian. The awards, of \$1,000 each, are presented through the Scandinavian Studies Fund. The latter is administered by the University of Alberta and draws upon donations from the SSA, the Torskekklubben of Edmonton service club and other donors. The 2025 recipients were: Sophie Binch, Finn Leland, Raina Stewart, Amisha Bavineni, Hunter Jones, Tani Hamborg, Natasha Johnston and Ciara Moore.

Another round of awards is scheduled for the fall.

More About Enrollment in Scandinavian at U of A

The Scandinavian Studies Program has had another excellent year in 2025-26, with strong enrollments in all language and content courses. Dr. John Eason taught first- and second-year Norwegian and Swedish, as well as two content courses: SCAND 330: Mamma Mia! 'Queer' I Go Again! and SCAND 329: Scandinavian Cinema. Dr. Natalie Van Deusen taught SCAND 341: Old Norse Mythology and Legends, SCAND 342: The Vikings (taught online with 300 students

enrolled), and SCAND 343: Scandinavia Through Folklore. Dr. Van Deusen supervises several MA and PhD students, whose research focuses on Scandinavian Studies, with topics ranging from mixed race identity in Old Norse literature to the role of the Sámi in World War II. The Program will offer more language and content courses in 2026-27, including Old Norse language and a course on the Icelandic sagas.

Learn More

For additional information about the University of Alberta's Scandinavian Studies Program and the Scandinavian Studies Association, check:

Modern Languages and Cultural Studies (ualberta.ca)
www.scandinavianstudies.ca



Hope to see you at our AGM May 3, 2026.

Check out our site

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