



Student Awards Ceremony

2024 Academic Year

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Acknowledgement of Country

With respect for Aboriginal cultural protocol and out of recognition that its campuses occupy their traditional lands. Western Sydney University acknowledges the Darug, Eora, Dharawal (also referred to as Tharawal) and Wiradjuri peoples and thanks them for their support of its work in their lands (Greater Western Sydney and beyond).

Message from the Executive Director, Advancement



At Western Sydney University, student success is at the heart of everything we do. The Student Awards Ceremony are a chance to celebrate the hard work, dedication, and achievements of our hardworking and ambitious students – recognising not just academic excellence, but also the passion and perseverance that will shape their and our collective futures.

These awards would not be possible without the generosity of our donors. By funding prizes and academic awards, donors play a vital role in encouraging students to aim high, supporting their aspirations, and giving them an edge as they step into the workforce. To our donors—thank you for believing in our students and helping them reach their full potential.

The Western Sydney region continues to grow and evolve, so do the opportunities for our students. The University is focused on preparing graduates who are adaptable, innovative, and ready to make an impact. These awards help ensure our students have the recognition, motivation, and confidence to take on the challenges ahead.

To our award recipients – congratulations! We are proud of all that you have achieved and can't wait to see where your journey takes you next.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'CBurden'.

Christian Burden
Executive Director, Advancement
Western Sydney University

Dani Gilroy Memorial Prize



Donor	<p>Dani Gilroy Memorial Fund</p> <p>Dani Gilroy was an exceptional young woman and an excellent student, enrolled in the Bachelor of Social Work at Western Sydney University. Amongst her peers, Dani was known as the 'go to girl' who always made time to support others. She believed in the most beautiful qualities of people and had an incredible ability to bring out the best in her peers. Those who worked alongside Dani recall the experience as a privilege.</p> <p>Dani was active in student activities on Bankstown campus and enjoyed all aspects of university life. She sought to empower others and to improve the lives and abilities of all people. She was an exceptional human rights advocate for people with a disability, which was demonstrated in her years of service in the disability services sector.</p> <p>Dani passed away unexpectedly on 13 June 2011, while completing the final year of her degree. She is sadly missed by her peers, teachers, friends, workmates and family.</p>
Prize	Dani Gilroy Memorial Prize for Social Work
Criteria	Awarded to a current student enrolled in the Bachelor of Social Work program who has shown academic excellence, emerging wisdom and worldliness as demonstrated through field placement critical reflections. The recipient must be dedicated to social justice
Recipient	Not Awarded
Prize	Dani Gilroy Memorial Prize in Social Work - Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Student Award
Criteria	Awarded to a current student from Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander background enrolled in the Bachelor of Social Work program who has shown academic excellence, emerging wisdom and worldliness as demonstrated through field placement critical reflection
Recipient	Zoe Lee Donoghue

Libero & Daisy Soldatić PhD Excellence Award



Donor	<p>Libero & Daisy Soldatić</p> <p>Libero and Daisy Soldatić are long term residents of the Western Sydney region.</p> <p>Libero immigrated to Australia in the 1950s from Istra, Croatia and met Daisy in Cabramatta. They have 5 children all of whom were born and raised in Western Sydney. Since the late 1960s, they have been active members of the Ingleburn Community for almost 50 years including the Ingleburn Chamber of Commerce Committee (Honorary Lifetime Member) and co-founding members of the Ingleburn Festival Alive committee which they have continued to support.</p> <p>This prize has been established to recognise local community members who have achieved excellence in social science scholarship and research, bringing pride and recognition to the people of Western Sydney.</p>
Prize	<p>Libero & Daisy Soldatić PhD Excellence Award</p>
Criteria	<p>Awarded for outstanding doctoral research performance through high quality and impactful research</p>
Recipient	<p>Chris Panagiotaros</p>

MCAE Commemorative Award



Donor	<p>Milperra College of Advanced Education (MCAE)</p> <p>Once known as Milperra College of Advanced Education (MCAE), Bankstown campus at Milperra is now one of 13 University campuses stretching across Western Sydney. Dating back to 1974, MCAE was the first college to offer specialised teacher and social work education in South-West Sydney. Until recently, the former college was home to Western Sydney University's Schools of Education, Humanities and Languages, Psychology, Social Sciences, and Nursing and Midwifery.</p> <p>The Milperra College of Advanced Education (MCAE) Commemorative Award has been established to honour those who were instrumental in establishing Bankstown campus. The award has been funded by former staff and students of MCAE and recognises the achievements of students in Education, Social Work and Social Welfare, who continue the tradition of excellence and commitment to their field started in the initial years of MCAE.</p>
Prize	<p>MCAE Commemorative Award</p>
Criteria	<p>This award recognises the graduating, non-honours student from the Bachelor of Social Work with the highest GPA.</p>
Recipient	<p>Vanessa Louise Carlino</p>

Natalie Bolzan

Social Justice Award

Donor	<p>Professor Natalie Bolzan Memorial</p> <p>Professor Natalie Bolzan worked at Western Sydney University for over two decades. As the inaugural appointee to the Margaret Whitlam Chair of Social Work, she made a foundational contribution to the world class and industry renowned Social Work program we have today.</p> <p>Through her research and her teaching, Natalie pursued equality and social justice, particularly through her research with young people. Her published works focused on young people and issues of youth justice, resilience, social capital, mental health, homelessness, asylum seekers and out-of-home care. This work reflected the social and regional mission of our University and the legacy of Margaret Whitlam.</p> <p>In defining the principles of social work, Natalie commented that ‘social workers work with, or on behalf of, individuals, groups and communities to identify, minimise and ultimately remove disadvantage associated with social arrangements, both formal and informal’. This was the model and inflection which she stamped upon the Social Work and Community Welfare programs at Western Sydney University, which has set our University apart and placed us at the frontiers of the discipline in Australia.</p> <p>Natalie was loved and respected by students and colleagues alike and is very much missed by her many friends at Western Sydney University.</p>
Prize	Natalie Bolzan Social Justice Award
Criteria	Awarded to an outstanding graduate in the Master of Social Work (Qualifying) who excels in areas of equity, access and social inclusion.
Recipient	Yen Nhi Nguyen

Planning Institute of Australia (NSW Division) Prize



Donor	<p>Planning Institute of Australia (NSW Division)</p> <p>The Planning Institute of Australia is the peak body representing professionals involved in planning Australia’s cities, towns, regions and places. This prize recognises excellence in student achievement and a commitment to upholding the integrity and practice of the profession.</p> <p>planning.org.au</p>
Prize	<p>Planning Institute of Australia (NSW Division) Prize</p>
Criteria	<p>Awarded to the most outstanding graduating student at the end of the Bachelor of Planning (Pathway to Master of Urban Management and Planning).</p>
Recipient	<p>Erica Rae Lacuna</p>

Presentation Sisters, Wagga Wagga Award



Donor	<p>Presentation Sisters, Wagga Wagga</p> <p>In the early 1870s, Father McAlroy was commissioned by Bishop Lanigan of Goulburn to recruit teaching nuns from Ireland for the schools in the Diocese of Goulburn, which then included Wagga Wagga. Five sisters were chosen to bring Christian education to the children of the early settlers of Wagga Wagga. Mt Erin was opened in 1874. The work of the Presentation Sisters was largely in school education. Since the 1980s, the areas of ministry have changed and the sisters are now involved in rural ministry outreach services, ecology and working for the environment, Aboriginal reconciliation, family support and youth camps as well as a no interest loan scheme in Western Sydney, and providing support and care to the ageing members of the congregation. All of these works are carried out within a commitment to justice for the Earth and those made poor.</p> <p>presentationsociety.org.au</p>
Prize	<p>Presentation Sisters, Wagga Wagga Award</p>
Criteria	<p>Awarded to an Indigenous student with the highest GPA at the end of first year in Social Sciences.</p>
Recipient	<p>Lily Sarah Johnson</p>

Rotary Club of Padstow Social Work Prizes



Donor	<p>The Rotary Club of Padstow</p> <p>The Rotary Club of Padstow has as a priority to support education. These prizes presents us with the opportunity to support students in the field of social work which meshes perfectly with the mission statement of Rotary International to 'provide service to others, promote integrity, and advance world understanding, goodwill and peace through its fellowship of business, professional and community leaders'. To achieve these goals requires the advancement of education, not only in technical areas but importantly in areas of service to those less fortunate than ourselves.</p> <p>These prizes reward and encourages students who have chosen to work for social justice in the community on issues that lead to the betterment of others rather than themselves. It is offered to third year students to encourage them to reach their higher goals in their final (fourth year).</p> <p>The motto of Rotary International is 'Service Above Self' which inspires the more than 1.2 million Rotarians in more than 34,000 clubs in over 200 countries and geographical areas. This motto is also reflected by the winners of this award in their choice of career and dedication to the service of others.</p> <p>padstowrotary.org.au</p>
Prize	Rotary Club of Padstow Master of Social Work (Qualifying) Prize
Criteria	Awarded to a student currently enrolled in the Master of Social Work (Qualifying) who has shown academic excellence, broader community involvement, a commitment to helping their peers, building community on campus and emerging wisdom and worldliness as demonstrated through field placement critical reflections.
Recipient	Katherine Annabel Mitchell
Prize	Rotary Club of Padstow Social Work Prize
Criteria	Awarded to a student currently enrolled in the Bachelor of Social Work who has shown academic excellence, broader community involvement, a commitment to helping their peers, building community on campus and emerging wisdom and worldliness as demonstrated through field placement critical reflections.
Recipient	Tyana Leigh Linacre

SMSA Award in Social Science



Donor	<p>Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts (SMSA)</p> <p>In 1833, Henry Carmichael founded the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts as an educational and recreational organisation for working people at the request of artisans and tradesmen, some of whom had studied with him aboard the Stirling Castle on their voyage to Sydney. Carmichael drew on the burgeoning Mechanics' Institutes and Schools of Arts movement, and his efforts resulted in the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts being formed on 22nd March 1833 at a public meeting attended by around 200 people.</p> <p>The Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts hosts a lending library, presents public lectures and holds classes in subjects as diverse as art, architecture, mathematics, anatomy and simple surgery.</p> <p>smsa.org.au</p>
Prize	SMSA Award in Social Science
Criteria	Awarded to the most outstanding graduating student in a social science-related degree.
Recipient	Mia Donna Bates

Teresa Sanko Šunde Memorial Award



Donor	<p>Teresa Sanko Šunde Memorial</p> <p>The Teresa Sanko Šunde Memorial Endowment Fund has been established in memory of her life journey as a migrant women from the Dalmatia Region of the Balkans between the inter-war period, arriving 1936 in Sydney. In 1944, she developed post-natal depression and as she couldn't speak English, all of her five children were removed and placed in foster care, with only occassional contact with her children. Teresa Sanko Šunde was placed in a government institution and remained in government care until her death in 1981, 36 years later. This endowment fund and student award is aimed to encourage students to think deeply about the relations of gender, migration and disability in the Australian health and welfare system to ensure that future women from migrant backgrounds will not have to endure such injustice.</p>
Prize	<p>Teresa Sanko Šunde Memorial Award</p>
Criteria	<p>Awarded to the most outstanding student in WELF 1012 Understanding Disability: Historical and Contemporary Frameworks.</p>
Recipients	<p>Simar Arora Etsub Tamene Mekasha</p>

The Honourable Dr Helen Sham-Ho Awards



Donor	<p>The Honourable Dr Helen Sham-Ho OAM</p> <p>The Honourable Dr Helen Sham-Ho OAM, former politician, is a key leader within the Australian-Chinese community and has been instrumental in linking that community with mainstream Australia.</p> <p>She is known for her advocacy for migrants, Indigenous Australians and other minority groups within Australian politics and in the wider community. Also, an advocate for education, social justice, youth issues, multiculturalism and a champion for equal rights for women, Helen is an active fundraiser and philanthropist.</p> <p>During her time as a parliamentarian, Helen initiated and led the Cabramatta Policing enquiry following calls from the community to address drug trafficking and drug-crime problems. The 13-month long enquiry profoundly changed policing policy and practice not only in Cabramatta but the whole of NSW.</p> <p>Helen has been a long-standing supporter of Western Sydney University and in 2014 was awarded as Honorary Doctorate of Letters in recognition of her contributions to the community. Helen supports numerous educational causes and is proud to offer this prize.</p>
Prize	The Honourable Dr Helen Sham-Ho Award for Evidence, Investigations & Police Intelligence
Criteria	Awarded to the most outstanding performance in the subject Evidence and Investigations within the Bachelor of Policing or Bachelor in Policing (Leadership Program) degrees.
Recipient	Ryan Christian Laycock
Prize	The Honourable Dr Helen Sham-Ho Award for Policing
Criteria	Awarded to the most outstanding performance in the subject People, Place and Social Difference within the Bachelor of Policing or Bachelor in Policing (Leadership Program) degrees.
Recipient	Souhaib El Arja
Prize	The Honourable Dr Helen Sham-Ho Award for Social Work Research
Criteria	Awarded to a Social Work graduate who has achieved the highest thesis mark in the Master of Research.
Recipient	Shobana Nair Saseedharan

Veljanov Award in Introductory Sociology

Donor	Mr Sasko Veljanov and Dr Irena Veljanova As Western Sydney University Alumni, both Sasko and Irena Veljanov have experienced the transforming power of their educational journeys. With a firm belief that the discipline of sociology can be the driving intellectual force towards a more equitable, just society, these awards aim to acknowledge and motivate students to continue exploring sociology and become future leaders.
Prize	Veljanov Award in Introductory Sociology
Criteria	Awarded to the most outstanding students in CULT1017 Understanding Society.
Recipients	Bethanie Jada Tran Sisley Jia Chen







GIVING TO WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY

Western Sydney University changes lives and shapes the social, economic, environmental and educational development of the region in which we live, and the world.

You are part of this journey.

The gift of knowledge empowers our students to embrace opportunity, growth and change. Your support of Western Sydney University students through awards, scholarships and research encourages them to strive for excellence and reach their potential.

For information on how you can support Western Sydney University and our students, please contact the Office of Advancement.

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