

# Graduate Internship Opportunity

SUMMER 2026

## Project Title

**Advancing Zero-Waste Strategies in Student Housing: Improving Sorting Practices and Supporting Behaviour Change**

## Organization

UVic Office of Campus Planning & Sustainability (OCPS)

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## About the Opportunity – Sustainability Scholars Program Info

*These 250-hour internships are offered in partnership with community organizations and provide UVic graduate students from any discipline with opportunities to gain applied sustainability research experience. Scholars work under the guidance of a partner mentor and contribute to projects with real community impact.*

*The 2026 pay rate is approximately \$34.72/hour. To apply, visit the [Sustainability Scholars Program website](#) and review the application guide to confirm eligibility and required materials. Applications close at 11:59 pm PT on Sunday, February 1, 2026. Questions? Contact Laurel Currie: [sustainability-scholars@uvic.ca](mailto:sustainability-scholars@uvic.ca).*

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## Project Background

The University of Victoria is expanding on-campus student housing, with 510 new student beds planned for completion in 2029. Student residences produce large volumes of waste, including recyclables and food scraps, contributing to UVic's carbon footprint through landfill disposal and greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs). High student turnover in residences creates ongoing challenges with waste sorting, leading to contamination in recycling and compost streams, increased operational costs, and reduced waste diversion.

Sorting behaviours vary widely across residences, and infrastructure inconsistencies exacerbate these issues. These issues are especially pronounced in upper-year and graduate housing accommodation styles such as apartments, cluster (quad), and pod floors, where shared living arrangements and access to full in-suite kitchens differ from traditional dormitories. These formats require tailored infrastructure and engagement strategies to ensure effective sorting and diversion.

Behaviour around waste sorting is shaped by two forces: structure (systems, infrastructure, policies) and agency (individual choice). The Scholar will explore how design improvements and targeted engagement strategies can balance these forces to improve participation and outcomes, while applying an equity lens to ensure accessibility and inclusivity for all students. This work will be grounded in UVic's sustainability values by encouraging practices that reflect

a shared responsibility for respecting relationships with the lands and communities where we live and learn. This includes promoting mindful consumption choices and active stewardship as part of our collective climate action.

The project is significant because it:

- Directly supports CSAP Strategy 10.6, which calls for reducing waste per campus user and improving waste management policies, processes, and infrastructure.
- Aligns with UVic's broader sustainability commitments, such as zero waste, responsible consumption (UN Sustainable Development Goals), AASHE STARS reporting.
- Supports campus health and cleanliness, reduces operational costs linked to waste disposal, and fosters sustainable behaviours and stewardship among the student population.

Provides actionable, research-backed recommendations and tools that Residence Services and Facilities Management can implement immediately.

### **Project Objectives + Activities**

This project aims to improve waste sorting and reduce contamination in student housing by combining infrastructure design, engagement strategies, and equity-informed approaches.

The objectives are to:

1. Develop a program framework for Community Leaders (CLs) and staff to engage and train residents on effective sorting practices.
2. Recommend infrastructure layouts and signage principles, informed by staff/resident insights, that make sorting easier and reduce contamination. Prioritize existing examples for immediate impact while ensuring adaptability for future builds and accommodation styles.
3. Apply an equity lens to ensure sorting programs are inclusive and accessible for diverse student populations.

The intended outcome will be a suite of practical, ready-to-use resources supported by a concise executive summary of benchmarked best practices that Residence Services can implement immediately and adapt for future housing projects.

### **Project Scope**

**The Scholar will focus on:**

- Reviewing literature and benchmarking leading universities' training programs and staff resources for waste sorting education in shared-space residence accommodation styles, noting key successes, failures, funding considerations, and service level implications.
- Assessing current sorting infrastructure and behaviours in cluster housing, apartments, and pod floors via site visits and staff input.
- Gathering insights through focused interviews/surveys with staff and residents to identify barriers and motivators.

- Developing a detailed program framework for CLs to train and engage residents.
- Recommending infrastructure layouts for waste stations and signage tailored to prioritized residence accommodation styles.
- Ensuring all materials incorporate equity considerations for diverse residents.

**Key research questions include:**

- How do structural and operational factors (bin location, container type, signage, collection practices, etc.) enable or constrain effective sorting in these housing types, and what lessons can be drawn from programs that have succeeded or failed elsewhere?
- What motivational, knowledge, or social barriers influence student sorting behaviour with varying autonomy and lifestyles?
- How can sorting programs be designed to be accessible and equitable for diverse student populations?
- What combination of design and education most effectively improves sorting accuracy and waste diversion rates, and what level of investment (initial infrastructure, maintenance, and recurring labour) is typically required to sustain these outcomes?

Main activities include literature review, interviews with staff/residents, benchmarking peer institutions, site visits, and synthesis into targeted, practical recommendations organized within a program framework for Community Leaders and staff.

## **Deliverables**

By August 15, the Scholar will produce:

- **Program framework** for residence Community Leaders (CLs) and staff to engage and train residents on sorting practices, adaptable for future housing projects.
- **Infrastructure & signage recommendations** tailored to key residence housing types, based on insights and site visits. This may include:
  - Designing a pilot for one prioritized accommodation typology (selected with Residence Services), ensuring adaptability for other layouts, and
  - Outlining challenges and opportunities for the remaining typologies (cluster, apartments, and pod floors).
- A concise **executive summary** summarizing research and benchmarking findings, and rationale behind recommendations.

An optional presentation or workshop may be delivered to Residence Services, Facilities Management Waste Reduction Services, and Campus Planning & Sustainability.

## **Time Commitment + Timeline**

The timeline below is a preliminary guide and will be reviewed and refined during the onboarding process.

### **Phase 1: Kickoff & Planning (early May)**

Confirm initial scope and deliverables between Residence Services and Facilities Management Waste Reduction Services, draft work plan, interview guide and templates, identify key contacts for interviews and site visits.

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#### **Phase 2: Research & Engagement (May – Mid-June)**

- Conduct literature review and benchmarking of peer institutions.
  - Site visits and documentation of current infrastructure/signage.
  - Begin Interviews within Residence Services and Facilities Management Waste Reduction Services staff.
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#### **Phase 3: Findings Synthesis & Prioritization (Mid-June)**

- Compile insights from interviews, site visits, and benchmarking.
  - Share findings on challenges, opportunities, and typology-specific issues.
  - Discuss and confirm priorities for remainder of the project (i.e. infrastructure/signage recommendations and/or pilot design).
  - Finalize scope for framework details and deliverables.
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#### **Phase 4: Drafting Practical Deliverables (Mid-June – Mid-July)**

- Program framework: develop engagement strategies, training steps, templates, etc.
  - Draft infrastructure/signage recommendations based on Phase 3 and outline challenges/opportunities.
  - Validate drafts with Residence Services and Facilities Management Waste Reduction Services for feedback.
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#### **Phase 5: Integration & Executive Summary (July 16 – Aug 5)**

- Incorporate feedback into final deliverables.
  - Prepare concise Executive Summary (benchmarking insights, success/failure analysis, high-level cost considerations, equity lens, and service level implications for ongoing maintenance and staffing).
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#### **Phase 6: Finalization & Submission (Aug 6 – Aug 15)**

- Final formatting and quality check, submit final deliverables, optional presentation and wrap-up meeting.

\*Regular mentorship check-ins to support progress.

#### **Required / Preferred Skills and Experience**

- Excellent research and writing skills

- Demonstrated interest in sustainability
- Experience conducting stakeholder engagement events, including facilitation skills, is an asset
- Familiarity with research methodologies and survey techniques
- Familiarity conducting focus group research
- Strong analytical skills
- Ability to work independently
- Deadline oriented
- Project management and organizational skills
- Familiarity with benchmarking methods and tools
- Comfortable interacting with strangers to conduct public/in person surveys
- Design and layout skills

### **Additional Project Information**

Ideal candidates will have backgrounds in sustainability, environmental science, or social sciences with research skills and an interest in waste management, student engagement, and equity. The candidate should be comfortable working independently with mentorship support.

Preferred skills and background:

- Knowledge of zero-waste principles and waste diversion practices.
- Competency in qualitative and quantitative research methods.
- Experience in creating engagement or training materials.
- Understanding of equity and inclusion in sustainability programs.
- Ability to translate research into actionable strategies appropriate for evolving campus housing types.
- Experience coordinating or supporting operational tasks (i.e. event logistics, housing initiatives, waste programming) is an asset for developing practical, implementation-focused solutions.