UVIC SUSTAINABILITY SCHOLARS PROGRAM

Graduate Internship Opportunity

SUMMER 2026

Project Title

Measuring comparative biodiversity at the UVic Campus Community Garden

Organization

UVic Campus Community Garden

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.

Project Background

The UVic Campus Community Garden is a 1.5-acre space that includes communal gardening areas, individual plots, a food forest, and surrounding hedgerows. Since relocating to its current site in 2011, the garden has continued to expand the diversity of plants and food crops grown on site.

Garden staff have observed noticeably higher levels of insect and bird activity within the garden compared to other areas of campus, particularly lawn-dominated spaces. Understanding how planting diversity influences biodiversity can help inform garden management practices and support broader conversations about habitat creation, pollinator health, and sustainable land use on campus.

Project Description

The Sustainability Scholar will conduct a comparative biodiversity assessment focused on insects and birds at the UVic Campus Community Garden and one or two additional locations on campus with contrasting planting practices (e.g., the UVic Quad, Finnerty Gardens, Family Housing, or another site identified in consultation with the partner).

The project will involve observing, identifying, and documenting species presence and activity over the summer months, with the goal of understanding how different land-use and planting

strategies influence biodiversity. Findings will help inform future planting and habitat enhancement strategies, such as the use of native plants or the installation of features like pollinator habitat structures (e.g.: bug hotels, bat houses, lower light pollution, etc.). The garden depends on pollinators to support food crops, as do Saanich farmers and balcony gardeners.

Project Scope

Key activities may include:

- Selecting one or two campus locations with contrasting planting practices (e.g., lawns, ornamental gardens, residential landscapes) to compare with the UVic Campus Community Garden
- Conducting regular, systematic observations of insect and bird species across sites throughout the summer
- Identifying species using a combination of field guides and digital tools (e.g., iNaturalist, Merlin/eBird, Google Lens, or equivalent resources)
- Recording species presence, location, and observable activity patterns
- Analyzing patterns in biodiversity and identifying factors that may contribute to differences across sites
- Synthesizing findings into practical recommendations to support biodiversity through planting choices and habitat enhancements

Deliverables

- A final report summarizing findings and patterns across the sites.
- Practical recommendations for strategies to support increased biodiversity, such as planting choices, or habitat enhancements.

Time Commitment + Timeline

All summer is quite active in the garden. Different species are more common at certain times of the year, particularly as different plant species bloom, fruit, and seed. The **250 hours** should be as evenly spread as possible between **May 1st to August 15th**.

Required / Preferred Skills and Experience

- Excellent research and writing skills
- Demonstrated interest in sustainability, ecology, or food systems
- Familiarity with research methodologies and survey techniques
- Strong analytical and organizational skills
- Ability to work independently and manage time effectively
- Project management experience
- Experience or interest in plant, insect, and/or bird identification is an asset
- Prior experience using biodiversity identification tools (e.g., iNaturalist, Merlin/eBird) is an asset but not required

Additional Project Information

This project is well suited to a Scholar who enjoys independent, field-based research and is comfortable spending time outdoors throughout the summer. Accurate species identification is important. The Scholar will be supported in using appropriate tools and reference materials to document observations responsibly.