

Summer 2025 Sustainability Scholars Program Internship Opportunity

The UBC Sustainability Hub is pleased to offer current UBC graduate students the opportunity to work on sustainability internship projects. Successful candidates work under the guidance of a mentor from the partner organization, and are immersed in real world learning where they can apply their research skills and contribute to advancing sustainability across the region. The pay rate for the summer 2025 program is \$31.25/hour or \$7,812.50 for a 250-hour project.

- Visit the [Sustainability Scholars Program website](#) to learn [how the program works](#) and to [apply](#).
- Be sure to review the application guide on the Apply page to confirm your eligibility before applying.

Applications close at 11:59 pm on Sunday January 26, 2025.

Project title: Understanding the barriers and opportunities to decoupling economic growth from regional GHG emissions in Metro Vancouver

Background

Metro Vancouver has committed to significant climate action through the *Climate 2050* strategy, with sector-specific roadmaps, and the *Clean Air Plan*, aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and improving air quality across the region. The *Climate 2050 Business and Industry Roadmap* in particular identifies actions to engage industries in transitioning to low-carbon practices, emphasizing the need to encourage innovation, decarbonization, and resilience within the regional economy. This roadmap, alongside those focused on transportation, buildings and energy, outlines emissions-reduction targets while supporting sustainable economic growth in Metro Vancouver.

Despite the opportunities to support a robust and sustainable low-carbon economy, effectively communicating progress toward these goals and building the necessary support is challenging, partly due to the complex interdependencies between emissions, economic growth, and industry-specific dynamics, and concerns about affordability.

Many other jurisdictions show increasing evidence of “decoupled” economic growth and GHG emissions, meaning economic growth continues while emissions decrease. This upends prior narratives that meeting climate targets imposes economic hardship. While some Canadian data is available (see Reference 1), the extent to which this pattern prevails in Metro Vancouver specifically is not known.

If regional trends likewise illustrate decoupling, it could contribute toward an evidence-based, positive narrative to highlight economic opportunities of climate action, essential for securing ongoing political and public support.

Project description

This project aims to explore economic trends relevant to regional GHG emissions reduction targets. The Scholar would investigate and potentially apply both qualitative and quantitative methods to identify the extent and drivers of decoupling of economic growth and emissions based on available economic modelling data, and avenues for further research. Better understanding the challenges and opportunities for decarbonizing the regional economy can help to tell a positive story and build support for continued and increased climate action.

The project aims to provide preliminary insights and identify opportunities for further research, supporting the following benefits:

- **Environmental:** provides potential insights into high-emission economic sectors, supporting targeted climate action planning and setting the groundwork for impactful emissions reduction.
- **Economic:** helps identify sectors with strong potential for sustainable growth and support for low-carbon economic diversification for regional resilience.
- **Social:** could enhance Metro Vancouver's capacity to engage with businesses and communities by fostering a data-driven, balanced approach to economic and environmental priorities, and promote positive stories with decision-makers to build support for climate action.

By establishing a foundation for positive storytelling around climate action, the project can contribute toward public and stakeholder support, laying the groundwork for future collaboration across sectors. This research aligns with Metro Vancouver's goals as a proactive leader in sustainable economic transformation and setting the stage for effective climate and economic policies.

Project scope

- 1. Literature review and data compilation.** In consultation with the project mentor confirm scope of the literature review and potential business/industry sectors for inclusion in study. Based on the agreed upon scope, review existing policies and plans, available emissions and economic data, identify relevant local organizations, available research and case studies to inform a picture of the state of regional economic/emissions decoupling
- 2. Expert interviews.** Conduct interviews with 3 to 5 subject experts identified through the literature review for insights regarding trends, barriers and opportunities for decoupling of economic growth from GHG emissions, compared to other leading jurisdictions.
- 3. Analysis.** Drawing on the information obtained from the literature review and interviews, undertake an analysis to characterize regional decoupling and/or identify opportunities for further analysis. This can be based on one or more of the following:
 - a. Trend analysis and economic-emissions decoupling – identify extent and drivers of decoupling in specific sectors (e.g., transportation, buildings).
 - b. Depending on the skillset of the Scholar and availability of the data, undertake modelling of future economic and emissions scenarios to identify industries with potential to achieve significant decarbonization with regional benefits. Alternatively, investigate methodologies that could be leveraged in future work.

SUSTAINABILITY SCHOLARS PROGRAM

- c. Identify potential partnerships and collaboration with business organizations, academia, and private consultancies with specialized relevant skills.
 - d. Identify data needs and future research opportunities for deeper insights.
- 4. Communications Approaches** – (Optional, depending on outcomes of previous tasks): Develop narratives, key message framing, and strategies to communicate results.
- 5. Research summary and presentation** – Draft research findings in a report, including a plain-language summary with engaging graphical layout, supplemented with a technical version with comprehensive findings and data, and slide decks for engaging with various audiences.

Deliverables

- Annotated bibliography and interview summaries from Tasks 1 and 2.
- A final report containing a summary of the work completed, including a plain-language summary with engaging graphical layout, supplemented with a technical version with comprehensive findings and data.
- Visually engaging slide deck with key findings and potential messages
- Data and modelling if applicable.
- A final report for the online public-facing [Scholars Project Library](#).

Time Commitment

- This project will take 250 hours to complete
- This project must be completed between May 1 to August 15, 2025
- The Scholar is to complete their hours between 9 am and 5 pm, Monday to Friday, approximately 17 to 20 hours per week.
- The Scholar will meet with the project lead in Metro Vancouver's Air Quality and Climate Action Services department and other relevant staff; a schedule of regular check-ins will be agreed upon at the start of the project.

References

- [Canadian Climate Institute, 11 Ways to Measure Clean Growth – 1. Low Carbon Growth](#)
- [Foresight \(2022\), Decoupling \(emissions from economic growth\)](#)
- [Our World in Data: Many countries have decoupled economic growth from CO2 emissions, even if we take offshored production into account](#)
- Deutch, J. 2017. Decoupling Economic Growth and Carbon Emissions. Joule, Volume 1, Issue 1, 6 September 2017, Pages 3-5

Required/preferred Skills and Background

- Excellent research and writing skills
- Demonstrated interest in sustainability
- Experience conducting stakeholder interviews, is an asset
- Familiarity with research methodologies and survey techniques
- Statistical analysis
- Excellent public speaking and presentation skills

SUSTAINABILITY SCHOLARS PROGRAM

- ☒ Strong analytical skills
- ☒ Ability to work independently
- ☒ Deadline oriented
- ☒ Project management and organizational skills
- ☒ Demonstrated experience in **economic policy, research, data and analysis**
- ☒ Comfortable interacting with strangers to conduct public/in person surveys
- ☒ Experience with financial modelling and analysis

Applications close at **11:59 pm Sunday January 26, 2025**

Apply here: [Click here to apply](#)

Contact Karen Taylor at sustainability.scholars@ubc.ca if you have questions

Useful Resources

We are holding a special **resume preparation workshop for prospective Scholars** on January 21, 2025. [Click here for details and to register.](#)

Below are some links to useful resources to help you with your resume and cover letter (there are many more online). Some of these resources also provide information on preparing for your interview.

<https://students.ubc.ca/career/career-resources/resumes-cover-letters-curricula-vitae>

<https://www.grad.ubc.ca/current-students/graduate-pathways-success>

<https://www.grad.ubc.ca/cover-letter-cv-resume-templates-ubc-career-services>