

Sustainability and Climate Applied Learning (SCALE) Impact Report 2024-2025

Duke University Office of Climate and Sustainability
Sparking action. Cultivating leadership. Nurturing community.

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INTRODUCTION

The Value of Applied Learning

Sustainability and Climate Applied Learning (SCALE) positions students to make a positive impact on global challenges at a local scale through place-based and project-based experiences. Students engage with real life implications of climate change and sustainability topics on and around Duke's campus through Green Devil internships, course-based collaborations and other special projects that fuel local sustainability progress through student leadership.

SCALE IMPACTS AT A GLANCE

Hands-on SCALE experiences support students in growing their practical and professional skills while also sparking action, cultivating leadership, and nurturing community.

- 57 Partners Engaged
- 12 Course Projects
- 12 Intern Projects
- 11 Special Projects

The following 2024-2025 report outlines examples of SCALE projects and their tangible impacts.

INTERNSHIP SNAPSHOTS

Green Devil interns are a paid cohort of students across disciplines who lead collaborative projects alongside campus and community partners. From campus circularity, sustainable dining, interdisciplinary arts, and more – the interns build capacity for partners and engage in real-world problem solving.

- 22 student interns
- 3,100+ hours worked

Sustainable Athletics

- CHARGE: Infuse sustainability across Duke Athletics, specifically through waste reduction, fan engagement and strategic planning.
- IMPACT: Interns coordinated two Green Games and two athletic shoe drives, and also supported the launch of the [Athletics Climate Team](#).
- BY THE NUMBERS: Interns supported the collection and repurposing of 1,732 pairs of shoes, 764 articles of clothing, 97 pieces of athletic equipment and [supported the missions](#) of 10+ community partners.

Inter-Institutional Sustainability Collaboration

- CHARGE: Build community and knowledge sharing for students engaged in climate and sustainability efforts at institutions around the region.

- IMPACT: Interns hosted a series of two conferences to facilitate shared learning, community building and visioning.
- BY THE NUMBERS: Through the Triangle Sustainability Gathering and Southeastern Student Sustainability Conference ([SSSC](#)), over 250 students and staff from nearly 25 institutions [converged to collaborate](#) on climate and sustainability topics.

Duke in the Gardens

- CHARGE: Support [Duke in the Gardens programming](#) to connect audiences with nature, the land and each other.
- IMPACT: Interns delivered workshops (such as [Rooted Responses to Climate Change](#)) to Duke courses and campus visitors to enhance [climate and sustainability fluency](#).
- BY THE NUMBERS: Interns led programs for over a dozen partners, including the SSSC, Hanami Festival, and Iglesia Emanuel Food Pantry. They also developed a zine to support outreach efforts.

Explore more at duke.is/scale-internships

COURSE-BASED PROJECTS

Sustainable Procurement Alternatives

A student team partnered with Student Affairs staff to develop a sustainable procurement strategy for Duke Housing and Residential Life. The team analyzed product offerings from a current supplier and conducted research on Certified Environmentally Preferred Products to recommend sustainable spending tactics. [Read more.](#)

Streamlining Residence Hall Recycling

To improve recycling rates and increase recycling knowledge among West campus undergrad residents, master's students conducted a waste audit to measure recycling contamination rates and benchmark current recycling practices in dorms. Among other methods, they also administered a survey to gauge student awareness and inform future educational programming. [Read more.](#)

Duke Alumni Careers in Sustainability

Students collaborated with the Duke Career Center to develop a career resource focused on Duke alumni working in climate, energy and sustainability fields. The team conducted alumni interviews to explore career paths and help Duke students navigate interdisciplinary career possibilities. [Read more.](#)

SPECIAL PROJECTS

The following highlights are a sampling of [SCALE Mini Grant](#) recipients.

Soil Climate Sensing Station

Students from the Nicholas School Soils Lab installed climate sensors, solar panels, batteries and a datalogger to log atmospheric and soil climate data in real time at the Duke Campus Farm. This field monitoring will measure temperature, rainfall and soil moisture to inform more efficient farm practices in the coming years.

Wellness Garden

Duke Physician Assistant Students transformed a soggy lawn into a vibrant garden, promoting mental wellbeing for students and employees and enhancing local biodiversity with hundreds of flowering plants, grasses, trees and shrubs. [Read more.](#)

Explore more at duke.is/scale-projects

SCALE TESTIMONIALS

Student participants reported:

- “My internship equipped me with practical skills in facilitation, project management, and sustainability communication which I plan to carry into future climate initiatives.”
- “I learned how to work in a group towards a common goal which is very indicative of the current environmental problems that require community-based approaches.”
- “This experience introduced me to the creative potential of video media as a tool for education, especially in making complex sustainability topics more accessible to a wide audience. Moving forward, I’d love to maintain this interdisciplinary approach of bringing together art, communication, and science to support sustainability initiatives.”

Campus and community partners reported:

- “My intern helped me accomplish more than I was capable of on my own. She brought skills and knowledge of data analysis and visualization and put her stellar writing skills to use to help us share people's stories highlighting what our community is actively doing to contribute to sustainability across Duke.”
- “My Green Devil Interns were incredible. They helped us access resources, build new stakeholder relationships, excite our work, and by the end of their time with us, they were running programming on their own. They absolutely made our work wider and deeper simultaneously.”

ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING

In 2025, a pilot survey was administered to assess participant learning through SCALE course-based projects, special projects and Green Devil internships.

Students were surveyed on their confidence to:

- apply practical skills to support future climate or sustainability initiatives,
- apply knowledge to support future climate or sustainability initiatives, and

- implement professional skills in job-related or career-related experiences

Survey Results

Practical Skills

Survey Item: “As a result [of my participation], I am confident that I can apply practical skills to support future climate or sustainability initiatives.”

- 28 of 58 survey respondents reported Strongly Agree
- 27 of 58 survey respondents reported Somewhat Agree
- 1 of 58 survey respondents reported Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 1 of 58 survey respondents reported Somewhat Disagree
- 1 of 58 survey respondents reported Strongly Disagree

Knowledge

Survey item: “As a result [of my participation], I am confident I can apply my academic knowledge to support future climate or sustainability initiatives.”

Below are the results to the survey item above.

- 31 of 58 survey respondents reported Strongly Agree
- 19 of 58 survey respondents reported Somewhat Agree
- 7 of 58 survey respondents reported Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 1 of 58 survey respondents reported Somewhat Disagree
- 0 of 58 survey respondents reported Strongly Disagree

Professional Skills

Survey item: “As a result [of my participation], I am confident I can implement professional skills in job-related or career-related experiences.”

Note, students who participated in course-based projects were not surveyed for this question due to differences in scope of work.

Below are the results to the survey item above.

- 14 of 20 survey respondents reported Strongly Agree
- 5 of 20 survey respondents reported Somewhat Agree
- 1 of 20 survey respondents reported Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 0 of 20 survey respondents reported Somewhat Disagree
- 0 of 20 survey respondents reported Strongly Disagree

TOWARD A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

SCALE’s real-world learning experiences spark changes that directly support Duke University’s Climate Commitment. By engaging students in hands-on projects that address sustainability and climate challenges on campus and in the community, SCALE empowers the next generation of leaders to innovate, collaborate and drive meaningful progress.

Whether through developing new engagement programs, informing campus operations, or building regional partnerships, students are not only shaping Duke's sustainability landscape, but also honing skills they will carry forward into their careers and communities. As Duke continues to lead in climate action, SCALe ensures that students remain at the heart of that momentum, translating learning into lasting impact

Sparking action. Cultivating leadership. Nurturing community.

GET IN TOUCH

If you'd like to explore ways to collaborate with the Office of Climate and Sustainability or learn more about SCALe, contact us at climate-sustainability@duke.edu.

EXPLORE THE LIBRARY

Visit the Applied Learning [Project Library](#) to learn more about projects that use Duke's campus as a living learning laboratory for climate and sustainability education.