



2027 Summer Research Project Template

Help us present your project in a way that connects with the right students. Thoughtful, engaging descriptions tend to attract stronger and more suitable applications. Thank you for putting a project forward - these programs rely on your contribution, and we couldn't do it without you.

Section	Description
Project title	Plastic-Free UQ: Systems Mapping and Pathways for Change
Hours & delivery	<p>The official project duration for the 2027 Summer Research Program is six (6) weeks between 11 January - 19 February 2027.</p> <p>Hours of engagement must fall within the official program dates and are 20 hours per week for this project (120 hours in total). This could be completed as 5 x 4hr days, for example. We are also open to you breaking up your weekly hour commitment differently if/as needed to fit around other commitments you might have over the program period.</p> <p>You can complete this work remotely, on campus in common areas, or there is also a SCL lab on campus at St Lucia that has desktop computers available for you to work from if needed, up to a maximum of 4 hours per day.</p> <p>We will accept up to 4 students working individually or as a team.</p>
About the project (150–250 words)	<p>Plastic pollution is a significant environmental challenge, and universities have an important role to play in reducing waste and supporting more sustainable practices. While many organisations aspire to become “plastic free”, achieving the full goal and/or making progress with first steps, such as ending single-use plastic use on campus, or ending plastic water bottles, requires understanding the complex systems, behaviours, policies, incentives, and stakeholders that influence plastic use across an institution.</p> <p>This project will explore what a Plastic-Free UQ might look like and identify practical pathways for achieving it. Students will investigate current approaches to reducing plastic use in universities and other large organisations, review relevant academic and industry literature, and examine the factors that enable or hinder change. Using a systems-thinking approach, students will map the people, processes, policies, infrastructure, and decision-making structures that influence plastic consumption and waste at UQ.</p> <p>The project will contribute to an emerging body of work focused on institutional sustainability and behaviour change. Findings may help inform future research, engagement activities, and sustainability initiatives. Students will work with supervisors to identify key themes, synthesise evidence, and develop recommendations for creating a more sustainable campus environment.</p>
What you'll do (100-150 words)	<p>Students will conduct a scoping review of research, reports, policies, and case studies related to reducing plastic use in large organisations, with a particular focus on universities. They will identify and evaluate evidence on successful strategies, barriers, and opportunities for change, and organise findings into a structured evidence base.</p> <p>Drawing on this research, students will contribute to the development of a systems map that identifies the key stakeholders, processes, behaviours, policies, and environmental factors influencing plastic use across UQ. Students will work with supervisors to synthesise findings and communicate them in a practical and accessible format. The primary deliverables will be a short, written report and/or infographic that summarises the systems map, key insights, and potential pathways towards a Plastic-Free UQ.</p>



What you'll learn
(100–150 words)

Students will gain experience in sustainability and behaviour-change research while developing practical skills in evidence synthesis, critical analysis, and systems thinking. They will learn how to conduct and organise a scoping review, identify themes across diverse sources of information, and translate complex findings into actionable recommendations.

The project will provide exposure to systems mapping approaches used to understand complex social and organisational problems and support change initiatives. Students will strengthen their written communication and science communication skills by producing reports and visual summaries for a broad audience. They will also develop project management, stakeholder awareness, collaboration, and independent working skills while gaining insight into how research can inform sustainability decision-making and institutional change.

They also have the opportunity to develop their presentation and public speaking skills if they choose to deliver a talk to a meeting of the Social Change Lab (SCL).

Project outcomes
(75–125 words)

By the end of the project, students will have developed an evidence-informed overview of the challenges and opportunities associated with creating a Plastic-Free UQ. Key outputs will include a systems map that illustrates the factors influencing plastic use across the university and a short report and/or infographic summarising the project's findings.

The project will also generate a consolidated evidence base identifying potential interventions, leverage points, and priorities for future action. These outputs may inform future sustainability initiatives, research projects, and stakeholder discussions focused on reducing plastic waste and encouraging sustainable practices across the university community.

Who should apply?
(75–125 words)

This project is open to applications from third- and fourth-year students with an interest in sustainability, organisational change, public policy, or behaviour change. Students from organisational psychology or other psychology, business, marketing, governance, environmental studies, sustainability, and related disciplines are encouraged to apply.

Strong applicants will have demonstrated skills in critical thinking, research, analysis, and written communication. The ability to work independently while contributing positively to a collaborative project environment is essential. An interest in complex systems, environmental sustainability, social change, or organisational decision-making would be highly advantageous. Students should be motivated, curious, and willing to engage with interdisciplinary perspectives and evidence.

Team & supervision
(75–125 words)

Academic supervisor is Prof. Winnifred Louis, Professor of Psychology and Director of the Social Change Lab. Additionally, the secondary supervisor (non-academic) is Christine McCoy, Project Officer in the Social Change Lab.

You will be expected to attend the following sessions with your Social Change Lab supervisors, in addition to any compulsory sessions hosted by the program coordinators:

- A one-hour group orientation session with your Social Change Lab supervisors and fellow summer scholars at the beginning of the program, in-person but with a Zoom option for anyone not able to attend face-to-face.
- One-hour weekly Zoom group consultation sessions with your SCL supervisors for academic/research support.
- We also ask that you send us a brief email updating us on your progress at the end of each day working on your project.

In addition, you will also be invited to attend the following optional meetings (not compulsory):

- One-hour weekly Zoom check-in meetings for practical support.
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- A group presentation session with fellow summer scholars towards the end of the program where you will have the opportunity to present your work.
- A social gathering after the presentation session to mark the end of the program, celebrate your accomplishments, and reflect on your experiences and the new skills you have learned.
- You are also encouraged to attend any relevant skills training workshops advised by program coordinators that are scheduled during the program.

Additional opportunities
(optional)

As an additional voluntary activity if they choose to do so, the student(s) would be welcome to give a short talk to a meeting of the Social Change Lab at the end of the project to present their work and reflect on their experiences and the new skills they have learned. With their permission, the presentation would be recorded and made available on our social media afterwards. The students are welcome to attend the SCL's regular, weekly lab meetings, during the project duration and beyond if they wish. These labs meetings provide the opportunity to connect with other lab members, engage in discussion of issues relevant to the lab, and hear talks by researchers invited to present in these meetings. They are also welcome to join our SCL mailing lists, as applicable, to remain connected and stay up to date with the lab's activities, events, and future opportunities.

Additional requirements
(if applicable)

None

Contact

Yes, students may make contact before applying.
Direct enquiries to: Christine McCoy at c.mccoy@uq.edu.au