

URBAN STUDIES PROGRAM AT SFU

Program, Student, Alumni
and Research Profile

SFU

FACULTY OF ARTS
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

URBAN
STUDIES

2021

Photo by Alasdair Butcher, MURB 2021

Territorial Acknowledgement

The Urban Studies Program respectfully acknowledges the Halkomelem hən̓q̓əmi̓nəḿ and Squamish Skwxwú7mesh Snichim speaking peoples who have inhabited the lands and waters where we study since time immemorial. Too often, the traditions that guide the study of urbanism and cities reflect the same patterns of erasure and injustice to Indigenous peoples as do other traditions and institutions in Canada. We approach Urban Studies with this legacy in mind and commit to carry our share of the ongoing work of Truth and Reconciliation.

Overview

We are an interdisciplinary program at Simon Fraser University (SFU) in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Located at the Vancouver campus, the program has:

- Strong application, enrollment and graduation numbers, with success from a diversity of disciplinary backgrounds, cities or origin and areas of expertise
- Accessibility to students with diverse backgrounds and needs, via engaging seminars, evening classes, part-time study options, para-professional and para-curricular enrichment, co-op work program, a transfer program and accelerated master's option
- An exceptional opus of academic, applied and engaged research, attracting external funding from SSHRC, CMHC, the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions, Lincoln Institute for Land Policy, Real Estate Foundation of BC, Bullitt Foundation, and more
- Award-winning faculty members, earning recognition within SFU including the Excellence in Teaching and President's Award for Leadership in Sustainability, and writing, speaking, acting in various positions of significance
- An excellent track record of graduates assuming high-impact roles as mayors, political strategists, senior planners, non-profit founders and leaders, development professionals and other kinds of change-makers, some of whom have gone on to obtain a PhD from the Universities of Toronto and Victoria and Clark University, among others
- A network of 250 graduates of the MURB degree and GDUS who actively engage with and mentor our students
- Significant positive impact across our home region of Metro Vancouver, and increasingly, worldwide
- A bridge from undergraduate to graduate studies through the accelerated master's program, with more undergraduate offerings planned

Our nine core faculty members have joint appointments in Political Science; History; Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies; Geography; Resources and Environmental Management; and Public Policy. Our interdisciplinarity is further showcased through the knowledge and experience of our associate faculty and adjunct professors, who have been drawn from across SFU and the urban professions. Collectively, they have significant expertise and leadership in the areas of Indigenous planning, urban design and architecture, urban data analytics, urban philosophy, climate action advocacy, criminology and legal geography, and the humanities.

The program is further enhanced by its engaged student body, active alumni network and committed staff.

We exemplify SFU's strategic vision "to be the leading engaged university defined by its dynamic integration of innovative education, cutting-edge research and far-reaching community engagement".





The Graduate Program

The challenges and opportunities facing Canadian and international cities are primarily social, political and economic ones, even if their consequences and potential solutions include technical, design and environmental dimensions. That is why we greatly value and benefit from our embeddedness in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.



What is SFU Urban Studies?

We are a multi- and interdisciplinary meeting place that addresses critical urban issues through engaged education and research.

Our faculty members supervise approximately 80 graduate students across two credentials: a master's degree and graduate diploma. We prepare students for urban careers in government and the private and non-profit sectors. The coursework-based graduate diploma engages students in theoretical and applied reflection on topics crucial to cities and urbanity today. The Master of Urban Studies (MURB) degree combines intensive coursework and independent research.

Over the last six years, our enrollments have grown by 35%. Our seminars average 14 students per class. Normally, our core faculty devote some of their teaching time each year to another disciplinary department, and all supervise master's research. This results in our faculty members having among the highest supervisory loads at the university (averaging 6-10 supervisees each). We are proud to provide high-quality graduate education, as is demonstrated by student satisfaction, the career success of our graduates and the high level of ongoing alumni involvement in our program.

Faculty, alumni, and students work hard with our partners to mobilize our research and contributions to both the study and practice of Urban Studies. We publish a quarterly newsletter that includes updates of student and alumni contributions to the field of urban studies. In 2020, we launched a YouTube channel (@SFU Urban Studies) that hosts videos of some of our public events. In 2019, we launched a podcast, Temporarily Urbane, discussing new urban careers and research.

In 2016, we launched a "Research Summaries" database of students' thesis research. For a full listing of MURB theses, see <http://summit.sfu.ca/collection/174>. Student research has also been published as books and in academic journals, as well as in venues for policy and popular audiences (see <https://www.sfu.ca/urban/alumni/projects-and-publications.html>).

To paraphrase SFU's strategic vision, we equip students with the knowledge, skills, and experiences that prepare them to make cities work better in an ever-changing and challenging world.

Our Curriculum

We model learner-centred graduate education. Our program is designed to allow for **part-time and full-time study**, with most classes held in the evening at SFU Vancouver's Harbour Centre building. Our curriculum covers a range of critical urban issues in depth, allowing students the flexibility to engage with the topics that most interest and inspire them. Courses are offered in fall, spring and summer terms. Elective courses include:

- URB 605** - Great Urban Thinkers
- URB 610** - Urban Design
- URB 613** - Storyscapes: Decolonizing the City Through Arts and Culture
- URB 620** - Urban Communities and Cultures
- URB 627** - Women in Cities
- URB 630** - Urban Development, Planning and Policy
- URB 635** - Urban Inequality and the Just City
- URB 645** - Urban Sustainable Development
- URB 647** - Urban Ethics
- URB 650** - Urban Governance
- URB 660** - Transportation and Urban Development
- URB 665** - Urban Housing Policy
- URB 675** - Urban Economic Development
- URB 491-697** - International Field School

Alongside these regular electives, we frequently offer special topic electives. Recent special topics have included **Smart Cities**, **The Indigenous City**, **Vancouver Ideas Book**, and **The Great Urban Transformation of China**. We also offer professional development seminars, and require master's students to take a research methods course, thesis prospectus course, and research project course.

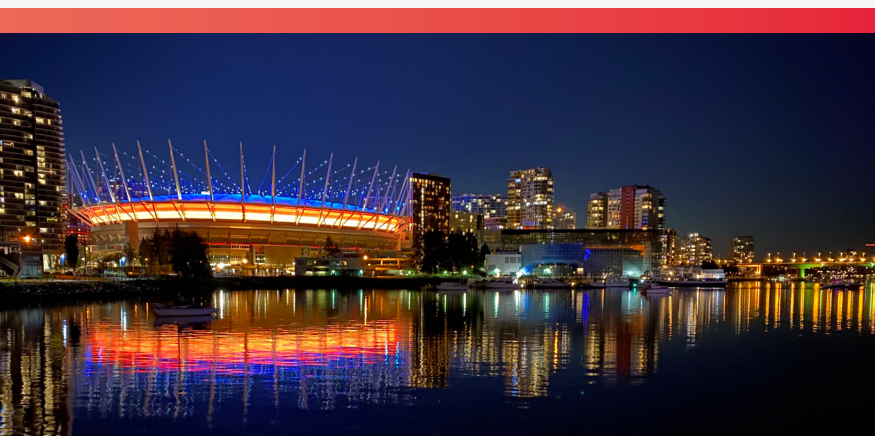


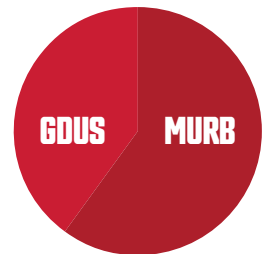
Photo by Nichole Holdbak, MURB 2021

FACTS:

GDUS → MURB

15-20%

of all admitted students transfer from the diploma to the master's program



2008-2021 Admissions

Places of Origin of Students and Faculty in Urban Studies



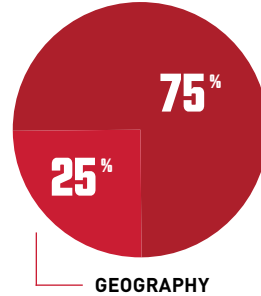
URBAN STUDIES STUDENTS

2022-2023

47
GRADUATES

24
MURB
23
GDUS

Urban Studies students' bachelor's degree background



SOCIAL SCIENCES

- Political Science
- Economics
- Sociology
- Psychology

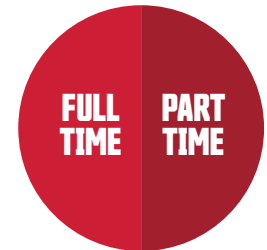
HUMANITIES

- English
- History
- Engineering
- Science
- Fine Arts
- Music
- Business

11 SEMESTERS
Average time to complete the master's degree

30 Average age of students throughout program history
23-55+ Current age range of students

APPROX. **80** students enrolled in our program



Half of students study full time and half study part time



75% of students originate from Canada and 25% from across the globe

75% Of admitted students have urban-related professional, student internship, and/or volunteer experience

25% Of our students are either recent graduates from undergraduate degrees or mid-career professionals aspiring to change careers

Profile of Student Research¹

A sample of 118 MURB theses defended and submitted to SFU's library between 2010-2019 demonstrates the breadth and depth of our research profile.

Place-based research is dominant, with 83% of theses containing a field site in one or more cities. The most popular city of focus is Vancouver itself, accounting for half of the theses reviewed. Including the other municipalities in Metro Vancouver shows that 78% of theses relate to urbanism in the Lower Mainland of BC. The remaining 22% have field study sites elsewhere in BC, elsewhere in Canada, in the USA, or elsewhere in the world (Lima, St. Lucia, and Iran in this sample).

The major focus of these theses can be classified into four thematic groups: **city-building (44%)**, **cities in transition (41%)**, **urban governance (29%)**, and **urban mobility (27%)**. Within each of these themes, some more granular topics and trends emerge.

From this sample of theses, the diversity of the Urban Studies research profile reflects **the strength of our interdisciplinary approach and represents a significant contribution to advancing urban research.**



44%

CITY-BUILDING

- Developmental processes
- Local Economy
- Sustainable Development
- Demographics
- History
- Industry
- Olympic Cities
- Housing + Gentrification
- Urban Design



41%

CITIES IN TRANSITION

- Social Justice + Inclusion
- Identity Groups
- Food/Agriculture
- Arts + Culture
- Indigenous
- Climate Change
- Sports + Recreation
- NIMBY



29%

URBAN GOVERNANCE

- Regional/Multi-level Governance
- Environment/Resilience
- Agriculture/Food
- Neoliberalism
- Participation
- Housing
- Crime
- Electoral



27%

URBAN MOBILITY

- Transportation Planning, Policy, Projects
- Transit Oriented Development + Parking
- Experience of Urban Mobility
- Shared Mobility

¹ Review conducted by Meg Holden for April 30, 2021 presentation to Crossing Paths, Crossing Perspectives seminar, SFU Urban Studies/INRS.

What attracts students to our Program?²

Urban Studies students' top skills and capacities to meet career goals and aspirations:

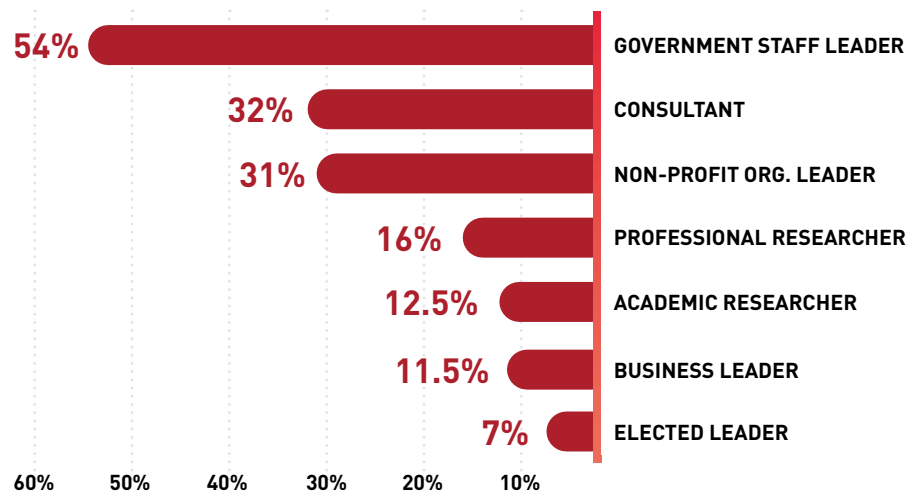
- 52%** THINK + COMMUNICATE WITHIN INTERDISCIPLINARY GROUPS
- 51%** CRITICAL + CONCEPTUAL THINKING SKILLS
- 32%** LOCAL KNOWLEDGE + RELATIONSHIPS
- 25%** LEADERSHIP
- 25%** QUANTITATIVE/QUALITATIVE RESEARCH
- 23%** ARTICULATE VALUES + APPLICATIONS



SFU Urban Studies graduates develop the ability to be holistic thinkers who are strategic, ask the right questions, and are able to help build bridges between people, professions and organizations.

— Urban Studies Alumni

What are Urban Studies students' career goals and aspirations?



Top 5 factors that attracted them to the Urban Studies Program

- 75%** FLEXIBILITY
- 55%** PERSONAL INTEREST IN LEARNING
- 35%** REASONABLE COST
- 33%** PROFESSIONAL ORIENTATION
- 30%** ACCESSIBLE LOCATION

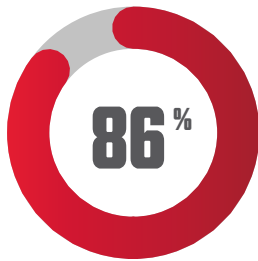
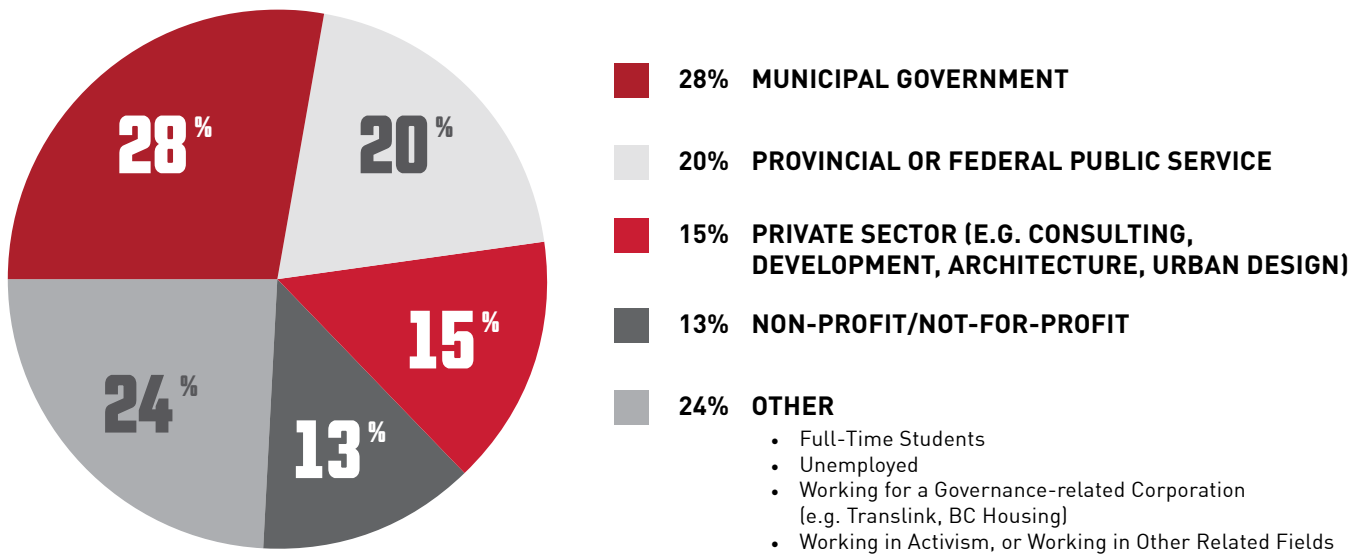
Top 4 most valuable skills developed within the Urban Studies Program

- 71%** CRITICAL + CONCEPTUAL THINKING SKILLS
- 62%** INDEPENDENT RESEARCH SKILLS
- 46%** DEEP SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTISE
- 36%** WORK, SCHOOL, LIFE BALANCE

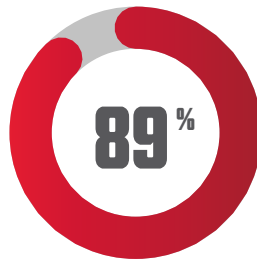
²Data from 87 responses to a summer 2020 websurvey of current Urban Studies students and alumni.

Experiences of Alumni and Students²

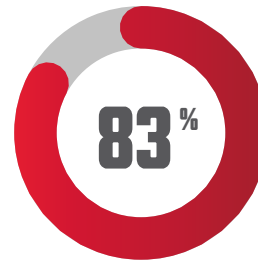
What kind of work do Urban Studies Alumni and Students do?



Would **recommend SFU Urban Studies** friends and colleague



Agreed that the **opportunity to connect with peers and faculty** who think and care deeply about cities is a key value of the Program



Of those who had completed the MURB program were satisfied with the **overall value of their degree and the cost + effort of attaining it**

Our alumni work throughout the world in a wide range of urban careers, including at municipalities and government agencies throughout the Lower Mainland and elsewhere in BC, the Yukon, Ontario and Newfoundland; municipalities in the United States; provincial agencies such as BC Housing, the BC Nonprofit Housing Association and the Office of the Auditor General of BC; federal agencies such as CMHC and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada; consulting firms Stantec, Brook Pooni, City Spaces, Argyle, Modus, Bakau Consulting, Bunt and Associates, and Perkins+Will Canada; real estate-related companies like Terra Housing, Qualico Communities,

PC Urban, and Garnett Wilson Realty Advisors; architecture firms such as Henriquez Partners Architects and HCMA; and non-profit organizations, environmental advocacy groups and business improvement associations. Urban Studies alumni have also taken on leadership roles in prestigious and significant professional and civic organizations, such as the Vancouver City Planning Commission, HUB cycling, Vancouver Renters Advisory Committee, Green Party, Canadian Green Building Council, Urban Land Institute, the International Association for Public Participation and Small Housing BC.

²Data from 87 responses to a summer 2020 websurvey of current Urban Studies students and alumni.

Alumni Award for Community Engagement

In 2014, we established the Alumni Award for Community Engagement. Through the fund raising and initiative of our alumni network, this award is now fully endowed. This annual award recognizes **our students who have established a record of, and future promise in, urban community-engaged leadership, while maintaining an excellent academic record.** We are proud of this award's roster of winners making an impact in a diversity of urban issues:



2014 • Jonathan Cote
 Defended his MURB thesis on land-use changes that occurred around the New Westminster and 22nd Street Skytrain stations just two months before he was elected as Mayor of New Westminster at the age of 35, becoming BC's youngest Mayor.



2017 • James Long
 Awarded for his distinguished contributions to the theatre community in Vancouver and demonstrated commitment to social issues.



2020 • Aman Chandi
 Whose continuous dedication to community engagement in Newton, Surrey and her dedication to reciprocal research were recognized.



2015 • Stephanie Allen
 Recognized for her research and advocacy concerning the displacement of Vancouver's Black Community through the destruction of Hogan's Alley.



2018 • Lani Brunn
 Recognized for her contributions to housing for women and her dedication to fostering healthy change and long-term relationships in vulnerable communities



2020 • Dionne Co
 Awarded due to her experience and passion for working with vulnerable people in Metro Vancouver and volunteer leadership for grassroots urban justice organizations.



2016 • Karen Sawatzky
 Whose research on the impact of short-term rentals on Vancouver rental supply attracted the attention of local media and the municipal government.



2019 • Audrey Guay
 Received the award due to her commitment to advancing urban justice, evidenced through her many years of working with community building organizations in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.



2021 • Claire Adams
 Whose leadership as a volunteer with Women Transforming Cities is mobilizing change toward increasing the impact of women's involvement in local politics.

SFU Urban Studies on Commitment to Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

We take seriously SFU's commitments to:

- **Reconciliation** with the legacy of injustice and erasure of the Indigenous peoples of the lands preceding and coexisting with Canada
- **Advancing** justice, equity, diversity and inclusion
- **Research** that engages meaningfully with an increasing share of community members

Our work to clarify how we do this within our specific personal, professional and epistemological commitments and beliefs in the Urban Studies Program, is in progress.

Research Networks and Partners Engaged by Urban Studies Faculty (selected)

- | | |
|---|--|
| World Congress on Transportation Research | Post-Carbon Institute |
| Urban Land Institute | European Court of Auditors |
| Women Transforming Cities | Institut National de la Recherche Scientifique |
| Community Housing Canada | Vancouver Foundation |
| International Political Science Association | Civida |
| Association for Nonprofit and Social Economy Research | Council for Canadian Urbanism |
| Metro Vancouver | International Sustainable Development Research Association |
| Enterprising Non-Profits | US High Speed Rail Association |
| Canadian Index of Well-Being | Canada Green Building Association |
| Planning Institute of British Columbia | Canadian Community Economic Development Network |
| Korea Transportation Research Institute | |

Winners of the 2020 Qara Clemente Urban Studies Photo Contest

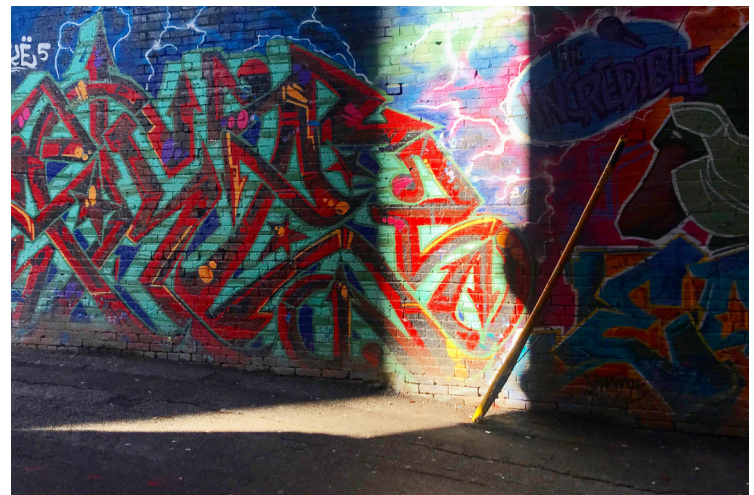
Urban Studies students have strong and compelling views on cities and urban life, here in Vancouver and around the world. The Qara Clemente Urban Studies Photo Contest showcases some of the most compelling of these views, via our annual student photo competition, organized by the Urban Studies Graduate Student Association since 2018. Qara was our dear friend, classmate, and an urban warrior with a great eye for photography. In memory of Qara, one of the winner's frames is permanently dedicated to holding her work. Each year's winning photographs are also framed and displayed prominently in our skybridge work space to inspire and propel our ongoing learning.



1st • John Mater
Gamcheon Culture Village, 2020
Busan, South Korea



2nd • Alasdair Butcher
Laundering, Two Ways, 2020
Mumbai, India



3rd • Amanda Gutmanis
Alley Light, 2020
Gastown, Vancouver, Canada



4th • Nichole Holdbak
Woodwards, 2020
Gastown, Vancouver, Canada



5th • Farina Fassihi
Civil, 2020
Vancouver, Canada



6th • Ghazaleh Akbarnejad
Midnight in Gastown, 2020
Gastown, Vancouver, Canada

A low-angle photograph of a modern building with a prominent circular, cantilevered upper section. The building has a grid of windows, some of which are illuminated from within. A flag is visible on a pole at the top of the circular structure. The sky is a clear, pale blue. The overall image has a slightly desaturated, high-contrast aesthetic.

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