Universities Canada's carbon footprint report

October 2024

Universities Canada. Universités Canada.

Message from the CEO

I am thrilled to introduce Universities Canada's first-ever carbon footprint report, highlighting the results from our inaugural greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions inventory and our commitment to combatting climate change. Over the past year, Universities Canada's climate initiative, Canada's Universities: Action for net zero initiative has made significant progress supporting our members' climate work. This report demonstrates our commitment to also look inward at our own corporate activities and put words to action by addressing our own carbon footprint.

The completion of our first GHG emissions inventory marks a significant step forward for the organization. It provides a baseline understanding of our current emissions, which has allowed us to develop strategies and interim targets to reach our goal of becoming net zero by 2050.

Moving forward, we remain persistent in our dedication to climate action. We commit to continuous monitoring of our GHG emissions, implementing innovative solutions and working towards our goal of achieving net zero emissions.

Together, let's continue leading through demonstrated action, inspiring positive change within our organization and beyond as we strive for a more resilient tomorrow.

Warm regards,

President and CEO

Introduction

Canada's universities are leaders in sustainability. They are monitoring the impacts of climate change and developing new technologies and solutions to help communities adapt to these changes. In addition, they are striving to prepare workers and students with the skills needed for a greener economy and mitigating the carbon footprint of their own operations and facilities.

In April 2023, Universities Canada launched a new climate initiative, *Canada's universities: Action for net zero*, to support and promote member institutions' climate work. The initiative is composed of six action areas:

1. Measuring and reporting on universities' impact and seeking strategies to address gaps.
2. Pursuing increased investment in universities' capacity to address climate change.
3. Collaborating locally, nationally and internationally to align efforts to address climate change.
4. Increasing awareness on the critical role Canada's universities are playing in addressing climate change.
5. Sharing resources and best practices in addressing climate change.
6. Addressing Universities Canada's own impact.

As part of the sixth action area, Universities Canada has committed to reducing the climate impact of its operations and to becoming net zero by 2050,[1] while continuing to advance the mission of its member institutions to transform lives, strengthen communities and find solutions to the most pressing challenges facing our world and supporting students directly through its scholarships and bursaries programs. To do so, Universities Canada will reduce the emissions generated by its activities where possible and offset unavoidable residual emissions to ensure a neutral overall impact on the climate.

This report provides an overview of Universities Canada's first greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) inventory, including the approach adopted, methodology used and high-level findings. The inventory serves as a baseline to allow Universities Canada to measure and report on progress towards the goal of net zero by 2050 and also helps determine the organization's interim reduction targets and strategies.

[1] Becoming net zero entails reducing GHG emissions as close to zero as possible and compensating the remaining emissions with an equivalent amount of carbon removal. World Resources Institute: https://www.wri.org/insights/net-zero-ghg-emissions-questions-answered

Governance of climate action

The responsibility for reducing the association's climate impact rests with Universities Canada's climate initiative team, under the direction of the Vice-President of Members Services as well as the organization's Operations Managers Group. These efforts are supported by Universities Canada's staff as well as the association's green committee.

Universities Canada's commitment to support members' climate efforts and to reduce the footprint of our own operations is embedded throughout the 2023-2026 organizational schema, as well as our policies and practices. The organization reports regularly on climate progress to the Board of Directors and to the full membership at bi-annual membership meetings.

Our climate journey

Our GHG emissions inventory

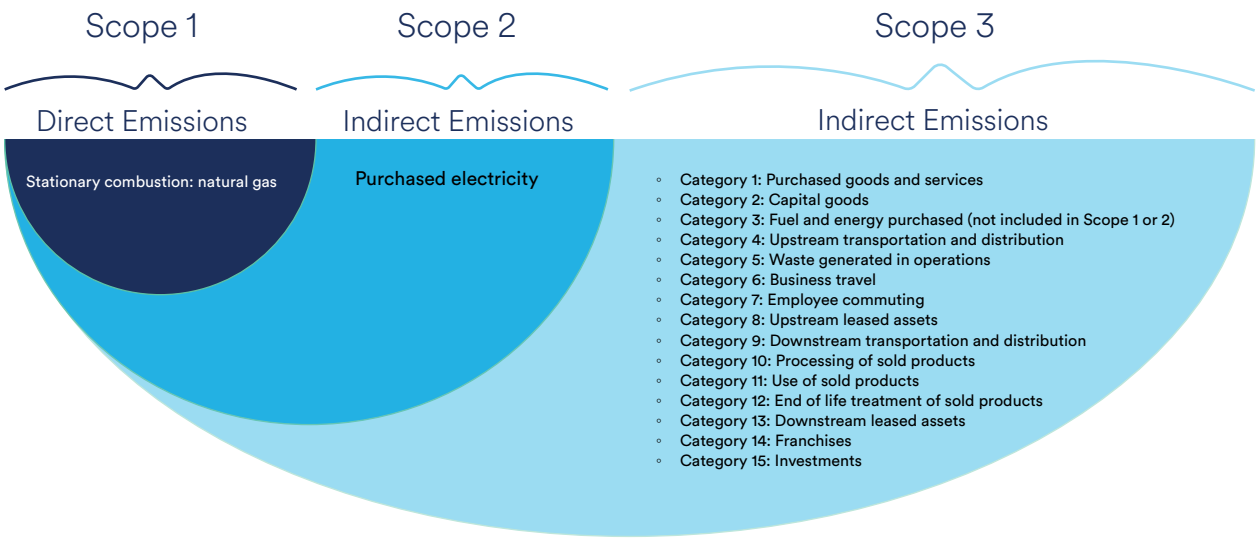
In June 2023, Universities Canada committed to becoming net zero by 2050 in accordance with the Government of Canada's targets and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's recommendation to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's parties. To meet this objective, in late 2023 Universities Canada began working with a third party to measure our internal climate efforts and create an inventory of our GHG emissions.

Methodology

The inventory used the last completed fiscal year as a baseline to align with the principles outlined in the Greenhouse Gas Protocol. The baseline year is the 2022-23 fiscal year, which refers to the period of April 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023.

The GHG Protocol is a globally recognized carbon accounting standard for private and public sector organizations, which includes generally accepted accounting principles for measuring and reporting corporate GHG emissions. It is used to quantify, manage and understand carbon dioxide (CO2) and other GHG emissions, and serves as the foundation for nearly every GHG standard and program in the world. It is a corporate accounting and reporting standard developed by The World Resources Institute and World Business Council for Sustainable Development. The inventory was commissioned by Universities Canada and prepared by a third-party, based on information provided by Universities Canada, without independent verification and subject to specified scope limitations. While the information provided was considered sound for analysis, findings may change for future inventory reports if new or more comprehensive information is found.

Universities Canada followed an operational control approach for the GHG inventory, where Scope 1 (direct emissions) and Scope 2 (indirect emissions from electricity) reflect managed operational emissions. Scope 3 emissions encompass all other indirect emissions that occur in Universities Canada's value chain.[2] The GHG Protocol guided the assessment, with sources considered immaterial excluded from the inventory after initial quantification. The results from this work serve as a baseline GHG inventory, aiding future performance measurement and emissions reduction targets. The table below outlines the scopes of emissions and their descriptions.



[2] Scope 1 emissions are direct emissions from owned or controlled sources. Scope 2 emissions are indirect emissions from the generation of purchased energy. Scope 3 emissions are all indirect emissions (not included in scope 2) that occur in the value chain of the reporting company, including both upstream and downstream emissions. (GHG Protocol: https://ghgprotocol.org/sites/default/files/standards_supporting/FAQ.pdf)

Data challenges and categorization

The inventory exercise identified gaps in data collection in certain categories. For example, information gaps were identified in relation to the transportation methods used by participants attending Universities Canada events and in determining the exact weight of the waste generated by the association's employees. In these cases, emissions were calculated using estimates based on expenditures ($), the distance travelled, or the square footage of the association's office.

Category 15: Investments

Investment-related emissions were excluded from the GHG inventory primarily due to a lack of specific data needed to perform the calculation of investment-related emissions (i.e. share of equity data). Universities Canada is comfortable with this exclusion as equity investments are not a core business activity for the organization and the nature of these equity investments are not aligned with specified categories within GHG accounting. In addition, Universities Canada does not have operations generating emissions from project financing and debt investments. As such, investment-related emissions were not included as part of this inventory. Universities Canada will continue to monitor developments in investment-related emission calculations for GHG inventories within the sector and if it becomes feasible, will include investments in future inventories.

Scholarships

Scholarships (tuition and travel-based awards given to students) are excluded from the inventory due to data gaps and data collection challenges. Scholarship calculations relied on proxy GHG emissions factors based on expenditures. Through this approach, reducing emissions based on current calculations would require Universities Canada to reduce support offered students. As supporting access to post-secondary education is core to the association's values and mission, Universities Canada will focus on improving scholarship data collection before working to reduce emissions associated with this category.

Results

Universities Canada emitted

234.32 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalents (tC02e) in the 2022-23 fiscal year. This is comparable to approximately

tCO2e

71.8 gasoline-powered passenger vehicles driven for one year

or 157 homes' electricity use for one year.[3]

Over 94%

of Universities Canada's emissions come from Scope 3 sources.
Scopes 1 and 2 account for less than 6% of the association's total GHG emissions.

Total GHG emissions for FY 2022-23

	2022 (tCO2e)	% of total emissions
Scope 1	4.76	2.03%
Scope 2	8.95	3.82%
Scope 3	220.61	94.15%
Total GHG emissions	234.32	100%

[3] https://oee.nrcan.gc.ca/corporate/statistics/neud/dpa/calculator/ghg-calculator.cfm#results

The inventory revealed that Universities Canada's most relevant sources of emissions include: the use of sold products (i.e. Universities Canada-organized events and related catering, waste management and travel), employee commuting and business travel. The breakdown of Scope 3 emissions below provides valuable insights into specific categories contributing to the organization's overall GHG footprint.

Scope 3 GHG emissions for FY 2022-23

Scope 3 categories*	2022 (tCO2e)	% of total emissions
Category 1: Purchased goods and services	44.64	20.23%
Category 3: Fuel and energy related activities	1.34	0.61%
Category 5: Waste generated in operations	2.68	1.21%
Category 6: Business travel	50.43	22.86%
Category 7: Employee commuting	28.48	12.91%
Category 9: Downstream distribution	0.88	0.40%
Category 11: Use of sold products[1]	91.94	41.68%
Category 12: End-of-life treatment of sold products	0.22	0.10%
Total	220.61	100%

[1] * Includes Universities Canada events and staff and participant travel to Universities Canada events.
[2] *Includes tuition, supports for student travel and living costs.

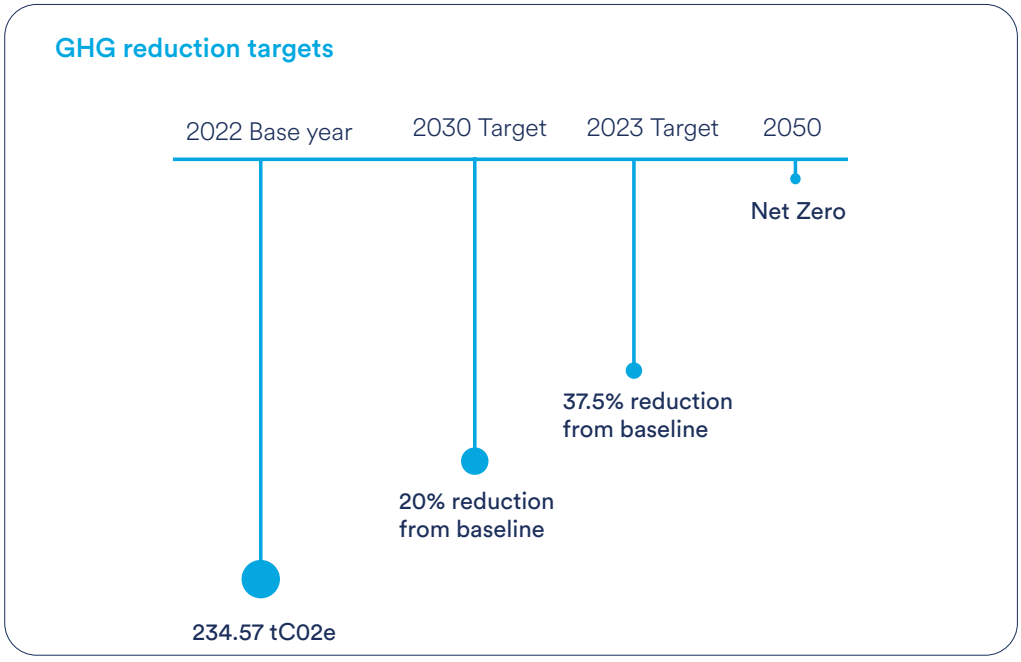
This exercise also revealed that some categories are not applicable to Universities Canada. Universities Canada did not make any capital purchases (category 2) in the base year. There is no known source of emissions for upstream transportation and distribution (category 4), as well as no upstream and downstream leased assets (category 8 and 13, respectively). There is no data for processing of sold products (category 10) as Universities Canada does not create intermediate products (products that require further processing, transformation or inclusion in another product before use).

Universities Canada's efforts to quantify and report GHG emissions for the 2022-23 fiscal year is a first step toward reducing its carbon footprint. This GHG inventory informs the development and implementation of a robust GHG reduction strategy. Going forward, Universities Canada will continue to conduct GHG inventories at regular intervals to monitor progress over time.

Our commitments toward becoming net zero:

- **Achieve net zero emissions by 2050 by reducing our GHG emissions and offsetting the residual amount.**
- **Establish two interim emission reduction targets aligned with scientific benchmarks and goals set by the Canadian federal government.**

Aligned with the goals of Paris Agreement and the targets set out by the Government of Canada, Universities Canada is committed to becoming net zero by 2050. To achieve this goal and monitor ongoing progress, the association has established two interim GHG emissions reductions targets in 2030 and 2035. These targets were guided by the Science Based Targets initiative's[4] requirements for Scope 3 emissions reduction and an internal assessment of feasibility.



[4] The Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi) operates as a corporate climate action organization, guiding global companies and financial institutions to combat the climate crisis. They establish standards, tools and guidance, enabling entities to set GHG reduction targets in alignment with necessary measures to limit global heating and achieve net zero by 2050. https://sciencebasedtargets.org/about-us#who-we-are

The organization strives to reduce overall emissions by 20% from the baseline year by 2030; and by 37.5% from the baseline year by 2035 to achieve net zero by 2050. As Universities Canada's Scope 1 and 2 emissions are much lower than the Scope 3 and represent less than 6% of the organization's carbon footprint, the above targets will be achieved by reducing Scope 3 emissions. The graph below distinguishes the different reduction efforts by scope.

GHG Reduction Strategy by Scope (tC02e)

Going forward

The journey ahead towards net zero and reducing our GHG emissions is not without its challenges. As a first step, Universities Canada will work to refine data collection processes and address data gaps where possible for the next iteration of the GHG inventory. In addition, Universities Canada has developed a GHG reduction strategy to guide efforts to meet the first interim target of a 20% reduction in emissions by 2030 and to identify appropriate approaches to offset unavoidable residual emissions.

Universities Canada is dedicated to achieving net zero in its operations and creating a culture that promotes climate resiliency while actively supports members' climate initiatives. Regular updates on progress will be shared with the Board of Directors and members, fostering transparency and collaboration in the pursuit of sustainability goals.

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About Universities Canada
Universities Canada is the voice of Canada's universities at home and abroad, representing public and private not-for-profit institutions. Our member universities are located in communities across Canada, serving over 1.4 million students and employing upwards of 400,000 people. Our universities—through teaching, research and local engagement —transform lives, strengthen communities and find solutions to the most pressing challenges facing our country and the world.

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