

THE FIELD

As global (especially urban) population increases and as natural resources are depleted, degraded, and inequitably distributed, decisions affecting the sustainability and resilience of the living environment assume increased importance. Public, private, and civic sectors must be involved collaboratively to address the challenges of balancing economic development with environmental protection and social equity, within a framework of community engagement and collective governance.

The sustainable community development (SCD) program prepares students for a range of careers that address these issues. Opportunities for professional involvement can be found in the fields of urban design, regional planning, cultural landscape management, horticulture, environmental law, real estate development, transportation planning, and other disciplines concerned with the sustainable development of communities. For professionals in related fields such as civil and environmental engineering, law, public policy and administration, public health, land and resource conservation, economic development, or finance, the sound theoretical and practical understanding of issues gained through the SCD program contributes to and informs land use and development decision-making processes and values.

A minor in sustainable community development is available; there is also a 4+1 accelerated pathway to the MRP (master of regional planning) and a 4+2 pathway to the MLA (master of landscape architecture) in our department.

THE MAJOR

The curriculum consists of eight required core courses, including the Integrative Experience (IE), accounting for 28–29 credits, and six additional courses in the student's area of concentration within the major. The core curriculum explores various approaches to planning and design so that majors can understand how human activities shape local environments. It provides the background for dealing with a wide range of cultural, social, political, economic, and ecological aspects in the planning, design, and development of sustainable communities. Each of the four concentrations emphasizes environmental or social issues at a different a scale.

CITY AND SOCIETY: The concentration in city and society (CS) is concerned with the quality of life in towns, cities, and metropolitan areas. CS students explore creative and systematic approaches to ecological, economic, equity, and engagement issues that impact communities and regions. The courses focus on social equity, human ecology, cultural vitality, economics, politics, policy, land use, and other issues to build a broad social science understanding of how cities can be redeveloped to better serve a broad range of sustainability goals.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE: The climate change and green infrastructure (CCGI) concentration is concerned with large-scale socio-environmental planning and policy. Its focus is on the ways that cities and buildings can reduce vulnerability, improve livability, and enhance resilience through building, infrastructure, and planning interventions. Students will learn how to enhance environmental quality through reallocation of resources that mitigate, anticipate, and adapt to long-term challenges arising in changing environments and perform a balancing act between development, remediation, and preservation.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT: The concentration in built environment (BE) explores the living environment from a variety of perspectives, ranging from building techniques and architecture to a larger context of natural and cultural landscapes. BE is as much about sustainable design theory and practice as it is about people and how their needs and ambitions can be expressed within spaces and structures. Students will study the sustainability, functionality, and beauty inherent in a well-designed building as well as in the physical fabric of a city or a regional landscape.

LANDSCAPE DESIGN AND BUILD: The landscape design and build (LDB) concentration focuses on the smaller-scale details of building and maintaining sustainable landscapes. It allows environmentally aware students to explore different aspects of the rapidly expanding "green" industries and learn how to apply sound technical, construction, and management principles in adding beauty to a sustainable environment. LDB brings together scientific knowledge of plants, soils, and ecology with practical aspects of landscape design, building construction technology, and business management.

For BE, CS, and CCGI concentrations, students must choose four required courses and two courses from the approved list. For the LDB concentration, all six courses are required. If SCD majors have potential professional interests at the intersection of those four standard concentrations, that student may combine landscape architecture and regional planning (LARP) courses from the various standard concentrations to allow more interdisciplinary focus—e.g., cultural heritage, urban policy, transportation planning. The independently designed (ID) concentration could also support applications to the 4+1 accelerated master of regional planning, or to the 4+2 master of landscape architecture. Students in those cases must work closely with the concentration advisor.

HONORS

Contact the departmental honors coordinator for information on how to pursue honors opportunities within the major.

STUDY ABROAD

Majors may choose to study abroad if it supports their academic and career goals. In that case, we generally encourage SCD majors to pursue their study abroad (or domestic exchange) in spring rather than fall semester. Students should contact the International Programs Office (413-545-2710, umass.edu/ipo) and work closely with their academic advisor to choose the appropriate courses in preparation.

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Graduates from our program will be prepared to pursue a profession or higher degree in various fields related to urban design, planning, and community development. There is a demand for knowledgeable individuals to enter the professions and to plan, manage, and implement the building of safer and more beautiful places in which to work and live. People from a wide range of fields—planners, architects and landscape architects, engineers, lawyers, environmentalists, educators, businesspeople, civic organizations, etc.—are involved in this decision-making process to revitalize communities, protect land, improve infrastructure, and conserve significant natural and cultural resources. Students become well qualified for positions with nonprofit organizations, community development agencies, governmental offices, and private firms specializing in site-, municipal-, and regional-level work. Perhaps most important, students will gain experience in knowing how to facilitate and lead change in communities. Whether one wants to address climate change resilience, bring permaculture into local environments, design regional greenways, distribute resources to impoverished communities, research how to increase renewable energy use, or work with stakeholders and diverse publics, one can gain critical knowledge, skills, and values in the SCD major.

COLLEGE OF SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

The social and behavioral sciences focus on behavior and organization from cultural, social, and biological perspectives, examining people as both social and individual beings. Undergraduates in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences study culture, society, and individual and social interaction processes and learn methods by which knowledge in the social and behavioral sciences is created. Students are guided by the SBS Pathways approach, integrating their academic, experiential, and professional pathways. They anchor their knowledge in at least one discipline, but are encouraged to expand this knowledge through various broadening experiences inside and outside the classroom.

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