MS3 Frequently Asked Questions

What do I need to apply?
To apply to the MS in Sustainability Science program, you must complete the Graduate School’s online application via SPIRE prior to the February 1st deadline. Prospective students must submit two letters of recommendation, official transcripts, a personal statement, and resume. International students are required to submit TOEFL or IELTS scores. The minimum TOEFL score for the paper-based test is a 550 and a 80 for the computer-based test. The minimum combined IELTS score needed is 6.5.

How long does the program take (can I do it part time)?
The Sustainability Science MS is designed as a streamlined, 1-year professional master's program. Most students choose to complete the program in 2 semesters and then do a 4-credit internship in the summer after their last semester of coursework. However, some students decide to space the program out over 3 or 4 semesters so that they can develop additional expertise in a specific area or because...
outside commitments don’t allow them to complete it at an accelerated pace. Each year we have a few students who choose the 2-year time frame.

How much does the program cost?
For Massachusetts residents, 2018-2019 tuition and fees are $8,262/semester for full time students. If you complete the program in one year, this would be $16,524. For students, whose residence is outside of Massachusetts, but in New England, the cost is $14,154/semester ($28,308/year). For students outside these areas the cost is $16,812.50/semester ($33,625/year). In addition, there is a one-time $507 enrollment fee, a $275/semester program fee, and a $34.50/semester Graduate Student Senate Tax. There is also a fee if you opt for the University’s health care plan, but if you already have health care you can waive this. The full tuition and fee table is available here and other fees here.

Are there assistantship opportunities?
Unfortunately, our program does not offer teaching or research assistantships at this time. The Sustainability Science MS is an intensive 1-year professional program with no thesis/research component. In addition, the 1-year structure provides insufficient time to undertake outside teaching assistantships. The benefit is earning a Master’s degree in half the time of a traditional research-based program, reducing educational costs and entering the workforce sooner. To help with funding we encourage you to apply for outside scholarships or fellowships, and/or explore financial assistance through the University’s financial aid services.

Can international students apply for financial aid?
Unfortunately, International students are not eligible for financial aid. You can apply for an alternative loan if you are able to obtain a U.S. cosigner. For further information, go to umass.edu/umfa/international-students.

International students are encouraged to contact the International Programs Office umass.edu/ipo/ for information on scholarship opportunities, or visit EduPass.org for information on other sources of aid available to International Students.

We also encourage you to apply for outside scholarships or fellowships.

How do international students apply for a visa?
You will be required to obtain an I-20. The I-20, also known as the Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (F-1) Student Status-For Academic and Language Students, is a United States Department of Homeland Security, specifically ICE and the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP), document issued by SEVP-certified colleges, universities, and vocational schools that provides supporting information on a student’s F or M status. Since the introduction of the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) run by SEVP, the form also includes the student tracking number (SEVIS ID number) and school code. The Form I-20 is only for F-1, F-2, M-1, and M-2 statuses. J-1 and J-2 status holders have an equivalent Form DS-2019 which is issued by a United States Department of State-
Can I take courses in different concentrations?
Yes, our program is designed to allow students maximum flexibility in choosing courses that best fit their academic interests and career aspirations. We allow students wide discretion in assembling courses across different topic areas, and there are in fact program requirements that students take coursework in other concentrations.

Can credits be transferred?
Up to 6 graduate-level credits of grade B or above may be transferred to your graduate transcript, pending approval from both the MS3 Graduate Program Director, Alison Bates, and the Graduate School. For more information, visit the Transfer Credit Policy in the Graduate School Handbook.

Can I create a new concentration?
We do not officially permit students to create their own concentrations as there is a great deal of flexibility within the five available concentrations. If your career goals extend beyond the defined concentrations, you are free to discuss further with the Graduate Program Director to identify additional options.

What is the degree structure and requirements?
All students are required to take a total of 33 credits to graduate:

- 14 “Core Knowledge” credits – a required 3-credit class called "Perspectives on Sustainability" and two 1-credit seminars, plus 9 credits in the “core breadth” categories – one 3-credit class each in Ecological Systems, Urban & Social Systems, and Policy & Economics
- 9 credits in the "Specialization"/concentration category
- 6 Elective credits – 3 credits from a different concentration area (“Breadth Elective”) and 3 credits from any category (“Free Elective”)
- 4-credit Practicum (internship)
- Additional requirements: 12 credits must be 600-level or above; at least half of the required credits must receive a letter grade; only courses with a “C” or better can count toward the degree.

What kind of courses will I take?
Our program trains students to be interdisciplinary thinkers who will go out and start solving the world’s sustainability challenges. All students gain a common foundation in the breadth of sustainability science and develop a deeper expertise within a concentration area of their choice. The Perspectives on
Sustainability course develops a foundational understanding of the field of Sustainability Science. The fall and spring Seminars expose students to current research in a wide variety of sustainability areas.

Students also select from one of our five concentrations: 1) Urban Sustainability, 2) Renewable Energy and Efficient Design, 3) Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems, 4) Water Sustainability and Climate Change, and 5) Environmental Quality. There are a wide variety of classes offered within each of these concentrations, so students can select courses that meet their own individual interests. Students also take at least one course in a different concentration so that they continue to develop an interdisciplinary understanding of sustainability.

**What kind of internships do students do?**
The capstone to the course is a 4-credit Practicum (internship) that allows students to apply what they have learned in the classroom to a real-world setting. Students can intern with a wide array of organizations such as nonprofits, businesses, government, and higher education institutions. Our students come from a variety of academic disciplines (such as environmental science, economics, business, public policy, and communications) and thus the individual internships/projects they choose to pursue span a wide range. We've had students work on water issues in Alaska, clean energy in Massachusetts, anti-pollution breast cancer campaigns, and sustainable food in schools projects to name just a few.

**Where are our graduates employed?**
Our recent graduates have successful careers in a variety of sectors including consulting firms, business, academia, environmental NGOs, research institutes and government. Please see our website for more information.

**What kind of careers does this prepare me for?**
Sustainability is an evolving and growing field. As society continues to recognize the need for sustainable solutions to environmental, social, and economic problems whole new categories of jobs (such as sustainability managers) are coming into existence. By training students to be interdisciplinary thinkers who can go out and start solving the world’s sustainability challenges we provide them with the foundations they need to succeed not only in the current job market but also in the emerging job market of tomorrow.

We attract students from a wide variety of academic disciplines (environmental science, economics, business, public policy, and communications to name just a few). These students have diverse professional interests and thus the individual careers they choose to pursue span a wide range. Within our program, the different concentration areas also serve to prepare students for different career paths. While students may choose to pursue additional career paths, Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems trains students for positions regulating food policy, promoting global nutrition, steering government
decision-making. Urban Sustainability prepares students for careers in city planning, environmental consulting, and renewable energy. Environmental Quality provides a foundation for careers in disease prevention, remediation, or consulting. Water Sustainability and Climate Change readies students to be watershed managers, climate modelers, and consultants. Renewable Energy & Efficient Design prepared students for work in the energy sector varying from consulting, environmental permitting, private industry/energy development, and government work. Some of our recent graduates are working for consulting firms, academia, government, and non-profits.

Is this degree terminal?
Our 1 year streamlined program is primarily designed for students wanting to build a professional career as a sustainability practitioner. This would include positions in business, consulting, non-profits, and government. Although it is designed as a terminal degree, students sometimes pursue additional degrees for research or academic careers.

How do I search for classes in Spire?
Please refer to the course list in your welcome packet. The program is interdisciplinary and is very flexible and you can really choose your own courses as long as they fit in the appropriate categories. The "Roadmap to Graduation" allows you to map out your courses. A good way to find the most relevant courses for you is to go to Spire and click --> Main Menu --> Course Guides --> Search for Classes.

You can search by department and look for classes greater than or equal to 500 level. Our students typically look under Environmental Conservation, Stockbridge School of Agriculture, Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning, Environmental Science, Public Policy, Resource Economics, Education, Geosciences, Geography, BCT, Architecture, History, Mechanical and Industrial Engineering, Food Sciences, Nutrition, Public Health, Marketing, etc. You can also search for courses categorized as "green" at the bottom of the page in the "class attributes" box ("GRN").

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions about classes. You will also be able to finalize your schedule during your individual advising session with Alison or another advisor at the orientation.

What is the GPA Requirement?
Generally students have at least a 3.0 GPA, and the average for admission to graduate programs across campus is 3.3, but we don't have a specific hard cutoff when we assess applications. We try to form a complete picture of applicants and the GPA is one component of that, but if students are a little weaker in one area of their application, this is not grounds for an automatic rejection.

GPA is scored differently in my country. How do I translate it into a US GPA score?
You may leave this blank. The Graduate School will calculate it based on your transcript.
**Where should the official transcripts be sent?**

Official transcripts will be required before any official offers of acceptance into the program can be made. Official transcripts are transmitted directly from the educational institution(s) attended to the UMass Graduate School. Any application materials not submitted electronically with your application can be mailed to:

Graduate Student Service Center
534 Goodell Building, University of Massachusetts
140 Hicks Way, Amherst, MA 01003-9333
Phone: (413)-545-0722 (8:30 AM-5:00PM M-F EST)
Email: gradadm@grad.umass.edu

One official transcript must be submitted from all colleges/universities attended, undergraduate and graduate, where 6 or more credits were taken are required. You do not need to list college/universities where 5 or fewer credits were taken; however, if you do include them on your application, the Graduate School will consider your application incomplete until those transcripts are received.

**Is there any limit to number of recommendation letters and is it restricted to only academic professors?**

We ask for a minimum of two but applicants can submit another if they think it will help round out their application. There is no restriction to academic professors.