

Practicum Info Sheet

The MS Sustainability Science (MS3) Program at the University of Massachusetts Amherst is an intensive, one-year Master's program designed to train highly-motivated students and professionals to be change-makers in the emerging sustainability field. A required and critical element of the MS3 Program is the Sustainability Practicum, a 4-credit, 150-hour work experience. To receive credit for the practicum, you must enroll in ECO 698S and fulfill the requirements described below.

Purpose and goals

The practicum is the capstone experience of the MS3 Program. The purpose is to provide students with career training that allows you to apply your coursework in a real-world setting, learn from practitioners and leaders in the field, and build your professional experience while still in school. This experience may be an internship, fellowship, full-time job, or contract work; most students fulfil this requirement through a summer internship. Ideally, you will produce a suite of products and/or outcomes during your practicum experience that you can add to your professional portfolio. The goal is for you to emerge with applied experience, a refined set of skills, a broadened area of expertise, and a better understanding of the type of professional opportunities you are most interested in pursuing beyond graduate school.

How it works

The practicum can be paid or unpaid. Students usually enroll in the practicum course (ECO 698S) during the spring semester and complete all the requirements by the end of the summer, although the timeframe can be extended. The course is pass/fail and you will receive an incomplete until the practicum requirements have been fulfilled. Once you have met the obligations of your practicum as set out in your Learning Contract, and completed the requirements outlined below, the final step is to ensure your academic record includes a passing grade for the practicum course. You can communicate with the Graduate Program Director (GPD) to ensure your obligations have been met.

Note: The Graduate School cannot approve you for degree eligibility until you receive a passing grade for your practicum.

Practicum requirements

The following are the requirements needed to complete your practicum:

1. **Secure a practicum and develop a Learning Contract:** Students are responsible for finding and securing their own internship or other work experience. Working with your advisor and the internship supervisor, you will develop a *Learning Contract* (using the MS3 template) that identifies the scope of work, key responsibilities, timeline, and deliverables. **You may not start your practicum until the Learning Contract is approved.** The contract must be approved and signed by the student, student's advisor, the MS3 GPD, and the internship Supervisor, and submitted to the MS3 program administrator **BEFORE** the internship start date. The required 150 hours does not begin until the Learning Contract has been signed by all required parties and submitted to the GPD.
2. **Initiate a midpoint review** (optional): Students are encouraged to have a midpoint check-in with your Supervisor to review the Learning Contract, assess progress, and refine goals/expectations, as needed.
3. **Submit Draft Practicum Report:** The *Practicum Report* summarizes your work, experiences, deliverables, "lessons learned", etc. This is a requirement for receiving a final grade for the Sustainability Practicum, and can be shown to prospective employers as evidence of your professional experience. You must submit the report to the GPD by the advised deadline; this will be two weeks prior to the deadline for your final report.
4. **Submit Final Practicum Report:** Revised report incorporating GPD/advisor feedback is submitted to the GPD by the advised deadline.
5. **Write a synopsis** of your work (up to 1 page) for public dissemination, e.g. through UMass publications, MS3 website, relevant blog or local news media. Submit this as an appendix to your Practicum Report.
6. **Ask for a final evaluation:** A key part of your ongoing professional growth is seeking and acting on feedback from your peers and from those with more experience than you in your chosen field. Towards the end of the internship, therefore, you should consider a final exit meeting where your supervisor can provide feedback on your work and success relative to the Learning Contract.
7. **Have your Supervisor submit verification:** The MS3 Program must receive a *direct correspondence/email* from your supervisor that confirms you completed the required 150 hours of service and adequately satisfied the internship as outlined in the learning contract.

Required Practicum paperwork recap:

1) Learning Contract, 2) Practicum Report, including Synopsis, 3) Email from Supervisor confirming completion of contract, 4) Correspond with Graduate Program Director that obligations are complete.

Internship considerations

Consistent with the MS3 Program's philosophy, above all, the practicum should align with your interests and serve as a stepping stone toward your long-term professional career goals. It should be a challenging professional experience suitable for a graduate-level student. The experience must involve you taking on responsibilities within the context of a broader project. Please see the Practicum Resources Guide for a suggested list of companies and organizations to contact about an internship.