Frequently Asked Questions During Online Information Sessions

Q: What is a typical student like in this program?

A: Applicants to the SSE program are attracted to this degree for a variety of reasons. Some are mid-career engineers looking to change jobs and break into the sustainable industry (consulting, sustainability engineering firms, sustainability positions in larger companies). Others want to move up in their existing organizations and need additional technical and leadership skills. Our student profiles vary from new graduates on their first jobs to people with more than 20 years of experience. We have engineers from many different industries (energy, construction, consumer products) and many different backgrounds (roughly 20% are not engineers, but have taken enough of our course prerequisites in their undergraduate work to qualify).

Because every person and industry defines sustainability differently, we recommend each student take our Core Competencies in Sustainability course, EPD 660, first. This course introduces students to the engineer's role in sustainability from a variety of perspectives, and gets them thinking about how they want to apply the degree in the future. Students do not have to select a specialization until after this course.

Q: Do you ever have to come to campus for this degree?

A: No, there is no required residency. The degree is 100% online because we have talked to too many students that say a residency just doesn't work for them. We do offer a 1 credit elective course, EPD 663: Sustainability and Society Seminar and Conference, that does require students to come to campus for two days in April to attend the Nelson Institute Earth Day Conference, meet faculty, and take a “sustainability tour” of UW facilities.

Q: How long will the degree take?

A: The degree is 27 credits. If you decide to take more than one class a semester (defined as spring, summer or fall) you can finish in 5 semesters, or two years. If you take only one class a semester (3 credits) it will take three years (9 semesters). We supply suggested course schedules for either a two or three year program.

Q: How much time will a class take per week?

A: In general, you need to expect about 10 hours per 3 credit course per week.

Q: How will the classes be run?

A: Each course will use a combination of tools. First, weekly reading materials and/or pre-recorded lectures can be downloaded to introduce the weekly topic. Then you will have a scheduled 60-75 minute live discussion with the professor each week (the day/time vary). Throughout the week you will also participate in an online discussion forum with your classmates and professor. In addition, you will have access to live web conference room at any time to meet with classmates to work on homework or group projects.

You will access all of your classes and discussion materials through one website: Learn@EPD. Program information and technical support will also be available from this site. Once you are accepted into the program and set up an Internet ID (NetID) with the university you will be granted access into the site.
Q: How hard is it to balance school with my job or travel?

A: First, your course materials can all be accessed from any internet connection, anywhere, which helps if you’re not at home. If you’re travelling and don’t have access to the internet, you can still call in to participate in the web conference. We also archive the live discussions if you miss one so you can listen to it when you are available. We also try to post homework assignments well in advance so you have time to plan.

Second, many of the courses require projects. Many students will be able to apply these projects to work you are currently doing, allowing you to combine work with school. Example projects we will have in this degree are modeling the energy profile of a facility, calculating the carbon footprint of a product or process, determining incremental improvements to a production cycle to improve sustainability, following the life cycle cost of a system, or writing a proposal to upper management for a sustainable initiative.

Q: Do the courses have quizzes and exams?

A: Most graduate level courses have minimal quizzes and exams, instead requiring semester long projects or presentations. Most classes will have smaller assignments however throughout the course.

Q: Can I get financial aid?

A: Financial aid is available, and we can get you in touch with the UW Financial Aid office. Federal programs are available to full time graduate students (students with 4 credits or more per semester). We can also talk to your companies to provide information on the value of the degree, which may help you get reimbursement.

Q: When/how should I apply?

A: June 1 for Fall start.
Apply by emailing your intent to apply to Gary Henderson at Henderson@epd.engr.wisc.edu. He’ll walk you through the process.