

## FAQ FOR MASTER'S PROJECT CLIENTS

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**Q: What is a master's project?**

A: Master's projects are interdisciplinary, problem-solving research experiences conducted by groups of Master's degree students as the capstone of their academic programs at the University of Michigan School for Environment and Sustainability (SEAS). Projects provide students with a team experience that approximates a future work environment while also providing client organizations with solutions to complex environmental issues and useful products. These projects focus the substantial capabilities of our students and faculty on problems faced by real-world clients. Project ideas are developed by faculty, students, or clients.

**Q: What info can I find on the SEAS master's project website?**

<http://seas.umich.edu/research/capstone/projects>

A: Ongoing and recently completed projects with links to view archived, completed project reports (via U-M's Deep Blue system). The project website also includes links to the master's project student forms and handbook.

**Q: How and when do I submit a project idea?**

A: Email completed project proposals to [seas-projects@umich.edu](mailto:seas-projects@umich.edu). You can download the proposal template at: <http://seas.umich.edu/research/capstone>

**Deadline to submit ideas: December 1, 2017**

**Q: What makes a good master's project idea?**

A: A good project proposal has a well-defined scope, with a focus on an environmental, natural resources or sustainability challenge. Projects should be interdisciplinary, engage students from 2-3 fields of study, and have the potential to make a significant impact at a supportive client organization. Project teams are advised by a relevant SEAS faculty advisor. The project should deliver a useful product to the client organization, and provide career advantages for students— allowing them to gain or apply marketable skills, connect with key leaders in the field, or present their research at a professional conference.

**Q: I have an idea but not sure it's a good one. Who can I talk to about it?**

A: If you would like to receive feedback on a project idea, please contact [seas-projects@umich.edu](mailto:seas-projects@umich.edu). Master's Project administrative staff are available to offer feedback on potential project ideas throughout the Fall Term.

**Q: How likely is it that my project proposal will be picked up by a team of SEAS students?**

A: We typically get 50+ project ideas submitted annually and approximately 20-25 proposals are selected each year. The final number of projects selected will vary by team size as well as the size of the incoming class. Not all projects are selected. Proposals are first reviewed by SEAS faculty, but the final selection is primarily driven by student interest.

## Here are a few tips on increasing the likelihood that your project is selected:

- Projects that are proposed by an **SEAS student** or who have an **SEAS student champion** are most likely to be selected. Clients can host virtual or in-person informational meetings to connect with interested students, or master's project administrative staff may be able to recommend a student who shares similar research interests. The best time to connect with a student champion is during the fall semester (September through November). Student champions may offer feedback on a proposal that would make the topic more attractive to a team, or help bring attention to your topic to cultivate interest and help identify other team members.
- Projects are also more likely to be selected if a **SEAS faculty member** is interested in advising your project. Clients can review faculty profiles, here. (<http://seas.umich.edu/research/faculty>) It is not required that a client identify a faculty advisor prior to submitting a project proposal; student teams are ultimately responsible for securing an advisor.
- Projects that cover **topics of high interest** to our students and that have **well-defined** research questions are more likely to be selected. Contact [seas-projects@umich.edu](mailto:seas-projects@umich.edu) to discuss research interests identified by the current project cohort or to get feedback on your proposed research question.

### **Q: Can non-SEAS students join the project team?**

A: No. SEAS master's projects are considered an academic research project and are graded by a SEAS faculty member so it is not appropriate to have students from other departments on the team. However, teams may include a mix of SEAS students pursuing a single MS or a dual-degree with another graduate program on campus. (See established dual-degree programs: [http://seas.umich.edu/academics/dual\\_degree](http://seas.umich.edu/academics/dual_degree).)

### **Q: How do I secure a faculty advisor for the project? Which faculty are eligible to advise a project team?**

A: In most cases, the faculty advisor will be a regular SEAS faculty member. Occasionally, faculty from other units will advise master's projects as a co-advisor with a SEAS faculty member acting as the primary advisor. The role of the advisor includes oversight of the development of the project work plan and budget, and the daily business associated with implementation of the project. The faculty advisor also assigns final grades to team members.

There may be some variations of who is allowed to serve as a master's project advisor. If you have further questions about this, contact: Ashley Richardson, [ashrica@umich.edu](mailto:ashrica@umich.edu). Advising by U-M faculty from outside SEAS requires the approval of the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.

### **Q: What's expected of a master's project advisor?**

A: Assist students at key points in the project, including but not limited to: finalizing the scope, reviewing the project work plan and budget, reviewing key drafts, participating in regular meetings with the student team, first point of contact for trouble-shooting emerging issues, attending project presentations, grading team performance.

### **Q: What's expected of a master's project client?**

A: The project must have buy-in from key leaders at the client organization, and the client must designate a representative who can commit to working with the master's project team throughout the project's duration as a primary point of contact. In addition, clients are expected to:

- Attend the Client Fair (in January) or provide an alternative opportunity to speak with students about the proposed project during the selection process.
- Help the student team in conceptualizing the project and interpreting research findings.

- Review draft documents in a timely fashion.
- Attend (or participate remotely in) key planning meetings with the master's project team or representatives.
- Help the team with access and/or referrals to important contacts and stakeholders.
- Attend the final project presentations in April or arrange for an alternate final presentation between the client and project team members.
- Desirable: Help with funding connections and other resources such as office space, tools, in-kind support, or local lodging facilities.

**Q: Are clients expected to provide funding for a SEAS master's project?**

A: Funding is not a requirement from clients and lack of funding should never discourage a client organization from submitting a project idea. Some clients do provide financial or in-kind support for the student team but the level of funding varies widely. The student team is ultimately responsible for developing a project budget and for securing any needed funds. Students can apply for limited funding through SEAS to cover research expenses.

Examples of client funding that have been provided in the past: direct student stipends, travel or housing expenses for students during summer research activities, funding for student travel/fees to participate in professional conferences, summer internship stipend(s), funding to cover printing costs for products (reports, brochures, etc.) produced for the client. Though not required, funding to cover travel costs, in particular, can make a proposal more attractive to students.

**Q: Where can I research past SEAS Master's Projects to see if the topic has been done?**

A: U-M Deep Blue System: <http://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.42/35325>

\*This link allows you to search all U-M research from SEAS and includes all master's projects, theses, dissertations, etc.

\*Search: COLLECTIONS: Environment and Sustainability (this database includes theses, projects, practica, and dissertations)

You can also see projects from recent years:

<http://seas.umich.edu/research/capstone/projects>

**Q: I'm a client who is concerned that the project info is confidential. How does U-M protect confidential information that is part of a research project at a public institution?**

A: Students work with the SEAS business office and U-M Office of Research and Sponsored Projects to address privacy concerns and conditions related to the openness of research. See more information about policies and privacy considerations in the [Master's Project Handbook](#), p. 7).

**For other questions** about developing or submitting an idea, please contact: Ashley Richardson, SEAS Career Services-Associate Director, [ashricha@umich.edu](mailto:ashricha@umich.edu). Ph: 734-764-8088.