

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Specialized Master's Degree

Master of Science: MSc in Sustainable Development with majors in:

- Economics and Management
- Natural Sciences
- Social Sciences
- without Major

Contributing to sustainable development is a contemporary challenge that must be approached in an interdisciplinary manner. Thus, in addition to specific disciplinary competences, the Master's Degree in Sustainable Development (MSD) draws on concerns of sustainability that are generated by the natural, social and economic sciences.

Methodological aspects of the curriculum include the analytical and integrative skills and knowledge necessary to work on complex questions relevant to sustainability, together with reflexive skills and proficiency in dealing with a broad range of instruments. Considerable importance is placed on competences facilitating and providing constructive work in interdisciplinary and research-based settings.

Focal area of teaching and research

The special feature of the MSD is its three-faculty-structure, formally recognizable by the three supporting faculties, but also by the equal treatment of the three pillars of sustainability – environmental, social and economic. Usually, the master's thesis is written in one of the three offered majors, but it may be interdisciplinary in its orientation as well. This guarantees that students can approach sustainability issues from different perspectives.

The research focuses of the three professorships and their research groups anchored in the MSD are incorporated into teaching, and offer students the opportunity to write a master's thesis within the framework of a current research project; for example on spatial planning for ecosystems and biodiversity conservation, impacts of global change drivers on biodiversity, governance of sustainability in global value chains and food systems, due diligence legislation in tropical commodity sectors, climate change mitigation and adaptation in coffee value chains, environmental ethics, inter- and intragenerational justice, resource economics, energy and climate policy, policy induced technological change, economic concepts of sustainability, etc.

By interrelating the supporting faculties, the three research groups, the responsible professorships and their teams, a very large network within and outside the University of Basel to cooperation partners ensures the inter- and transdisciplinarity of the degree.

Course structure

The MSD is a postgraduate degree that requires a successfully completed bachelor (for details see section on «Admission», next page). The program awards 120 ECTS credits in total. It is a so called «monocourse». When applying for the degree, applicants choose one of the following majors or the possibility to study without a major. This selection can still be changed upon application once students are enrolled in the MSD. Details are stipulated in the study guidelines.

Curriculum Master's Degree in Sustainable Development	CP
Major Economics and Management with the modules	
Introduction to Sustainability Science	12
Interdisciplinary Research and Applications	15
Topics and Methods in Sustainable Development: Economics and Management	30
Complementary Knowledge Natural Sciences	9
Complementary Knowledge Social Sciences	9
Electives	15
Master's Thesis	30
Total	120
Major Natural Sciences with the modules	
Introduction to Sustainability Science	12
Interdisciplinary Research and Applications	15
Topics and Methods in Sustainable Development: Natural Sciences	30
Complementary Knowledge Economics and Management	9
Complementary Knowledge Social Sciences	9
Electives	15
Master's Thesis	30
Total	120
Major Social Sciences with the modules	
Introduction to Sustainability Science	12
Interdisciplinary Research and Applications	15
Topics and Methods in Sustainable Development: Social Sciences	30
Complementary Knowledge Economics and Management	9
Complementary Knowledge Natural Sciences	9
Electives	15
Master's Thesis	30
Total	120
Degree without major with the modules	
Introduction to Sustainability Science	12
Interdisciplinary Research and Applications	15
Topics and Methods in Sustainable Development: Credit points out of the majors in Economics and Management, in Natural Sciences and in Social Sciences (details according to study regulations and guidelines)	30
Complementary Knowledge: Credit points out of the majors in Economics and Management, in Natural Sciences and in Social Sciences (details according to study regulations and guidelines)	18
Electives	15
Master's Thesis	30
Total	120

One ECTS credit point equals 30 hours of study.

Course language

The language of instruction is English; no language certificates are expected, although a good command of English is required (level B2 or higher).

Exams

Student performance is assessed throughout all courses by a variety of assessment formats: Written examinations, oral presentations, essays, seminar papers, reports for internships or independent research works, etc. Details are fixed in the online course directory and/or stipulated in a learning contract according to study regulations and guide lines.

Combination of subjects

There is no possibility to combine this master with other master programs.

Start of program

Students can begin their studies in fall or in spring semesters; although starting in fall is recommended.

Duration of study

The program lasts four semesters (full-time study/30 CP each semester). Part-time studying with a longer study time is possible and according to individual progress plan.

See also examples of optimal course progression plan on www.msd.unibas.ch (download section MSD 2026)

Further degrees

The MSD qualifies students for a **doctorate** in natural, social, or economic sciences.

Career opportunities

The MSD teaches key competences in the field of sustainability and transdisciplinary project work. It is a science-based course of study that enables graduates to gain a foothold in the academic environment as well as in other professional areas. Whether at consulting firms, engineering offices, public authorities, large corporations, NPOs, political parties, banks or auditing firms - an enormous spectrum of job entry opportunities are offered to MSD graduates, which receive a challenging supplement through the foundation of start-ups.

Admission

To be admitted to the MSD, students must provide evidence of a university bachelor's degree worth at least 180 credit points (according to ECTS), or another academic first degree recognized in accordance with the guidelines of the University of Basel. Evidence of at least 100 credit points from one, or at least 150 credit points from two, of the following branches of study must be provided: agricultural sciences, business administration, biology, chemical engineering, electrical engineering, earth sciences, geography, communication and media sciences, mechanical engineering, pharmaceutical sciences, philosophy, political science, social work and social policy, sociology, social and cultural anthropology/ ethnology, environmental engineering and geomatics engineering, environmental sciences, macroeconomics.

Further admission requirements:

- a) A bachelor's degree with an average grade of at least 5.0/unrounded (Swiss scale) in the degree relevant for admission ([formula](#) for the conversion of grades awarded by foreign institutions). As an alternative to this condition current test results from the Graduate Record Examination® General Test (GRE® General Test: <https://www.ets.org/gre.html>) can be submitted:

- quantitative reasoning: your performance must be among the top 30%;
- analytical writing: your performance must be among the top 20%.

b) Evidence of basic knowledge in mathematics, in statistics or methods of empirical social research or a combination of it at university level in the form of at least 6 CP;
See study guidelines for more details.

Details concerning admission requirements are published on www.msd.unibas.ch (section "Admission")
Binding information under: <https://unibas.ch/admission>

Application

Application under <https://unibas.ch/application>; the application fee amounts to CHF 100.-. Application deadline for the fall semester is April 30, for the spring semester November 30.

Enrollment

The letter of admission informs students on the procedure of enrollment.

Tuition fees

Tuition fees per semester (also for examination semesters): CHF 850.-
Individual costs of living etc. are not included.

Scholarships and student loans: Applications should be sent to the responsible office of the canton in which the parents are eligible to pay their taxes. International students should find out what scholarships they are eligible for in their home country. The MSD cannot offer any scholarship.

Mobility

Mobility semesters are possible – abroad or within Switzerland. Details for mobility semesters must be clarified with before the start of the mobility semester (for details see fact sheet on recognition of credit points: <https://msd.unibas.ch> (Services > Downloads MSD 2026))

Further information:

Student Exchange, T +41 61 207 30 28, mobility@unibas.ch, <https://unibas.ch/de/Studium/Mobilitaet>

Further information

Guidelines and regulations

Guidelines and study regulations (both documents in German; English translations available) of the Master's Degree in Sustainable Development are available as downloads on: <https://msd.unibas.ch> (Services > Downloads MSD 2026).

Online course directory, medium-term syllabus and timetable are also available on the same site.

Information about the University of Basel

- The course directory («Vorlesungsverzeichnis») can be found at: <https://www.unibas.ch/en/Studies/In-My-Studies/Course-Directory.html>
- Basler Studienführer: <https://studienberatung.unibas.ch>
- Homepage: <https://unibas.ch>

Student advice

MSD office, Camelia Chebbi, MA/MAS ETHZ/MAS NPPM FHNW (head)

Appointments for study counseling etc. are possible on agreement via: coordination-msd@unibas.ch

Office hours according to information on the website: <https://msd.unibas.ch/en/organization/msd-office/contact/>

Contacts

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Enquiries: <https://unibas.ch/studseksupportEN>

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Imprint

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