



Building Career-Ready Graduates: The Case for Required Internships

CITL Teaching Conference, January 2026

ACAC



Academic and Career Advising Center
University College
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point

Introductions

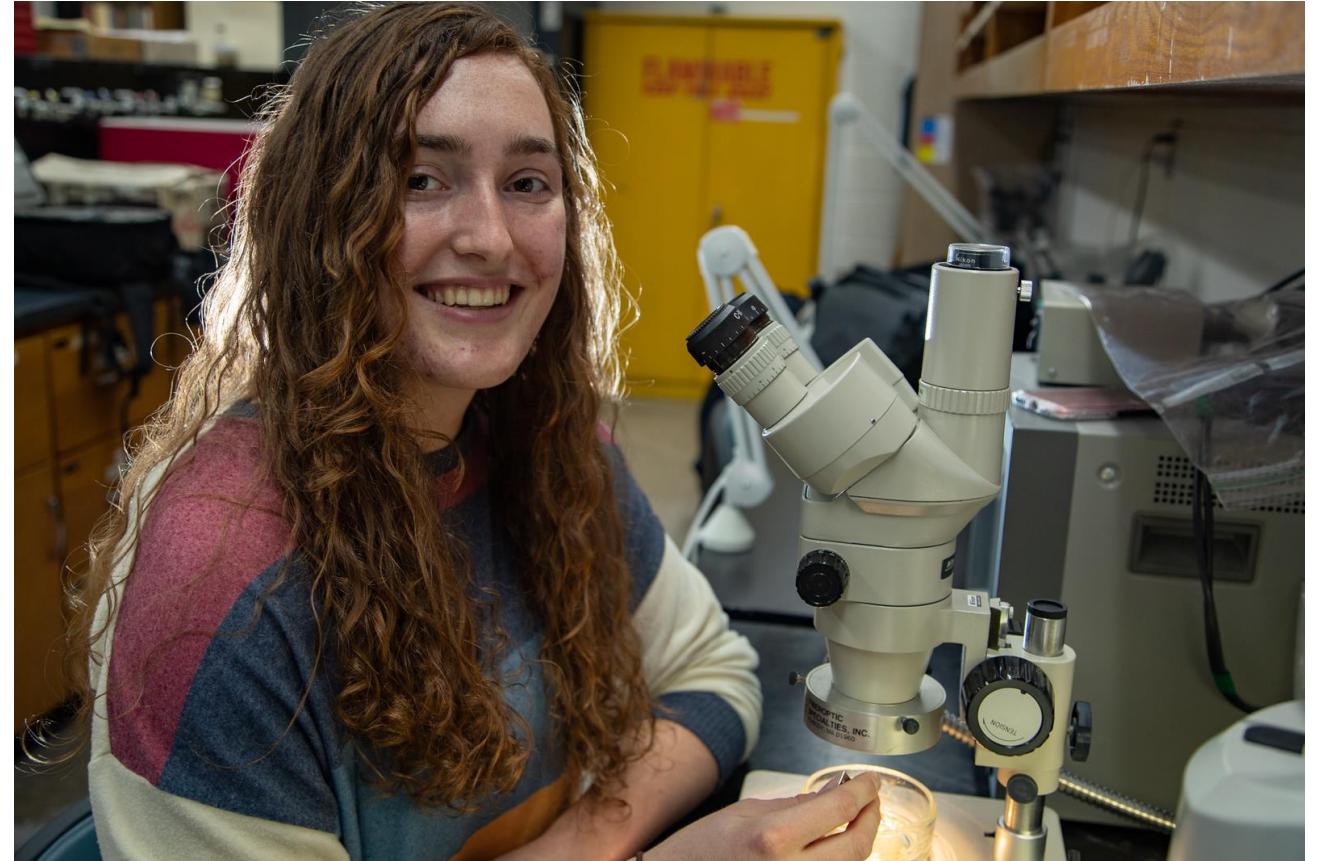
- Jacqui Guthrie, Academic and Career Advising Center
- Professor David Barry, Department of Sociology and Social Work
- Professor Daniel Keymer, Soil and Waste Resources Discipline



Thesis statement: Departments that do not currently require internships as part of their curriculum should seriously consider doing so.

Acknowledging the Many Why Nots

- Workload
- Purview
- Cost



National Data

- Internships are correlated with improved rates of professional job offers and initial starting salaries
- Low socioeconomic status students do not do optional internships, widening the long-term outcomes gap



UWSP Data

- Students tell us that they expect their degree to transform their socioeconomic status
- Alumni who completed internships are more likely to be satisfied with their career 10 years after graduation than those who did not



Applied Sociology Practicum

What, when, why, and how...

- Previous, optional program
- Alumni Survey 2018
- Reality check of grad demo
- 94% of employers hire (NACE)
- Public sociology

What did you find most useful in terms of career preparation about your classes in your Sociology/Social Work/Criminal Justice program of study?		
	Frequency	Percent
What could we do differently to better prepare future students for their post-graduate jobs?		
	Frequency	Percent
of tags (Raw n)		
More hands-on experience/internships	9	40%
Direct career development programming	7	30
Maintain and develop content that is relevant and applicable	7	30
Preparation and alignment for continued education	3	13
Connect directly with the community	1	4
Total	27 (23)	117
<i>"Critical thinking, research and practical application of theories in sociology"</i>		
<i>"Primarily the understanding/acceptance of diverse backgrounds, human needs, and better awareness of community issues."</i>		
<i>"Internship truthfully. Field experience as you learn so much through doing the job vs. just reading theories."</i>		

Applied Sociology Practicum

Now... The Structure

- Two options (field and research)
- Two courses (placement and seminar)
- Application process
- Course release for field coordinator
- Multi-regional, multi-modality



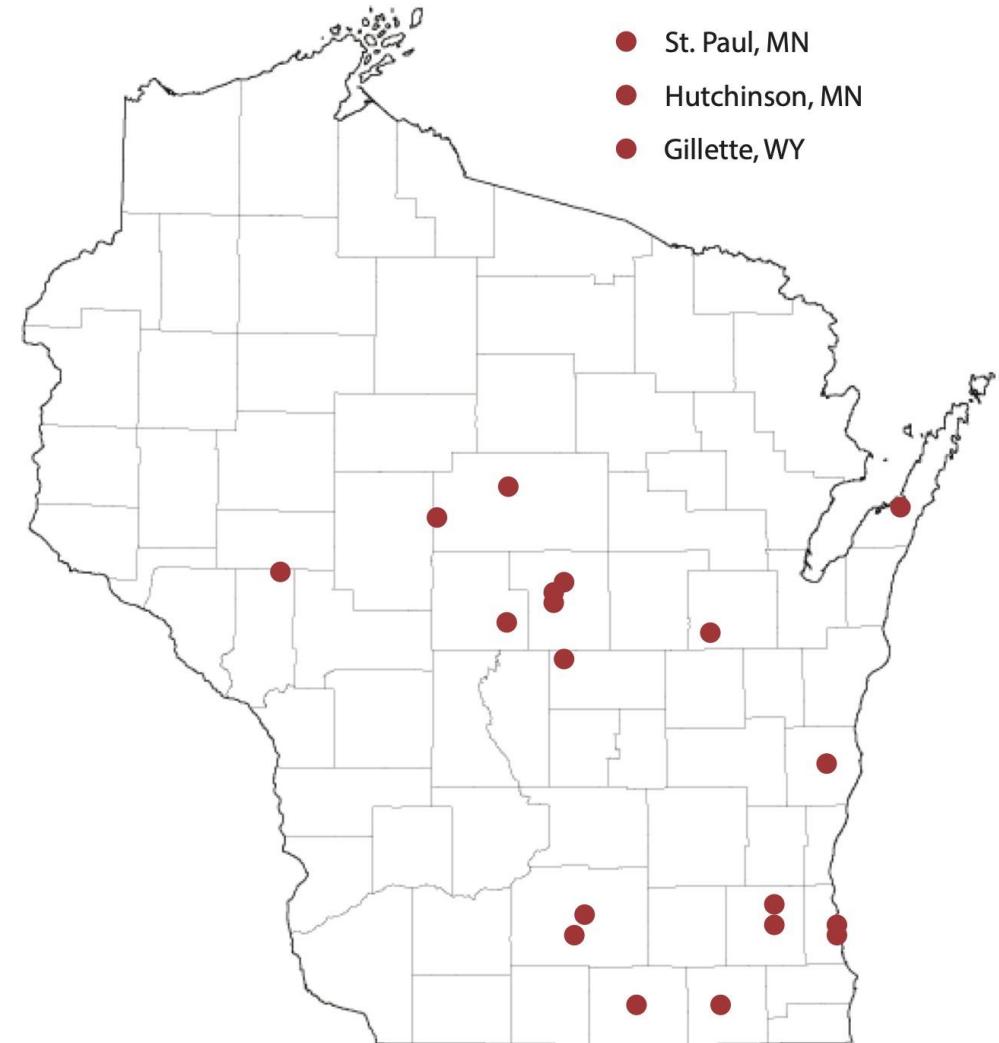
CNR Soil and Waste Resources

- 20+ years of experience with required internships
- Soil Science and Land Management
 - Agronomic services and consulting
 - Soil conservation
 - Soil testing or research
- Waste Management and Environmental Protection
 - Wastewater treatment operations
 - Solid waste departments and landfills
 - Recycling, composting, septic systems



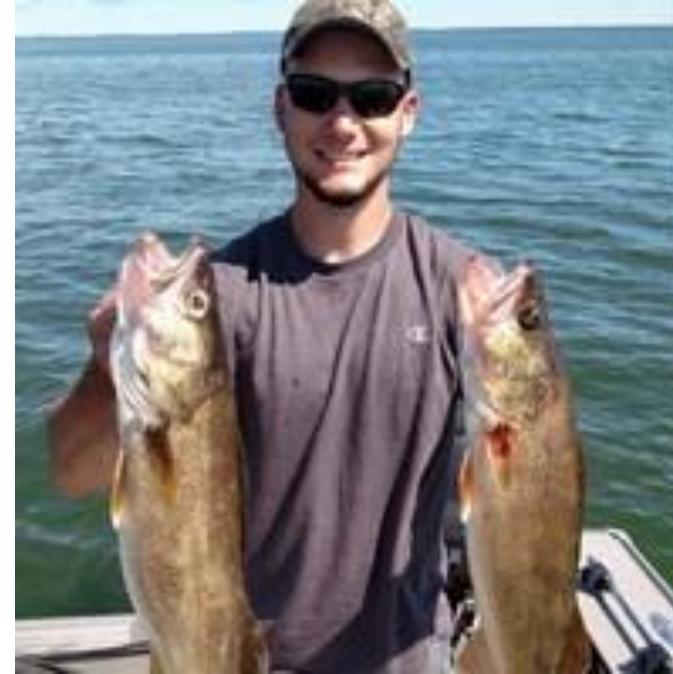
Soil and Waste Interns – Summer 2025

- 22 academic internships completed
- 21 different employers
 - Municipal
 - Counties
 - Environmental service providers
 - Private consultants
 - University researchers
 - Nonprofits
- Average hourly wage = \$16.70
 - Range: \$15-\$22



Benefits of Soil & Waste Internship

- Competitive hourly wage
- Practice interviewing
- Networking with professionals
- Increased employability
- Valuable job references
- Community partnerships
- Improved engagement in coursework



Required Internship Challenges

- Maintaining relationships with extensive database of potential intern employers
- Students have restrictive geographic preferences
- Tuition for required summer credits
- Internship coordinator workload
 - Helping students find opportunities
 - Oversight during internship



Reflection

- Consider the worksheet available at your table individually
- Now, discuss your reflections with the folks at your table
- Question for the presenters or goal-sharing with the room

Thank you

References/Resources

- [Graduation Exit Survey Dashboard](#)
- [Hope Center data sheet - UWSP](#)
- [NACE early career internship data](#)
- [Hora – low SES barriers to internships](#)
- [First year student survey - UWSP](#)