Independent Research Project: Applied Leadership Practicum (AS.420.801.51)

With each passing year, it is increasingly clear that the current trajectory of our world is unsustainable and that rapid, transformational rather than incremental change is necessary. Given the enormous talent and commitment of JHU AAP students, our graduates are poised to make a significant contribution to what has been described as the biggest challenge and opportunity that mankind has ever faced.

To help students better position themselves to play meaningful roles in this change, we are offering a semester-long Applied Leadership Practicum. The purpose of the Practicum is to provide students with practical hands-on leadership experience in an area of their choosing. By developing and implementing a leadership project, students will improve their marketability by documenting leadership experience. They will also further develop their leadership “toolbox” for taking on larger challenges, including professional settings. Features of the Practicum include structured oversight, check-ins at key mileposts, synchronous peer consultations and periodic lessons-learned reflections to help keep you on track and be successful.

**Prerequisites:** Instructor permission; your leadership project idea needs to be developed and approved before you can register. For more information, please consult the course instructor Paul Kazyak (pkazyak1@jhu.edu). Students should have completed 7 courses in the AAP program, and taking Sustainability Leadership (420.670.91) prior to taking the Practicum is recommended.
Practicum Advisor

Paul Kazyak has been providing intensive leadership training and coaching for nearly two decades to high school, undergraduate and graduate students, government, NGOs and other organizations. He has also been a popular JHU/AAP lecturer since 1994, including courses in applied sustainability and sustainability leadership. In addition, he has served as mentor for many JHU independent research projects as well as numerous student leadership projects at other institutions. Paul is a Fellow of the prestigious National Conservation Leadership Institute (NCLI) and he served for a year as an NCLI staff member following his fellowship year. In 2008, Paul was named Environmental Educator of the Year by the National Association of Science Teachers and one of his sustainability projects (Frostburg Grows) was a national finalist for a Climate Leadership Award from Second Nature.

FAQs

Why should I do this practicum?

Leadership skills are highly sought by employers, so being able to demonstrate success on a leadership project increases the likelihood of getting the job or promotion that you are seeking. After this experience, you should expect your ability to assess problems, evaluate assumptions and come up with creative solutions to substantially increase.

What is the format for the practicum?

You will conduct your project on a topic of your choice, in a location of your choice, and with a team that you recruit. Interactions with your advisor and activities such as peer consultations will be done remotely, and you will be expected to participate in several synchronous peer consultations with your small group. Your primary deliverable for the course will be a robust paper (or optional recorded presentation) which documents the process you undertook, what the results were, and lessons learned.

Will I get to choose my own project and what are the requirements for a project?

Yes. You will choose a hands-on project that is of particular interest to you. However, pre-approved by the instructor is necessary to ensure that projects involve some type of direct action or securing a firm commitment to act that has demonstrable environmental and/or societal benefit. So, for example, simply developing a climate resiliency assessment tool for a
small business would not qualify as a project, but development, application, and commitments made as a result of applying the tool would qualify.

**Will I be doing this project myself?**

This project will be directed by you, but it needs to include at least two other team members besides yourself (preferably more). It is recommended that your choice of team members be based primarily on their interest in the action you are pursuing. You also have the option of seeking organizational support/sponsorship for this project, and you may want to line this support up ahead of time. You will also have a team of peer consultants that will provide feedback on your initial project idea and on any revisions you may make. These consultations will occur at a mutually agreeable time that you will determine.

**Does the leadership project have to be ‘successful’?**

No. However, as part of their project, students will carefully consider likely roadblocks and devise strategies to overcome them, so most projects are successful and end up with concrete action. It is important for students to be cognizant of time constraints that a one semester project entails and select a project that has a reasonable chance of being successful within the timeframe of a semester.

**How will my leadership project be graded?**

Grades will be based on a combination of factors that include relative degree of difficulty, effort, processes and strategy that are employed, commitment of the team that is assembled, effectiveness of communication, participation as a peer consultant, documentation of the process, project accomplishments, lessons learned during the project, and quality of final presentation.

**What are the advantages to having taken Sustainability Leadership prior to doing my project?**

Students who take Sustainability Leadership prior to doing their leadership project will have been exposed to cutting edge leadership concepts and have a chance to put those concepts
into practice. However, students who have not taken the course can also be successful and will benefit greatly from enrolling in the leadership practicum.

What are some examples of leadership projects that have worked?

Examples include energy efficiency improvements, behavior change initiatives to reduce consumption, installation of renewable energy at a faith community, initiation of upcycling, initiation of composting at a facility, institution and local government policy changes related to social justice, native tree plantings, creation of community gardens or rain gardens, small-scale sustainable agriculture initiatives, starting a native tree nursery, institutional commitments for purchasing local and sustainably produced food, bog turtle habitat restoration and many more.

What should my proposal to do a leadership project look like?

Proposals should be no more than 2 pages long, and include: an explanation of why the project is considered important, how the project is important to the student, and what the expected concrete outcome of the project will be. Interested students are encouraged to discuss possibilities for projects with the course instructor, Paul Kazyak (pkazyak1@jhu.edu).

What is the tuition for the Applied Leadership Practicum?

The tuition for an independent study is the regular tuition for a single course for the term in question.