

Graduate Certificate in Coastal Resilience

Practicum Requirement: Guidelines for Students

Department of Marine Affairs | University of Rhode Island

Updated 6/9/26

1. Practicum Overview

The Graduate Certificate in Coastal Resilience requires students to complete a 3-credit practicum as one of its four required components. The practicum is the applied capstone of the certificate, giving students the opportunity to translate classroom learning into real-world practice in coastal resilience, hazard assessment, policy, engineering, or related fields.

This document provides guidance on how to meet the practicum requirement, what types of experiences qualify, how to register, and what students must submit to receive credit.

Credit Requirement	3 graduate credits
Grading	Typically S/U (Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory); letter grading may be available
Faculty Advisor Required	Yes — all practicum credits must be advised by a URI faculty member
Documents required	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Practicum Agreement Form (Appendix A)• Reflection Report (Appendix B)• Evaluation (Appendix C)

2. Eligible Practicum Types

The practicum requirement can be satisfied in several ways. All options must be three graduate credits (e.g., MAF 591/592), supervised by a URI faculty member, and clearly connected to coastal resilience. The table below summarizes the primary pathways that students may select from. All 3 practicum credits represent approximately 135–150 total hours of work (8-10 hours/week).

Pathway	Example Courses / Mechanisms	Description
Internship or project associated with professional employment (see 2A below for details)	Departmental internship/practicum credit (e.g., MAF 591/592; confirm course number with faculty advisor)	Supervised work at a government agency, NGO, private firm, or research institution with responsibilities directly related to coastal resilience. Current professional employment may also qualify — see Section 2a.

Directed Study, Special Problems, or Applied Research Project	e.g., MAF 591/592, OCG 493, NRS 491, GEO 491, or departmental equivalent	Individually designed study or applied research project on a coastal resilience topic, completed under the mentorship of a URI faculty advisor. Includes research reviews, policy analysis, model development, and defined projects producing a deliverable (e.g., technical report, vulnerability assessment, stakeholder tool, or policy brief) for or with a partner organization.
Field Research / Field Work	Arranged through supervising faculty (OCG, NRS, GEO, CVE)	Active participation in field data collection, sampling campaigns, hazard assessments, site monitoring, or similar applied field activities tied to a faculty research project.
Approved Graduate Practicum Course	BUS 515 (Entrepreneurship Practicum), CPL practicum, or others with approval	A structured practicum course offered at URI in another department, pre-approved by the Program Director as meeting the coastal resilience practicum objectives. The student must complete a coastal resilience-focused project within the course. Note: courses like BUS 515 (Entrepreneurship Practicum) may qualify if the student's project has a clear coastal resilience focus, confirmed in the Practicum Agreement.
Thesis, Major Paper, or Dissertation Research	Departmental thesis/dissertation credit (confirm course number with faculty advisor)	Graduate thesis, major paper, or dissertation research with a clear coastal resilience focus. Requires faculty advisor approval confirming the coastal resilience connection.

2a. Professional Employment as Practicum

Many students in the Graduate Certificate in Coastal Resilience are working professionals whose current employment is directly relevant to the field. Current professional employment can qualify as a practicum, and the program is designed to be open to this pathway. However, simply holding a job in a related field is not sufficient. The following three criteria must all be met, and are assessed upfront by the faculty advisor as part of the Practicum Agreement approval process.

Criterion 1: Project-Based

The practicum must be built around a specific, bounded project — not routine job duties. The project must have a defined scope, clear deliverables, and a beginning and end within the enrollment period. General professional responsibilities, even those closely related to coastal resilience, do not qualify on their own.

Examples of qualifying projects: developing a municipal coastal resilience plan, conducting a vulnerability assessment for a specific asset or community, leading a stakeholder engagement

process for a flood mitigation project, or producing a technical report on a defined hazard or policy question.

Examples that do not qualify on their own: ongoing management of a coastal program, routine permit review, general environmental consulting work, or day-to-day emergency management responsibilities.

Criterion 2: Genuine New Learning (Novelty Test)

The project must represent genuine new learning for the student — a stretch beyond their existing professional skills and experience. Novelty is assessed relative to both the student's current professional expertise and the scope of their certificate coursework. Students are encouraged to explore aspects of coastal resilience that are new to them, even if those aspects do not map directly onto their coursework.

The faculty advisor makes the novelty determination upfront, as part of approving the Practicum Agreement. Students should be prepared to explain in their proposal what is new about the project relative to their existing skills and experience, and what they expect to learn.

Example: An experienced coastal engineer proposing a project focused on community engagement or policy analysis for a resilience plan would likely pass the novelty test, even though engineering is their professional background. An experienced coastal engineer proposing to do more coastal engineering of the same type they have been doing for years would not.

Example: A planner working in a municipal planning department who routinely reviews zoning applications and updates land use plans would likely pass the novelty test by proposing a project focused on quantifying flood risk to critical infrastructure using storm surge modeling outputs. This stretches beyond their planning expertise into technical hazard analysis. The same planner proposing to update the coastal element of the municipal comprehensive plan, a task closely aligned with their existing duties, would likely not pass without a compelling argument for what is genuinely new.

Criterion 3: Structured Academic Reflection

All work-based practicum students must complete the standard Practicum Reflection Report (see Section 5, Step 6), regardless of whether their experience is through a new employer or their current job. The reflection is what transforms a professional project into an academic practicum experience: it requires the student to explicitly connect their work to the certificate's learning objectives, identify what was new, and critically evaluate what they learned.

Regular check-ins with the faculty advisor during the semester are also required — at minimum at the start and midpoint of the enrollment period.

3. What Does Not Qualify

The following do not satisfy the practicum requirement on their own:

- Regular lecture or seminar courses (even if related to coastal resilience)
- Work experience completed prior to enrollment at URI
- Credits already counted toward the certificate's other three requirements (social science, natural science, or free elective) — the same credits cannot satisfy two certificate requirements simultaneously

4. Practicum Learning Objectives

Regardless of the pathway chosen, all practicum experiences should advance one or more of the following program learning objectives:

- Apply theoretical concepts in coastal resilience to real-world or applied scenarios
- Gain practical skills relevant to professional employment in coastal resilience, emergency management, coastal planning, ocean engineering, or related fields
- Communicate technical or policy findings to professional or public audiences
- Collaborate with agency partners, community stakeholders, or research teams
- Evaluate the effectiveness of policies, programs, or interventions related to coastal hazards and resilience

5. Process for Completing the Practicum

Step 1 — Identify a Placement or Project

Students are responsible for identifying and securing their own practicum placement or project, with guidance from the Program Director and faculty advisor. There are no prerequisites for the practicum — it may be taken at any point in the program, including the first semester. Students are encouraged to consult the Program Director early — ideally the semester before they plan to do the practicum — to discuss options and identify an appropriate faculty supervisor.

Potential placement partners include:

- RIDEM, CRMC, FEMA Region 1, NOAA, USACE, RIGEMA, NERRS
- Municipal planning and emergency management offices
- Environmental consulting firms and engineering companies
- NGOs working on climate adaptation, disaster recovery, or coastal management (e.g., Save the Bay, Narrow River Preservation Association)
- URI research centers and labs (e.g., Environmental Data Center, CHAMP Project, URI Bay Campus research programs, GSO labs)

Step 2 — Identify a Faculty Advisor

Every practicum must be supervised by a URI faculty member, including but not limited to members of the Departments of Marine Affairs, Ocean Engineering, Geosciences, Natural Resources Sciences, and the Graduate School of Oceanography. If a student's preferred faculty supervisor is not already listed as a certificate affiliate, approval from the Program Director is required. Students who are unable to identify a willing faculty advisor should contact the Program Director, who will serve as faculty advisor of record if no other affiliate is available.

Step 3 — Complete a Practicum Agreement Form (Appendix A)

Before registering for practicum credits, students must complete a Practicum Agreement Form. This form is signed by the student, the faculty advisor or instructor, and the site supervisor at the host organization (if applicable). For students using an external internship or directed study with no external host, the site supervisor signature may be waived with Program Director approval. For students using current professional employment as their practicum, the site supervisor is the student's employer or direct supervisor at their workplace. The form must specify:

- The practicum type (internship, directed study, field work, or other)
- The host organization and site supervisor (if external)
- Specific activities, responsibilities, and time commitment
- Learning objectives tied to the certificate program

- Expected deliverables and how the practicum will be evaluated
- The course number under which the student will register for 3 credits

Step 4 — Register for Credits

Once the Practicum Agreement Form is approved by the faculty advisor and Program Director, the student registers for 3 graduate credits under the appropriate course number for the relevant department (confirm the correct course number with your faculty advisor — numbers vary by department). Registration follows standard URI Graduate School procedures and deadlines. Students should confirm with the Graduate School that their practicum course is correctly reflected on their Program of Study; questions about how the practicum counts toward the certificate should be directed to the Program Director.

Step 5 — Complete the Practicum

Students carry out their practicum activities according to the agreement. As a general benchmark, 3 credits corresponds to approximately 135–150 hours of engaged work over the semester (consistent with URI’s credit hour policy). This includes direct activity hours, preparation, writing, and meetings with the faculty advisor.

Faculty advisors and students should meet at least three times during the practicum — once at the start to finalize expectations, at least once mid-semester to review progress, and once at the end to wrap up.

Step 6 — Submit Required Deliverables (Appendix B)

To receive a Satisfactory grade, students must complete all deliverables specified in their Practicum Agreement. At minimum, all students must submit:

- A written Practicum Reflection Report (Appendix B) — five structured sections, up to 500 words each. Students should review the evaluation rubric in Appendix C before writing.
- The completed Evaluation Rubric (Appendix C), filled out by the faculty advisor and submitted to the Program Director before or concurrent with grade submission. For internship and professional employment pathways, the rubric also includes a site supervisor input section (see Appendix C and Practicum Agreement)
- Any additional deliverables specified in the Practicum Agreement (e.g., reporting requirements of another course, a technical report, vulnerability assessment, policy memo, or presentation)

Step 7 – Evaluation and Grading (Appendix C)

The practicum is typically graded Satisfactory (S) or Unsatisfactory (U), though letter grading may be available at the discretion of the faculty advisor or instructor. To receive a Satisfactory grade (or equivalent passing grade), students must:

- Complete the full scope of work described in the Practicum Agreement
- Submit all required deliverables by the agreed deadline
- Receive a satisfactory evaluation from the site supervisor (if applicable)

Faculty advisors have discretion to specify additional performance criteria in the Practicum Agreement. If a student is not making adequate progress, the faculty advisor should notify the Program Director as early as possible. Students who receive an Unsatisfactory grade may repeat the practicum once. A second Unsatisfactory grade will be referred to the Program Director for review in accordance with URI Graduate School policies.

6. Frequently Asked Questions

Can I use a practicum I am already doing as part of another URI degree program?

Yes, as long as you are enrolled in both programs simultaneously and the experience is clearly related to coastal resilience.

I already have significant professional experience in coastal resilience. Can I waive the practicum?

There is currently no formal waiver process for the practicum requirement.

Can I complete the practicum at a remote location or fully online?

Yes, subject to faculty advisor approval. Directed studies and some applied research projects can be conducted remotely. For external internships at organizations in other states or countries, faculty advisor check-ins should be scheduled regularly (at minimum twice per semester).

What if I have trouble finding a placement?

Contact the Program Director early. The Program Director maintains relationships with regional partners in state and local government, NGOs, and research centers that regularly host students. Starting your search at least one semester in advance is strongly recommended. Remember the Graduate Professional and Community Development is a resource to help find and apply for opportunities.

What if I can't find a faculty advisor willing to supervise my practicum?

Contact the Program Director. If no affiliated faculty member is available or willing to supervise your specific project, the Program Director will serve as faculty advisor of record. This is a fallback, not a first step — students are encouraged to approach faculty whose research or professional interests align with their proposed practicum project before reaching out to the Program Director.

Can the practicum span more than one semester?

The 3-credit practicum is typically completed within a single semester. If the nature of the experience requires more time, the student and faculty advisor should discuss this and ensure that the Practicum Agreement reflects a realistic timeline. Credits must be registered and earned in accordance with Graduate School policies.

What happens if I receive an Unsatisfactory grade?

Students who receive an Unsatisfactory grade may repeat the practicum once, with a new Practicum Agreement and faculty advisor approval. If a student receives an Unsatisfactory

grade a second time, the matter will be referred to the Program Director for review in accordance with URI Graduate School academic standing policies. Students concerned about their progress should contact their faculty advisor or the Program Director before the end of the semester — do not wait until grades are posted.

7. Key Contacts and Resources

Role	Contact	Resource
Program Director	Dr. Austin Becker (abecker@uri.edu)	Initial advising, practicum approval, course registration questions
URI Graduate School	web.uri.edu/graduate-school	Graduate School policies, program of study forms, intent to graduate
Certificate Website	https://web.uri.edu/maf/academic/graduate-certificate-in-coastal-resilience/	Program requirements, faculty affiliates, course lists
URI Career & Experiential Education	web.uri.edu/career	Career events, , Handshake job and internship portal, online career readiness resources
URI Graduate Professional and Community Development	https://web.uri.edu/graduate-school/professional-development/	Career advising for graduate students, and internship resources

Appendix A: Practicum Agreement Form

Complete this form before registering for practicum credits. Submit signed copies to the Program Director and retain a copy for your records.

Student Information	
Student Name:	
URI ID / Email:	
Semester / Year:	
Course Number for Registration:	

Faculty Advisor	Site Supervisor (if external)
Name:	Name:
Department:	Organization:
Email:	Email / Phone:

Practicum Details	
Practicum Type:	<input type="checkbox"/> Internship <input type="checkbox"/> Professional Employment Project <input type="checkbox"/> Directed Study / Applied Research Project <input type="checkbox"/> Field Research <input type="checkbox"/> Approved Course <input type="checkbox"/> Thesis / Major Paper <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
Location / Organization:	
Start and End Dates:	
Estimated Hours/Week:	
Description of Activities:	(describe specific tasks and responsibilities)
Supervisor evaluation required:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Learning Objectives Addressed:	(list 2–4 specific objectives from Section 4 of the Guidelines)
Required Deliverables:	1. Practicum Reflection Report (required for all) 2. 3.
Coastal Resilience Connection:	Briefly describe how this practicum relates to the goals of the Graduate Certificate in Coastal Resilience:

Signatures	

Student Signature / Date:	Faculty Advisor Signature / Date:
Site Supervisor Signature / Date (if applicable):	Program Director Approval / Date:

Appendix B: Practicum Reflection Report (Required Structure)

The Reflection Report must be organized into the five sections below, each up to 500 words. Sections should be clearly labeled. The report is an academic document: write in full prose, not bullet points. The faculty advisor will evaluate the report using the rubric in Appendix C — students are encouraged to review it before writing.

For reference, the five Graduate Certificate in Coastal Resilience learning objectives are:

- Apply theoretical concepts in coastal resilience to real-world or applied scenarios
- Gain practical skills relevant to professional employment in coastal resilience, emergency management, coastal planning, ocean engineering, or related fields
- Communicate technical or policy findings to professional or public audiences
- Collaborate with agency partners, community stakeholders, or research teams
- Evaluate the effectiveness of policies, programs, or interventions related to coastal hazards and resilience

Section 1: Project Description (up to 500 words)

Describe the practicum experience. What was the project or activity? Who was the host organization, and what was your role? Who did you work with? What were the main deliverables, and were they completed? Provide enough context that a reader unfamiliar with your placement can understand what you did and why it mattered.

Section 2: New Learning (up to 500 words)

What did you learn that was genuinely new to you? Describe the knowledge, skills, methods, or perspectives you gained that you did not have before the practicum. Be specific: what were you able to do or understand at the end that you could not at the beginning? This section should reflect honestly on where your learning edge was, not simply describe what you already knew going in.

Section 3: Connection to Certificate Learning Objectives (up to 500 words)

Identify two or more of the five certificate learning objectives (listed above) that your practicum addressed, and explain specifically how your experience advanced those objectives. Avoid generic statements. Connect specific activities or outcomes from your practicum to the language of the objectives. For each objective identified, briefly describe the specific activity or deliverable through which you expect to demonstrate it. You do not need to address all five, but you should engage meaningfully with at least two.

Section 4: Critical Reflection (up to 500 words)

Reflect critically on the experience. What worked well, and what did not? What would you do differently if you could start again? What surprised you about the work, the organization, the field, or yourself? This section rewards honesty and analytical thinking over positive reporting. A practicum that was challenging or imperfect often produces the richest reflection.

Section 5: Professional Implications (up to 500 words)

How does this practicum experience connect to your career goals in coastal resilience or a related field? What doors did it open, confirm, or close? How has it shaped your sense of where you want to work, what problems you want to tackle, or what skills you still need to develop? Students who are already working professionals should reflect on how the experience changed or reinforced their professional practice.

Appendix C: Practicum Evaluation Rubric

This rubric is completed by the faculty advisor after the student has submitted the Practicum Reflection Report (Appendix B) to their advisor and before a final grade is issued. The completed rubric must be submitted to the Program Director before or concurrent with grade submission. It applies to all practicum pathways, including internships, directed studies, professional employment projects, field research, and thesis or major paper submissions. The rubric is designed to ensure that students completing the practicum via thesis or major research paper meet the same standard of applied reflection and critical thinking as students completing experiential practicums.

Note on research-only pathways (thesis, directed study, field research): Where the rubric refers to “host organization,” students in research-only pathways should describe their research context instead. Where it refers to “deliverables,” students should describe the agreed research output (e.g., thesis chapter, technical report, dataset, or field campaign results). References to “the organization” in Section 4 should be read as “the research conditions, methods, or team.”

Rubric Scoring - Each of the five required reflection sections is scored on a 4-point scale:

4 – Exemplary | 3 – Proficient | 2 – Developing | 1 – Inadequate

Passing threshold: A total score of 10 or above (out of 20), with no individual section scoring Inadequate (1). A report that meets the threshold receives a Satisfactory grade on this component. A report that does not meet the threshold should be returned to the student for revision before a final grade is assigned.

Reflection Section	Exemplary (4)	Proficient (3)	Developing (2)	Inadequate (1)
Section 1 Project Description	The project, role, organization, and deliverables are described with precision and clarity. A reader unfamiliar with the context gains a complete and vivid picture of what was done and why it mattered.	The project and role are clearly described. Key information about the organization and deliverables is present. Minor gaps in context do not impede understanding.	The description is present but incomplete or vague. Some key elements (role, deliverables, or significance) are missing or underdeveloped. For professional employment pathway students: describing general job duties rather than a specific bounded project should be scored here or lower.	The description is absent, severely incomplete, or so vague that the reader cannot determine what the student actually did. For professional employment pathway students: a description of general job responsibilities with no identifiable bounded project scores Inadequate regardless of length.

<p>Section 2 New Learning</p>	<p>The student clearly and specifically articulates what was genuinely new — new knowledge, skills, methods, or perspectives. The learning edge is identified honestly and with precision. The student distinguishes what they gained from what they already knew.</p>	<p>New learning is identified and described with reasonable specificity. The student demonstrates awareness of their learning edge. Some statements may be general but are grounded in the experience.</p>	<p>The section gestures at learning but relies on general or vague statements. It is unclear what was truly new versus what the student already knew before the practicum.</p>	<p>The section is absent, or describes only prior knowledge without identifying genuine new learning. No meaningful learning edge is articulated.</p>
<p>Section 3 Connection to Learning Objectives</p>	<p>The student engages specifically and substantively with at least two certificate learning objectives, drawing clear connections between particular activities or outcomes and the language of the objectives. Connections are precise and evidence-based. For thesis and directed study students: the response must address how the research translates to real-world application or professional practice, not only its academic contribution.</p>	<p>The student addresses at least two learning objectives with reasonable specificity. Connections are present and mostly grounded in the experience, though some may be stated rather than demonstrated.</p>	<p>The student mentions learning objectives but connections are superficial, generic, or address only one objective. The link between the experience and the objectives is asserted rather than demonstrated. For thesis students: a response focused solely on academic contribution with no reference to applied or professional relevance scores here or lower.</p>	<p>Learning objectives are not addressed, or connections are so vague or formulaic as to be meaningless. Fewer than two objectives are engaged.</p>
<p>Section 4 Critical Reflection</p>	<p>The student reflects analytically and honestly on what worked, what did not, and what they would do differently. Surprises or challenges — about the work, the organization, the conditions, the methods, or the team — are engaged with intellectual depth. The reflection goes beyond positive reporting to genuine critical thinking.</p>	<p>The student reflects on both strengths and weaknesses of the experience. Critical thinking is present, though some sections may lean toward description rather than analysis. At least one genuine challenge or surprise is engaged.</p>	<p>The section is present but predominantly positive or superficial. Critical reflection is limited — challenges or areas for improvement are acknowledged but not meaningfully analyzed.</p>	<p>The section is absent or consists entirely of positive reporting with no evidence of critical thinking. No challenges, surprises, or areas for improvement — in the work, conditions, methods, organization, or team — are identified.</p>

<p>Section 5 Professional Implications</p>	<p>The student articulates specific and thoughtful connections between the practicum and their career goals. The reflection addresses what doors were opened, confirmed, or closed, and identifies concrete next steps or skills still to develop. Working professionals address changes to practice with specificity.</p>	<p>The student connects the practicum to career goals in a meaningful way. Implications are identified, though they may be stated somewhat generally. Working professionals address professional practice with reasonable specificity.</p>	<p>The section addresses professional implications but in vague or generic terms. Career connections feel obligatory rather than genuinely reflective. The student does not demonstrate that the experience shaped their thinking in a specific way.</p>	<p>The section is absent, or consists of statements so generic (e.g., 'this helped my career') as to convey no real reflection on professional implications.</p>
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**Coastal Resilience Certificate
Practicum Evaluation Rubric**

Student Name: _____ Date: _____

Course Code: _____ Semester/Year: _____

Faculty Name: _____ Faculty Advisor Signature: _____ Date: _____

Practicum Pathway:

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Internship | <input type="checkbox"/> Directed Study / Applied
Research Project | <input type="checkbox"/> Thesis / Major Paper |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Professional
Employment Project | <input type="checkbox"/> Field Research | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Approved Course | |

Additional deliverables specified in Practicum Agreement: Yes — all completed Yes — not all completed (do not proceed; contact Program Director) No additional deliverables.

Site supervisor input received: Yes No N/A

Coastal resilience connection remains evident in the final work: Yes No — explain: _____

Scoring Summary

Section	Score (1–4)	Notes
1. Project Description		
2. New Learning		
3. Connection to Learning Objectives		
4. Critical Reflection		
5. Professional Implications		
Total Score (max 20)		<i>Passing threshold: 10 or above, with no section scoring Inadequate (1)</i>

Faculty Advisor Comments (optional):
