



# An Interview with Lauren O'Malley (MScSM '22)

"I found myself, my values and my goals through everything that MScSM provided me with."

-Lauren O'Malley

## **What is the most essential skill you learned from the MScSM program and that you currently use in work?**

There are numerous transferable skills that you learn from the program. But the most essential skill that has been of great use to me is effective researching- be it formal or informal. The informal side of this usually covers industry benchmarking, social media scans, and general news updates around the latest advancements in sustainability.

Skills in formal researching have been useful for, analysis of documents such as industry publications, scientific papers, industry frameworks and sustainability reports. The critical skill here is being able to pull the relevant information for my scope of work, in a concise and efficient manner.

## **What are the job duties of your current role?**

I perform a wide range of roles and duties at work. Firstly, as a part of our sustainability team's internal efforts, I focus on driving organizational sustainability. That involves promoting employee education and engagement, by hosting sustainability focused events, educating employees on what sustainability represents for Aecon, and finally, providing employees with sustainable engagement opportunities. For example, we created a sustainability website, where we have employee resources where they can learn about sustainability, submit ideas around improving sustainability in operations, and request sustainable equipment, tools and materials on project sites.

Secondly, I'm involved in driving our sustainability across our project sites which is very crucial to achieve our goals. We work with our suppliers to procure sustainable equipment and materials to trial on our sites. This helps to set up a more sustainable supply chain in the industry.

Thirdly, I am involved with the monitoring and reporting of our ESG metrics. This includes calculation of organizational emissions, setting greenhouse gas emission reduction goals as well as, designing the strategy to achieve these goals. This also includes collaboration to produce our annual Sustainability Report, where we highlight our sustainability initiatives, metrics, and progress.

## **How did you decide which sector you want to work in?**

I am a member of a family of engineers, so I have been heavily exposed to the construction industry. But throughout my undergraduate program, I wanted to stay away from the topic of construction and engineering. So, it is quite ironic that I ended up with a profession in the construction industry. The change happened through our classroom discussions in the MScSM program when I realized the significant socio-economic role of the construction industry in achieving sustainability. This got me thinking about the opportunities in the industry, as the industry was still at a very early stage in terms of established sustainability programs, giving me the opportunity to start something from ground up. When I saw the opportunity at Aecon, I seized it, and the rest is history.

## **What is the most prominent problem that you face in your industry?**

The biggest issue in the construction industry is that there's a lot of dependency on all industry members and supply chain actors to be equally committed to sustainability, and there is varying levels of commitment between these actors. Right now, in alignment with government goals, one of our key priorities is greenhouse gas emissions reduction. While we are making significant progress on this front, supply chain complexity and lack of technological readiness have been hurdles. The supply chain in construction industry is large and complex, making practices such as scope 3 emission calculation and target setting quite a challenge. Also, there is a general lack of technological readiness in North America—for “sustainable” site equipment and tools. Mostly, there is an absence of electric or hybrid options and where it is available, it comes at a high cost and not mature enough for full scale rollout. So, we're just waiting on people to be ready.

## **What are your suggestions for the Class of 2024 and beyond?**

I speak from experience when I suggest keeping your minds open. Don't skip any course or seminar just because you don't like the subject because of past experiences. Be fully on board, committed, ready to learn and just absorb the experience, which may potentially surprise you. This open mindset helped me get to where I am.

## **Where do you see yourself in 5 years?**

I've never been the kind of person who plans everything out or who can visualize where I was going to be in. But currently, let alone five years from now, I'm happy in the industry and the company I'm in. I'm content that I'm learning a lot and applying my skills in a significant manner to the industry. I think the beauty of the sustainability industry is that it is ever changing and there's so many opportunities out there to grow and to continue learning. The greatest thing about the MScSM program is that it prepares you for ample opportunities in the sustainability industry through transferable skills through its courses.

## **What is one sustainability trend that you foresee soon?**

There will be some changes around sustainability reporting and frameworks, which would involve standardization of frameworks across all industries and effective verification of reported disclosures. Currently, there's a global push towards transparency and sustainability reporting across all industries. Many companies are getting on board with publishing their sustainability reports. But the problem with this is that there's so many different frameworks out there, it's becoming difficult to discern the value and correlations of this data to the company's actual performance. This necessitates a need for standardization to establish credibility to the reporting.

## **What is your most memorable experience in the MScSM program?**

Honestly, what comes to mind is the people. I had the most amazing cohort and the group that I worked with was phenomenal. Due to covid, we did a year and a half of completely virtual classes and we were able to establish such a strong bond and friendship through the pandemic. It was just like it was so nice to go through it with such a great group of people.

## **How would you describe the entire MScSM program, your experience, and your journey in the past two or three years in one single sentence?**

Self-discovery and learning. I know that sounds very spiritual. But I found myself, my values, and my goals through everything that the program provided me with.