

# UConn Environment Corps

update on an innovative model of learning  
and public engagement

November 2022



**UConn** | UNIVERSITY OF  
CONNECTICUT

## A New Model for Life-Transformative Education

The UConn Environment Corps (E-Corps) is a multi-college effort that began in 2017 with an Academic Plan seed grant from the Office of the Provost. E-Corps combines classroom instruction, service learning, and Extension outreach in a new model that provides life transformative education for our undergraduates, while also fulfilling the Land/Sea Grant mission of the university by providing needed assistance to Connecticut communities. The three current E-Corps courses each focus on the local impacts of, and responses to, pressing environmental issues: climate resilience, brownfields redevelopment, and stormwater management. A classroom semester steeped in active learning is followed by a practicum semester where student teams conduct projects for towns recruited through ongoing Extension (or Extension-like) outreach programs. Improvements to the model, and research into its impacts on faculty, students, and the university, are currently funded by a grant from the National Science Foundation.



*Climate Corps students mapping a site.*

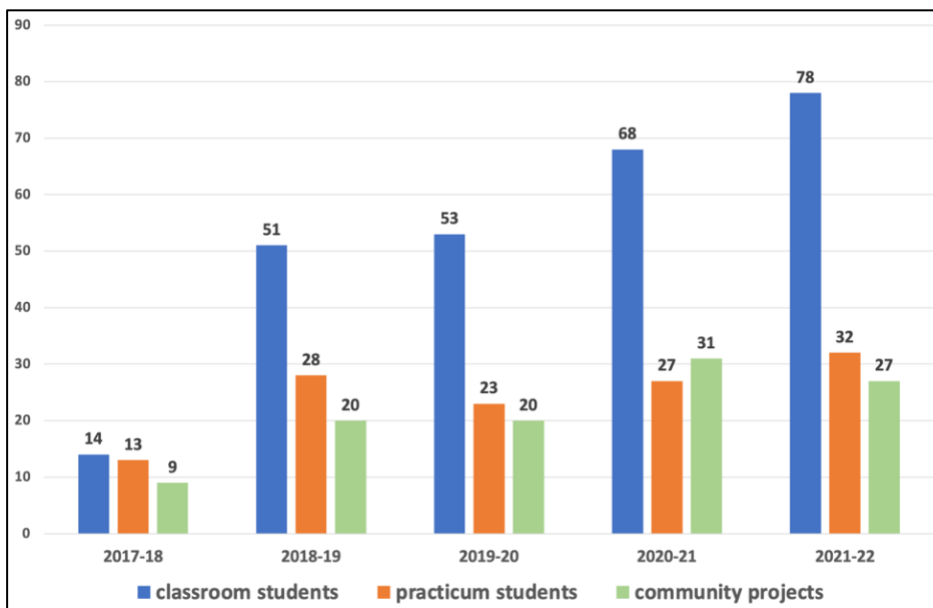
## Facts about E-Corps

### The E-Corps Partnership:

- 4 Schools/Colleges: CAHNR, SoE, CLAS, Neag
- 5 Academic Departments: Extension, Natural Resources, Civil & Environmental Engineering, Geography, Curriculum & Instruction
- 4 University-wide Centers/Institutes: CLEAR, CETL, IoE, Sea Grant
- 3 Environmental Major programs: Environmental Studies, Environmental Sciences, and Environmental Engineering
- The **Office of the Provost**



*Brownfields Corps students on a site visit*



### Totals Through Fall 2022:

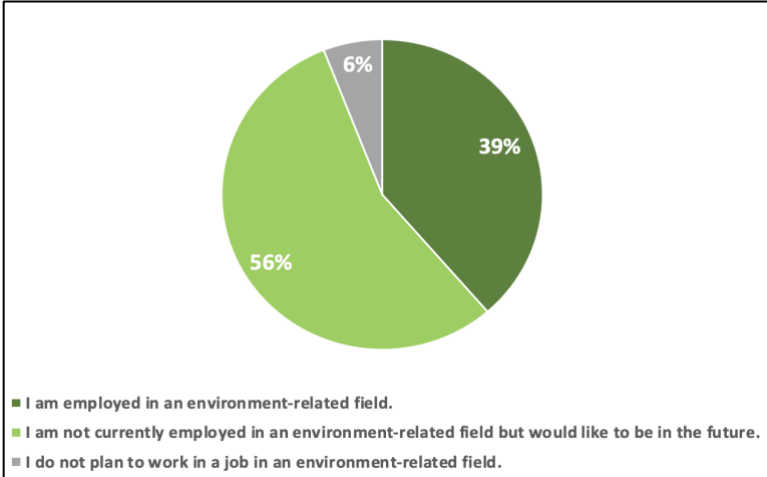
<b>454</b>	total enrollment
<b>319</b>	classroom students
<b>135</b>	practicum students
<b>21</b>	majors represented by E-Corps students
<b>118</b>	community projects
<b>73</b>	partner towns/entities

## A Lasting Impact on Students

As part of the NSF effort, in Spring 2022 the project’s evaluation partner Horizon Research, Inc. conducted a study of former E-Corps students. A total of 170 UConn graduates who had taken at least one E-Corps course were sent an invitation to complete a survey. 70 survey responses were received (a 40% response rate). In addition, 12 of the respondents (4 from each course) underwent a follow-up interview.

There were **5 Key Findings** from the study:

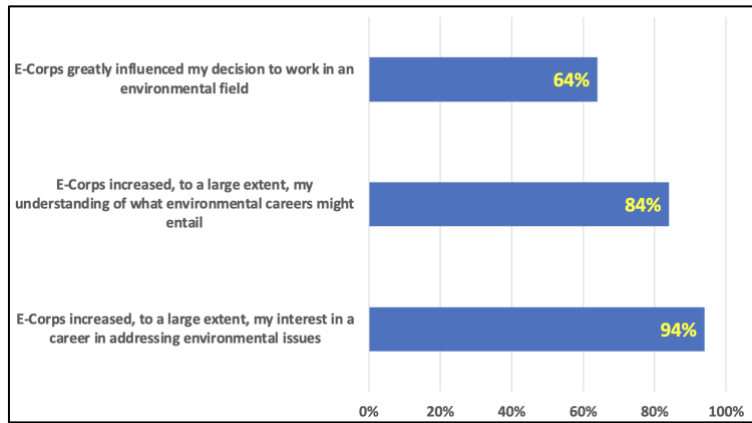
- Finding 1:** E-Corps graduates reported that the course had a substantial impact on their **KNOWLEDGE**.
- Finding 2:** E-Corps graduates reported that the course had a substantial impact on their development of **PROFESSIONAL SKILLS**, and that they are using these skills.
- Finding 3:** E-Corps graduates often pursue **GRADUATE DEGREES** in environmental fields, and over half of those that do say E-Corps had a large influence on their decision.
- Finding 4:** E-Corps graduates overwhelmingly choose **ENVIRONMENTAL CAREER PATHS**, and two-thirds of them say E-Corps greatly influenced their decision to do so (see below).
- Finding 5:** Most E-Corps graduates say that the course influenced their interest in **ADDRESSING ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AS A CITIZEN**. And many are turning that interest into action.



**Finding #4:** 94% of all 70 respondents reported being employed in an environmental field, or desiring to be in the future. Most of these reported that E-Corps increased their interest in a career in environmental fields. 64% said that E-Corps greatly influenced their decision to seek employment in these fields.



Stormwater Corps students inspecting drainage

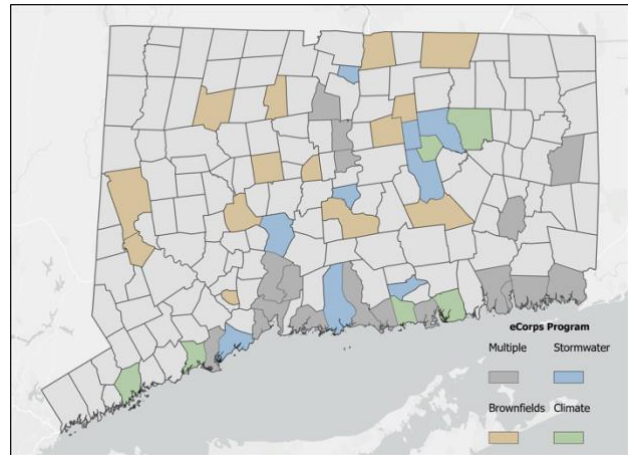


## Real Assistance to Connecticut Communities

E-Corps student teams are making a difference in CT communities. E-Corps was created in part to address the “capacity gap” experienced by many Connecticut communities that struggle to find the resources to respond to environmental issues and regulations. The program brings the power of trained undergrads to this problem. Student teams work closely with their partner communities, and provide information that leads to grants, assists with regulatory compliance, saves money, and leads to new perspectives in how to deal with the local impacts of complicated environmental issues. A community impact study is planned for AY22-23.

To date, our students have completed 118 projects, working with 73 municipalities or other local organizations.

- Brownfields Corps students have conducted research and assessments that has formed the basis for EPA grant applications resulting in over \$4.4M in grants to 10 communities.
- Stormwater Corps students have developed municipal “Runoff Reduction Plans” for 19 communities that help them to comply with federal and state stormwater management regulations.
- Climate Corps students have conducted a wide variety of projects helping towns to be more proactive about the local impacts of sea level rise, flooding, habitat loss and other climate-related problems.



*I think there's benefits for the town, ...especially smaller towns like ours. We don't have a lot of money to get some of this work done... And so the idea that you could have somebody with, you know, scientific knowledge go through that [process] and summarize it, is fabulous. It saves the town a lot of money and time.*

*(Town Planner)*

## Benefits to the University



In addition to its benefits to students and communities, the E-Corps program contributes to UConn in several important ways:

- ⇒ *It provides an effective model of **Life Transformative Education**.*
- ⇒ *It increases **recognition of, and support for, UConn** in CT communities.*
- ⇒ *It has resulted in substantial **external funding**, including \$2.4M in NSF funding and over \$1.5M in leveraged/related funding from other agencies.*
- ⇒ *It embodies the concept of an **engaged institution**, as envisioned by the Land Grant and Sea Grant College Systems.*

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