

# A lasting impact on students



A study of post-graduation UConn  
Environment Corps students  
July, 2022

**UConn** | UNIVERSITY OF  
CONNECTICUT

# Evaluating the impact of E-Corps

The [Environment Corps](#) (E-Corps) is a multi-college collaboration at the University of Connecticut implementing a new model of undergraduate STEM education that combines classroom instruction, service learning, and Extension outreach. Currently, there are three courses - climate resilience, brownfields redevelopment, and stormwater management - each focusing on the local aspects of a critical environmental challenge. 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. As part of this 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. The following is a summary of the results of the survey, with representative quotes from the interviews.

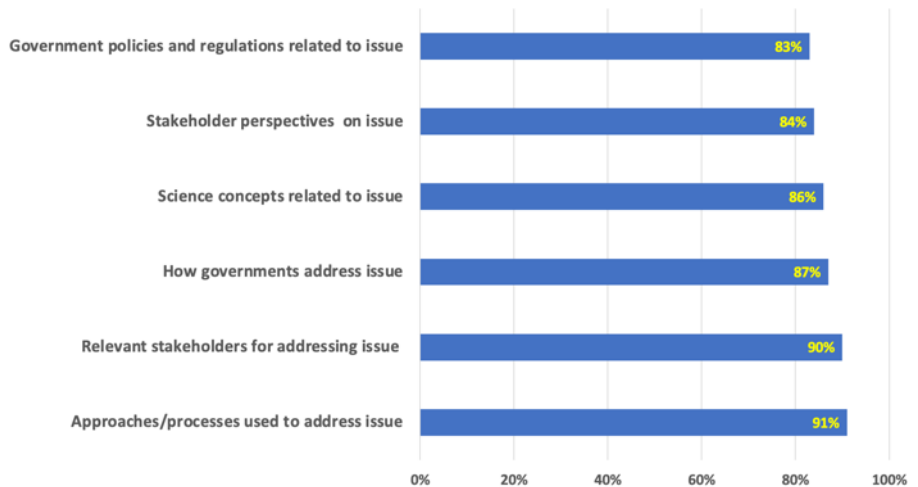
## 5 Key Findings

**Finding 1: E-Corps graduates reported that the course had a substantial impact on their KNOWLEDGE.**

The vast majority of the 70 respondents indicated that E-Corps had a substantial impact on their understanding of the focus issue of the course (i.e., rank of 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale from 1 "not at all" to 5 "to a great extent").

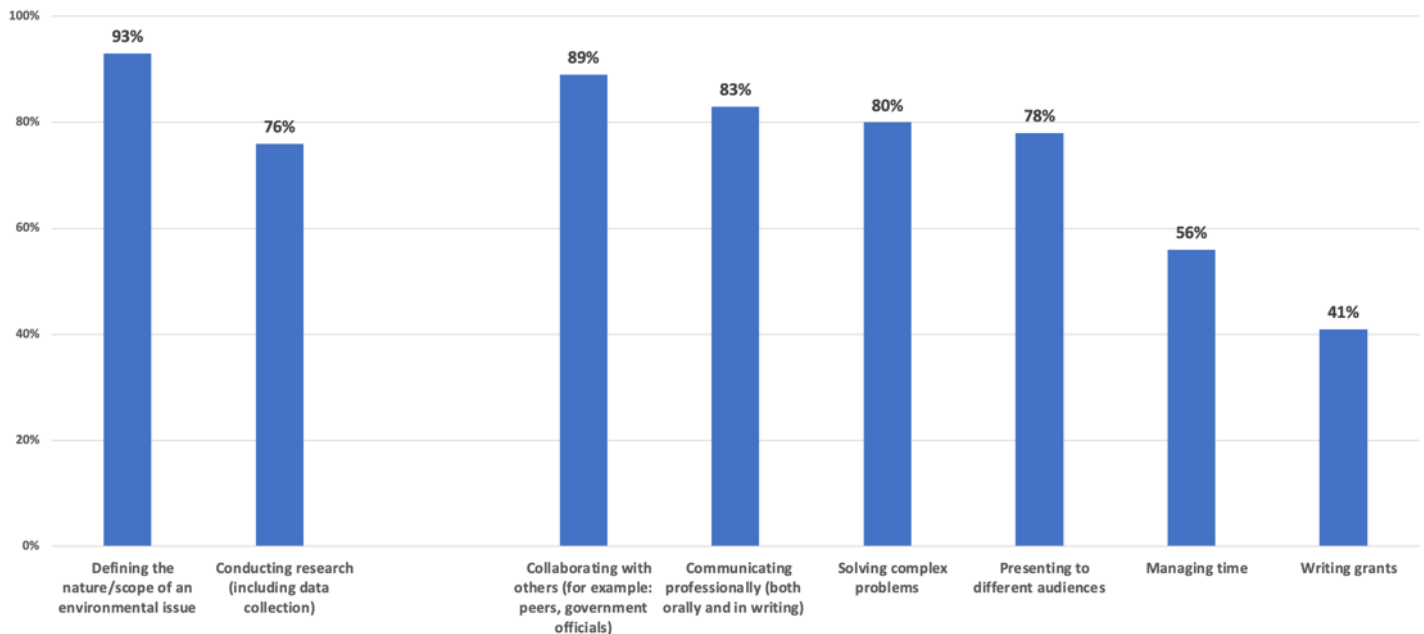
*"One thing that stood out to me as an engineer working in that second semester environment was that a lot of the times the approach to brownfields remediation includes a lot of non-scientists. So like having conversations about what people want versus what's realistic and different ways to look at a problem was sort of helpful. . . . I think my understanding of brownfields remediation was expanded, you would have to work with very different people because you have to work with people who are living in the area, and then you have to work with the town planners and then the town regulators."*

*"So [the course] taught me how to bring my scale of thinking inwards and down, and think at community-level solutions for the community, because that's what's needed. Big climate solutions are necessary, but to help people immediately. . . helping them kind of build solutions that they can take their own action on is what I found really helps get the community involved."*



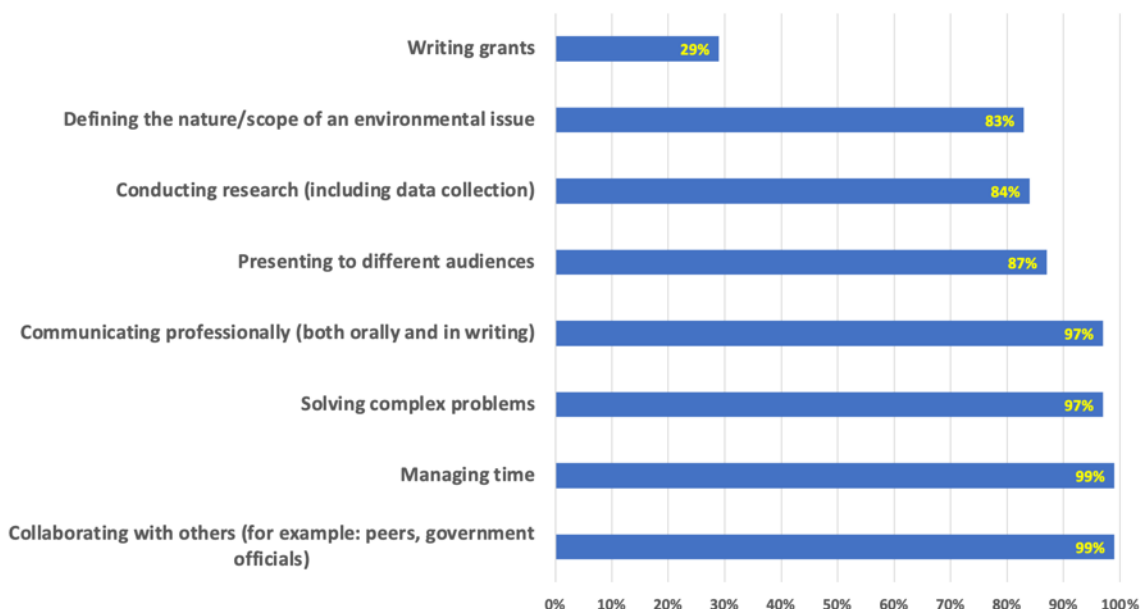
**Finding 2: E-Corps graduates reported that the course had a substantial impact on their development of PROFESSIONAL SKILLS, and that they are using these skills.**

Large percentages of the 70 respondents indicated that E-Corps had substantially helped them to develop skills, including both skills specific to environmental work (left two columns), and general professional skills (right six columns).



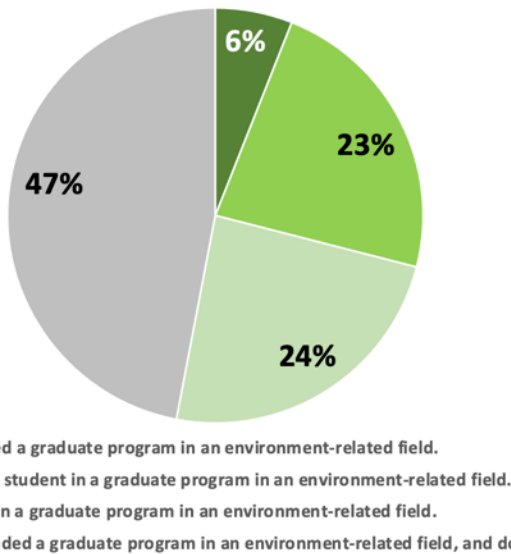
*"We had to make quite a big presentation. We wanted to make sure that the people from the town were interested and wanted to look, so not having too many words on the slides. Making sure, when we made our pictures of our designs, you could actually look at it and understand what we were saying if you haven't previously heard of stormwater infrastructure."*

*"I think it was a really good practice in writing and academic writing, which kind of translates into grant writing, and report writing. . . . At the time, it was the first time I'd ever written something for a broader community, not a scientific community, and kind of put together a report that was comprehensive, and readable, and all of this stuff. That style of writing, I think, really helped quite a bit."*



When asked if they are using these skills, the great majority of the 70 respondents reported that they were. (Note: only Brownfields Corps involves writing grants).

**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.**

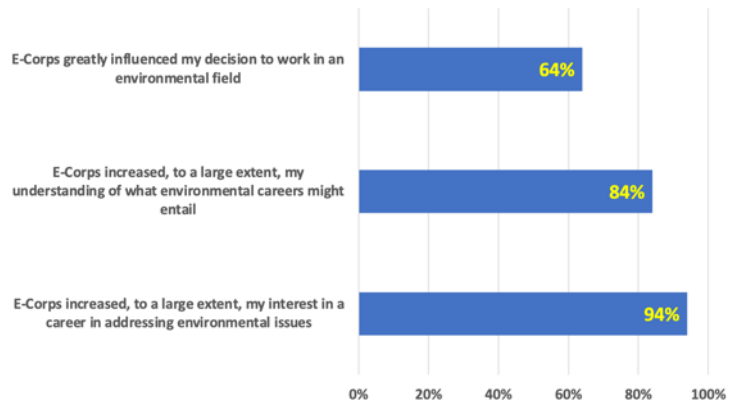
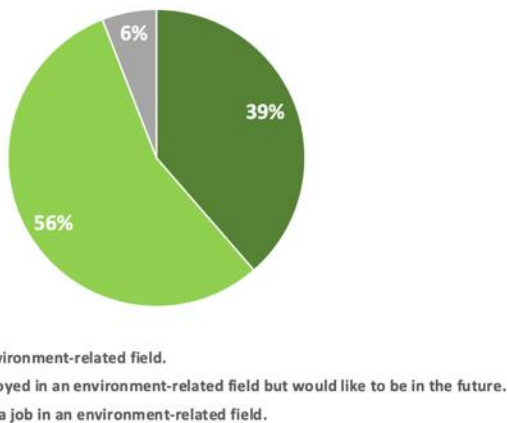


29% of the 70 respondents had completed or were enrolled in graduate school in an environmental field, and another 24% planned to do so. Of these individuals, over half (54%) indicated that participating in E-Corps had a large impact on their decision.

*"I think specifically from E-Corps, the practicum portion, and being able to get field-based research experience and just field-based experience as well, impacted my decision [to attend graduate school] because I was like, "Oh, this is kind of fun. This is cool. This is something I could see myself doing."*

*"I really liked this course, and it helped me to identify my future path. It convinced me to learn more in the soil and water quality side [of brownfields remediation]. And right now, I just graduated from a master's program. . . . I think that [E-Corps] had some impact on me to choose my future path, because I saw the industrial impact on the urban—on the town, and the soil and water quality of the human living environment."*

**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.**

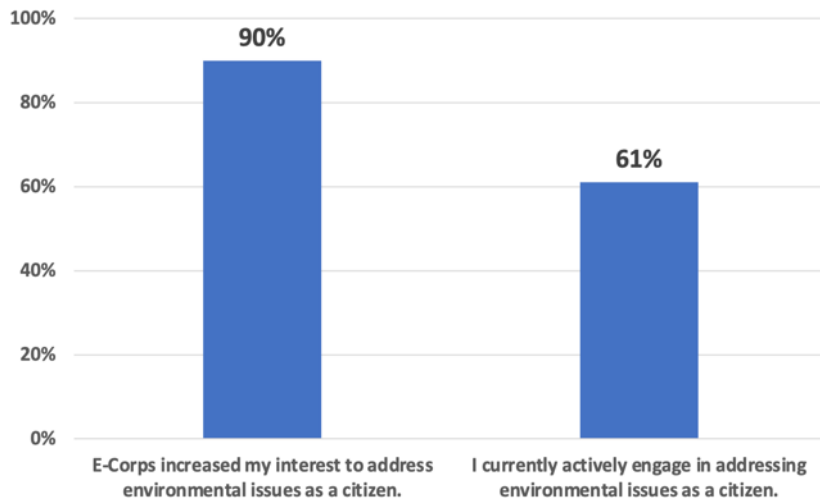


94% of all 70 respondents reported being employed in an environmental field, or desiring to be in the future. Most of these reported that E-Corps increased both their understanding of what environmental careers might entail, and their interest in a career in environmental fields. 64% said that E-Corps greatly influenced their decision to seek employment in these fields.

*"It definitely opened my eyes to some other positions I didn't know because I had no idea what this field was at the time. I just knew that I liked the environment and I wanted to do something to protect it. So, I didn't know that civil engineering was involved. I didn't know that there were even things like sustainability offices as part of city government."*

*"I would say the only reason I have my job now is because that course kind of gave me all the basic knowledge that I needed to—when I go into these interviews, I can talk shop and have a pretty good understanding of what needs to get done. Again, not the same professional experience as someone of years of doing it, but way more than someone who would've not taken the course."*

**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.**



Finally, because E-Corps aims to produce individuals who are environmentally conscious in their personal lives, the survey asked former students about the extent to which E-Corps impacted their interest in addressing environmental issues as a citizen. The vast majority of respondents (90 percent) indicate that E-Corps impacted their interest to a large extent.

*"[Interest in addressing environmental issues is] definitely something I already had, but [E-Corps] did help foster it more. So as you kind of get more involved and you know a little bit more about all these different environmental impacts, and it makes you want to do something."*

*"Yeah, I think [E-Corps] helped me relate, see in the different aspects of climate that I could relate to. When I was in school, they taught climate as like polar bears on ice caps that were melting, which isn't very tangible for somebody that doesn't live in the Arctic to understand. So, it helped me relate and see the importance of movement towards resiliency. And so, it's definitely impacted how I view my connections to climate and different resiliency practices that would be important in my communities."*

## Some final thoughts from the study participants

*"I'm just really glad they're still doing it. It was the first time I'd gotten out of the classroom at UConn and really met people that weren't students or professors. And I think that was a really valuable thing to offer students. So I'm just glad they're still doing it, and I'm just happy to sing its praises whenever I can."*

Brownfields Corps Student

*"I do think [E-Corps] was very impactful. And I definitely got the foundations for a lot of skills that I'm currently using. . . And I'm very happy that I took that class and got the experience that it provided me."*

Climate Corps Student

*"I think all environmental classes should be the same [E-Corps] format of learning. And then also, field-based portion. . . Or even in the same semester having the practicum component, I think it's really helpful to be able to apply the skills that you learn about and being able to actually see them."*

Stormwater Corps Student

This report was created with information from the 2022 Impacts Study Report of [Horizon Research, Inc.](#) Environment Corps is supported by the University of Connecticut, private donors, and a grant from the [National Science Foundation Division of Undergraduate Education/Improving Undergraduate STEM Education \(IUSE\) Program](#), Award #1915100. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation. More information about E-Corps can be found on the project website at <https://ecorps.initiative.uconn.edu/>

