

There Are Jobs Out There! An Urban Sustainability Program Measures the Effectiveness of Curricular Innovation

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CHESC Conference

MA in Urban Sustainability Program

- Designed to address problems at the intersection of climate change and inequality
- Learning goals
 - Systems thinking
 - Human rights framework
 - Practitioner skills
 - Collaboration

The Big Question Lab

- Curricular element that takes place at start of each semester
- Faculty create partnership with local organization
- Students given specific assignment
- Students work collaboratively in pre-assigned teams
- Students produce deliverable for organization
- All done within 6-day residency

Big Question Lab Goals

- 11 elements the Big Question Lab aims to develop
 - Problem solving
 - Community organizing
 - Collaborating/working in teams
 - Conducting research
 - Practicing systems thinking
 - Putting theory into practice
 - Strategic thinking and planning
 - Understanding group dynamics/teambuilding
 - Developing presentation skills
 - Developing curriculum
 - Developing a communications strategy

April 2015 BQL Example

- Work with Los Angeles Black Worker Center
- “Do you see me now?” campaign
 - Faith community
 - Business community
 - Celebrity community
- Student assigned to work on outreach to each of these targeted groups
- ["Do you see me now" PSA](#)

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A
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K

Community
Input/Needs

Curriculum

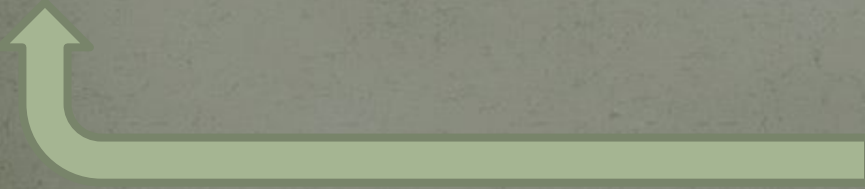
Faculty
Evaluation
of Student
Learning

Student
Reflections
on Own
Learning

Students
Collaborate on
Community
Problem Solving

Community Issue
Addressed

Practitioner Skill
Building



Impact of Big Question Lab

- Student experience
 - Residency evaluations
- Student use of skills
 - Capstone projects
- Professional application
 - Alumni survey

Residency Evaluations

- Reviewed student residency evaluations from April 2014 –October 2016 (6 semesters)
- First 3 semesters had rating scale 1-5 for several skills “How effective was this residency as a way to learn...”

	April 2014	October 2014	April 2015
Problem Solving	4.58	4.75	4.42
Collaborating	4.53	4.75	4.32
Conducting research	4.58		4.32
Systems thinking	4.58	4.63	4.32
Putting theory into practice		4.94	4.79

Residency Evaluations

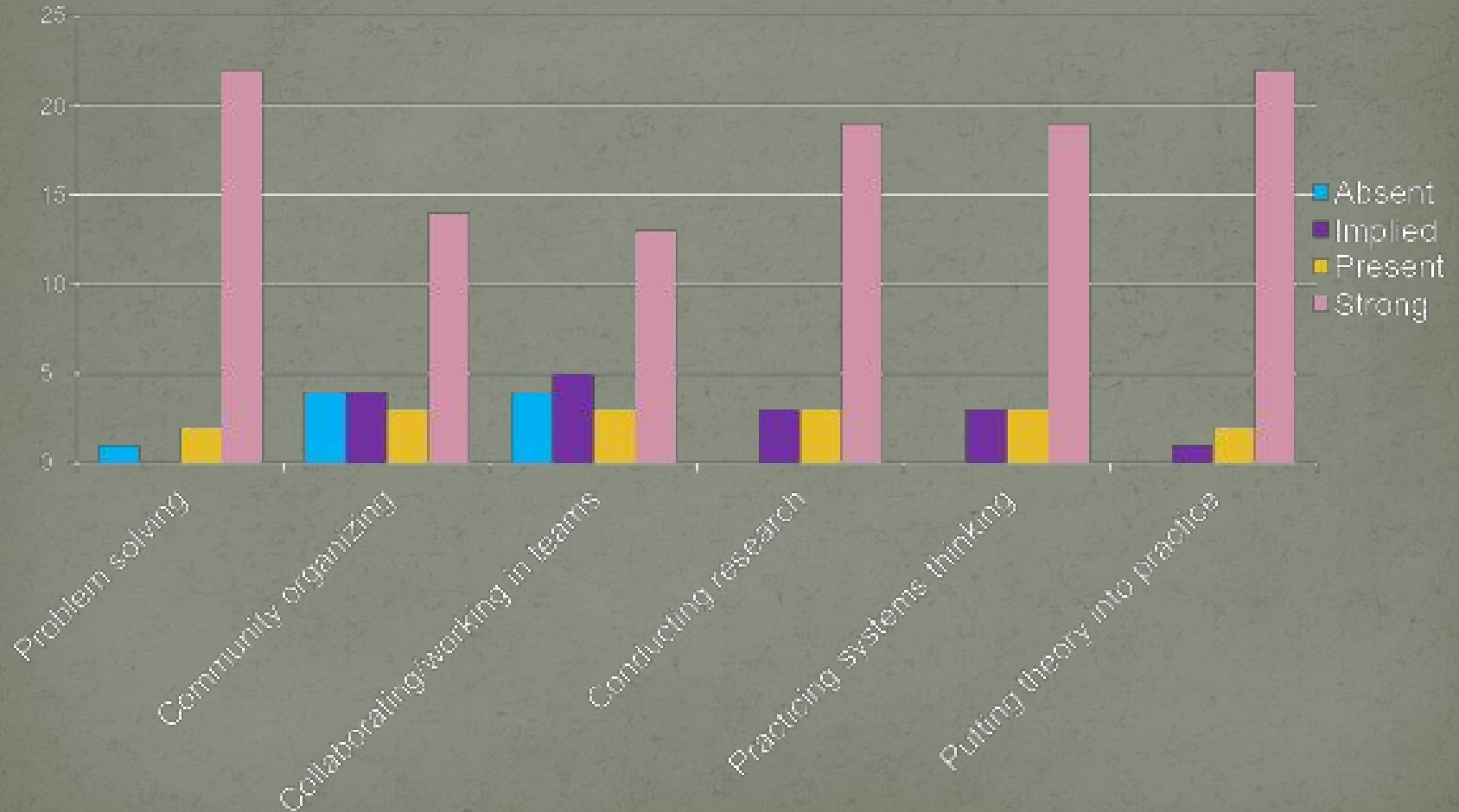
- Evaluated degree to which 11 goals of Big Question Lab were mentioned in narrative: “What activities provided the strongest learning experience/which skills were strengthened?”

Goals	Responses
Problem solving	3
Collaborating	43
Conducting research	5
Systems thinking	1
Putting theory into practice	8
Strategic thinking & planning	5
Understanding group dynamics	21
Developing presentation skills	4
Developing communications strategy	6

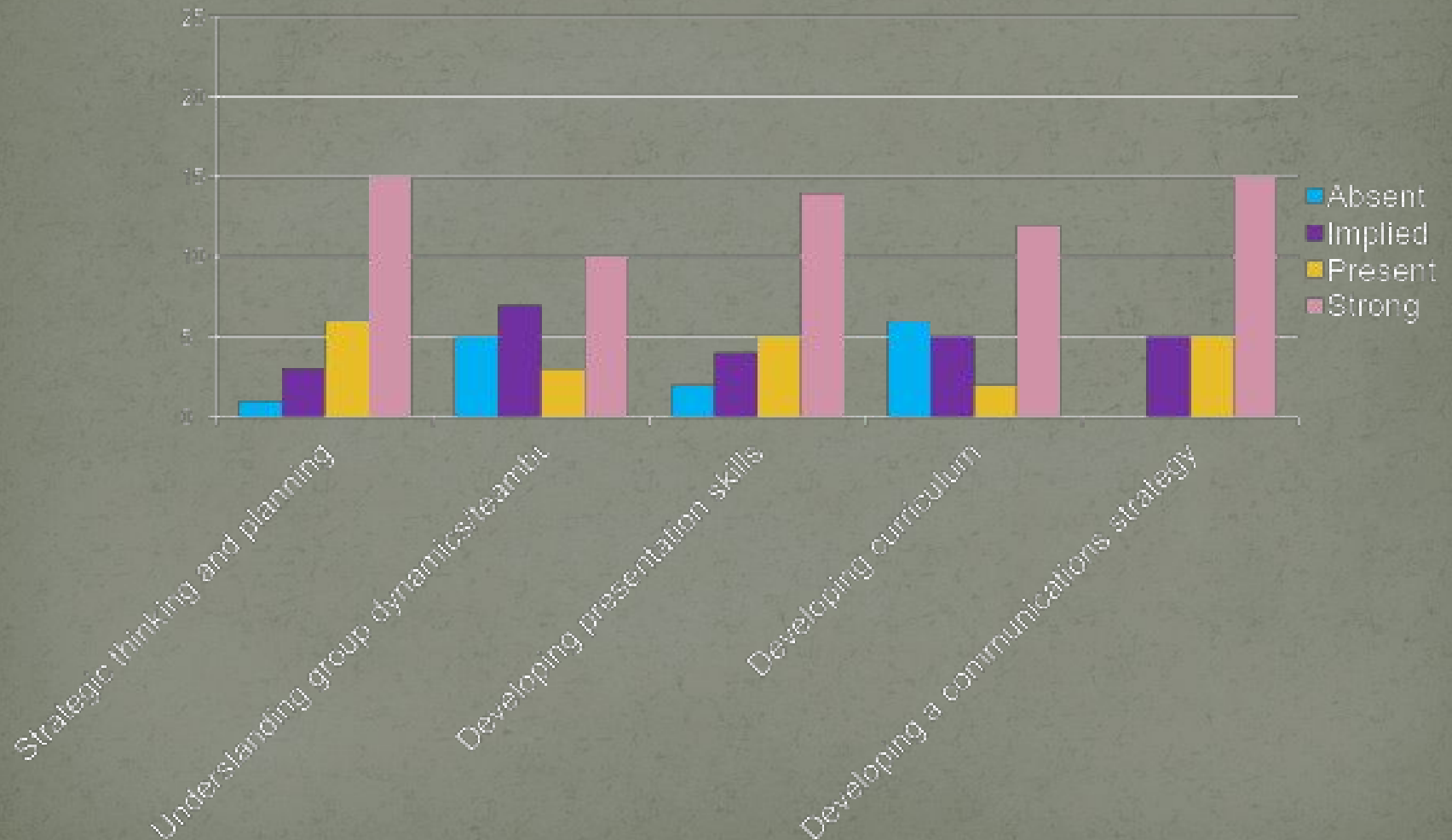
Capstone Projects

- Reviewed capstone projects from all students who had participated in at least one Big Question Lab (N =25)
- Evaluated 11 BQL goals
 - Absent
 - Implied
 - Present
 - Strong

Capstone Projects



Capstone Projects

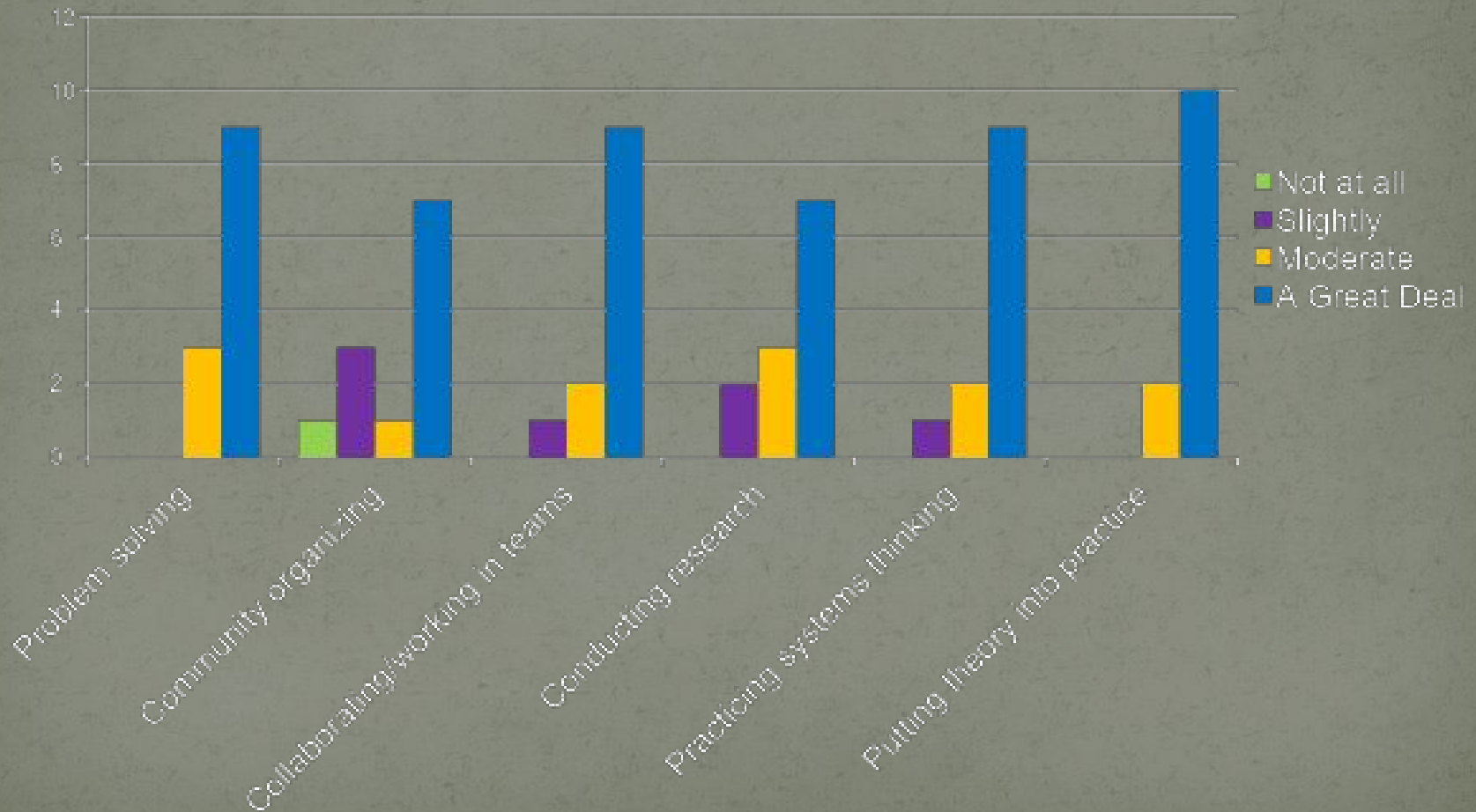


Alumni Outcomes

- Outreach to 25 Alumni who had participated in a BQL between April 2014 –October 2016
- Total of 12 Respondents
- Asked alumni to evaluate the 11 Big Question Lab goals through 3 lenses
 - Degree to which their experiences in the Big Question Labs contributed to their skill development in each of the 11 areas
 - Degree to which each of these skills were an integral part of their capstone projects
 - Degree to which each of these skills were used in their professional practice
- All rated as “Not at all”, “Slightly”, “Moderate Amount”, or “A Great Deal”

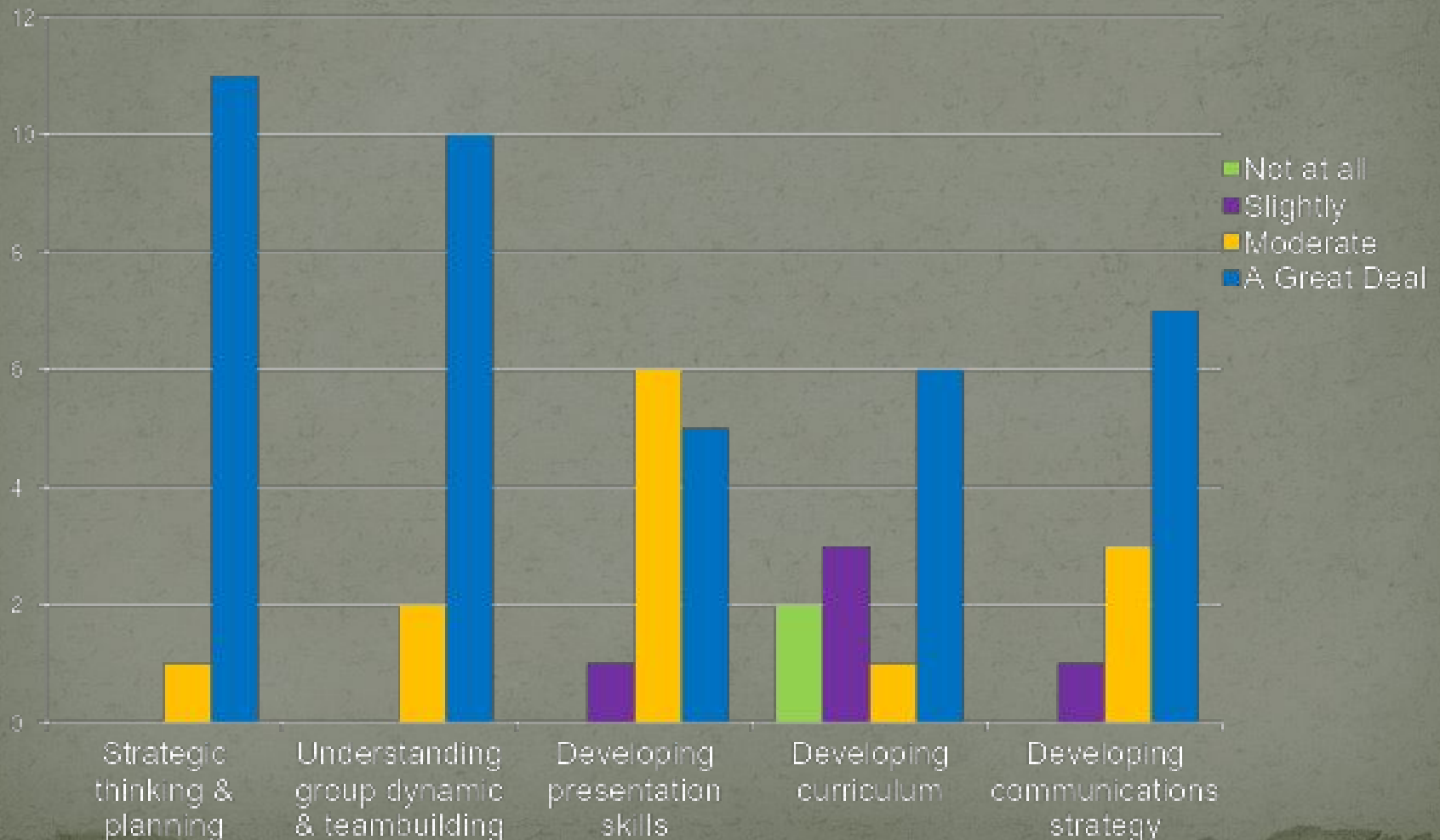
Alumni Outcomes

Degree to which skill used in professional practice



Alumni Outcomes

Degree to which skill used in professional practice



Alumni Outcomes

- “I learned a lot about the different ways people can be valuable members of a team. How we can look for where folks have strength and lean into that”
- “The labs were incredibly helpful in that they allowed us to look at real-world issues/problems and engage with them as opposed to working purely theoretically. The labs are a tremendous benefit of the Antioch program and teaching style”
- “It gave me opportunity to question my assumptions; experience synergy as well as conflict in group work. It gave me opportunity to learn a lot about myself while falling forward. “

The Jobs Out There

Organization	Job Title
CalRecycle	Recycling Specialist
City of Atlanta	Senior Recycling Program Coordinator
Thunder Valley Sustainable Development	Sustainability Manager
REVSolar	Commercial Solar Development Specialist
Los Angeles Department of Water and Power	Management Analyst and Utility Services Specialist
Culver City Department of Public Works	Management Analyst

The Jobs Out There

Organization	Job Title
Gaia Development	Associate Principal
Movement Generation	Collective Member/Organizer
Arizmendi / Solidarity Research Center	Co-owner of a business / cooperative business development consultant
TESA Collective	Worker/Owner/Communications Specialist
Tree People	Senior Manager Environmental Education, Watershed Specialist
Code Pink	Campaign Director
Food and Water Watch	Campaign Manager/Researcher
Student Conservation Association	Program Director
Ride On!	Executive Director