

Teen Perspectives on the Britannia Teen Centre's Garden Transformation

LFS 350  
April 10, 2017  
University of British Columbia

# Introduction

The Grandview Woodland Food Connection (GWFC) is a Neighbourhood Food Network that works to improve food access and sustainability in the neighborhood surrounding the Britannia Community centre (Grandview Woodland Food connection, n.d.). Our project was designed to complete the first phase of a garden transformation project facilitated by the GWFC at the Britannia Teen Centre (BTC). We applied an Asset-Based Community Development (defined in Appendix) approach to this project which recognized the BTC's existing decorative garden as an unrecognized asset, and the proposed transformation into a food garden as an opportunity to increase the intrinsic value of this plot of land and also the food knowledge of these teens (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). Our project's contribution was to ascertain the perspectives of the youth who attend the BTC and are intended to be the end users of the food garden.

This project is guided by the Vancouver Food Strategy, which has identified food friendly neighborhoods and food access as aspects of the food system to be improved by 2020 (City of Vancouver, 2013b). Additional guidance was provided by the GWFC, particularly in helping to guide our interactions with the youth.

## Significance

Many community projects rush ahead with implementation, making assumptions about what the end user is looking for (Siroli, 2012). Seeking stakeholder input may be especially relevant for youth projects, as what youth want and what adults expect youth to want are often discordant (Fish, 2013). This project will help the GWFC consult a key stakeholder and provide an opportunity for the administration to include youth perspectives to help improve teen food sovereignty (defined in Appendix) (Wittman, 2009).

Our literature review found no studies reporting on garden projects developed through participatory consultation with youth. This project trialed a modified Delphi method that has been successful in achieving consensus among teens in other food systems contexts (Harmon & Maretski, 2006). The results of our project will help inform future youth consultation in a garden project context.

## Objectives

- Engage the youth of the Teen Centre in a way that entices them to share honest and thoughtful perspectives on the prospective food garden
- Evaluate a modified Delphi methodology as a way to engage teens on the topic of food gardens

## Inquiry Questions

- What activities are recommended for workshops aimed at engaging youth?
- How will the teens respond to the following questions:

- Why do you want a garden?
- What level of control over the garden are you looking for?
- What is the significance of growing food to you?
- What kind of experience do you want to take away from the garden?
- How might these teen perspectives help shape the development of this garden?

## Research Methods

### Workshop Implementation

The design of our workshop was guided by a literature review using the UBC Library search engine with search terms of “garden” and “teen OR youth” as well as by conversations with GWFC administrations.

We used an introductory icebreaker activity to foster a sense of equality between ourselves and the teens, to ensure the teens felt their presence was valued (Fish, 2013). The teens were split into four groups, each sitting with a poster featuring an open-ended question. The teens responded to the posters throughout a facilitated five minute response period. The groups then rotated to a new poster which allowed the teens to semi-anonymously build on previous rounds of responses as per the Delphi methodology (Harmon & Maretski, 2006).

As compensation for their participation, respondents were served pizza and by random draw, a pair of movie passes was awarded. We, along with the GWFC felt this level of compensation adequate for the participation required and not so valuable as to be coercive.

### Question Selection

We limited the workshop to four questions to reduce the time burden on the teens (listed in Inquiry Questions section). We selected our questions such that the responses would inform us as to whether the teens wanted a garden, and if so, gather some insight into their vision for the garden: the level of control they would like to have over this aspect of their food system, what their garden should include and what aspects of growing food was most interesting. We also wanted to get the teens thinking about what value the garden might be able to provide them, to generate some intrinsic motivation Scheve, Perkins & Mincemoyer’s (n.d.).

## Results

The responses have been tabulated in bar charts as shown below. Images of the posters have been included in Appendix B to aid future analysis

## 1. Why do you want a food garden?

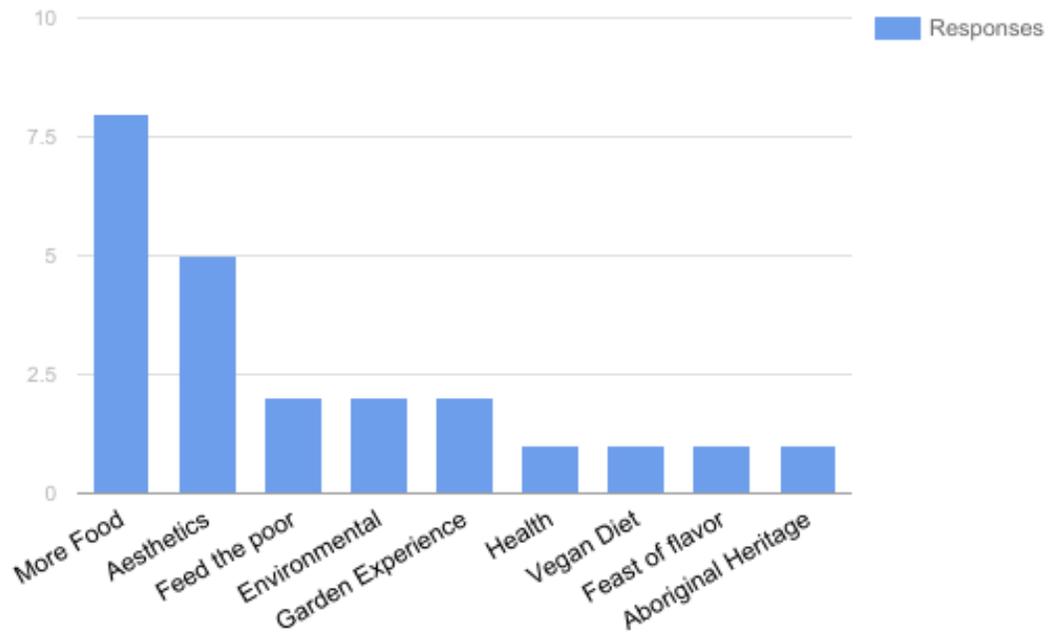


Chart 1

In chart 1 we see that the highest scoring response is that the garden will provide more food, followed by improving the aesthetics of the Teen Centre.

## 2. How much responsibility do you want over the garden?

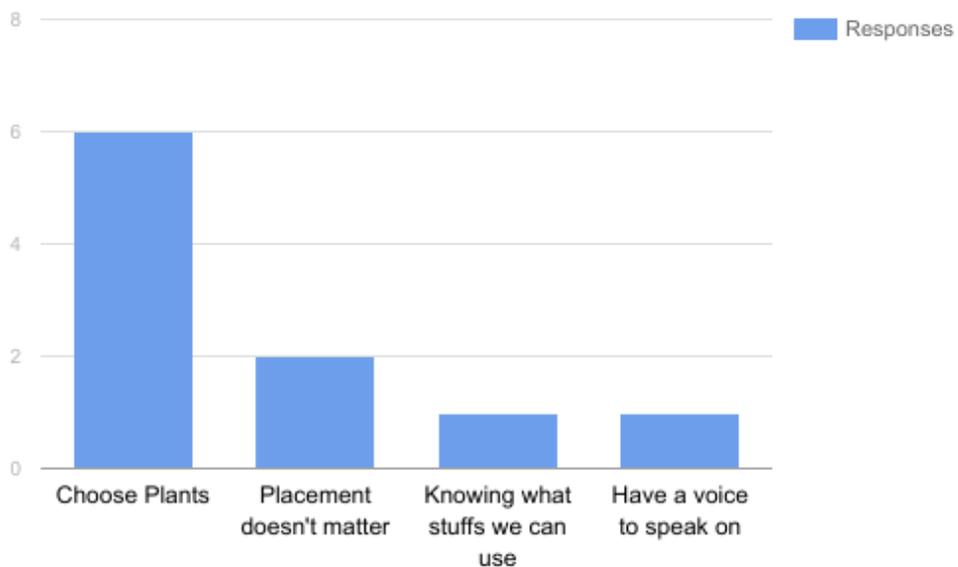


Chart 2

Chart 2 illustrates the level of control the teens would like to have over the food garden. The most common response was the desire to be involved in deciding what gets planted in the garden. One respondent wanted to have a voice into how the garden was run. Three responses could not be interpreted.

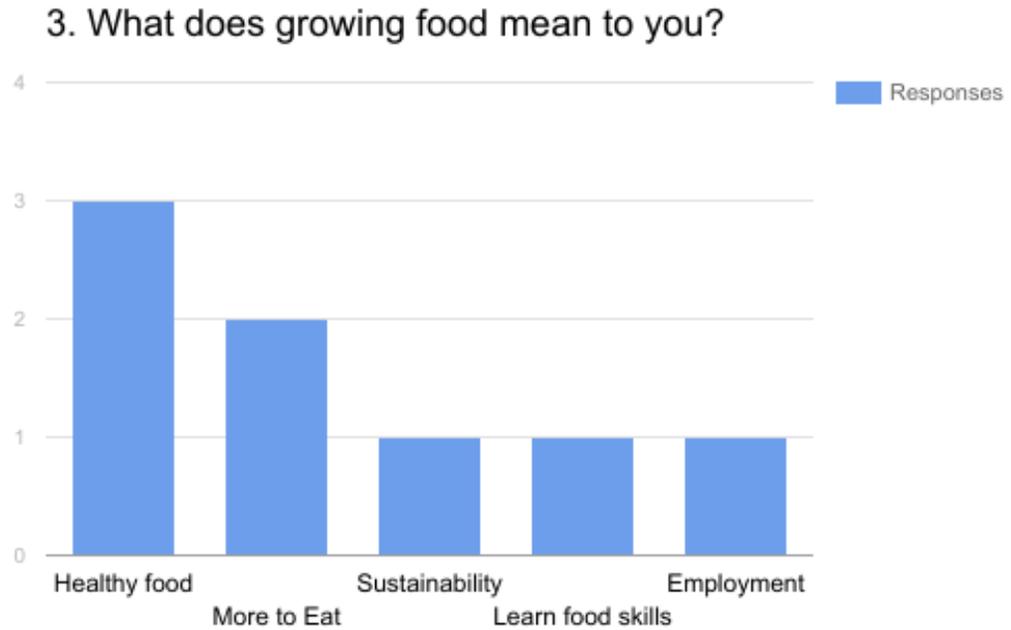


Chart 3

Chart 3 shows that the most frequent responses related to their ability to eat healthier and to eat more.

#### 4. What kind of experience do you want to take from the garden?

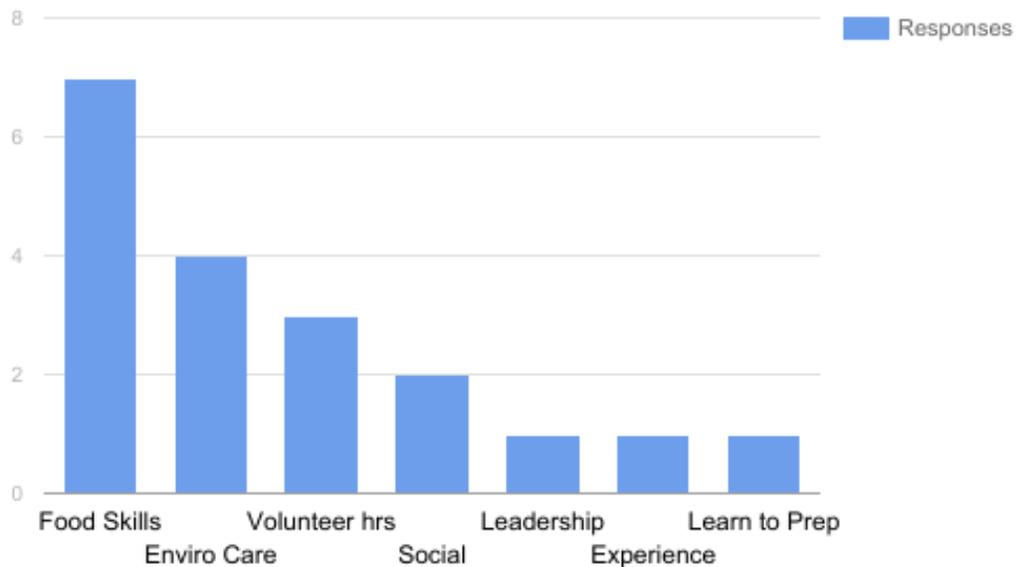


Chart 4

Chart 4 shows that the most common response was to gain food skills, followed by learning about caring for the environment and gaining volunteer hours.

## Discussion

The data presented above highlights the teens' awareness of how their food access and food quality could be improved, a desire to do so and a desire to be involved with the food garden.

The responses to question 1 help satisfy Siroli's (2012) mandate that one must first listen to stakeholders before attempting to solve their problems. The results demonstrate that most commonly, these teens want to convert the existing decorative garden to a food garden because it will increase food availability. Given the socioeconomic conditions of the Grandview-Woodland neighborhood, these results support the notion that many of the respondents may be struggling with food security (City of Vancouver, 2013a).

Question 2 shows a majority (62.5%) of responses relating to food access, with the most common response related to the healthiness of the food. These results align with Dixon's (2012) argument that many populations face limitations preventing them from simply choosing to improve their diet.

The question 3 responses relate to food sovereignty and show that the respondents are most interested in having control over what gets planted. It is interesting to see that one response seeks to have an ongoing voice in how the garden is run. This suggests that the GWFC has an opportunity to implement a participatory decision making process and may want to let the individual teens self-select for what level of involvement they would prefer (McCullum, Desjardins, Kraak, Ladipo & Costelloet, 2005).

Question 4 responses reinforce the importance of food to this population, with food skills being the most commonly sought after. This points again to the importance of harvesting and preparing the yield from the garden when it comes to engaging this population.

## **Limitations**

It became clear during the analysis process that some of the responses needed additional clarification to be properly interpreted. Follow-up exploration with respondents would be advised for future sessions to improve data analysis.

The behavior and the responses of the teens anecdotally suggested that they were engaged at the workshop. However, were we to conduct this workshop again, we would include a survey to help us assess engagement more objectively. This study design would also be strengthened by a follow up session measuring how engagement at the initial workshop translates to engagement at future stages of the garden project.

## **Conclusion**

Our project has demonstrated that the BTC youth want a food garden and are keen to be involved in garden operations. Though additional inquiry will be needed to determine which crops the teens would like to plant, the results indicate that the harvest and food distribution from the garden may be the most important part of the program to these youth. If the project sees high teen involvement in subsequent phases, the GWFC may be able to “lead by stepping back” and treat the social capital developed in these teens as a community asset to build upon (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003).

The importance of food to these teens suggests that GWFC programming might benefit from increased emphasis on improving access to low cost, healthy food and that a food skills workshop linked with the garden harvest might be well received. The GFWC can now move forward with the next steps of their garden transformation with a better idea of how to involve their teen stakeholders, improve teen food sovereignty and align the project with the teens’ expectations.

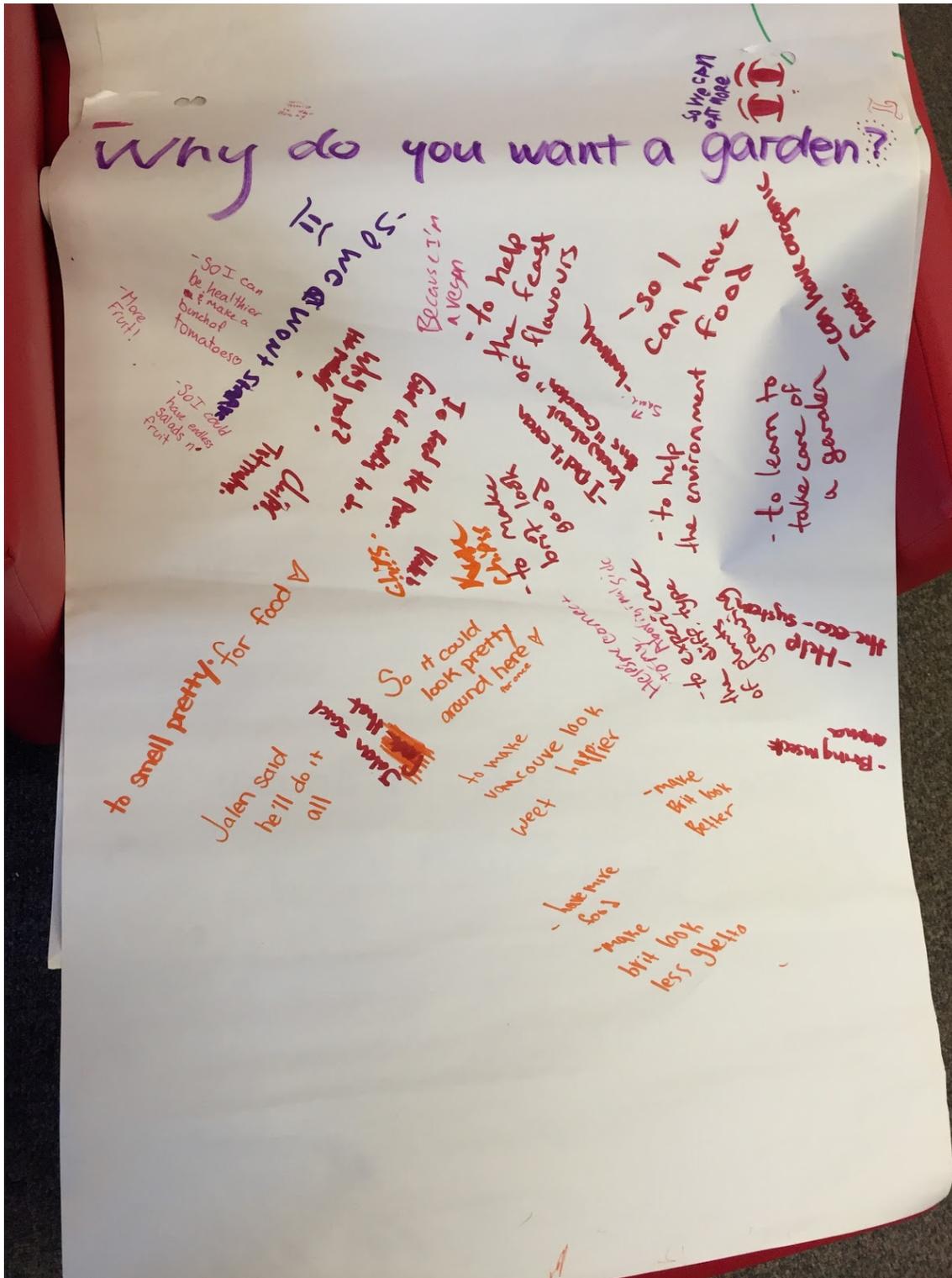
Our results have also helped address a knowledge gap concerning methods of engaging teen audiences on the topic of garden projects. A workshop guided by the Delphi methodology may be an effective way to engage teens on the subject. Questions remain about its effectiveness, but future sessions designed to address the weaknesses listed above would produce a more robust assessment of the method.

## Appendix A: Definition of Key Terms

**Asset Based Community Development** - a strategy for sustainable community-driven development [which] is focused on community mobilisation rather than institutional reform (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003)

**Food Sovereignty** - the Right of peoples, communities, and countries to define their own agricultural, labour, fishing, food and land policies, which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances. It includes the true right to food and to produce food, which means that all people have the right to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food and to food producing resources and the ability to sustain themselves and their societies (Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty 2008).

# Appendix B: Images of Poster Responses



Poster for Question 1: Why do you want a garden?

# How much responsibility do you want over the garden?

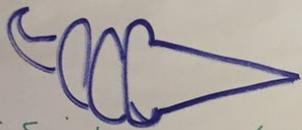
examples:

- plant selection / arrangement
- planting, weeding, watering

- Chores market

- choice of vegetablez — stuff we can use
- Placement doesn't matter — PLANT WHATEVER
- PLANT WHATEVER

- PLACEMENT DOESN'T MATTER



Plants Don't Matter.

(hannah's ugly writing)

Visitors/Staff

outreach workers:

SARAH AND KRIGG

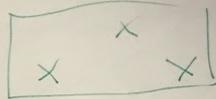
Andrew

Ian

EMMA

Mark

NICK



NICK DU

To have the choice to only grow tomatoes, cucumbers, and carrots.

Volunteering

Poster for Question 2: How much responsibility would you want over the garden?

What does growing food mean to you?

food

We get to eat it.

Sustainability

It provides Job's

that we work grow

Tania, Hannah, Talen, Devon

-To be more  
Kathryn

No huge  
EXP



Everything so it & others  
can eat healthy

IT MEANS  
WE CAN  
LEARN TO  
COOK

FOOD



# What kind of experience do you want to take from the garden?

examples:

- Volunteering hours ++
- Socializing +
- gardening practice ++
- leadership
- LEARNING TO COOK
- MUNCHIES +

make more friends  
Learn to read

- LEARN TO EAT HEALTHY FOOD
- MANTAIN THE GARDEN
- learn to grow plants & fruit & veggies +

- Take care of (what?)
- Learn how to take care of a garden +
- Learn how to grow a whole bunch of different kinds of food/plants
- throw dirt @ Jalen. ++ kyle

Grants stuff.  
Humbly stuff.  
Learning exp from it.  
Learns to not let plant  
flourish

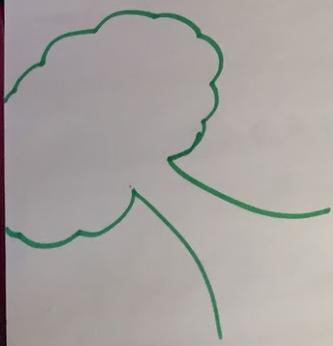
Jalen writing

Learn how to take care of plants  
Drinking water  
Food  
Veg

HAIRPAIN WRITING  
Gomer sucks?

have time with sonerii

Killed!



Poster for Question 4: What kind of experience do you want to take from the garden?

## Appendix C: Critical Reflections

### Student 1

By selecting the “choose your own adventure” project, the members of our group made a statement that we wanted the freedom to build our experience from the ground up. The “flexible learning” lectures fed into this freedom by allowing us the “time sovereignty” to act in a way that would most enhance our project and our learning. They were also key in allowing the five members of our group to find a common time to meet in-person and discuss the challenges and opportunities presented by our project.

Face-to-face communication is generally considered the most effective communication channel because of the additional non-verbal cues that can be communicated. Another strength is the fact that it requires attention and focus which leads to more effective outcomes, and that certainly proved to be the case in this project. Technology promises the ability to connect teams without having to be in the same location, but it came up short for us in several instances. We chose to use a Facebook group because of its ability to create multiple discussions as opposed to one large email chain and also because all of us check it regularly. However, online discussions of deadlines and key ideas regularly required in-person clarification. For future group projects determined to work online, it may be worth investigating tools with the project management functionality to set deadlines and schedule meetings.

### Student 2:

To borrow an old idiom: if understanding of food system sustainability and justice can be seen as water, then LFS 350 undertakes to lead us horses (students) to it, in the hopes that we will drink. It appears to have been acknowledged from the beginning of the course that there is a limit, in a field with as few clear and testable solutions as food systems, to the information that could be taught in the traditional academic manner-that is to say, that there is a limit to what the teaching team and course curriculum could “make us drink”. This acknowledgement is to be applauded, but sadly, the structure of the course largely fails to build on it. Rather than being allowed to drink for hydration’s sake, we hardly had time after each sip to swallow before we were asked to produce reports, in the academic style that had been previously criticized, relating the sips we took to lofty notions of rivers and ponds and oceans that most horses had only heard of weeks earlier, if at all (I don’t know of a single horse who read all the assigned papers).

If the goal is to have students gain experience on the ground working to improve food systems, help them find relevant internships, jobs, and volunteer experiences. Make these mandatory, if you like. If the goal is to provide a theoretical, non-disprovable basis for why they should want to, teach an entire academic course on food justice. Make it mandatory, if you like (though hopefully not for APBI students). Right now this course is attempting to do both and succeeding in neither. There’s a joke going around that LFS stands for “lots of fluff and stuff”- and the core curriculum, especially 350, is why.

### Student 3

Reviewing our initial CBEL objective, “to create [your] own project by identifying an element of the food strategy to investigate” surfaces mixed emotions. I laughed sadly inside when I first realized how our team’s path had paralleled the one described by Sirioli in his TED Talk. Connecting with local experts eventually revealed to my group that our passion-infused idea (guerilla grafting) had some big flaws that were clouded by our lack of community-based experience. From my perspective, “Scope Change” is an understatement when referencing what ensued for us half way through the term.

Meeting Ian from GWFC was exciting as we had the opportunity to sift through an extensive list of ideas that Ian presented to us, but also somewhat disheartening since we had to ditch a lot of the content we had worked so hard to bring to fruition. If I could pass on a single piece of advice to a future Food Strategy project group it would be to BEGIN by finding a community partner whose projects line up with their interests, then to ask how they can support them. Taking this approach would have reduced the continual game of “catch up” that was a constant in my group this term.

My group was a diverse bunch in terms of values, interests and skills. Reconciling our differences wasn’t always easy. Struggles aside, I am proud of us- we managed to make it out of that labyrinth in one piece and complete a full-term project in half the time.

#### Student 4

We started off our CBEL projects very strongly with motivation to expand and do something new and innovative that have not been done before especially in LFS 350. With many challenges along the way we realized that our original idea of guerrilla grafting was out of the picture and we struggled to complete the course objective as we lacked a community partner half way through the semester. We did finally come across a great community partner. I am proud that as a group we stuck together and listened to each other ideas rather than panicking and making things worse. All this despite not being able to provide as much as we wanted due to time scarcity in having to finish a report. I wish we could have had more time to really make an impact within the community but more importantly, I wish we had had less flexibility within the context of the project. Having some kind of foundation to build upon would definitely have been much simpler, rather than trying to do something that might contribute to food security and food justice in a certain community and seeing it all crumble down in the end. I however, am grateful for the support received by both Will and Colin on this project especially during the tough times and I think this is something very unique to the LFS community.

#### Student 5

When we chose to work together toward guerrilla grafting at the beginning of the semester, we were excited and expected a fantastic result. We assigned each member to positions and planned out our future actions. The project flowed well until an expert in the field pointed out several flaws with our idea. As Will mentioned in lecture, this course deal with uncertainty. When we were unable to resolve it, we had to abandon the project. However, we underwent something more severe than uncertainty, which was failure. We put lots of effort into guerrilla grafting; when it finally failed, we were left without enthusiasm.

A big turning point was when we eventually got ourselves a new community partner who provided several project options. We decided to hold a consultation workshop for youth involved in constructing a garden, which fell into the right scope of the course perspective and allocated time length. When conducting this new project, although communication was not perfectly aligned with our expectation from the start of the semester, all the group members showed great resilience and accomplished their assigned work. The turnout of the project is quite satisfying, especially when

taking the time limit into consideration. Personally, the fact that we overcame the failure and moved was quite rewarding. This project is also great experience for my future studies and career.

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