The UCL EAST modules: perspectives from students of the future

The modules that are on offer sound really amazing because of that real-life context you're offering.

It also matters who the professors of the modules are. Disruptive modules should be led by disruptive thinkers.

EAST

UCL

Afiya Amesu
Majid Chowdhury
Joseph Cook
Elena Dimova
Maariya Qaisar

EA ST

UCL

Executive Summary

As an interdisciplinary group of current UCL students, both undergraduate and postgraduate, over the last two months we have been engaging with our peers across the university, asking them for their views on the 9 new modules coming to UCL East: '*Academic & Inter-disciplinary Communication: Thinking Disruption*', '*Collaborative Challenge*', '*East London Lab*', '*Entrepreneurship Theory & Practice*', '*Exploring Power, Inclusion & Exclusion with Local Communities*', '*Find & Design Your Future*', '*Food, Communities and the Environment*', '*Protecting and Managing Creative Content*', and '*Wellbeing and the Community*'.

An online survey, targeted at current UCL undergrads was conducted, with 85 unique informants, and a subsequent focus group was then carried out with 7 students from across the university. The following report contains highlights resulting from both studies, including both quantitative data and a range of insightful quotes on the modules, both individually and as a group.

You'll see that all modules were seen as having strengths and weaknesses, though no single module stood out as particularly above or below the others, with even the least popular module being the top favourite of 8% of survey respondents. There was something for everyone, with '*Entrepreneurship Theory & Practice*' standing out for its usefulness for student's career prospects, '*East London Lab*' jumping out for being particularly unique, and '*Food, Communities and the Environment*' being a favourite of students who thought of it as a particularly enjoyable option.

Respondents from the focus group were generally enthusiastic about the new modules, particularly the engagement with local communities, though pressed that they felt that the modules should seek direct action within the community where possible, and that their was too strong a focus on the humanities to appeal to some.
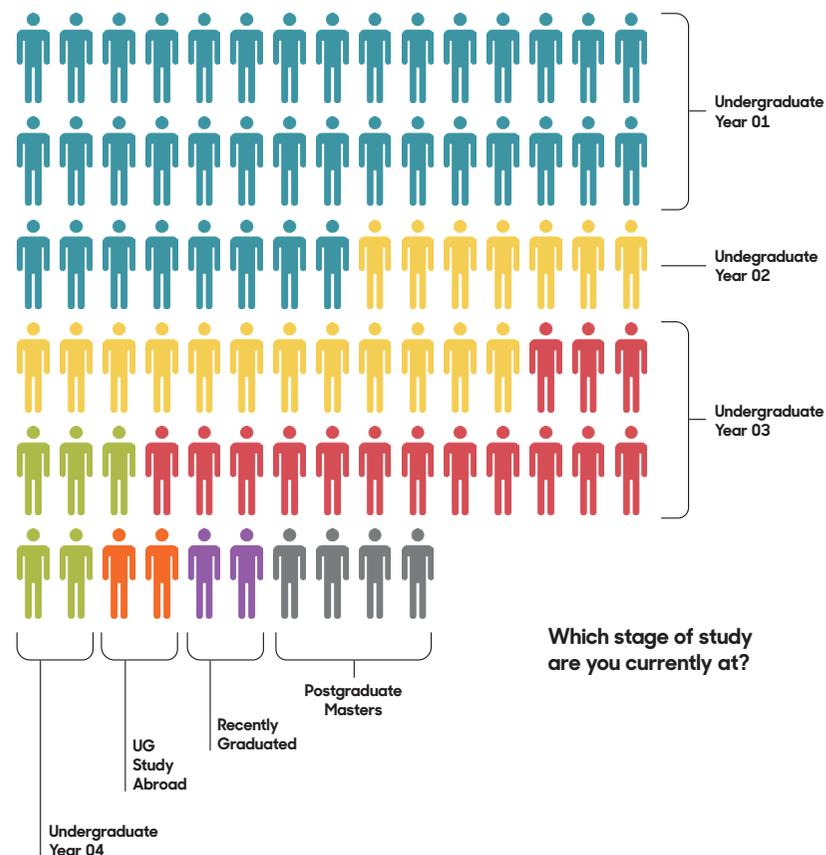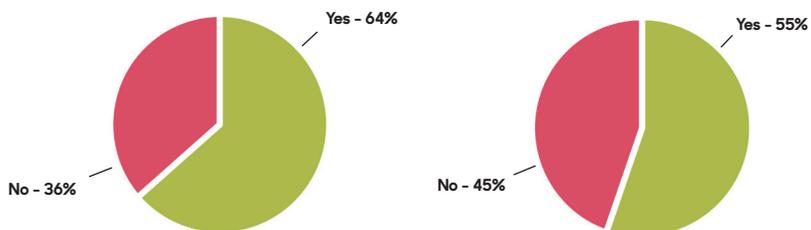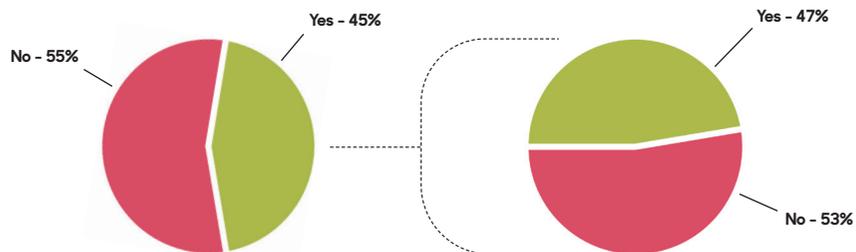
UCL EAST Modules internship team
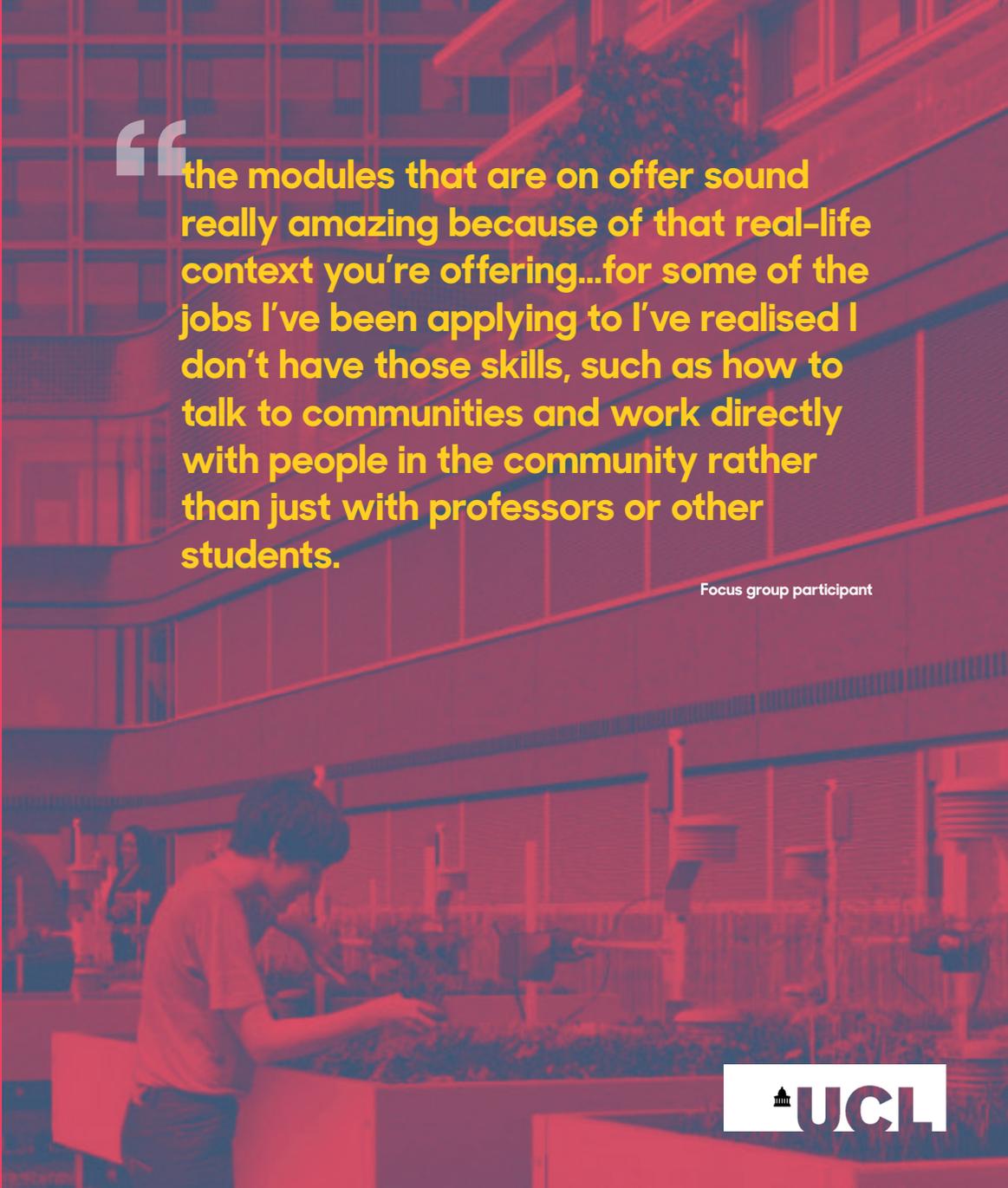
" **the modules that are on offer sound really amazing because of that real-life context you're offering...for some of the jobs I've been applying to I've realised I don't have those skills, such as how to talk to communities and work directly with people in the community rather than just with professors or other students.**

Focus group participant
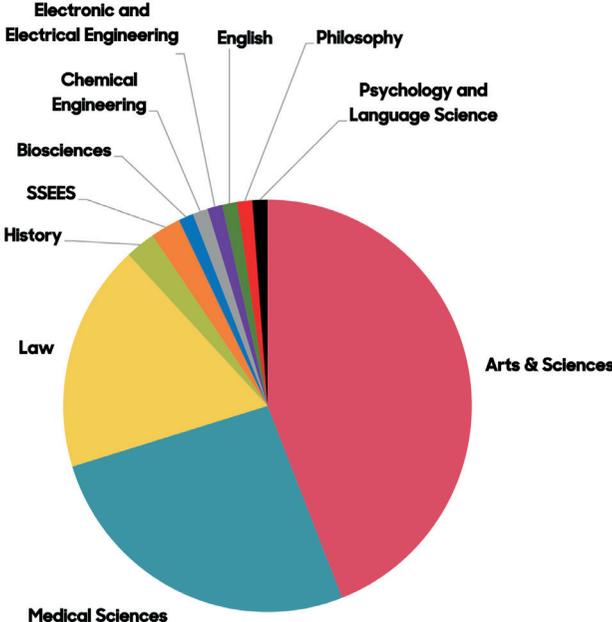
Who were our survey respondents?

Through an online survey with the chance to win a £10 voucher, we had **85 individuals** provide their views on the future modules at UCL EAST. The majority of respondents were not only new to London but were originally from outside the UK, with 79 of the 85 being currently enrolled on UCL undergraduate programmes. Reassuringly, a majority of respondents had already heard of UCL EAST prior to completing our survey, with **64% interested in completing postgraduate study at UCL**.

No – 55%   Yes – 45%

Are you from the UK?

Yes – 47%   No – 53%

(If from the UK)… before joining UCL, had you ever lived in London?

Yes – 64%   No – 36%

Are you interested in PG study at UCL?

Yes – 55%   No – 45%

Have you heard of UCL EAST?

Undergraduate Year 01

Undegraduate Year 02

Undergraduate Year 03

Undergraduate Year 04

UG Study Abroad

Recently Graduated

Postgraduate Masters

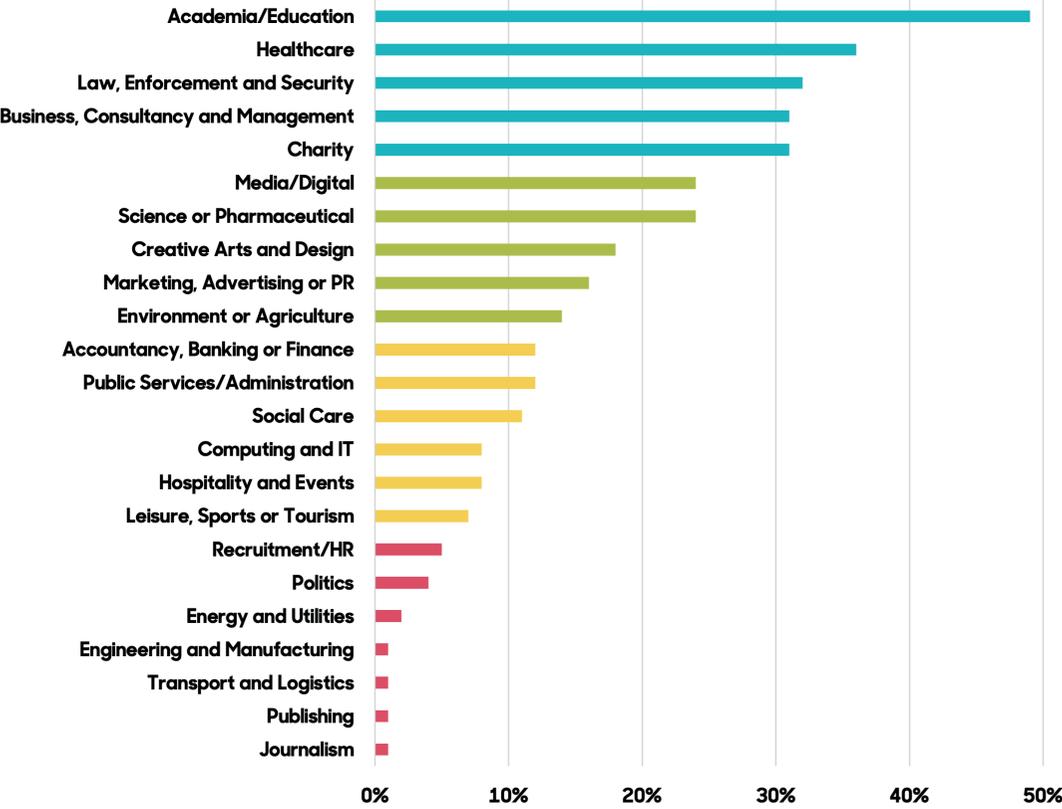**Which stage of study are you currently at?**

EA ST

Who were our survey respondents?

Respondents were currently based in a wide range of UCL departments, though a large contingency came from Arts & Sciences, which, as a purposefully interdisciplinary programme, is aligned with the goals of UCL EAST. Respondents could see themselves working in a wide variety of sectors in the future, from academia, healthcare and law, to consultancy and the third sector.

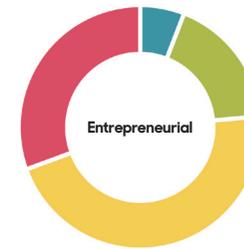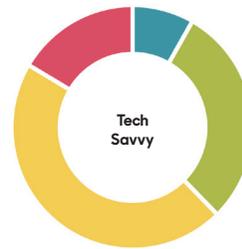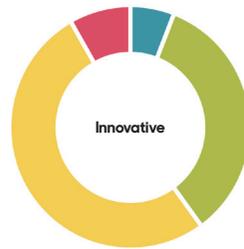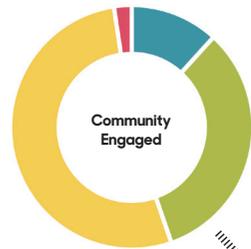**Which department are you currently based in?**

Labels: Electronic and Electrical Engineering, English, Philosophy, Chemical Engineering, Psychology and Language Science, Biosciences, SSEES, History, Law, Medical Sciences, Arts & Sciences

Which sectors could you see yourself working in?

- Academia/Education
- Healthcare
- Law, Enforcement and Security
- Business, Consultancy and Management
- Charity
- Media/Digital
- Science or Pharmaceutical
- Creative Arts and Design
- Marketing, Advertising or PR
- Environment or Agriculture
- Accountancy, Banking or Finance
- Public Services/Administration
- Social Care
- Computing and IT
- Hospitality and Events
- Leisure, Sports or Tourism
- Recruitment/HR
- Politics
- Energy and Utilities
- Engineering and Manufacturing
- Transport and Logistics
- Publishing
- Journalism

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50%

EA ST

Which attributes did our respondents consider themselves having?

Extremely

Very

A little

Not at all
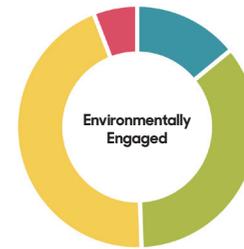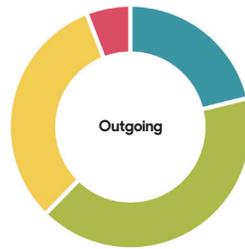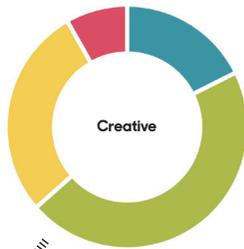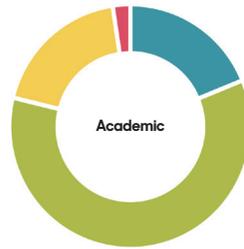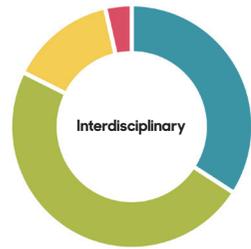
Interdisciplinary

Academic

Professional

Collaborative

Creative

Outgoing

Confident

Environmentally Engaged

Financially Motivated

Community Engaged

Innovative

Tech Savvy

Entrepreneurial

Respondents who described themselves as very or extremely 'collaborative' tended to choose '*Academic & Interdisciplinary Communication: Thinking Disruption*', '*East London Lab*' and '*Exploring Power, Inclusion, & Exclusion with Local Communities*' as their favourites.

Respondents who described themselves as very or extremely 'collaborative' tended to choose '*Academic & Interdisciplinary Communication: Thinking Disruption*', '*East London Lab*' and '*Find & Design Your Future*' as their favourites.

Respondents who described themselves as very or extremely 'community engaged' tended to choose '*Food, Communities and the Environment*', '*Academic & Interdisciplinary Communication: Thinking Disruption*' and '*Wellbeing and the Community*' as their favourites.

Respondents who described themselves as very or extremely 'financially motivated' tended to choose '*Find & Design Your Future*', '*Entrepreneurship Theory & Practice*' and '*East London Lab*' as their favourites.
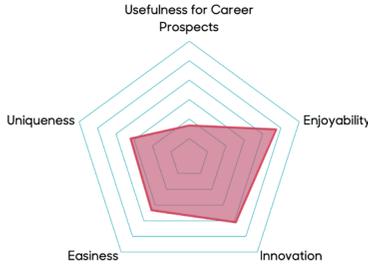
EA ST

What impression do the modules give off?

Giving them only the module title and a short description, we asked respondents how they sounded. Did they seem easy? Unique? Enjoyable? Innovative? Did they seem useful for students' future career prospects?

Perhaps reassuringly there were no individual modules that stood out either for good or for bad. If not seen as a good all-rounder *(Exploring Power, Inclusion & Exclusion with Local Communities)*, then the modules were interpreted as having particularstrengths, such as *Entrepreneurship Theory & Practice* and *Find & Design Your Future* being interpreted as good for employability, and *East London Lab* seeming the most unique and innovative of the new modules.
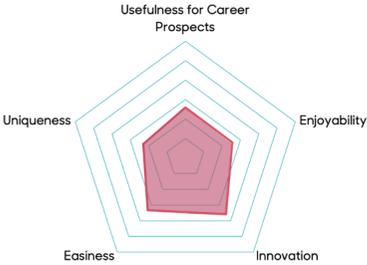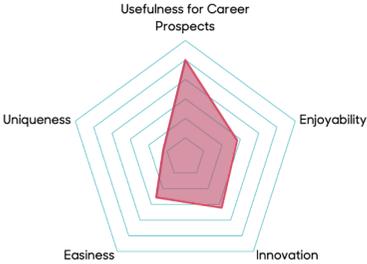
Academic & Interdisciplinary Communication: Thinking Disruption

Collaborative Challenge
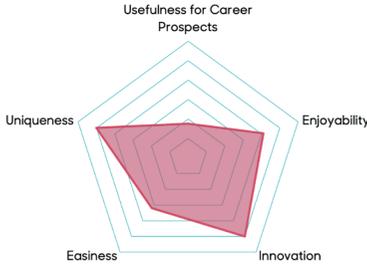
East London Lab

Entrepreneurship Theory & Practice
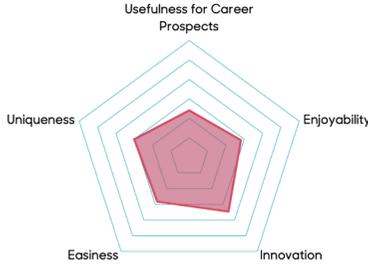
Exploring Power, Inclusion & Exclusion with Local Communities
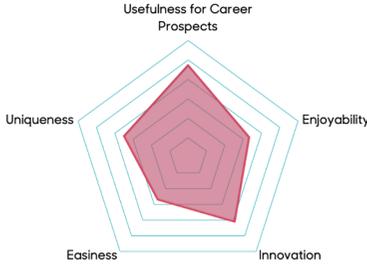
Find & Design Your Future
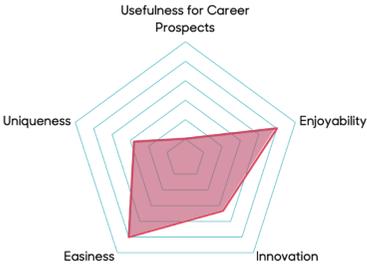
Food, Communities and the Environment
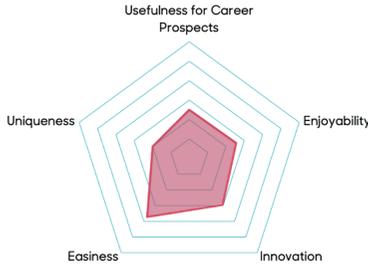
Protecting and Managing Creative Content

Wellbeing and the Community

EA ST
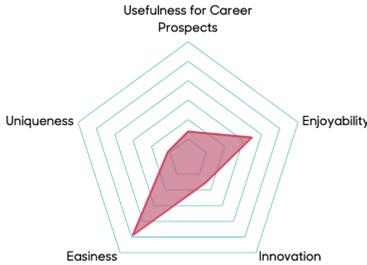
Which module would respondents choose themselves?

We asked respondents to tell us, out of the 9 modules, which were there 1st, 2nd, and 3rd favourites that they would want to take themselves. Impressively, **each and every module had at least 7 out of 85 respondents choose it as their favourite**, showing a fairly even spread across all modules. This perhaps shows that the variety provided in the 9 modules has something that would appeal to everyone. *Food, Communities and the Environment* **was in the top 3 for 38 respondents**, and *Academic & Interdisciplinary Communication: Thinking Disruption* was chosen as the top favourite by 14 respondents.

● Favourite

● 2nd Favourite

● 3rd Favourite

EAST
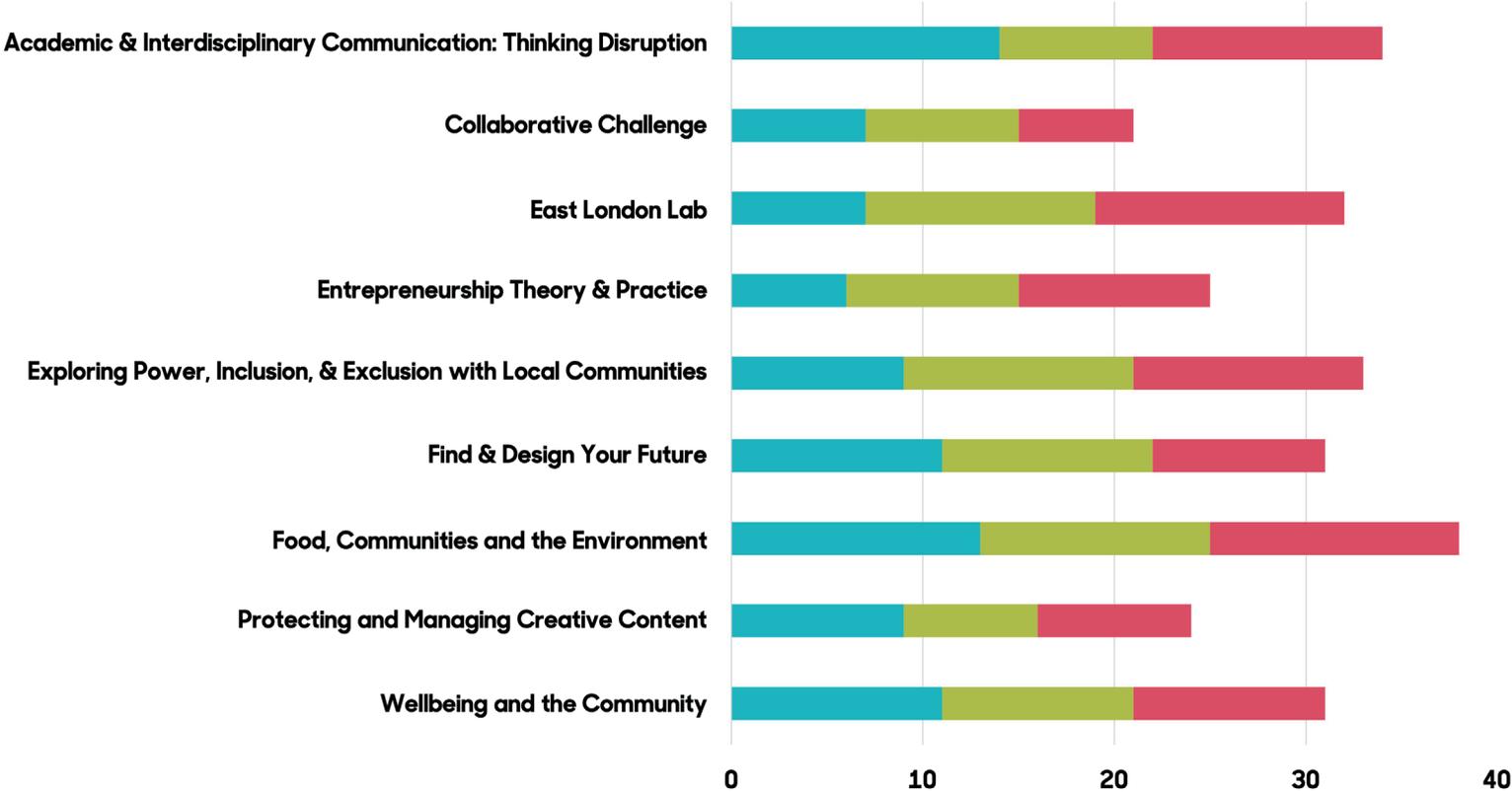
Academic & Interdisciplinary Communication: Thinking Disruption

Students will reflect about themselves as scholars, practitioners, and professionals as they read, think and communicate about their academic fields, developing academic literacies relevant to UCL EAST's themes.

More of our survey respondents chose this as their favourite than any other module, and generally saw it as an all-rounder. Those who chose it in their top 3 considered themselves more academic, confident, and interdisciplinary than average, and commented that this kind of module was beneficial in understanding academias wider links within society.

During our focus group some Arts & Sciences (BASc) students pointed out that this module seems very similar to their current core modules, so they questioned the extent to which it would differ from those core modules. They expressed their hope that their feedback on the BASc core modules would be taken into account when developing this module. One first-year Law student shared that they expect this module to promote thinking outside the box — something he said UCL currently lacked.
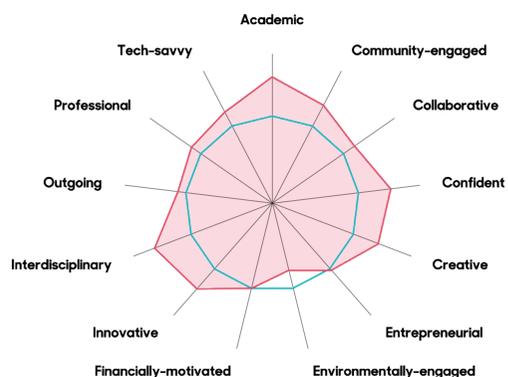
Attributes for students who chose this module in their top 3 favourites relative to average respondent

blend   potential
unrestrained   problem-based
interconnected
fusion
growth   **holistic**   reality
disruptive   interconnectedness
difference   multifacetdness
challenging   combination
application   excitement
beneficial

How focus group respondents responded to the question: 'What does interdisciplinary mean to you?'

"

I think it's important to understand and be able to use our positionality as academics within society.

Survey respondent

"

I want to work in academia in the future.

Survey respondent

EA ST

Collaborative Challenge

In collaboration with the London College of Fashion, students will address challenges, provocations, and concepts affecting the fashion landscape, engaging with current research and technologies, industry partners, and academic partners.

This module was viewed as being particularly enjoyable and innovative by our survey respondents, though they were less convinced of how useful it would be for future career prospects. Those who chose it in their top 3 considered themselves more tech-savvy, creative, and financially-motivated than average.

While our focus group participants did not share a common interest for fashion, one student did express a particular interest in sustainable fashion. One of their comments for this module was that it would be great for students to collaborate with makers and industry professionals external to UCL. This student hopes to get a hands-on experience by accessing the facilities at the London College of Fashion and thus, developing practical skills relevant to fashion.
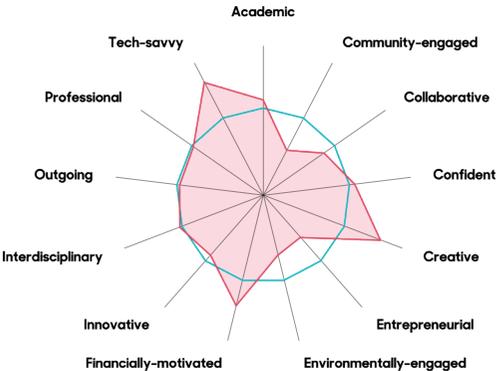
Attributes for students who chose this module in their top 3 favourites relative to average respondent

> " **I was at a fashion school before UCL and always directed my work to incorporate a more academic side of fashion so this module just really appeals to my personal interests.**
>
> **Survey respondent**

> " **I enjoy being challenged and I think as a postgraduate I will be even more so. Moreover, my passions include fashion designing and sewing but also biology and technology so the module seems like the perfect balance between passions and studies.**
>
> **Survey respondent**

EAST

East London Lab

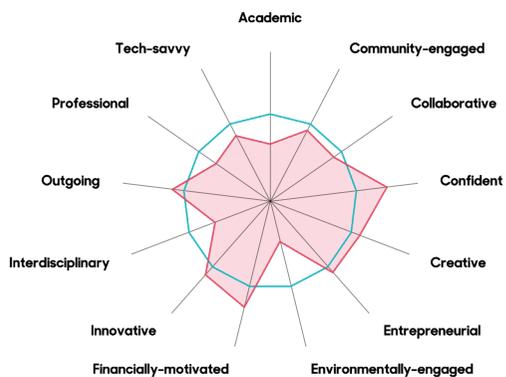*In collaboration with UCL MASc Global Urbanisms, students will use East London as a 'living lab' to explore London as a dynamic, global city. Students will investigate East London through lectures, site visits and workshops, culminating in a multimedia output.*

This module was seen by survey respondents as being very unique, innovative, and enjoyable, though people were less convinced of its usefulness for future career prospects. Students who chose it in their top 3 considered themselves particularly confident, financially-motivated, outgoing, and innovative.

Many students from the focus group considered this module unique, as they had never heard of anything quite like it before. While many seemed enthusiastic about the learning aspect of the module, one student questioned the module's practicality in terms of the impact students would have on the community. This student said that beyond presenting a proposition on how to resolve a challenge in the community, students would ideally directly impact that community.

Radar chart axes: Academic, Community-engaged, Collaborative, Confident, Creative, Entrepreneurial, Environmentally-engaged, Financially-motivated, Innovative, Interdisciplinary, Outgoing, Professional, Tech-savvy

Attributes for students who chose this module in their top 3 favourites relative to average respondent

> " Before law I was really interested in sociology and urban studies, and this seems like a really interesting and unique hands on opportunity to be studying it.

Survey respondent

> " The idea of a living lab, specifically in East London is very innovative and interesting. It offers something new.

Survey respondent

EA ST

Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice

An entrepreneurship course for students aiming to develop and test new business ideas. Through the study of existing high-potential ventures and the development of a business feasibility plan, students acquire deep insight into critical success factors and strategies.

Survey respondents who chose this module in their top 3 generally considered themselves higher than average on every attribute apart from creativity. In particular they saw themselves as entrepreneurial, tach-savvy, and confident. This module was seen by survey respondents as being extremely useful for future career prospects, but were concerned it sounded less enjoyable and harder than other options.

During the focus group, a student saw this module as very theory-based and compared it to any other Business module. They suggested that the best way to practice entrepreneurship is to design one's own company instead of writing papers about other people doing it. A comment in our survey suggested that skills learnt from this module would be useful for those in a range of careers though, including freelance writing.
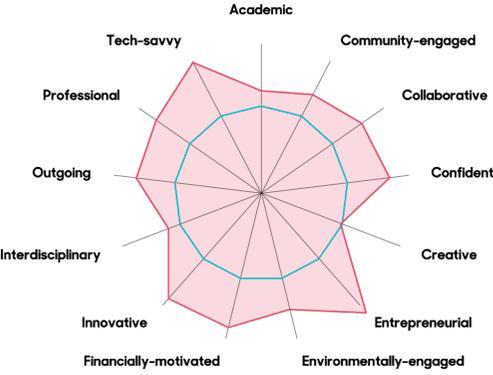
Attributes for students who chose this module in their top 3 favourites relative to average respondent

> ❝ I like the idea of learning entrepreneurship skills. As an English student, my career after graduation will be mostly self-designed, and I definitely see myself starting business to supplement my income from freelance writing.

Survey respondent

> ❝ I like the idea of entrepreneurship, but find it intimidating so this could be a good introduction.
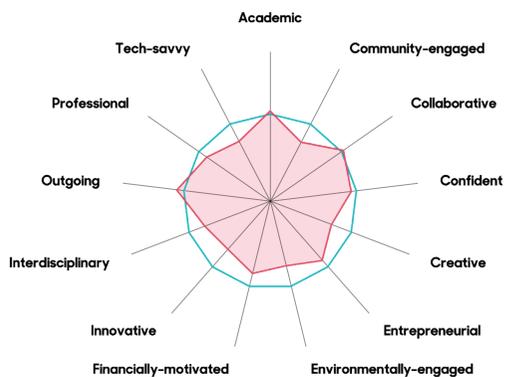
Survey respondent

EA ST

Exploring Power, Inclusion and Exclusion with Local Communities

Engaging with communities in East London, students will seek to understand their challenges, assets and makeup, develop engagement skills, and reflect on their professional practice through the lens of community engagement and inclusivity.

Survey respondents who chose this module in their top 3 generally considered themselves to be all-rounders – which is also how they considered the module itself. Out of the 9 modules it was the 3rd most likely to feature in respondent's top 3 favourites, with 32 out of 85 choosing it. It was particularly popular with students who consider themselves more collaborative than average.

One student in the focus group commented that this module would be highly useful for anyone's future career, and especially for the UCL community, for example, by understanding ways to ensure equal opportunities for all members of the community. However, some students questioned, once again, the link between the students' work as part of the module and the community.

Attributes for students who chose this module in their top 3 favourites relative to average respondent

> " I think it would be very enlightening and could feed into future policy efforts.

> " Power, exclusion and inclusion as a black woman are things that affect me and interest me. An opportunity to further explore these themes and engage with people from various different background in order to broaden my knowledge on their experiences sounds really good. Especially in our current world climate.

> " Very relevant in the modern day where social justice is (rightly) coming to the forefront of processes. Nice how its real-world based with communication with communities as things like this need to be in the material world rather than just theory based.

EAST

Find & Design Your Future

Through a variety of interdisciplinary learning methods, alongside a core component of work experience, this interdisciplinary module allows students to partake in the 'Creating Connections East' campaign where they could secure a work placement in an East London corporation.

This module was of particular interest to survey respondents who described themselves as creative and financially-motivated. Those who picked this in their top 3 of the new modules saw themselves as very environmentally- and community-engaged, though described themselves as less tech-savvy and confident than average. This module was seen as being extremely useful for career prospects, but also unique, enjoyable, and innovative.

The module was appealing to all students in the focus group. One of the STEM students shared that due to the strict requirements for their chosen medical career path, out of all the modules on offer, this module would benefit them the most. They said that every student needs time and space to plan their future, which is something university does not always provide students with.
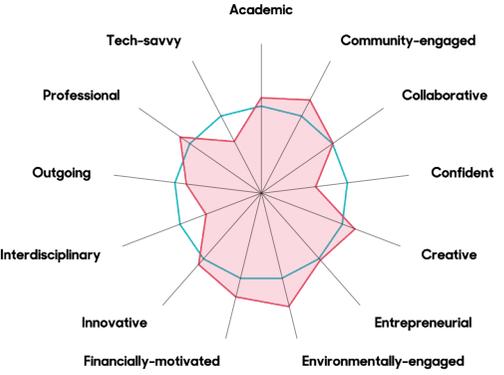
Attributes for students who chose this module in their top 3 favourites relative to average respondent

> "Securing a career as a new graduate is really important to me.
>
> Survey respondent

> "Interdisciplinary learning is key to having a holistic education and there is not much of that at an undergraduate level. Adding the component of work experience would also be great for students who are in need of some, and would be a good bridge between academia and careers.
>
> Survey respondent

EA ST

Food, Communities and the Environment

Using a problem-based learning approach to delve deeper into the politics, history and science of food, students will reflect on sustainability and equality, using global, local and community links to tackle the growing issues surrounding food and the environment.

This module was the most popular with survey respondents, with 38 out of 85 picking it in their top 3. Those who did this considered themselves more environmentally-engaged than most, but were less likely to consider themselves creative or entrepreneurial. Respondents were unconvinced that the module would be useful for their future career prospects, but saw it as particularly enjoyable, quite innovative, and the most easy-sounding of all the new modules.

One focus group student expressed particular interest in the topic, however, once again, they questioned the practicality of the module in terms of the impact students would have on the community. They suggested that a system could be created for all the community-based modules, which enabled the students' work to have direct impact on communities in real life.
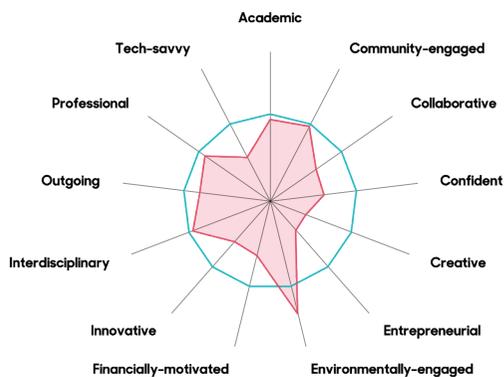
Attributes for students who chose this module in their top 3 favourites relative to average respondent

> " The culture, politics and environment of food production/distribution/consumption is exactly what I'm interested in and have tried to focus my degree on. I'm writing my undergrad dissertation precisely in this field, but it's so exciting to see a potential masters module that brings these interests together.
>
> **Survey respondent**

> " It's important for us to understand the social inequality even between students. Once we understand a little bit more about what others are going through, we can do something more about it.
>
> **Survey respondent**

> " It's an interesting concept that I haven't seen/heard of before and it's very relevant and could lead to some rewarding work.
>
> **Survey respondent**

EA ST

Protecting and Managing Creative Content

This module teaches students how to capitalise on their own or somebody else's creative processes. Students will develop practical knowledge about how to legally protect and exploit creative contents, such as books, films, research papers, art installations, etc.

Survey respondents considered this module to be an all-rounder, which is also how those that put it in their top 3 considered themselves.

Those particularly interested in the module did think of themselves as slightly more creative than average, which makes sense, but also less collaborative and outgoing, which is perhaps surprising. Respondents thought that this module sounded slightly easier and slightly less unique than most of the others.
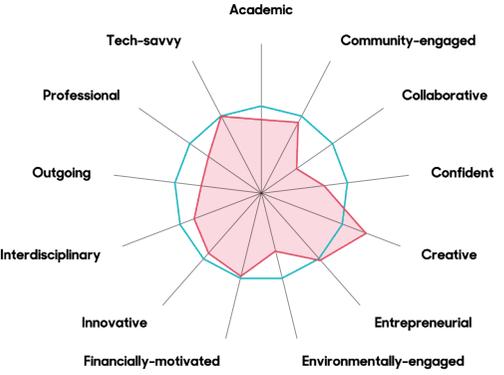
A student in our focus group expressed interest in pursuing a career in the creative industries and commented on how this module would teach them useful skills that they can apply directly into the real-world to protect their own work in the future.

Attributes for students who chose this module in their top 3 favourites relative to average respondent

> " **The module sounds like it thrives off a collaborative spirit that truly encourages the sharing of ideas (instead of pitting students against each other).**
>
> **Survey respondent**

> " **I personally get a lot of my creative content from Instagram, where I can find a lot of outside artists' work and self-taught people who make and create outside of institutions, so I think this could be a really valuable thing to consider.**
>
> **Survey respondent**

EA ST

Wellbeing and the Community

Enabling students to collaborate with peers in other programmes, community members, organisations in the third (non-profit) sector, this module adopts a research-based learning approach using established and new methods to engage with community wellbeing and social inclusion.

Those survey respondents who chose this module in their top 3 considered themselves to be particularly community- and environmentally-engaged, though less innovative, confident, and tech-savvy than average. Respondents were particularly enthusiastic regarding this modules connection with the wider community, something they thought more modules across UCL should strive to do. From reading only the module's title and a brief description, respondents thought it seemed like one of the easiest of the 9 new modules, though thought it sounded less unique than most.
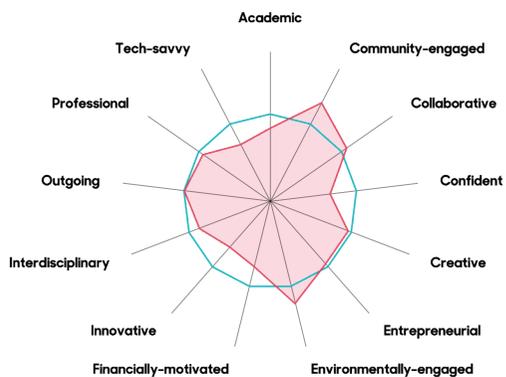
Attributes for students who chose this module in their top 3 favourites relative to average respondent

During the focus group, one student commented that out of all the community-based modules, this module seems to have the strongest link to the community in terms of the impact students could have on the community.

> "Working with the community is something more modules should involve. I really enjoyed Arts, Nature & Wellbeing this year and so this feels like another extension of that; something I think should be further promoted at UCL East.
>
> Survey respondent

> "Working with the community is something more modules should involve. I really enjoyed Arts, Nature & Wellbeing this year and so this feels like another extension of that; something I think should be further promoted at UCL East.
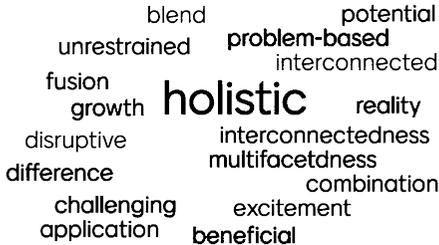>
> Survey respondent

> "Wellbeing and Communities sounds like a module opening up useful career prospects.
>
> Survey respondent

EA ST

Comparison with Staff Views

Whilst still analysing the results of our survey and focus group, we conducted a webinar with a wide range of UCL staff interested in UCL East developments. Below we compare what we heard from staff with what our student respondents said.

What does interdisciplinary mean to you?

blend   potential
unrestrained   **problem-based**
            interconnected
fusion
growth   holistic   reality
disruptive   interconnectedness
            multifacetdness
difference   combination
challenging   excitement
application
        beneficial

Students

leader   risk
listening   freedom   teams
respecting others   breadth
broader thinking   outside-of-the-box
challenge   connecting
    creativity   risk taking
integration   barrier-free
learning-from-others   experimentation
disciplinarity-plus   uncertainty
collaboration   interconnected
opportunity

Staff

Which modules would feature in your top 3 to study yourself?

● **What staff thought students would choose**

● **What students actually chose**

During the session staff said that they expected that in 20 years time, the cohort of students at UCL East would be '*empowered, digitally-literate, creative citizens*'…'*able to switch jobs, careers, and shape their own path*'…'*leading the way in all the markers of academic excellence*'…'*running charities, sothers leading start-ups or social enterprises, alwasys working in collaboration with other people.*' As the above graph shows, and small sample sizes should be taken into account, but in general staff overanticipated the appeal of socially- and community-oriented modules, and underestimated the appeal of those focusing on entrepreneurship and career development. In addition, when asked what they expected to see in future UCL East students, the word mentioned most was 'creativity'. This is noteworthy because a third of out student respondents described themselves as having little or no creativity, and were more likely to think of themselves as being 'professional' – a word none of the staff mentioned.

EAST

For more information on UCL East, the new modules, or the UCL East internship programme, please contact:

Dr Anne Preston
Associate Professor
(Teaching)
anne.preston@ucl.ac.uk