



Bridging the Early Career Readiness Gap

How Colleges Can Leverage Technology to Prepare Students for Career Success

Strategic Advisory Services

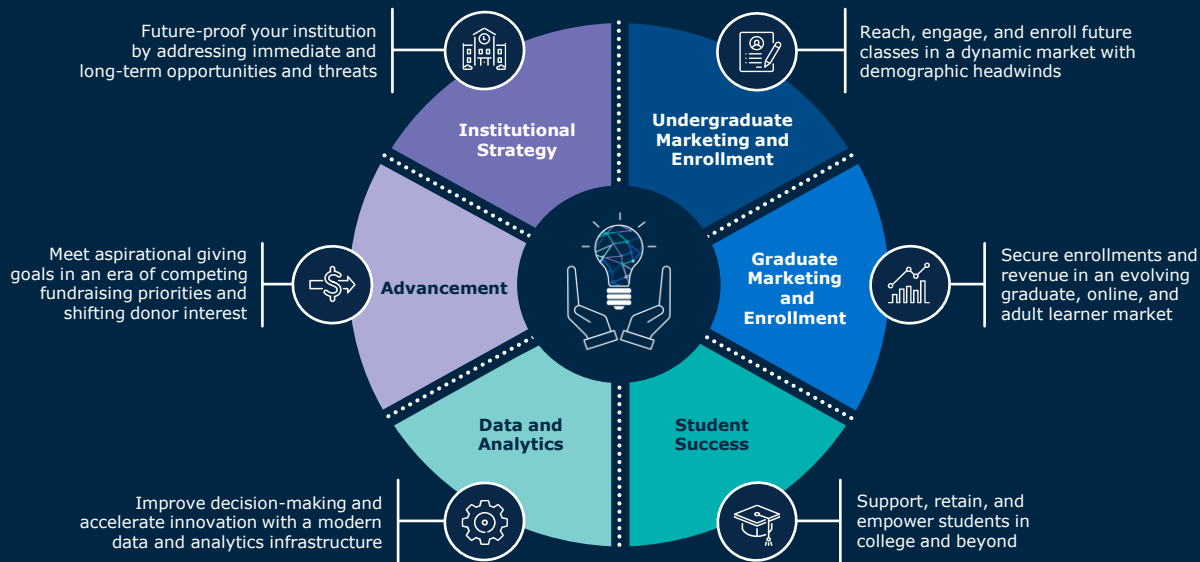
Meet Your Presenters



Logan Morris,

Associate Director,
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EAB

Insight-Powered Solutions for Your Top Priorities and Toughest Challenges

We partner with **2,800+** institutions to accelerate progress, deliver results, and enable lasting change.

95%+ of our partners return to us year after year because of results we achieve, together.

- 1 Early career readiness landscape
- 2 Three ways tech can support career readiness
- 3 Building a career ready culture



Early Career Readiness Landscape



Student Readiness Challenges Arrive at Work



75%

of high school graduates say they were moderately, slightly, or not at all **prepared to make college or career decisions** after graduation



39%

of new college graduates said their education did not prepare them for the **mental health difficulties of transitioning into the workforce**



47%

of employers reported new talent showing up to work dressed inappropriately



53%

of young professionals said they **feel burnout** at least once a week

“The **declines in critical thinking** skills and executive presence have been the most notable, and it’s compounded because they are **scared to ask for help**.”

HR Executive

“The **lack of confidence** in students transitioning into the workforce is prevalent, as well as a **lack of resiliency**.”

Associate Director, Four-Year Public University

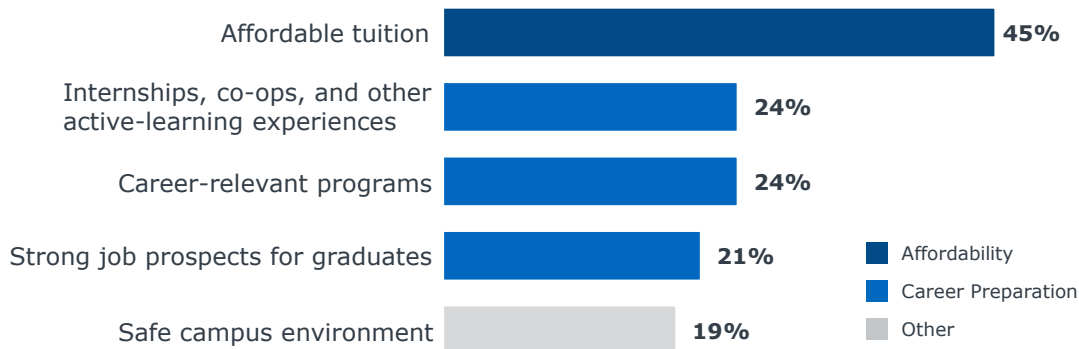
Career Preparation a Clear Value Add



Career Opportunities Heavily Influence Students' Search

Top 5 responses to, "What are you looking for in your college experience?" (EAB Communication Preferences Survey, 2023)

n=20,324



Job Placement Overcomes Cost Measures When Evaluating College Value

"What best represents value?" (EAB Communication Preferences Survey, 2023)

42%

of students say **successful job placement upon graduation** best represents the value of higher education

36%

of students say **availability of scholarships** best represents the value of higher education

Discussion



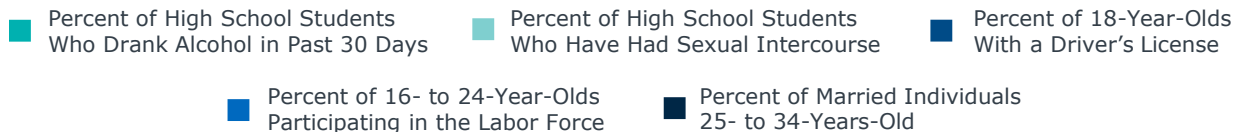
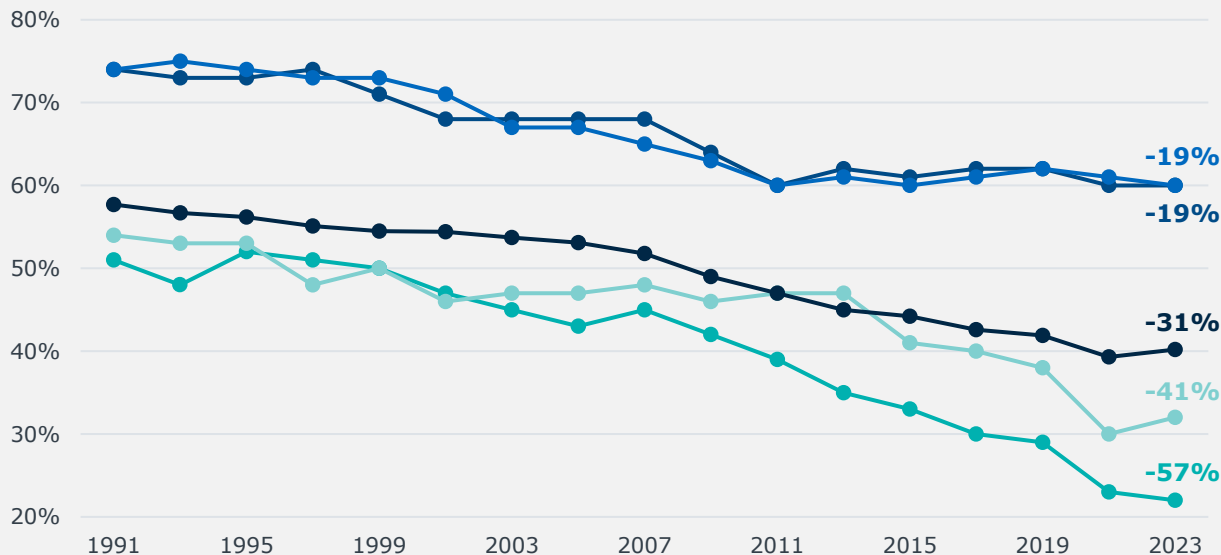
What **career readiness shifts** are you seeing among your recent graduates?





Same Milestones, Different Timeline

With Adulthood Delayed, Colleges Shoulder Even More of the “Growing Up”

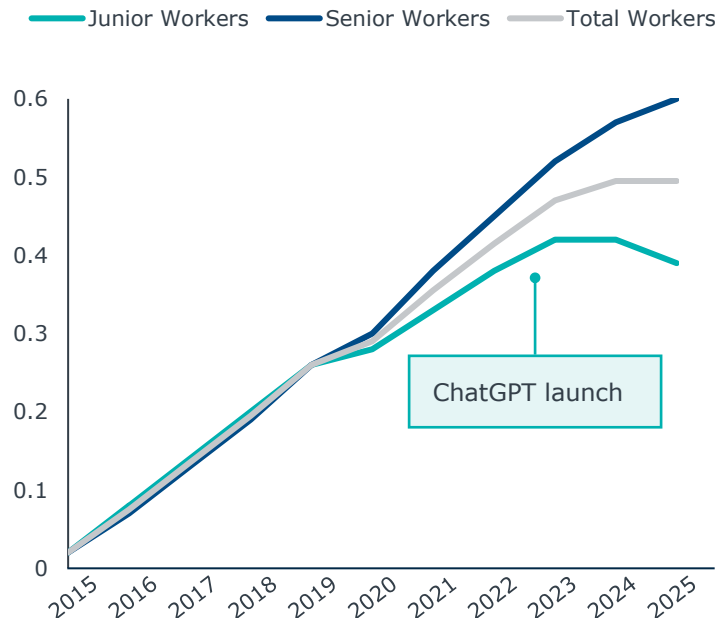


Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, [Labor Force Participation Rates](#); CDC, [Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System](#); Federal Highway Administration, [Highway Statistics](#); IPUMS, [Current Population Survey](#); EAB interviews and analysis.

No Time to Wait and See

AI's Disruption Already Visible at the Entry Level

Average Number of Total, Junior, and Senior Workers
(Normalized to 0 in January 2015) at 285,000 U.S. Firms¹



-7.7%

Decline in junior headcount
across firms that adopted AI
(Jan 2023 - Jun 2024)

-40%

Decline in junior hires in
wholesale and retail trade per
quarter at firms that adopted AI
(compared to non-adopters)

-20%

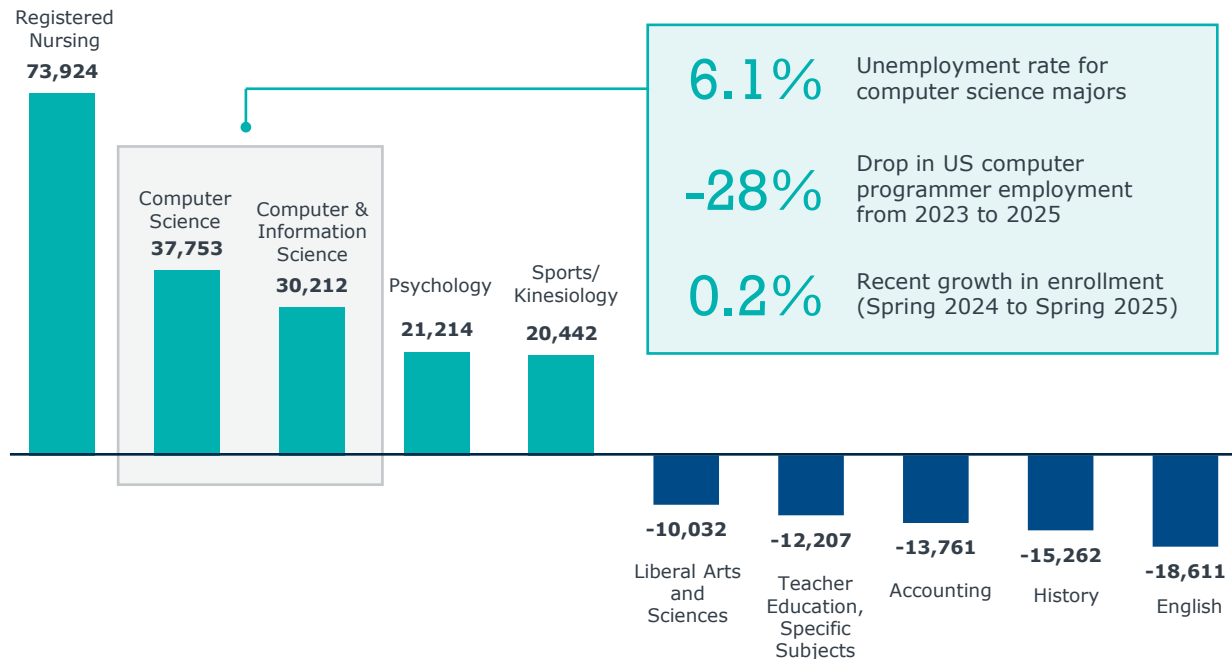
Decline in junior hires in
manufacturing per quarter at
firms that adopted AI (compared
to non-adopters)

1) Harvard University researchers' analysis of LinkedIn resumes and job postings data; n=62 million workers across 285,000 U.S. firms.

Some Historically “Safe” Majors Under Pressure

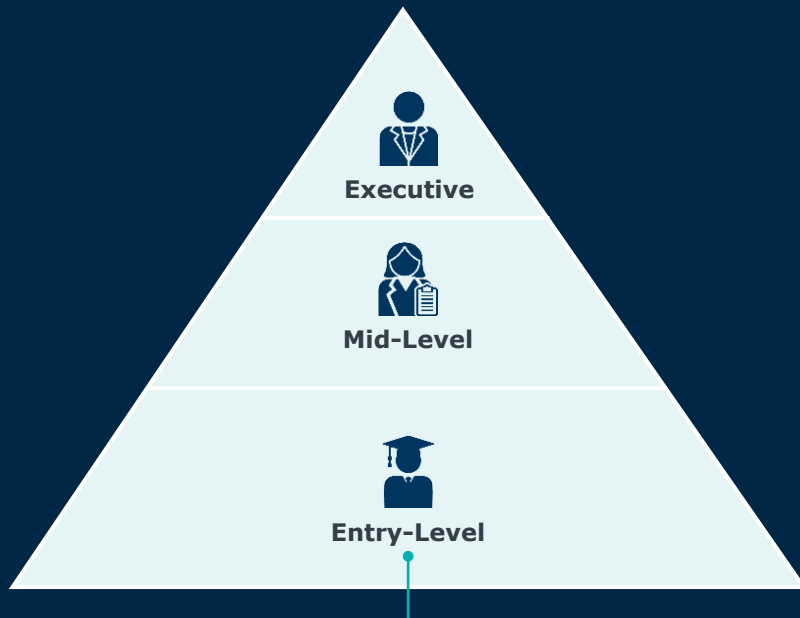


Top and Bottom Five Bachelor's Programs by Change in Completions, 2010-2024



Source: Federal Reserve Bank of New York, [Labor Market Outcomes](#); NSC, [Current Term Enrollment Estimates \(Spring 2025\)](#); NYT, [Goodbye, \\$165,000 Tech Jobs. Student Coders Seek Work at Chipotle.](#); The Atlantic, [The Computer-Science Bubble Is Bursting](#); The Washington Post, [More than a quarter of computer-programming jobs just vanished](#); EAB analysis of IPEDS data.

The Old Career Ladder



- Abundant, accessible starter jobs
- Accessible with minimal professional experience or polish
- Progression assumed—time and loyalty yield advancement
- Employers expect to train and socialize junior hires

From Pyramid to Diamond



- Entry points are scarce, tightly gated, and reserved for already-skilled candidates
- Employers demand more polished, experienced hires from day one
- First jobs feel less like “learning roles” and more like immediate proving grounds

Earnings and Career Outcomes Take Center Stage

14

22%

of high school students, who are weighing their post-secondary options, say they're **nervous about getting a job** after college



Federal Earnings Accountability (OB BB)

Graduates' median earnings must be at least as high as the median earnings of working adults aged 25 to 34 with a high school diploma in the state where the institution is located.

Increased State Accountability

Increasingly, states are tying performance-based funding to how much graduates earn (i.e., LA and MN). Additionally, some states are increasing transparency in post-graduate outcomes.

Student ROI Expectations

Students increasingly cite career outcomes and strong career guidance as markers of a quality post-secondary experience

Discussion



What are you hearing from graduates and employers about the state of the **early-career job market?**

How prepared do you think new graduates are to enter an **AI enabled workforce?**

What Employers Want From New Graduates



Real World Experience

Internships, externships, clinicals, apprenticeships, research, or substantial project experience that demonstrates the ability to contribute from day one.



AI Fluency

Uses AI tools effectively to research, analyze, create, and improve work while understanding their strengths and limitations.



Critical Thinking & Human Judgment

Evaluates AI-generated output, identifies errors or bias, asks better questions, and makes sound decisions rather than accepting answers at face value.



Professional Communication

Communicates clearly in writing and verbally, collaborates across teams, and presents ideas with confidence.



Adaptability & Grit

Learns new technologies quickly, embraces change, and continuously develops new skills as the workplace evolves.



Initiative & Problem Solving

Takes ownership, identifies opportunities, solves ambiguous problems, and works independently with minimal supervision.



Three Ways Tech Can Support Career Readiness



College-to-Career Journey a Constant Stressor



Early Years

- Explore career paths
- Visit career center
- Declare major

Final Years

- Attend career fair
- Apply and interview for jobs
- Accept job offer

Middle Years

- Create a resume
- Apply for internships and research positions
- Attend networking events

Post Graduation

- Meet financial needs
- Manage work-life balance
- Learn new job skills and workplace norms

Higher Ed Often Overlooks Mental Health Connections

Three Failure Paths

1

Failing to extend **resilience-building** programs across the student lifecycle

2

Overlooking **student agency** in reducing anxiety and fostering preparedness

3

Ignoring the need and ability to help cultivate **inclusive workplace** environments

Technology Can Help At Every Step



Three Ways To Integrate Tech:



Build early momentum by nudging students over initial hurdles.

- Most students need quick reminders
- Students aren't sure where to start



Reduce the burden on staff by making career guidance automated and self-guided.

- Creating concrete "check points"
- Reduce burden on staff while still guiding students



Take advantage of new ways students can get relevant work experience through online opportunities

- Increase access to the "day to day" of different fields
- Virtual job simulations

Career Exploration and Integration From Day One

Incorporating Careers into Advisement Across The Student Lifecycle



Academic & Career Advising Center

Going beyond traditional advisement and career services

New students

Identify and affirm students' career goals while offering opportunities for exploration

Continuing students

Reinforce engagement with their career decision through "inescapable" touchpoints

Graduating students

Help students land jobs that reflect their qualifications and career goals

90% *Avg. job placement rate across the past 4 years*

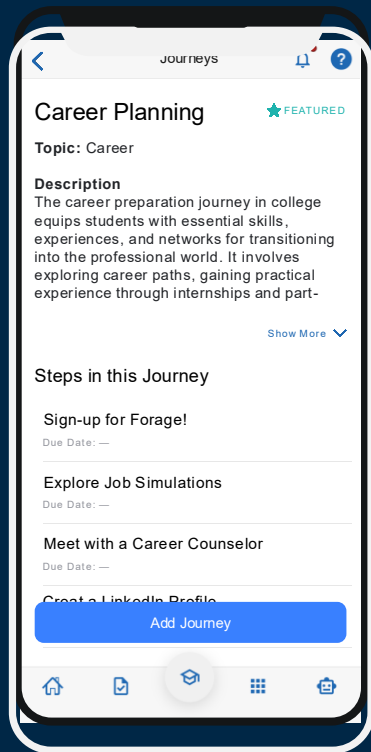
Tech Touches Supporting This Work

- ✓ Intake survey to understand students' college and career goals
- ✓ Faculty progress reports and student "hand raise" self-alerts for early intervention
- ✓ Major and Career Explorer tools
- ✓ Campaigns and appointment scheduling to connect directly with students



Digitizing Career Milestones

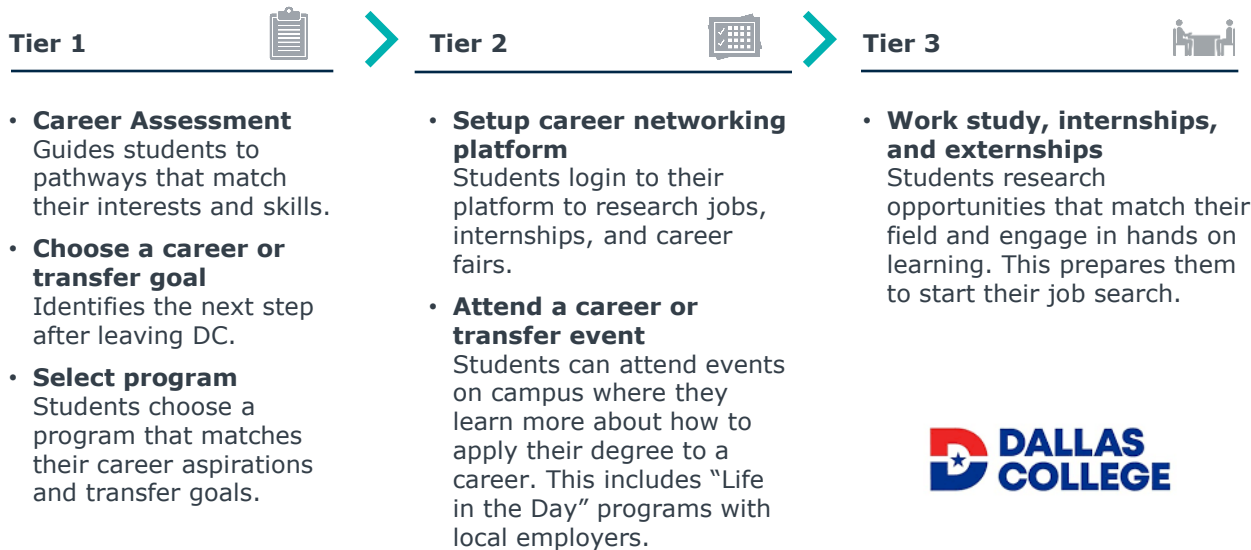
Journeys



Dallas College's Career Readiness Journey



Milestones created in Navigate360 for all FTIC students



How are students guided on their career readiness journey?

After census, all FTIC students are assigned to a career and transfer counselor who prompts them to complete career readiness milestones in Navigate360. Counselors can message students, create campaigns, and prompt appointments all from Navigate360.

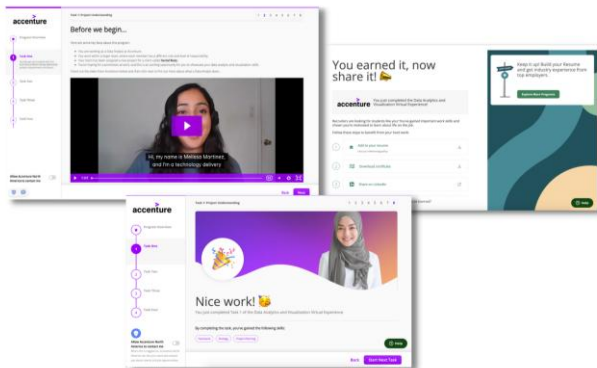
Introducing Forage

www.theforage.com



What Are Job Simulations?

Self-paced online learning programs that simulate the work performed in different roles at different companies through interactive hypothetical tasks.



Scalable

Unlimited participation



Engaging

Include hands-on exercises



Inclusive

No barriers to participation



Always on

Available on demand 24/7/365

4M+
students using
Forage

300+
job simulations
across
a variety of
careers

130+
employers
across diverse
industries

3.3x
students are 3x
times as likely
to land a job
after completing
a sim

BCG

Deloitte.

Red Bull

BANK OF AMERICA

Walmart

Increasing Access To Career Exploration

Where do we start?

- To expand access to career-skill development, Stony Brook University integrated the Forage platform into its curriculum, providing flexible experiential learning opportunities for students who cannot participate in traditional internships.

Forage Usage:

- Faculty members have incorporated Forage simulations into more than 50 courses across the business school, health professions, and other programs.
- By assigning simulations as course projects, faculty can enhance students' understanding of careers without having to develop their own content.

Stony Brook Forage Impact

15k+ Student users

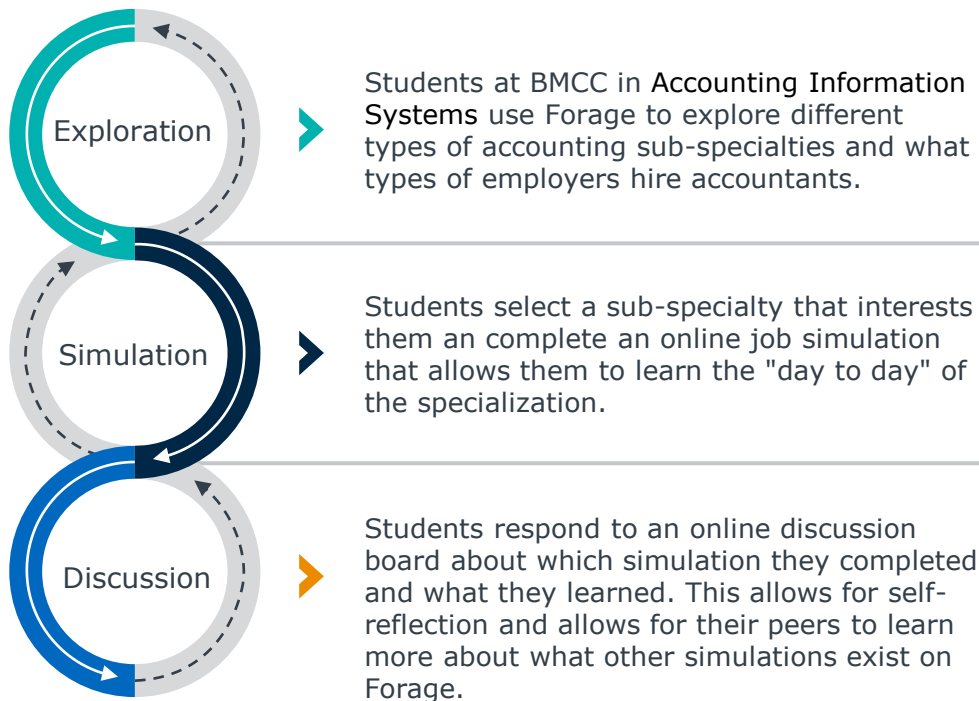
80% Say they gained practical skills

2x Increase in student understanding of career roles and duties



Stony Brook
University

BMCC Forage Accounting Courses



Students can also explore modules on how to get hired- including guidance on resume writing, interviewing, and how to network.

Discussion



Where can your college use tech to add **more guidance** and to expand **career exploration opportunities?**

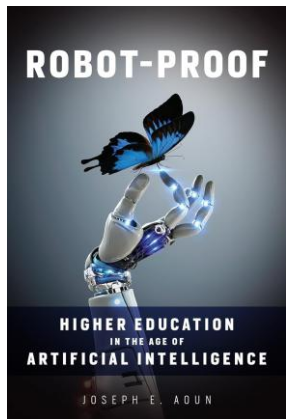


Building A Career Focused Culture



Towards a “Robot-Proof” Graduate

Years Before AI Took Center Stage, Joseph Aoun Sketched the Playbook



2017

Humanics Curriculum

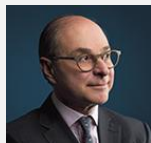
- Integrate tech, data, and human literacies across the curriculum
- Prioritize cultivating literacies and competencies over content delivery
- Increase interdisciplinary, applied, project-based learning in classroom

Experiential Learning

- Connect classroom learning with practical, real-world experiences
- Expand co-ops and internships, recognize co-curriculars as learning
- Provide a secondary transcript to document applied learning

Lifelong Learning Mindset

- Offer reskilling to help grads thrive amid ongoing tech changes
- Support alumni with lifelong access to learning and career services



“Instead of educating college students for jobs that are about to disappear under the rising tide of technology, twenty-first-century universities should liberate them from outdated career models and give them ownership of their own futures.”

A Return to Relationships



Students Are Frustrated With Job Postings... And So Are Employers

61%

Of Gen Z job seekers submit at least 100 applications

11K

Applications per minute on LinkedIn, hundreds of applications per post

43%

Of HR professionals use AI to manage volume of applications

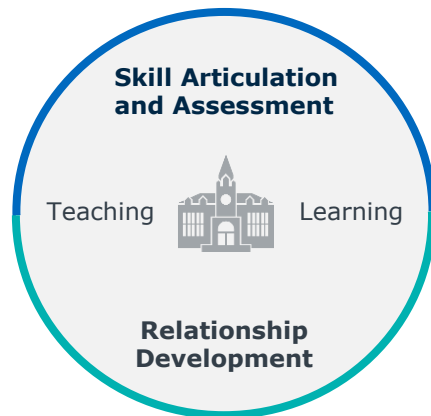
25%

Of job applicants worldwide could be fake by 2028

Networks May Matter More Than Ever

- ✓ Referred applicants have a **50%** chance of advancing past resume review (compared to 12% for non-referrals)
- ✓ Employers are investing more in referral programs to boost verified candidates
- ✓ Recruiters are posting fewer jobs publicly to avoid application overload, fake profiles
- ✓ Smaller, local firms may hire junior talent at higher rates moving forward

Higher Ed's Pivotal Roles



Faculty as the Fulcrum



Curriculum Design

- Embed AI fluency into disciplinary content
- Keep syllabi current with evolving tools, industries, and employer needs
- Balance AI/tech fluency with distinctly human differentiators in every course

Pedagogy

- Mirror workplace ambiguity in projects
- Design activities and assignments where AI is a co-worker
- Incorporate relational intelligence practices in the classroom

Professional AI Use

- Use AI transparently in teaching prep and grading
- Narrate AI-related judgement and risk management
- Demonstrate professional norms for responsible AI use

Employer & Career Integration

- Stay current on discipline-specific career pathways
- Build ongoing feedback loops with employers and alumni
- Ensure capstones and assignments include external validation

Assessment

- Grade the process, not just the final product
- Equip students with verifiable evidence of career readiness
- Assess relational and professional skills with the same weight as technical ability

Continuous Learning

- Engage in continuous reskilling cycles
- Collaborate with colleagues across disciplines on innovative approaches
- Contribute to institution-wide efforts by sharing AI lessons and failures



Discussion



Which of the "faculty as a fulcrum" recommendations would **feel most attainable** at your college?

What Thriving Schools Will Do



Hardwire AI Literacy

Embed AI literacy across programs as a credential requirement, rather than an optional add-on



Guarantee Work Experiences

Partner with local employers to embed apprenticeships, internships, and applied learning in every pathway



Elevate Relational Intelligence

Make perspective-taking, trust-building, and conflict navigation core learning outcomes, not just soft skills



Reimagine Career Services

Transition from a coaching center to a talent broker that actively connects students with employers



(Re)design for a Dual-Edge

Ensure all programs equip students with technical fluency and human differentiation



Scaffold Network-Building

Incentivize, enable, and track professional networking with the same intentionality as degree progress



Incentivize Faculty Innovation

Recognize and reward faculty who co-design with employers and integrate AI/technology into instruction



Enable Lifelong Learning

Create flexible on-/off-ramps through stackable credentials to allow students to pause, return, and regularly upskill

Breakout Activity

Preparing Graduates for the AI-Era Workforce

Campus Readiness Check

As AI reshapes entry-level work, employers increasingly expect graduates to contribute on day one with workplace experience, AI fluency, and durable human skills. As a team, assess your institution's readiness and identify one opportunity that would have the greatest impact on graduate success. Use the checklist below to assess where your college is excelling, and where you need to dedicate more resources.

Career Preparation

Students begin career

Career milestones (n
are intentionally em

Students understand

Faculty and career s
employment.

Students can clearly
will bring to an emp

Experiential Learn

Every student has a
apprenticeships, or p

Employer partnershi

Students graduate w
employers.

Experiential learning
financial, work, or fa

Students regularly s
graduation.

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Analyze Your Results

Total your responses from the previous pages and identify the categories where your institution has the greatest gaps. Then, browse our resources on the next page to begin making enhancements.

Assessment Categories	"No"	"Partially"	Total "No" and "Partially"
I. Career Preparation			
II. Experiential Learning			
III. AI Workforce Readiness			
IV. Professional Skills			
TOTALS:			

Reflect on Your Answers

1. In what area is our institution strongest?
2. Where is the greatest opportunity for us to improve? Who needs to be involved in that discussion?
3. What is one action we could realistically implement within the next 90 days?

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3

EAB-1220

1 Complete Pages 1 and 2 of your workbook

2 Tally your "No" and "Partially" for each section (pg. 3)

3 Complete the three reflection questions (pg. 3)

4 Share your responses with your table or a neighbor. Determine your similarities and differences.

Check Out Our Resource Center

Use the QR code to access materials referenced in today's session and to connect with EAB.





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