EAB

The New Rules of Workforce Readiness

How Productive Friction Helps New Grads Thrive

Today's Presenters



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Research

Bringing Together Technology and Strategic Guidance

Navigate360: Higher Ed's Leading CRM

Make every student feel like your only student from first inquiry to first career

EAB's Strategic Advisory Services

Help higher ed leaders make stronger decisions and move priority work forward

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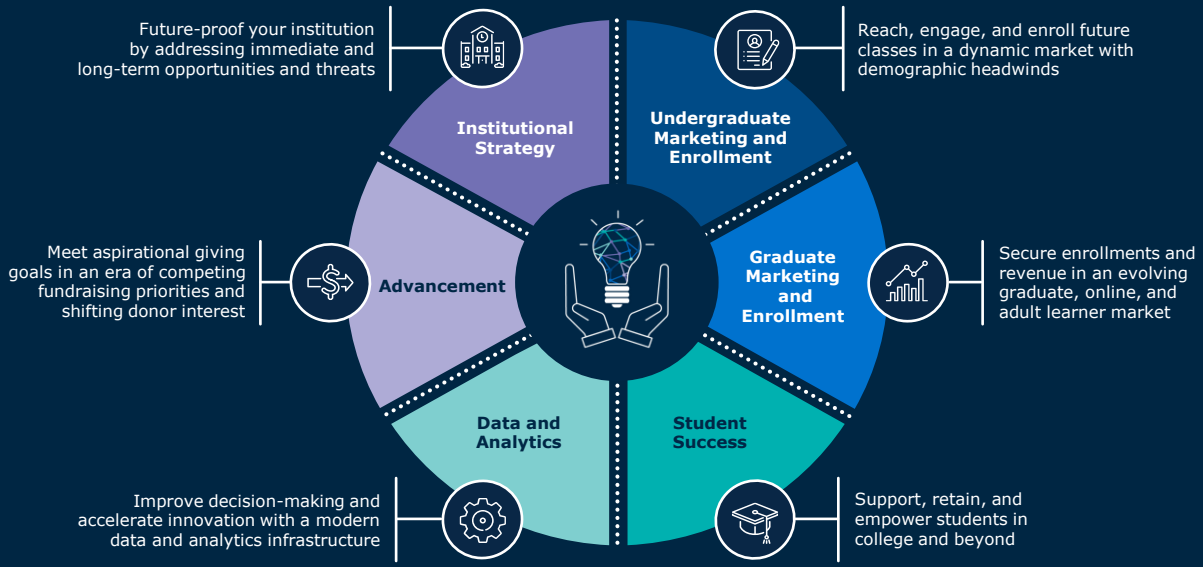
Education's Trusted Partner to Help Schools and Students Thrive

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.

Three Questions Guiding Our Work

1. How is AI changing **entry-level roles** for recent college grads?

2. How is AI impacting **learning** and cognition?

3. How must we redesign the **student journey** in response?

One paradox connects all three.

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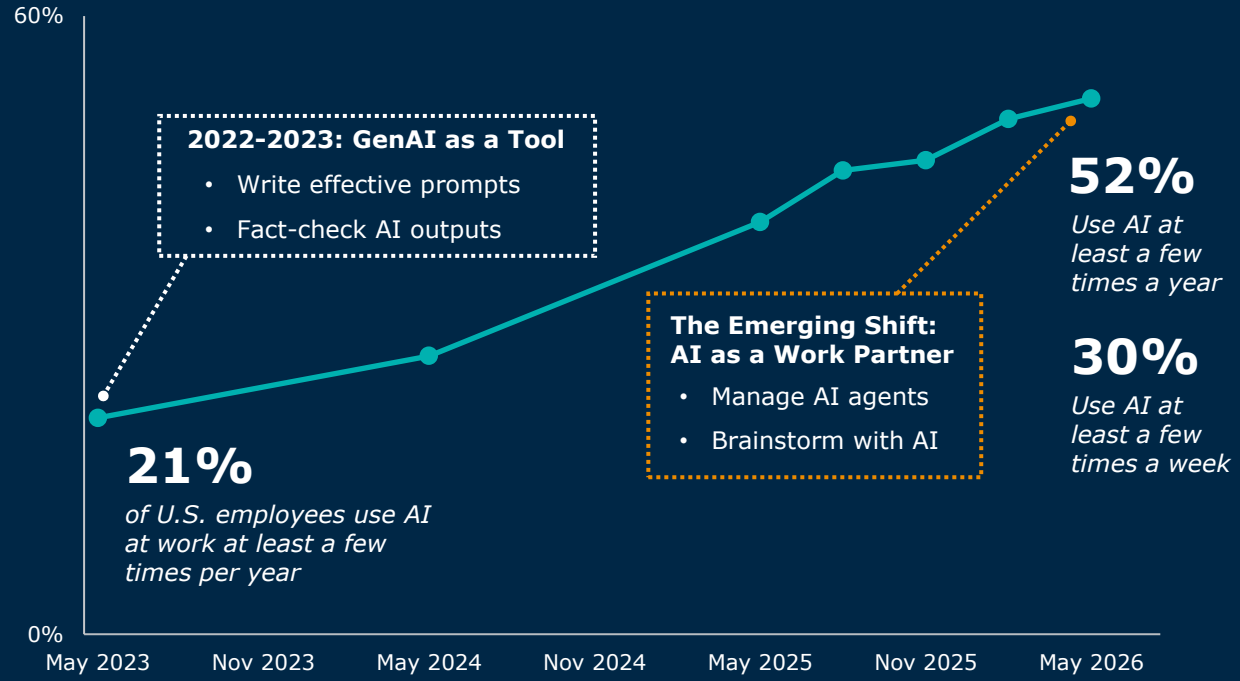
Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Three Years After ChatGPT, AI Use Is Widespread



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Sources: Gallup, "Indicator: Artificial Intelligence," Accessed August 6, 2026; EAB interviews and analysis.

AI is Reshaping the Entry-Level Ladder

5.7%

Recent grad **unemployment rate** (vs. **4.1%** for all workers), Q2 2026

7.8%

Unemployment rate for recent **computer engineering** grads, 2024

-7.7%

Relative decline in junior employment at GenAI-adopting firms (Jan 2023 – Jun 2024)

Sources: Federal Reserve Bank of New York, "The Labor Market for Recent College Graduates"; Melissa DiMarzio, "No Country for Young Grads," The Burning Glass Institute, July 28, 2025; Hosseini, Seyed M. and Lichtinger, Guy, Generative AI as Seniority-Biased Technological Change; EAB interviews and analysis.

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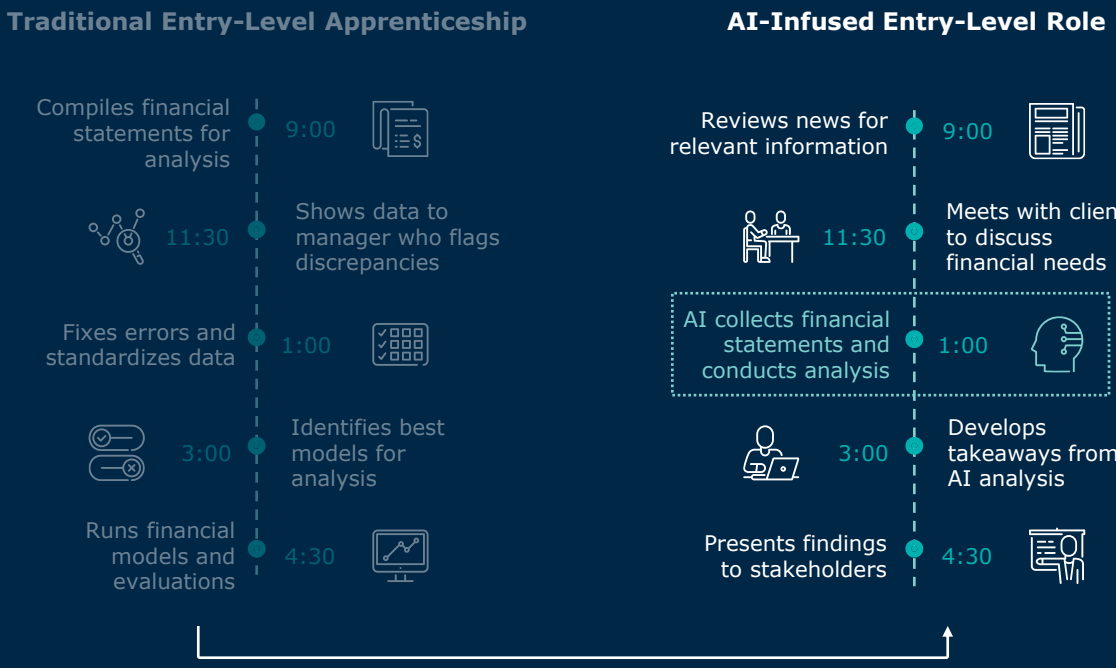
For Those Who Find Jobs, Work Looks Different Now



- *Less time learning through routine work*
- *Earlier responsibility for judgment and communication*

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Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

New Grads Must Perform Higher-Order Work Sooner

Traditional Ramp

- Learn professional norms through observation
- Complete structured, lower-risk tasks
- Build toward greater responsibility

Entry-Level Expectations

Compressed Ramp

- Analyze complex information
- Question and verify AI output
- Communicate with partners and leaders
- Exercise judgment amid ambiguity
- Learn professional norms while contributing at a higher level

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Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

AI Raises the Value of Judgment—and Can Undermine Its Development

> Getting the right answer from… [AI] can create the illusion of learning—but it can also trigger "**cognitive surrender,**" where students fall back on AI at the first hint of struggle.… They cheat themselves of the cognitive friction and **productive struggle** necessary for actual learning."
>
> MIT Report on AI and Education

Students can produce a strong answer without building the capabilities required to reach or evaluate it.

Source: MIT Ad Hoc Committee on AI Use in Teaching, Learning, and Research Training. *Report*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, August 13, 2026. https://aiandeducation.mit.edu/report/; EAB interviews and analysis.

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We Have Rightly Expanded Support Across the Student Journey

While colleges have rightly expanded **support** for students to reduce anxiety and give learners confidence…



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Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Now We Must Pair Support with Intentional Challenge

While colleges have rightly expanded **support** for students to reduce anxiety and give learners confidence…



…reintroducing meaningful challenge—**productive friction**—is necessary to account for the cognitive surrender produced by AI.

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Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Not All Friction is Productive

Unproductive Friction	Productive Friction
Confusing processes	Ambiguous problems
Hidden expectations	Consequential choices
Red tape and unnecessary steps	Trial, feedback, and revision
Inaccessible systems	Independent judgment

Productive friction is **intentional challenge** that requires learners to exercise judgment, adapt, and try again.

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Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

When We Remove Bad Friction, We Must Design Productive Friction Back In

Necessary improvements	Risks if challenge is not restored
Greater family engagement	Fewer opportunities for students to self-advocate
High-touch, student-centered service	Staff may solve problems students could learn to navigate
Streamlined degree pathways	Fewer meaningful choices through which students develop judgment
More career-focused curricula	Less opportunity to explore unfamiliar fields and ideas

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Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Questions for Reflection

1. Where have we successfully **removed bad friction** from the student journey?
2. Where must we now design **productive friction** back in?
3. What **support** would make that challenge developmental and equitable?

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Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

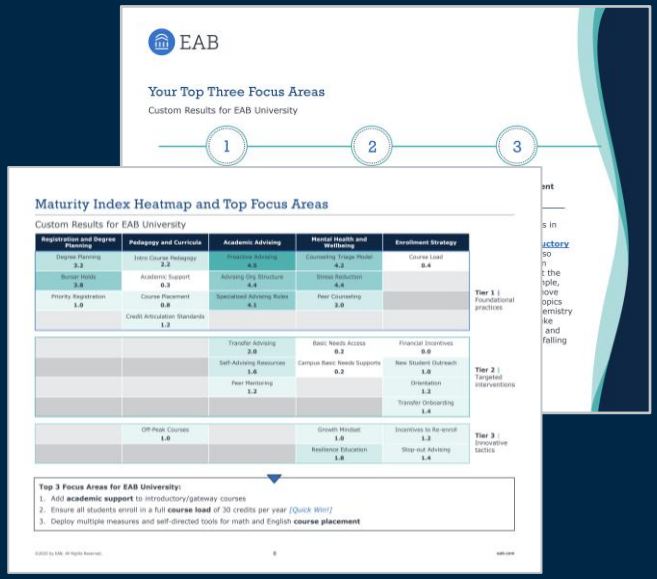
Student Outcomes Maturity Index

Strategic Advisory Services

Increase revenue amid unpredictable enrollments by retaining and graduating more students

Organize resources to address growing academic, socioemotional, and financial **readiness challenges**

Understand current state of practice across **decentralized organizations**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Your Top Three Focus Areas

Custom Results for EAB University

1 2 3

Maturity Index Heatmap and Top Focus Areas

Custom Results for EAB University

Registration and Degree Planning	Pedagogy and Curricula	Academic Advising	Mental Health and Wellbeing	Enrollment Strategy	
Degree Planning 3.2	Intro Course Pedagogy 2.7	Proactive Advising 4.5	Counseling Triage Model 4.2	Course Load 0.4	
Bursar Holds 3.8	Academic Support 0.3	Advising Org Structure 4.4	Stress Reduction 4.4		
Priority Registration 1.0	Course Placement 0.8	Specialized Advising Roles 4.1	Peer Counseling 3.0		Tier 1 | Foundational practices
	Credit Articulation Standards 1.3				
		Transfer Advising 3.8	Basic Needs Access 0.3	Financial Incentives 0.0	
		Self-Advising Resources 1.6	Campus Basic Needs Supports 0.2	New Student Outreach 1.0	Tier 2 | Targeted interventions
		Peer Mentoring 1.2		Orientation 1.2	
				Transfer Onboarding 1.4	
	Off-Peak Courses 1.0		Growth Mindset 1.0	Incentives to Re-enroll 1.2	Tier 3 | Innovative tactics
			Resilience Education 1.0	Stop-out Advising 1.4	

Top 3 Focus Areas for EAB University:

1. Add **academic support** to introductory/gateway courses
2. Ensure all students enroll in a full **course load** of 30 credits per year *[Quick Win!]*
3. Deploy multiple measures and self-directed tools for math and English **course placement**

How can we help? Let us know in the poll.

Learn more about the Student Outcomes Maturity Index

Schedule an overview of EAB's Strategic Advisory Services Partnership

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Use AI Deliberately: Human-First and AI-Intensive Learning

Human-First Activities

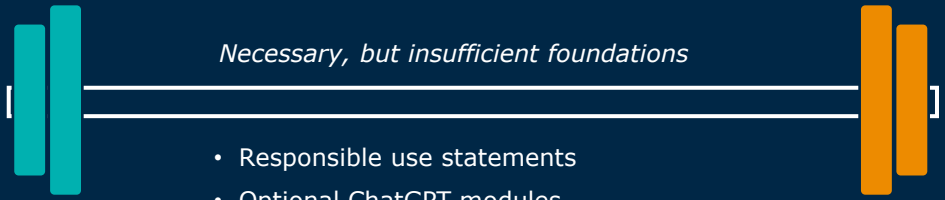
Add productive friction back in by removing access to frictionless technology

- Write essays without AI
- Work through proofs by hand
- Read academic papers

AI-First Activities

Build productive friction into open-ended, complex projects where AI use is required

- Build products with AI
- Critique an AI-generated answer
- Complete a group project with AI as a teammate



- Responsible use statements
- Optional ChatGPT modules
- Basic prompting tips added to existing courses

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Sources: Simas Kucinskas, "University Education as We Know It Is Over," *Inexact Science*, November 5, 2025; EAB interviews and analysis.

More Challenge Requires More Support

Challenge without adequate support … promotes defensiveness and **anxiety**. Support without adequate challenge… promotes **lifelessness**. Both kinds of imbalance lead to withdrawal.



Basic Needs Support
Food, housing, childcare

Mental Health Support
Counseling, wellness campaigns

Academic Guidance
Advising, office hours

Mentorship & Belonging
Peers, faculty, staff, alumni mentors

Sources: University of Florida, Introduction to Student Development Theories, retrieved August 7, 2026; EAB interviews and analysis.

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Coordinated Care Removes Unnecessary Barriers Between Students and the Support They Need



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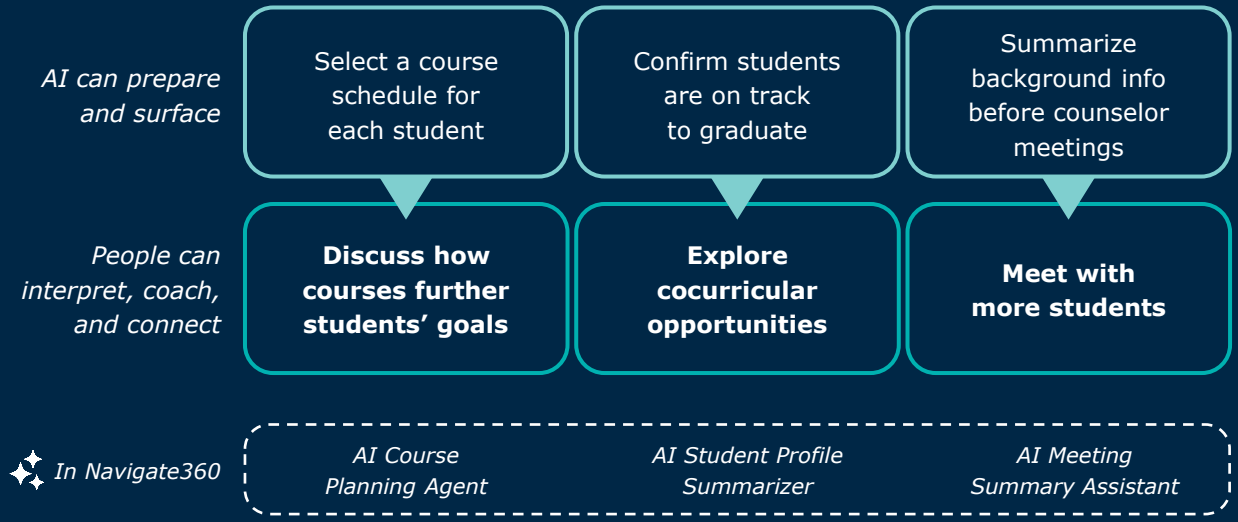
Use AI to Remove Bad Friction, Reinvest Time in Students



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10 minutes

Saved per student appointment using **AI Meeting Summary Assistant**, allowing St. Edwards to offer additional appointment times

2.3 pp

first-to-second year retention loss mitigated after **Agent Campaign's two-way outreach** helped 79 students re-enroll late in the cycle



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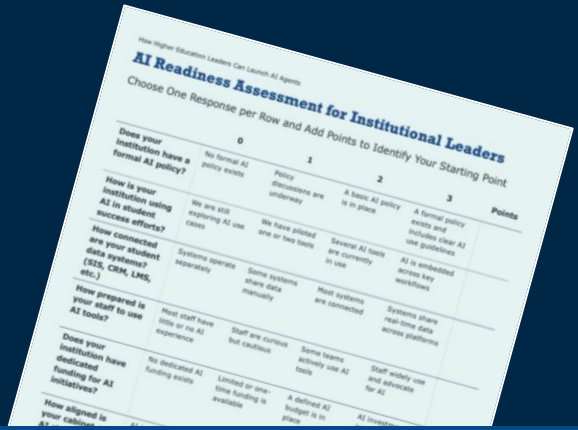
Get the Playbook: **AI Agents in Student Success**





The Higher Ed Leader's Guide to Responsible Implementation

Playbook

AI Readiness Assessment for Institutional Leaders

Included maturity assessment

How can we help? Let us know in the poll.

Send me EAB's latest playbook on AI agents in student success

Schedule a Navigate360 demo tailored to my campus's priorities

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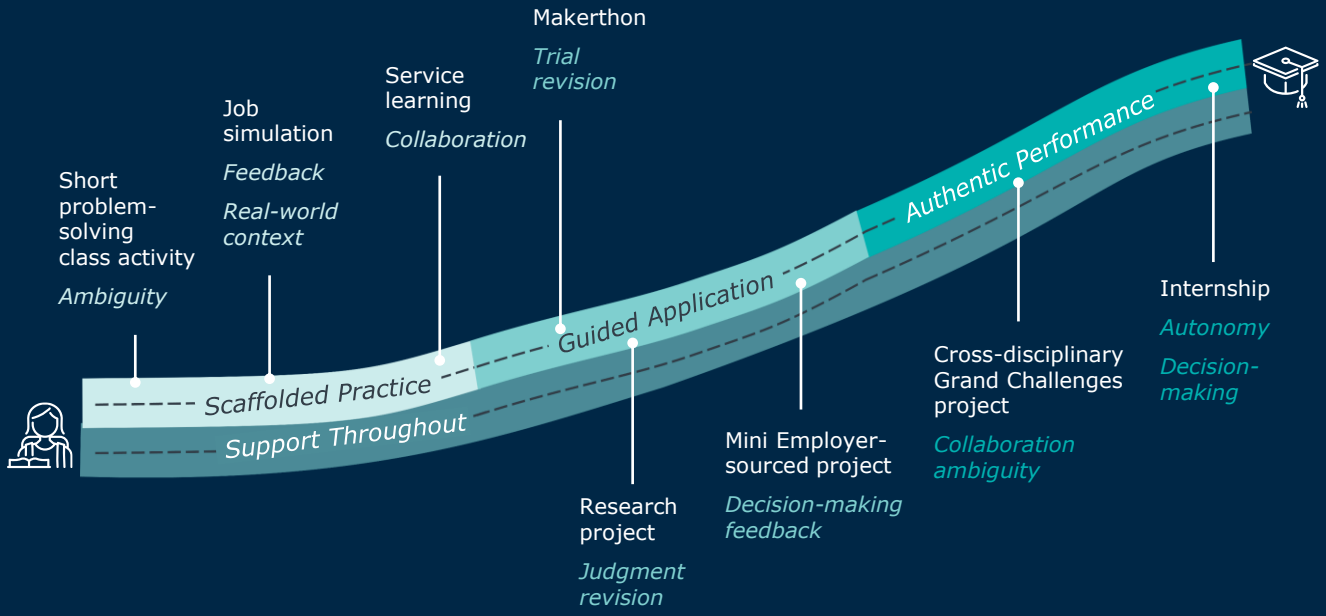
Reimagining the Student Journey with Good Friction



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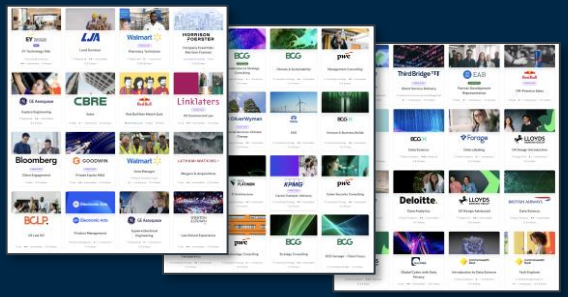
Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Embedding Productive Friction Into the Curriculum with Forage

Choose from Hundreds of Simulations Within the Forage Library



Personal Exploration

Discover interests with Career Explorer

Industry Exposure

Experience a day in the life of an electrical engineer

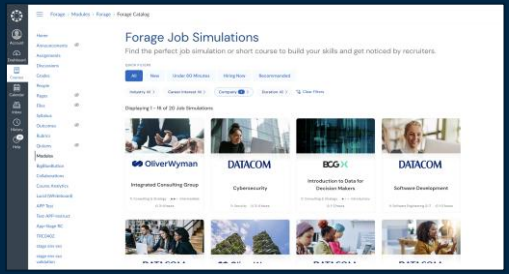
Skill Development

Analyze client data with Python

Forage Foundations | GE Aerospace | BCG X

NEW WORKFORCE READINESS PLATFORM

- Employer-created job simulations **accessible in the LMS**
- **Curriculum mapping** assists faculty with selecting the right experience in each course



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Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Preparing Students to Meet the Moment

As hiring managers raise expectations for entry-level roles…

…students leave with experiences they can explain, evidence they can show, and judgment they can trust.



Tell me about a time you solved an ambiguous problem

I took on an employer project where I had to solve…





Tell me about a time you worked through disagreement or difference.

My Grand Challenges project team disagreed. I helped us…





Tell me about a time you used AI and had to question, correct, or improve its output

In my research project, I tested an AI-generated analysis and found gaps. I improved it by…



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Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

How Can We Help?

*Let us know how you'd like **EAB to follow-up with you...***



1. Schedule an overview of **EAB's Strategic Advisory Services** Partnership
2. Learn more about the **Student Outcomes Maturity Index**
3. Schedule a **custom Navigate360 demo** focused on your institution's priorities
4. Learn more about the role of **AI agents in student success**
5. Schedule a **custom demo of Forage**'s employer-created virtual job simulations

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The New Rules of Workforce Readiness

1

AI increases the premium on **human judgment.**

2

Judgment is developed through **productive friction.**

3

Productive friction must be architected **throughout the student journey.**

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Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Your Charge as Architects

1

Remove friction that blocks progress.



2

Design friction that builds judgment.



3

Pair increasing challenge with increasing support.



4

Give every student repeated, authentic practice.



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Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Thank you!



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