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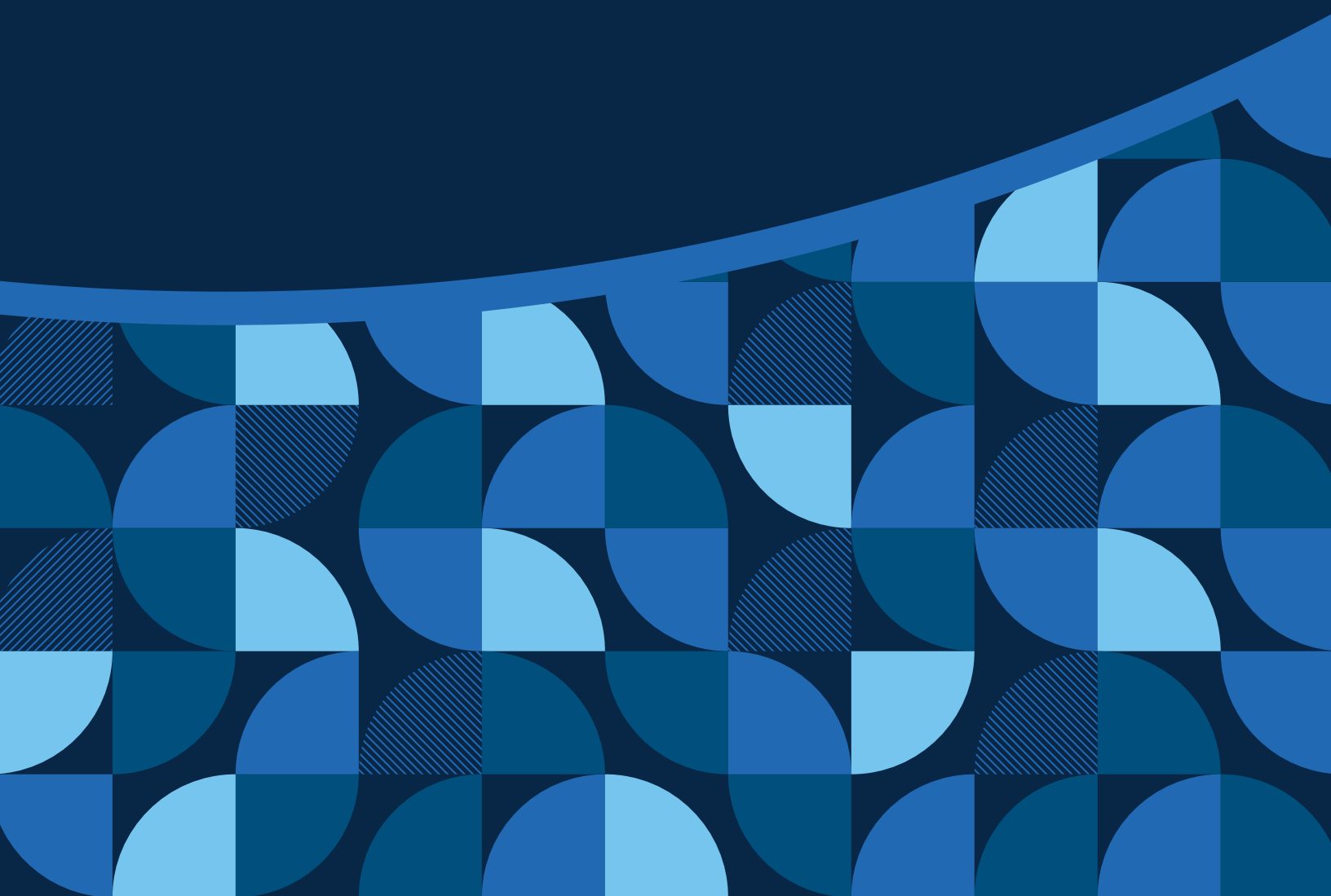
Bridging the Early Career Readiness Gap Through Student-Facing Technology

Colleges Under Pressure from All Sides to Prove Career Outcomes

Colleges and universities are under increasing pressure from all sides—parents, employers, governments, accreditors, and students themselves—to improve career outcomes for graduates and demonstrate a return on their investment of time and money. This pressure is compounded by new accountability measures, such as the Carnegie Foundation's forthcoming "student access and earnings" classification, which will assess institutions in part based on the economic outcomes of their graduates.[1,2] This shift in focus has intensified the demand for colleges to ensure that graduates are not only well-educated but also gainfully employed shortly after completing their studies. As a result, institutions are now strongly compelled to prioritize career readiness initiatives and job placement strategies to demonstrate their value and effectiveness in fostering economic mobility.

There is plenty of evidence that colleges could be doing more to get students career ready. Students say they do not feel they are equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate the complexities of the modern job market. Surveys show that three-quarters of new high school graduates feel unprepared to make informed college and career decisions,[3] and less than half of college students express confidence in their ability to secure employment post-graduation.[4] Once graduates enter the workforce, many report feeling unprepared for the mental health challenges associated with this transition.[5] A significant number of them experience burnout at least once a week.[6]

Career readiness could become even more of a challenge over the next few years. While in some ways career readiness has always been a concern among graduates, the pandemic years further complicated matters by disrupting traditional educational experiences and hindering the development of essential social and professional skills among students. Now many of these students are entering the workforce with misaligned expectations and understanding about what a job entails. Employers report that recent graduates seem to be struggling more with work hours, deadlines, communication expectations and basic cultural norms,[X] echoing the concerns that college professors have been expressing about this cohort over the last few years. It remains to be seen if today's college students, many of whom were in high school during the pandemic, will struggle with the same issues.

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 college students are not confident or only somewhat confident that they **know how to get a job after college**

53% of young professionals said they **feel burnout** at least once a week

Student success leaders in academic affairs and student affairs are responding in a myriad of ways, notably in making changes to curricula, adding experiential learning opportunities, and standing up shorter credentials that help students gain skills in rapidly emerging fields, such as artificial intelligence.

As part of these initiatives, many advising offices want to evolve to provide students with hybrid academic and career support. This sounds good in principle—students often want to plan their majors and careers together—but can run into some significant challenges. Of these, staffing turnover may be the greatest. Turnover is already making it difficult to keep full teams of academic advisors in seat, and those that remain are working extra hours to make up for the gap. Asking advisors to upskill during this time may be a bridge too far for many team leaders.

How can student success leaders respond to the new mandate to support career readiness while protecting the capacity of their advising teams? This briefing outlines three recommendations for how technology can be used to supplement your advisors capacity and skills to provide students with effective, self-paced early career guidance.

1 Build early momentum by nudging students over initial hurdles.

Recruiters recommend that potential candidates connect with them during the first two years in college. Fortunately, this early engagement might simply mean doing a career assessment, opening a LinkedIn account, and attending a recruitment event. Many students just need nudges or quick reminders to complete these steps, and most advising offices already have communication technology that can support these messages.

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

Career guidance differs from academic guidance in that many early career steps can be completed by students on their own using publicly available online tools. Colleges operating in a budget and staffing constrained environment can take advantage of this by developing automated checklists for students to follow. Advisors can then redirect their time to support students who are not making progress on their own.

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

Paid internships remain the gold standard for career preparation, yet they can be in short supply and are difficult to scale equitably without major investment from the institution. Less intensive options are emerging, such as micro-internships or online job simulations, that can be delivered at scale and provide students with many of the same benefits.

1

Build early momentum by nudging students over initial hurdles.

Employers want college students to begin engaging in the career recruitment process before the end of their second year[7]. This timing puts students on pace to pursue summer internships after their third year, which then opens the door to getting hired after graduation. Employers also say that early engagement is a great way to stand out from the pack when applying for competitive roles.

This may seem daunting, but early engagement with employers doesn't have to be complicated. Many say that they are happy if students merely attend early career events to indicate interest. Recruiters also want students to take some basic early steps such as signing up for LinkedIn so that they can keep track of them.

These steps seem simple, so why don't more students engage in the career process early on? For most students, this doesn't seem to be an issue of being unready or wanting to put it off. Instead, they are saying that they want to move forward, but they just don't know the basics of how to get started or explore what opportunities might be out there.[8]

Student success leaders should be encouraged by this, because it means that getting students started on carer development might be as simple as giving them an early, targeted nudge in the right direction. Many advising offices use student success CRMs such as **Navigate360** to send reminders to students about upcoming deadlines or opportunities. These communication tools can also be used to send nudges about career readiness action steps.

Some colleges may be worried about overwhelming their students with yet another set of messages. Fortunately, the "Journeys" feature in **Navigate360** organizes career guidance into an easy-to-follow checklist that students can access on their mobile device or desktop. This reduces the chance that a student will lose or ignore a message and allows advisors to quickly see how each student is progressing.

Another benefit of Journeys is that it can add a significant amount of advising capacity without overburdening advising staff with new duties. This is welcome news for leaders feeling pinched between the mandate to improve career outcomes and the stark reality of tight budgets. We will explore this further in the next section.

How to Get Hired (In a Nutshell)

Apply for Early ID programs | **Apply for Internships** | **Apply for Grad Roles**

YEAR 1 — **YEAR 2** — **YEAR 3** — **YEAR 4**

Internship | Graduate Role

Students have 1.5–2 years to decide what they want to do, network, and build their relevant skills.

Recruiters aim for a high intern to grad conversion

> "
>
> We're a lot more proactive in finding students—we're **meeting them, and speaking to them before they apply to us**. So we have an understanding of who they are and we have built that initial rapport. **We then know to look out for their application.**
>
> We get thousands of applications—but we can see who has come to our events, who we know have stood out and already have feedback from the business.
>
> **Early Career Recruiter**
>
> "

What are the top barriers to preparing a successful job application?

71%
Lack of opportunity to gain relevant industry experience

64%
Confusion on where to start and what they should do

49%
Lack of awareness of available job opportunities

2

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

Staff capacity and turnover may be the biggest barrier for many colleges that want to enhance early career development. Half of higher education administrators and staff are working more than full-time hours,[11] with many shouldering the responsibilities of colleagues who have left over the past year.[12] Alarmingly, less than a third feel they are compensated fairly,[13] leading to high turnover and forcing managers to spend an excessive amount of time on recruitment and onboarding.

To maintain morale in this environment, student success teams need to look for tools that can help reduce the burden on their staff while still providing students with the advising and support they need. Technology can support career development by enabling students to guide themselves on their own career journeys without heavy dependence on face-to-face career advising.

What "More With Less" Really Looks Like
CUPA-HR 2023 Higher Ed Employee Retention Survey

50%
work more than full-time hours

56%
have absorbed responsibilities of staff who left

31%
think they are paid fairly

The Journeys feature in Navigate360 breaks down student support processes into a series of manageable steps that students can follow themselves. Advisors and support staff only need to be involved during prescribed steps on the Journey, or if they choose to intervene with students who are not making progress.

Colleges often use Journeys for processes related to orientation, advising, and program exploration. Each Journey comprises customizable steps that can be enriched with a wide range of multimedia resources, creating an engaging and informative experience tailored to the unique needs of any college or university.

The career search process is inherently well-suited to the Journeys framework, offering a clear roadmap for students to follow. By providing a checklist of essential steps, such as attending career events and creating a LinkedIn profile, Journeys demystify the path to professional success. Steps can be automated to trigger once students complete credit milestones, keeping the advice relevant as students get closer to graduation.

Journeys in Navigate360
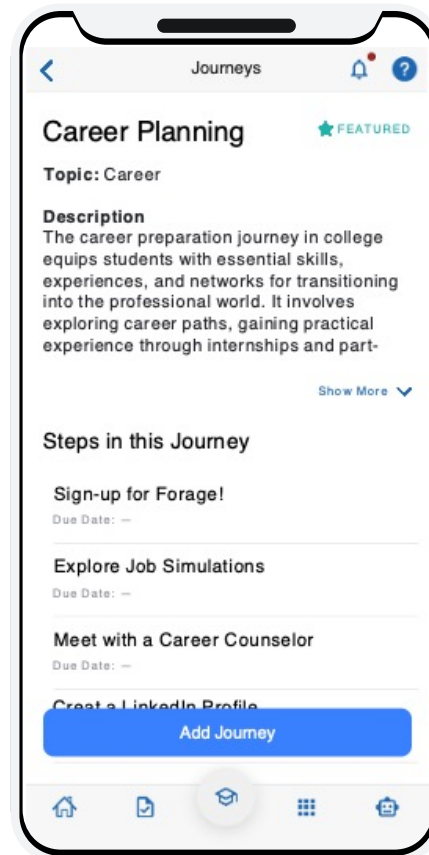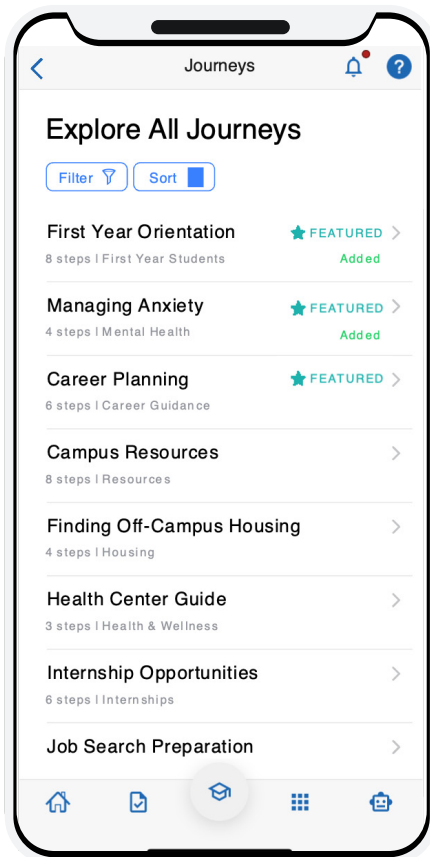
RECOMMENDATION

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

Of all the steps to put on a career Journey, those that lead to an internship could be the most valuable for many students. Work opportunities such as internships have long been seen as the best possible way to get students connected to employers and relevant job experience. In an ideal world, an internship would be a requirement for many college majors.

Unfortunately, most internships are unpaid, creating a financial barrier for students who need to work to earn money. In response, colleges that require internships as a graduation requirement commit millions in investments to help students get connected to paid positions and/or compensate students who accept unpaid positions. This investment needed to be effective is a tough ask for many colleges.

Scalable alternatives to internships

Unsurprisingly, many colleges are looking for alternatives that provide work experience in a way that can be accessed more equitably by all students, regardless of their financial resources. There are several emerging models that schools might consider:

Micro-credentials

"Badges" or certifications on resumes that signal experience with certain job skills. Micro-credentials are often awarded via non-credit courses that are spun up quickly without the need for faculty approval, making them ideal for tracking fast emerging careers. They can be developed internally or provided by a third-party.

Micro-internships

Short-term projects funded by employers and completed by students. Each project is highly specific and can range from content creation to data analysis to research work. The project can extend from a week-long assignment to a one-month engagement, virtual or on site. The goal is to build career experience and connections while solving real problems for real companies. Unlike summer internships, a micro-internship is available throughout the year.

Job simulations

Online exercises that simulate a typical project or workday at a potential employer. They take just a few hours to complete and are available year-round, 24 hours a day. Simulations are useful for giving exploratory students experience with a wide range of real-life jobs. Completing a simulation signals interest to recruiters, who often use this as a first step in their process. Faculty in some fields embed simulations as course assignments.

Forage Virtual Job Simulations at **Stony Brook University**

Internships and experiential learning are crucial for developing career skills in college students, yet not all students can participate in traditional, long-term, or in-person experiences. To address this gap, Stony Brook University, part of the State University of New York System, has integrated the Forage platform into its curriculum.[9]

Forage offers students virtual job simulations designed by corporate partners such as Citibank, Goldman Sachs, KPMG, and Lululemon. These simulations are free for students to use, take 3-8 hours, and mimic a day in the life of an early career employee at the sponsoring company. Simulations allow students to gain professional skills, build their resumes, and explore career paths with top global employers without the logistical or financial barriers associated with traditional internships. Completing an internship signals interest and competency to recruiters at the employers, giving the student a leg up should they pursue a job.

Stony Brook 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.

Looking ahead, Stony Brook aims to expand the use of Forage simulations by integrating them into student employment training and internship courses. SBU is also enhancing access to job simulations through integration with Navigate360, their student success CRM. This integration will improve data tracking and insights into student outcomes, helping SBU tailor their career readiness programs more effectively.

Forage Results at Stony Brook University[10]

15K+
student users

2x
increase in student understanding of career roles and duties

80%
agreed that they developed practical skills

1.7x
increase in student likelihood to apply to a role at simulation company

Integrating Job Simulations into Career Journeys at **Texas Southern University**

Texas Southern University (TSU) is a public Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in Houston, Texas. HBCU culture often emphasizes mentoring and growth. and many have a long tradition of providing detailed guidance and road mapping for their students. For TSU, career journeys align seamlessly with their mission, enhancing their ability to prepare students for the workforce by organizing these steps into a single place that can be monitored by advisors. This structured approach supports students in navigating their career paths effectively.

TSU is integrating Forage simulations and career assessments into their career journey in Navigate360. This integration is part of TSU's long-term vision to scale high-touch career mentoring. By breaking down the journeys into manageable steps, TSU can monitor student progress closely and analyze which career steps students find more attractive or more challenging. These insights will inform even more sophisticated mentoring and allow TSU to tailor support and interventions even more effectively.

≡	ORDER	STEP TITLE
≡	1	Make an appointment with Career Pathways Center
≡	2	Take the Major Explorer Survey
≡	3	Take an online career assessment through Forage
≡	4	Build your resume
≡	5	Complete a job simulation
≡	6	Create a LinkedIn profile
≡	7	Research career pathways
≡	8	Start building your network

Conclusion

The integration of structured career readiness frameworks and technologies represents a significant advancement in bridging the gap between academic preparation and early professional success. By offering a clear, self-guided pathway, these tools empower students to proactively navigate their career development while alleviating the burden on overstretched career advising staff.

Moreover, the emphasis on early engagement with employers and the strategic use of technology to simulate real-world work environments addresses the critical challenges of accessibility and equity in career readiness. As colleges face mounting pressure to demonstrate tangible career outcomes, these innovations offer a scalable solution that aligns with the evolving expectations of stakeholders. The ability to track and analyze student progress through these platforms not only enhances institutional accountability but also enables tailored interventions that can significantly improve student outcomes.

Ultimately, the adoption of these advanced career preparation tools reflects a broader shift in higher education towards a more holistic and inclusive approach to student success. By prioritizing experiential learning and early career engagement, institutions can better equip graduates to navigate the complexities of the modern workforce, thereby fulfilling their mission to foster socioeconomic mobility and lifelong achievement.

We're Here to Help

Keep reading to learn about career readiness tools in Navigate360 and Forage.

You can also email **edvenit@eab.com** to speak to one of my colleagues about how EAB can support your career readiness efforts.

Holistically Address Student Needs with Navigate360

## A Comprehensive CRM for Higher Ed

Navigate360 is the first enterprise-level technology for student success, built on a decade of research and feedback from college and university leaders and users. Navigate360 brings together students, administrators, advisors, faculty, and other staff in a collaborative network to holistically support students across the college journey.
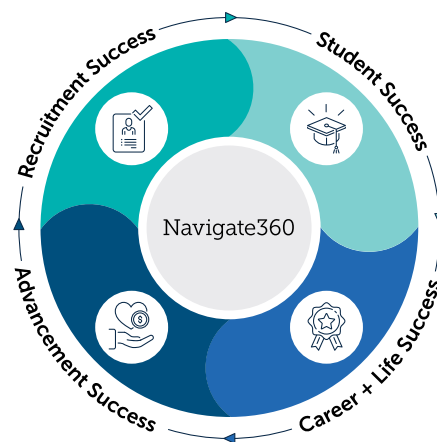
Staff Workflow and Automation

Empower staff to proactively engage with prospective and current students

- AI-Powered Messaging
- Complete Student Profile
- Coordinated Care Network
- Cases and Referrals
- Automated Alerts and Messaging
- Two-Way SMS
- Campaigns and Template Library
- To-Dos
- Appointments and Surveys
- Events
- Notes and Attachments
- Faculty Progress Reports
- Prospect Application Management
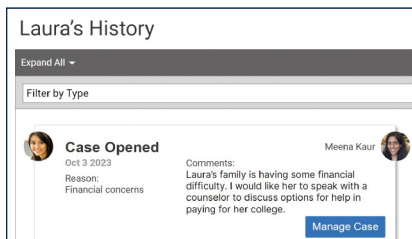
Student Engagement Hub

Provide your students with a one-stop shop for self-service resources

- AI-Powered Knowledge Bot
- iOS and Android Apps
- Student Success Network
- Campus Resources
- Appointment Scheduling
- Class Schedule
- In-App Messaging, Notifications, and Surveys
- Career Match and Journeys
- Study Buddies
- Financial Planner
- Prospect Portal
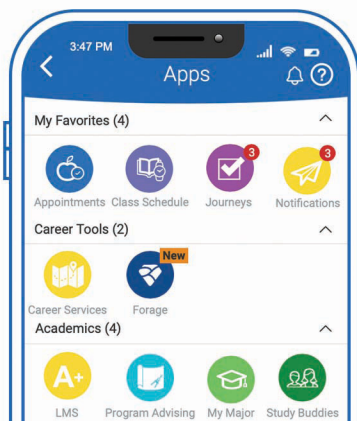
Reporting and Analytics

Proactively identify opportunities for better student support

- AI-Powered Report Builder
- Advanced Query Builder
- Data Visualizer
- Templated and Scheduled Reports
- Automated Workflow from Reports
- Population Health Analytics
- Activity Analytics
- Intervention Effectiveness Analytics
- Historical Analytics
- Predictive Model
- Analytics Data Exports
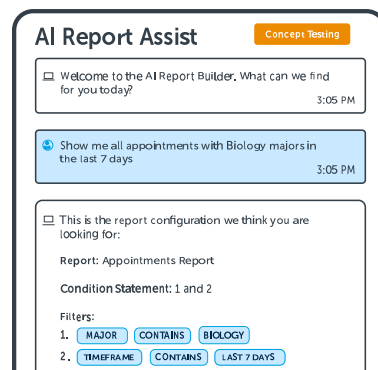
OUR PARTNERS

850+
Partner Institutions

10M+
Students Served

OUR IMPACT

3.5%
Typical improvement in graduation rate

5:1
ROI based on 500 partner value stories

Schedule a student success consultation by visiting us online at **eab.com/Navigate360**.

Introducing Forage

Innovative Job Simulations Bridge the Gap Between Students and Employers

What Are Job Simulations?

Forage job simulations are self-paced online learning programs that simulate the work performed in different roles at different companies through interactive, hypothetical tasks.

Forage Simulations Are:

Educational and Immersive

Forage simulations bring roles and companies to life for learners.

Data Driven

Learners can measure their performance on simulations and employers can track engagement.

Inclusive

There are no barriers to participation; simulations are 100% free for learners and educators

Scalable and Always on

Simulations are available on-demand 24/7.

Forage job simulations connect students to great jobs.

Job simulations are innovative skill-building experiences designed in partnership with leading companies in industries like banking, consulting, and retail. See next page to learn more.

How Forage benefits your students:

Build confidence: Students better understand their major by experiencing what related careers are like.

Build resume: Student earn certificates after completing Forage job simulations.

Stand out to employers: Companies use Forage data to identify engaged and committed applicants.

How Forage benefits your institution:

Demonstrate your commitment to career success: Promoting Forage to students reflects your commitment to preparing them for the workforce.

Easily build skills into the curriculum: Educators can choose Forage simulations to feature on class-specific landing pages and track engagement.

Forage partners with leading employers across diverse industries

300+
Job Simulations

125+
Employers

Forage creates an inclusive path to successful early careers

4M
students are using Forage to explore early careers globally
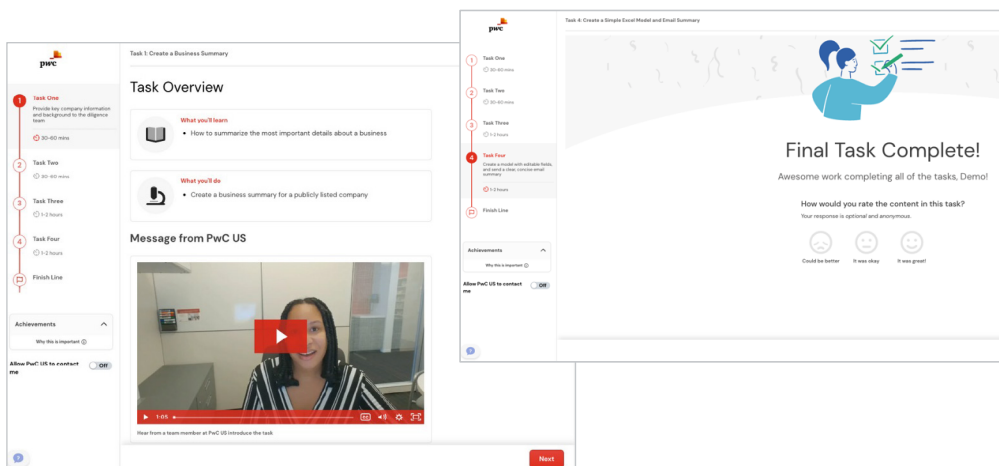
45%
of Forage users identify as first-generation university students

3.3X
On average, Forage users are 3.3x more likely to get a job offer

95%
of Forage users say they better understand a company after completing a job simulation.

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Endnotes

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ABOUT EAB

At EAB, our mission is to make education smarter and our communities stronger. We work with thousands of institutions to drive transformative change through data-driven insights and best-in-class capabilities. From kindergarten to college to career, EAB partners with leaders and practitioners to accelerate progress and drive results across five major areas: enrollment, student success, institutional strategy, data analytics, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). We work with each partner differently, tailoring our portfolio of research, technology, and marketing and enrollment solutions to meet the unique needs of every leadership team, as well as the students and employees they serve. Learn more at eab.com