

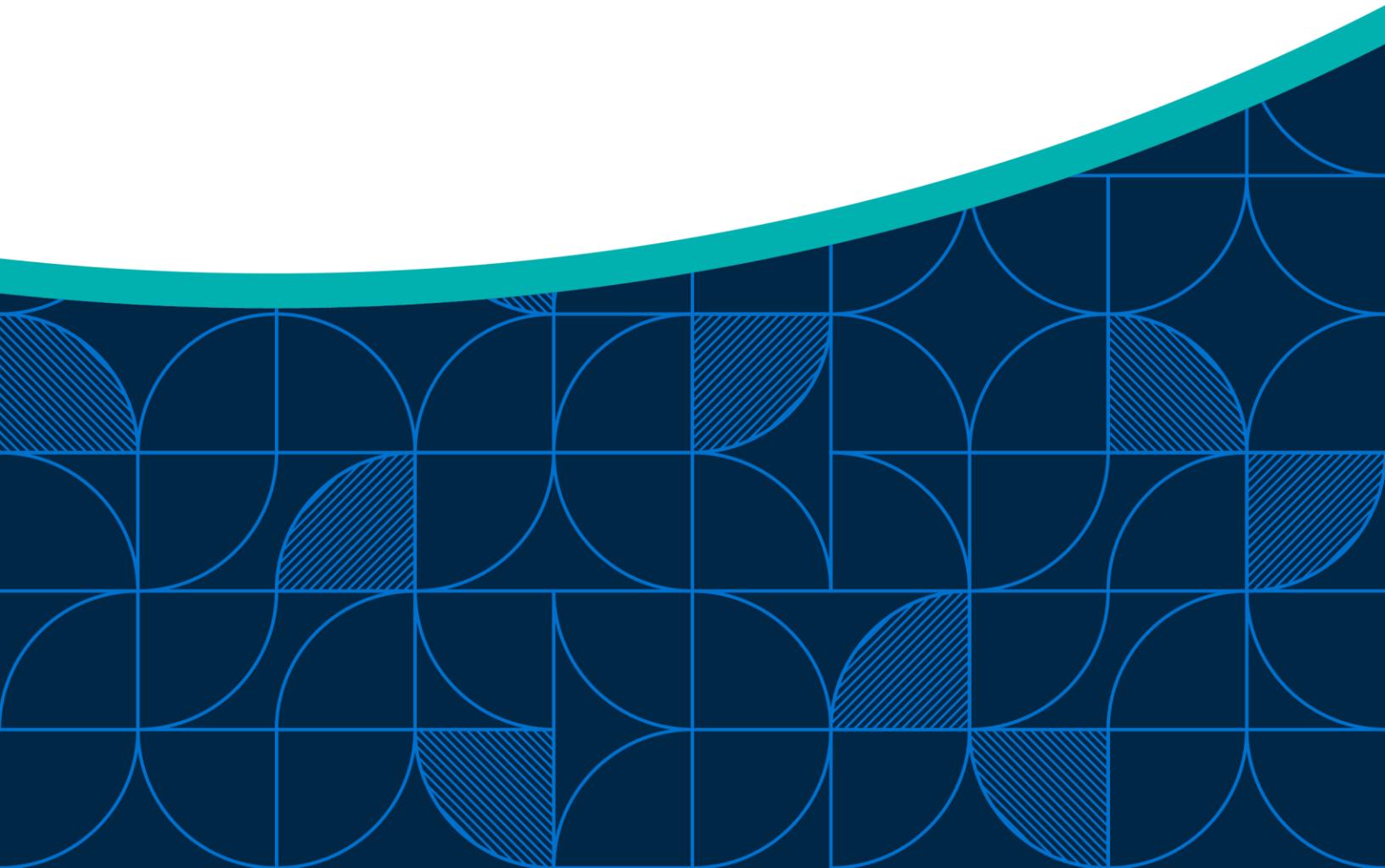


EAB

FORAGE

From College to Career

Why Early Career Discovery is Critical to
Student and Institutional Success



Career Exploration in the First-Year Experience

From College to Career: Executive Summary

Why Early Career Discovery is Critical to Student and Institutional Success

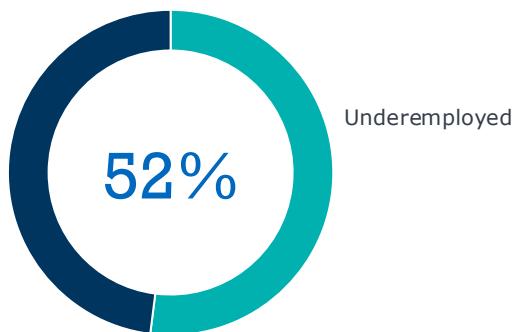
Students are Facing a New Career Landscape

The college-to-career path is less linear than it was a decade ago. Employers expect demonstrable skills earlier; students want more work-based learning; and generative AI is reshaping what entry-level work entails.

Together, these trends raise the bar for career readiness. Multi-year analyses show that a large share of bachelor's graduates begin, and remain, in jobs that do not require a degree, with consequences for equity, earnings, and institutional accountability.¹

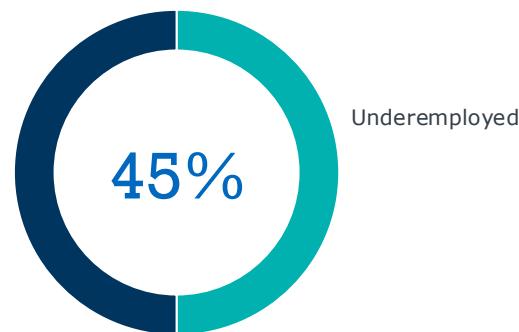
Employment of 4-Year Graduates

One Year After Graduation



Employment of 4-Year Graduates

Ten Years After Graduation



Federal Policy Points the Accountability Needle Toward Higher Education

Policy is moving in the same direction. The 2025 Carnegie Student Access and Earnings (SAE) classification elevates how well institutions both broaden access and foster economic mobility after graduation.²

The practical implication is clear: start career preparation earlier. EAB's recent guidance emphasizes technology-enabled strategies, including virtual job simulations, advising journeys within student success platforms, and structured reflection opportunities, that scale experiential learning without overburdening staff.³ Employer-designed simulations from Forage give students low-friction opportunities to practice applied skills, align academic choices with careers, build confidence, and connect with employers well before graduation.⁴

The Career Readiness Challenge Facing Students

The Current Landscape



A Tougher Transition from College to Career

Underemployment is common and persistent. The Burning Glass Institute found that 52% of recent bachelor's graduates are underemployed one year after graduation; 45% remain underemployed a decade later according to a Strada report. Internships reduce risk but remain unevenly accessible across majors and demographics.¹

Timing works against students. Too often, exploration, upskilling, and networking are compressed into a high-pressure senior-year sprint after major choices and recruiting cycles have already limited options.

This is a curricular design challenge. EAB recommends embedding career-connected tasks and reflective practice in first-year and gateway courses, so students start articulating competencies well before they even think about recruitment.⁶



Students Are Asking for More Work-Based Learning

Students consistently prioritize paid internships, stronger employer connections, and courses focused on job-relevant skills, according to Inside Higher Ed's 2025 Student Voice survey.⁷ Simultaneously, recent NACE studies finds that internship and work-based experience remain employers' top tiebreaker between otherwise comparable candidates.⁸

These preferences reinforce what faculty and student-success teams see daily: classroom instruction must be supplemented with experiential learning and career discovery to help students translate learning into work-ready capabilities.



AI Is Raising the Stakes for Early Career Preparation

Generative AI disproportionately automates entry-level tasks, first-pass research, documentation, basic analysis, and QA, eroding traditional "learning ground" roles.^{9,11} As a result, many employers are raising experience expectations at the point of hire.

For higher education, the implication is direct: if early jobs teach less (and expect more), campuses must teach more of the applied work earlier, and must do so equitably and at scale. EAB's playbooks on experiential learning and reflection are designed precisely for this moment.⁶

Experiential Learning Must Start Sooner

Why Early Experiential Learning Matters

When experiential learning is implemented with explicit outcomes and structured reflection, high-impact practices improve persistence and help students translate coursework into competencies that are essential to campus and career success.¹⁴ EAB research shows that authentic tasks in classes, such as redesigned student employment and course-embedded projects, improve students' ability to name and evidence skills for employers.⁶

Policy trends heighten the urgency. The Carnegie SAE classification connects who institutions serve to how alumni fare economically making equitable, scalable experiential learning a core institutional priority.²

What Early Experiential Learning Helps Reveal

Emerging, faculty-led evidence highlights student impact even before long-term outcomes mature. In a recent collaboration between accounting faculty at Quinnipiac University and Forage, virtual, employer-designed simulations were embedded in several auditing courses.

While the study does not claim causal employment effects, it does document consistent patterns: greater engagement, clearer understanding of professional work, earlier confidence in skills and language, and more informed pathway decisions, especially for students who struggle to connect coursework to practice.¹⁵

Impact of Forage on Student Self-Efficacy and Career Confidence

Data collected from students at 1,671 institutions



Understanding of Auditing Roles

38%

increase in understanding of role before & after students complete Forage auditing job simulations



Confidence in Ability

37%

increase in student self-confidence in skills & ability after completing a simulation



Likelihood to Apply

73%

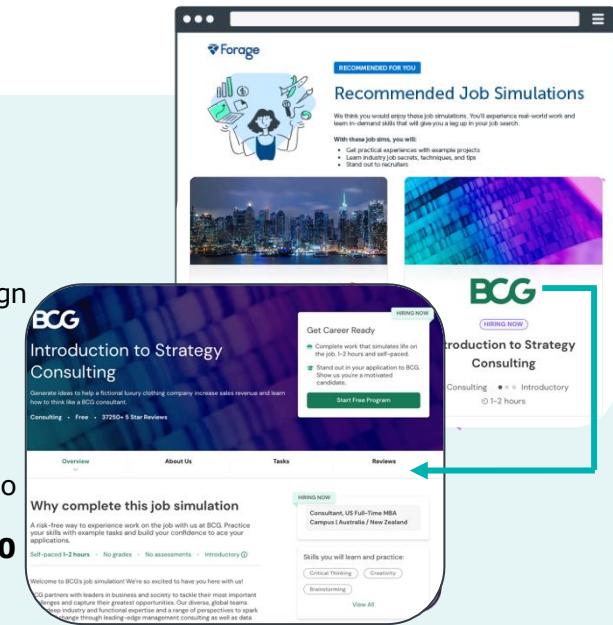
of students on Forage are very likely to apply for roles after completing job simulations

Why Forage Fits This Moment

What Is Forage?

Forage offers short, employer-designed simulations that mirror day-in-the-life tasks across roles and industries. Programs are self-paced and open-access, making them easy for faculty to assign and for students to complete in hours rather than weeks.¹⁶ Institutions use these simulations as a practical, tech-enabled strategy across dozens of courses.³

Early signals from employers are promising: students who complete a company's simulation have been **~2.16x** more likely to receive (and accept) offers from that employer in one large partnership.¹⁷ Forage usage has also scaled rapidly, surpassing **10 million** student engagements globally.¹⁸



How Early Use of Forage Supports Career Readiness

Build skills through practice: Simulations emphasize judgment, problem framing, written/oral communication, and applied analysis—competencies employers value and that map to NACE's eight Career Readiness Competencies.¹⁹

Help students plan for their futures: Early exposure helps students pick majors, electives, and co-curriculars that match intended roles; EAB recommends guided "journeys" that nudge milestone completion on time.³

Develop confidence over time: Students accumulate artifacts (briefs, analyses, presentations) for advising and interviews, aligning with NACE findings that substantive internship-like experiences correlate with higher offer rates and starting salaries.^{20,22}

Expand access: Asynchronous, no-cost, uncapped simulations democratize early exposure, especially for commuters, caregivers, first-gen, and working students, while advancing equity goals central to institutional strategies.⁶

Embedding Brief, Authentic Work Tasks in First-Year and Gateway Courses



Strengthens student motivation and persistence

Early, structured exploration and reflection are linked to improved retention and completion.⁶

Advances equity

Universal access to career-relevant practice reduces reliance on scarce, selective internships.

Addresses AI-driven shifts

Helps instructors quickly respond to AI-driven shifts without overhauling their course content.

Conclusion

Early Career Discovery is Critical to Student and Institutional Success

Students, employers, and labor-market evidence converge on the same message: career readiness must start earlier. As AI reshapes entry-level work, students need time to explore, practice, and form professional identities. Scalable experiential learning, supported by EAB toolkits and platforms like Forage, offers an equitable way to provide that time. In today's market, early experience is not a luxury; it is the foundation for success.^{2,12}

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