

GRADPLANHQ · HIGHER EDUCATION BRIEF

Developing Talent From Within

A Higher Education Brief for Student Success, Career Readiness, and Experiential Learning

Help students build experience before opportunity arrives.

Experience compounds.

Students who start earlier have more time to build Experience, Proof, Relationships, and Visibility.

WHAT CHANGED, AND WHY IT'S URGENT

Students face a higher bar earlier.

A degree still matters. But students now compete for internships and first professional roles with higher expectations. Nearly 90% of employers say they look for evidence of a student's ability to solve problems when reviewing resumes.¹

Students increasingly need four things to build Career Momentum:

Experience

Meaningful action through projects, leadership, service, collaboration, credentials, outreach, and work already underway.

Proof

Artifacts, results, stories, reflections, and references that make a contribution visible and understandable.

Relationships

Connections with peers, faculty, mentors, employers, and community partners who can support or verify the work.

Visibility

A professional presence that helps useful work reach people who can recognize, support, or build upon it.

Internships remain valuable. Yet while about 70% of first-year students plan to complete one, fewer than half find and complete an internship.² Students need more ways to build Experience before, alongside, or without a traditional internship.

Why starting earlier matters

For decades, career development often followed a familiar sequence: first-year students explored, sophomores considered options, juniors looked for internships, and seniors prepared for employment. That timeline leaves too little room for experience to compound.

The goal is not to make first-year students search for jobs. The goal is to help them begin building experience.

Explore interests and test direction

Develop professional habits

Build relationships

Create proof of capability

Learn from setbacks

Discover the next opportunity

1. NACE, *Job Outlook 2025* (Nov. 2024).

2. Strada Education Foundation, *Building Better Internships* (May 2024).

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOUR INSTITUTION

The institution already has many of the assets.

Colleges already provide valuable learning, relationships, activities, projects, and opportunities. The gap is not a lack of student potential. The gap is helping students begin earlier, act on what they are learning, and carry valuable experiences forward as credible Proof.

Institutions already invest in student success, career readiness, experiential learning, service-learning, community engagement, faculty development, alumni engagement, internships, and employment outcomes. The opportunity is to help students begin earlier, take repeated professional action, and carry more value forward from education and experiences already available.

Faculty, Career Services, alumni, employers, community partners, student organizations, courses, and opportunities to contribute are already present. GradPlanHQ helps more of those assets connect around student growth.

HOW GRADPLANHQ HELPS

A Practice Field that strengthens work already underway.

GradPlanHQ is a virtual professional-development community and the GradPlanHQ Practice Field, where college students and recent graduates build Experience, Proof, Relationships, and Visibility through four connected parts:

- 1 **Growth Cycle** — Students choose a goal that matters, take meaningful action, capture what happened, and use the result to pursue the next opportunity.
- 2 **Action & Momentum Meetups** — Recurring working sessions that create protected time for networking, projects, Proof building, and professional practice.
- 3 **Community App** — A private space for project groups, peer connection, feedback, resources, and ongoing participation. Chapters are membership experiences within the Community App.
- 4 **Project Launchers** — Structured starting points for meaningful work students can shape around their goals, major, and community.

Students can create new experience or strengthen coursework, capstones, volunteer roles, leadership activities, credentials, internships, and employment already underway. The full system is in *Developing Talent From Within: Field Guide for Community Leaders*.

How it complements existing institutional work

The model complements Career Services, internships, service-learning, experiential learning, community engagement, and existing student-success initiatives. It does not replace them.

Career Services	Students arrive with stronger experiences, clearer stories, Proof, and examples to discuss during advising, resume reviews, interview preparation, and employer conversations.
Faculty	Courses, capstones, and projects become starting points students can carry forward as Proof.
Experiential Learning	The Growth Cycle connects action, reflection, evidence, visibility, relationships, and the next opportunity.
Service-Learning	Students carry community-engaged work beyond the final grade by documenting the contribution, producing an artifact, and identifying people who can verify the work.
Student Success	Starting earlier creates more time for exploration, confidence, relationship building, reflection, and direction before graduation creates urgency.
Community Engagement	Project Launchers and campus communities connect student goals with real needs, partners, and opportunities to contribute.

PARTNERSHIP PATHWAYS

Partnership Pathways

Institutions do not need to begin with a campus-wide implementation. Each pathway offers a practical starting point that can complement existing priorities and approval processes.

1

Course Partnership

A focused collaboration involving one course, cohort, or experiential-learning initiative. A practical way to test the model with a defined student population.

2

Program Partnership

A repeatable pathway supporting several courses, cohorts, or programs through Career Services, Student Success, Community Engagement, Honors, or another defined unit.

3

Campus Partnership

A broader approach that may include campus Chapters within the Community App, dedicated Action & Momentum Meetups, sponsored participation, student leadership, alumni and faculty involvement, and coordinated reporting.

A Model That Starts With Student Action

Students can begin building immediately. Institutions can observe what students produce, determine where the model complements existing priorities, and expand participation through the pathway that makes sense for their structure.

Start with a defined group

Learn from actual participation

Build evidence before expanding

Strengthen existing assets rather than replacing them

OUTCOMES AND NEXT STEP

What Success May Look Like

Institutional priorities vary. The following outcomes provide a practical starting point for defining success.

Earlier student engagement

More experiential-learning participation

Stronger evidence of career readiness

Stronger professional networks

Greater student confidence

Sustained student momentum

More visible campus and community opportunities

Better connection between learning and professional practice

Ready to Explore a Fit?

A college may begin with:

One course

One cohort

A Career Services initiative

An Experiential Learning pilot

A campus Chapter

A broader institutional partnership

START A HIGHER EDUCATION CONVERSATION

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