

# Connecting Low-Income Students to Careers



- **Making internships paid and accessible**
- **Developing virtual opportunities**
- **Providing intensive support**
- **Moving career services into the classroom**

**F**or most students, the goal after college is to move into fulfilling, fairly paid careers. But too often low-income students do not have the support, social capital, connections, and internship experience their more-affluent peers do — and therefore are frequently behind on the path to a career even before they earn their diplomas.

Low-income students are less likely to take unpaid internships because they can't afford to work for free — or to pay the associated costs, such as travel and housing. Landing such internships also often requires connections that many less-affluent students — who are often students of color and first-generation students — do not have.

# TIME FOR SOME REAL TALK.

At FIU, a Top 50 public research institution, we are committed to uplifting our community and our students with a rigorous, inclusive and changemaking education.

With a mission and passion to expand opportunities for all students, including minorities and first-generation students, it's no surprise *U.S. News & World Report* named us a Top 20 Performer on Social Mobility (2020).

Our alumni are a true testament that anything is possible at FIU. Take Alba Castillo Baylin, from the Class of 1995, who now leads the community and stakeholder relations team for Coca-Cola North America. In 2018, Alba was recognized as a Top 5 Latina Rising Star by the Association of Latino Professionals for America (ALPHA) and *Fortune Magazine*.

We also have current FIU student Justyce Pinkney, a first-generation, African American and Puerto Rican doctoral student who, as a recipient of the Milam Family First Generation Scholarship, examined the neurobiology of children with autism spectrum disorder using eye blinking conditioning.

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At our university, we empower our students to excel, graduating with the knowledge and confidence to take on the world's most pressing challenges. We do this by offering them opportunities to be involved in research and entrepreneurial projects and by expanding their horizons through study abroad programs and internships that lead to jobs.

Here, we turn obstacles into opportunities, empowering students of all socio-economic backgrounds to break down barriers and achieve their dreams. In fact, 25 percent of our students are first-generation, and nearly 50 percent qualify for Pell grants. Our Pell recipients are among our most focused and determined students – their graduation rate outpaces that of their non-Pell colleagues.

We're proud to award more degrees to Hispanic students than any other university in the nation and to be national leaders in granting STEM degrees to minorities. And we take seriously our role as a solutions center for our community, having been recognized by *Washington Monthly* in 2020 as the No. 18 public university for contributing to the public good.

Established in 1965 to serve a culturally rich community, FIU has gone on to produce more than 260,000 graduates. Every day, I meet some of the most determined and committed Panthers who are blazing a new path for themselves and their families.

Ultimately, it's their success stories and those of generations of Panthers that tell the real FIU story.

Sincerely,



Mark B. Rosenberg  
President

A study by the National Association of Colleges and Employers also found that Black and Hispanic students are less likely to get paid internships than their white counterparts — just 6 percent of the paid internships went to Black students, and only 7.9 percent went to Hispanic students.

**Industry may provide one solution: As the need for middle-skilled workers grows, businesses are increasingly interested in providing internships.**

That lack of internship experience — along with the other factors — makes poorer students less competitive in the job market. Low-income college students typically earn only 80 percent as much as their more affluent peers at the beginning of their careers, widening to 70 percent mid-career.

And the problems deepened during the pandemic, where communities of color were harder hit than others and many employers had to revoke entry-level jobs or internships.

But colleges, employers, and nonprofits have never been more aware of the need to find innovative approaches to ensure that less-affluent students have the same career opportunities as their wealthier classmates. Here are some ways they are tackling the challenge.

### **Making internships paid and accessible**

Colleges are increasingly cognizant that internship experiences will never be equitable unless they include decent pay and the flexibility for students to work around other responsibilities, which can often include full-time jobs or parenting.

In 2015, the Ascendium Education Group provided funding and support to 33 colleges in four states to develop quality paid internships for low-income students. Through these efforts, far more low-income students — many of whom were students of color and first generation — received paid and meaningful internships. It was difficult, however, for the colleges to come up with the funding to continue the program after the three-year grant ended.

Industry may provide one solution: As the need for middle-skilled workers grows, businesses are increasingly interested in providing internships.

About 10 years ago, Bunker Hill Community College, in Massachusetts, partnered with Massachusetts Competitive Partnership, an organization of the chief executives of some of state's largest businesses, to place students in internships that paid \$15 an hour (now \$18); if the internship is at a nonprofit, the college could subsidize the pay. The initiative also includes a transportation stipend and college credit for the internship.

The average student at Bunker Hill is 27 years old, and three out of five students are parents. About 600 students have gone through the Learn and Earn program; several years ago, the college wanted to broaden the program beyond its top students, so it began recruiting in classrooms to ensure a wide range were represented. A high percentage of the students in the program go on to substantive jobs, said Pam Eddinger, the college's president, and often in fields they knew nothing about until their internships.

### **Developing virtual opportunities**

As Covid-19 shuttered campuses and businesses in the spring of 2020, many internships and job opportunities evaporated — and so colleges and businesses had to get creative. About 55 percent of companies last summer moved to virtual internships; that went up to 71 percent for companies with 20,000 employees or more, according to the National Association of Colleges and Employers.

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Virtual internships may outlive the pandemic, which could possibly help low-income students. Even though working remotely can exacerbate inequities for those who don't have access to adequate technology, with the right support, remote internships could offer the necessary flexibility and the ability to reach geographically diverse students without requiring them to pay for travel or housing.

Other online career resources have also proliferated. This spring, 17,000 employers are signed up for virtual fairs at 700 colleges on Handshake, a company that works with career centers to connect students to employers. Nearly half the students who responded to a survey by the company said they feel less intimidated meeting potential employers remotely.

Colleges have also made a big effort to

connect students online with alumni for career mentoring, like at the University of Pennsylvania, which according to the campus newspaper has connected over 300 first-generation, low-income students with graduates of the college.

### **Providing intensive support**

Colleges increasingly realize that they need to provide students who don't grow up in families that are conversant with the customs of the professional working world — from building a résumé to preparing for job interviews to seeking mentors — not just with skills but with a deeper understanding of the difference between simply getting a job versus envisioning a career. At the Stella and Charles Guttman Community College, part of the City University of New York system, all students take a yearlong course called the Ethnographies of Work. In it, they take a deep dive into learning about the history, stereotypes, and myths of work. They then spend a semester investigating and researching a career they are interested in pursuing.

Another example is Braven, a nonprofit that began as a pilot program in 2014 and now partners with four universities — Lehman College, San Jose State University, Rutgers University at Newark, and National Louis University — that serve high numbers of students eligible to receive Pell Grants.

In a semester-long course, the students learn not just the skills of résumé-writing and interviewing, but also gain the knowledge they need to psychologically navigate the working world. This includes how negative stereotypes about their race, gender, or ethnicity can influence their own mind-set — as well as how to frame their work experience in a way that resonates in a professional environment.

Local employers volunteer as coaches, and Braven assists the students as needed for two and a half years after graduation.

So far the program has served 3,300 students; those enrolled in the Braven program are more likely to be hired for a well-paid job with a career track after graduation and quickly out-earn their parents, says Aimée Eubanks Davis, chief executive officer and founder of Braven.

### **Moving career services into the classroom**

More and more, colleges realize that career services can't be siloed, that the one place all students go on a campus is the classroom, and that faculty members must be part of an intentional effort to make students career ready.

With that in mind, the University

Innovation Alliance spent the last three years reimagining and redesigning what career services should look like by working with numerous higher-ed institutions. One of those was the University of Central Florida, which used foundation grants to train faculty members in integrating career competencies into their teaching.

Professors don't need to rework their curricula, but they look for opportunities to explicitly identify core career-readiness competencies — such as teamwork or critical thinking — into their lessons. The goal is to make students aware of the skills they possess and able to adeptly articulate that in a job interview — something employers say students too often cannot do.

*“Connecting Low-Income Students to Careers” was produced by Chronicle Intelligence. Please contact [CI@chronicle.com](mailto:CI@chronicle.com) with questions or comments.*

# REAL EMPOWERS A NEW MAJORITY

*Florida International University is named a "Top 20 Performer on Social Mobility" by U.S. News & World Report*

Founded in 1965 to serve one of the nation's most culturally rich communities, FIU has become a national leader in creating educational access and economic opportunity for generations of diverse student populations.



- Ranked **#1** in America for awarding bachelor's and master's degrees to Hispanic students
- National leader in granting **STEM** degrees to minorities
- With a **90%** job placement rate, FIU's 256,000 graduates have gone on to serve in the highest levels of industry, academia, and government

FIU's impact is as real as it gets.

Learn more at [top50.fiu.edu](https://top50.fiu.edu)

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