

# Critical Early Professional Development Needs of Gen Z Business Students

Evidence-Based Strategies to Boost Comfort, Clarity, and Readiness Starting in the First Year



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# Executive Summary

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Gen Z business students are arriving on college campuses with heightened anxiety, low self-clarity, and an urgent desire to feel “career ready”—often before they’ve completed their first year. At the same time, business schools are under increasing pressure to ensure students succeed both in their academic programs and in the workforce.

This white paper examines how leading undergraduate business schools are responding by embedding self- and professional development into the first-year curriculum—and **how these changes are producing real results.**

Drawing on national research and direct implementation data from AACSB-accredited institutions, we highlight how learning tools like Career Key’s PathAdvisor support a scalable, data-driven approach to career readiness and student support.

Institutions like Texas State University, University of Alabama’s Culverhouse College of Business, University of Minnesota Carlson School of Management, and University of Toronto Mississauga used these tools to help thousands of students explore their college majors, build confidence, and clarify their direction—while enabling faculty and advisors to measure progress and intervene early.

By integrating reflection-based experiential learning, validated readiness assessments, and scalable digital tools, these schools not only prepare students for internships and employment earlier — they help students better understand themselves, persist through college, and thrive in the evolving world of business.

This white paper provides research-backed strategies and practical frameworks any business school can adopt to:

- Support AACSB Standard 4 with a more innovative curriculum that integrates career and professional readiness competencies,
- Support AACSB Standard 6 by documenting progress in learner progression, degree completion and career development,
- Support AACSB Standard 7 through teaching impact to measure and identify innovative and effective teaching practices,
- Increase first-year student engagement and retention, and
- Gather more robust student success-related data for truly data-driven program decisions.

# Introduction: Meet the Moment for Gen Z Business Students

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Undergraduate business programs face a critical moment.

Gen Z students enter college with higher levels of anxiety, uncertainty, and skepticism than ever before.

Many feel unprepared to navigate their choice of major and career.

The statistics below reflect Gen Z's impact of entering the workforce during and after the pandemic, the rise of AI and automation, and a disconnect between traditional college curricula and the real-world demands Gen Z faces.

- Over half of 18–24-year-olds report feeling unsure about their next career step,
- One-third say they lack control over their career direction (LHH/Adecco Global Study: Gen Z Anxious About Skills, Career Clarity),
- In a global survey, 55% of Gen Z respondents reported anxiety about career progression, while 34% felt their skills weren't being fully used in their jobs, and
- Nearly two-thirds of Gen Z young adults say they are dissatisfied with how college prepared them for employment, and many graduates feeling “woefully unprepared” (Entrepreneur, 2024: Are You Giving Gen Z What They Want From Their Employers?).

70% of Gen Z say professional development and training are essential when considering a job, yet few say they receive meaningful support in their college experience.

At the same time, employers report a significant professional skills gap in undergraduate business graduates. (Quinnipiac University School of Business, 2024: [Closing the Skills Gap With Dynamic Partnerships](#))

From communication to receiving feedback, Gen Z needs help during school to be more ready for the job market.

We can argue about who's to blame, a lack of high school preparation, whether students are active or passive, and so on. The reality is that higher education institutions are being held more accountable for student employment outcomes – no matter a student's level of readiness.

# Closing the Readiness Gap

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Forward-looking business schools are closing that gap by making self- and professional development a first-year priority, supported by digital tools that allow scalable, measurable, and personalized instruction.

These tools empower students to reflect on who they are, explore academic and career options, and build confidence—all while giving faculty and advisors actionable data to guide their teaching and advising.

The striking results are in.

At **Texas State University's McCoy College of Business**, a required first-year course used PathAdvisor and the Career Decision Profile (CDP) to measure student progress in Fall 2024.

621 students completed pre/post assessments and related reflection activities.

**At semester's end, over one-third reported feeling more clear, comfortable and knowledgeable about their professional direction and self-clarity.**

In Spring 2025, that number is rising to 1,000+ students—a rate of completion and engagement that is unheard of in career development programs.

Scaling access at this level means more students benefit from guidance that improves academic persistence, career clarity, and decision-making.

Texas State isn't alone. Schools like the **University of Alabama Culverhouse College of Business, University of Minnesota Carlson School of Management, and University of Toronto Mississauga** are integrating these same strategies across thousands of first-year students.

They're proving that **large-scale impact is not only possible—it's essential** for institutions serious about improving student outcomes and meeting accreditation goals.

This white paper shares the research, models, and tools behind those successes. It offers faculty and administrators a roadmap for delivering professional development at scale, without sacrificing quality, and with measurable returns for students and institutions alike.

## Why Scale Matters

**In one semester**, Texas State University will measure the teaching impact of its Introduction to Business course on **nearly double the number of first-year students** from 621 students in Fall 2024 to over 1,000 in Spring 2025.

This level of data collection and measurement is rare—and powerful. Scaling access to professional development learning tools means more students benefit, more data drives improvement, and more faculty and advisors can see their impact in action.



## Unmet Needs, Untapped Potential: Rethinking Gen Z Professional Readiness

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Despite their digital fluency and entrepreneurial energy, a majority of Gen Z students enter college underprepared to make confident, informed career decisions.

This disconnect between student needs and traditional business education models presents both a pressing challenge and an opportunity to innovate.

Gen Z's professional uncertainty is well-documented:

- 55% feel anxious about their career progression,
- 34% report their skills aren't being used effectively at work (LHH/Adecco Global Study).
- More than half of 18–24-year-olds are unsure about their next career step, while
- One-third feel they lack control over their career direction.
- Nearly two-thirds say college did not prepare them adequately for employment, with many reporting they felt “woefully unprepared” to enter the workforce (Entrepreneur, 2024).

# Need for direction and skills - earlier

This anxiety stems from a combination of forces. Gen Z came of age during the pandemic and is entering a rapidly evolving job market shaped by AI, automation, and shifting employer expectations.

Yet in many undergraduate programs, professional and career development is still optional, siloed, and outsourced. A lack of integration leaves students to organically visit career services late during their enrollment – junior or senior year.

At the same time, employers are recruiting earlier in the student lifecycle, making it essential for students to explore and clarify career options long before upper-division internships.

## A skills gap has left students unprepared

While students want clearer direction and control, they also lack critical preparation for the workplace.

According to [“Closing the Skills Gap With Dynamic Partnerships,”](#) a November 2024 study conducted by Quinnipiac University School of Business, Deloitte, and AACSB, undergraduate business students lack several skills that are key to their successful professional development.

These include:

- Asking effective questions
- Engaging in self-advocacy
- Learning outside of structured settings
- Navigating ambiguity
- Communicating clearly
- Receiving and applying feedback

“Students need to know earlier what they want to pursue for a major and career because companies... are coming earlier and earlier to build brand awareness with them.”

— *Dr. Keely Latopolski, University of Alabama - Tuscaloosa, Culverhouse College of Business*

## Why We Need to Rethink Readiness for Gen Z Business Students

Unmet Needs	Untapped Potential
67% of first year business students need assistance making college major and career decisions.	Early development builds confidence and clarity—key to higher GPAs, persistence and on-time graduation.
1 in 3 feel they lack control over their career direction.	Learning tools like PathAdvisor give students personalized insights and agency in their future.
Over 50% of Gen Z students are unsure about their next career step.	First-year integration creates built-in equity—every student benefits.
Career and industry exploration often delayed until junior or senior year.	Texas State now reaches 1,000+ first-year students per semester with structured professional development.
Career services are often optional or underused.	LMS-integrated tools enable scalable, measurable student support that connects to career services.
Employers recruit earlier, but students delay major/career decisions.	Early clarity and knowledge of majors enables more strategic internship and course planning.



# Untapped Potential: Student Professional Development at Scale

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Forward-looking institutions are responding—not just with innovative content, but with scalable systems that reach more students, earlier, with measurable results.

Instead of relying on optional workshops or campus events, schools are embedding career readiness into required first-year courses and using tools like PathAdvisor and the Career Decision Profile (CDP) to:

- Text Inset
- Help students gain self-clarity and career confidence,
  - Provide real-time insights to faculty and advisors, and
  - Measure change in learning outcomes at scale.

For example, at Texas State University, 621 first-year students completed pre/post assessments in Fall 2024. In Spring 2025, that number is projected to exceed 1,000 students—a level of implementation that is rare in career development, and a clear example of what becomes possible with the right tools and strategy.

Scaling doesn't dilute the experience—it amplifies the impact. The more students who benefit from structured self-reflection and early exploration, the more confident, satisfied, and engaged your entire student body becomes.

“There’s no way we could do a lot of this at scale without the use and technology of Career Key.”

— *University of Alabama - Tuscaloosa, Culverhouse College of Business*

# A Scalable, Research-Based Framework for Early Professional Development

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Business schools across North America are discovering that the key to helping Gen Z students succeed isn't just about offering support—it's about **embedding professional development where it matters most: early, at scale, and within the curriculum.**

This section outlines a three-part framework that reflects some of the most effective, research-based practices currently used by AACSB-accredited institutions.

1. Pre/Post Measurement of Learning Outcomes
2. Reflection-Based Experiential Learning
3. Project-Based Experiential Learning

Together, these practices offer a scalable, measurable, and student-centered approach to building career readiness in the first year.

## Why They Scale Across Large Cohorts

- Assignments take 5 to 10 minutes to complete,
- Scientific validity and reliability with 30+ years of research ensures good data,
- Individualized student feedback and cohort-level data for faculty and advising,
- Required assignments across hundreds or thousands of students via LMS (Canvas, Blackboard, etc.) with grade syncing and rubrics, and
- Affordable 1<sup>st</sup> day delivery in class through campus-wide inclusive or equitable access course material programs.

## Accreditation and Competency Alignment

- **AACSB Standard 4** (Curriculum), which calls for innovative, relevant, and technology-supported learning experiences that develop professional competencies and a mindset for lifelong learning;
- **AACSB Standard 6** (Learner Progression), by embedding structured career development and advising tools into required coursework, enabling early identification of at-risk students and promoting measurable learner success;
- **AACSB Standard 7** (Teaching Impact), by measuring and identifying innovative and effective teaching practices; and
- **NACE Career Competencies** (National Association of Colleges and Employers).

# 1. Pre- and Post Assessment Assignments

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## From guessing impact to proving it.

To demonstrate teaching impact (AACSB Standard 7) and plan student success interventions, schools need valid, reliable ways to measure student growth in large cohorts.

That's where Career Key's *Career Decision Profile* (CDP) comes in.

The 5-minute CDP, also built into the *PathAdvisor* digital course material as a "Comfort Reflection," assesses student readiness across key domains:

- Decidedness (certainty about major/career),
- Comfort (confidence in decision),
- Self-Clarity,
- Knowledge of the Institution's College Majors and Careers,
- Decisiveness
- Career Choice Importance
- Existence of Barriers (Internal and External)

"A pre/post administration of the CDP allows us to measure the degree of change on all the scales... and we've found statistically significant progress."  
— Dr. Felicity Morgan, Director, University of Toronto Mississauga Career Centre

## AACSB Accreditation Standards Supported

- AACSB Standard 7: Basis for Judgment – demonstrated learner success and satisfaction; Suggested documentation includes: Innovative and/or effective teaching practices that have had significant, positive impact on learning; examples of teaching impact.

(Career Key AACSB Alignment, 2023)

## NACE Career Competencies Supported

- Career and Self-Development
- Technology

(Career Key Map to NACE Career Competencies, 2024)

## 2. Reflection-Based Experiential Learning

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**Help students understand themselves - before they pitch to an employer.**

Traditional experiential learning in business schools focuses on solving business problems or simulating workplace scenarios. Schools must also extend experiential learning inward—to help students explore their identity, values, strengths, and aspirations.

Students won't get the internship if they can't articulate who they are and why they stand out as a fit for the opportunity.

By integrating reflection-based activities into first-year business courses, students begin building the foundation of career readiness: self-awareness and self-clarity.

Key Examples:

- **Texas State University's "Your Social Brand"** activity asks students to reflect on how their personality and strengths show up in their online presence.
- **University of Alabama Tuscaloosa's Professional Brand Project** leads students through personal reflection, LinkedIn development, and presentations of their brand to peers.

And because these assignments are built into required courses, every student participates—not just those who seek it out.

### **AACSB Accreditation Standards Supported**

- AACSB Standard 4: Basis for Judgment – Include relevant competencies that prepared graduates for business careers and foster a lifelong learning mindset;
- AACSB Standard 6: Basis for Judgment – Consistent, timely high quality advising; Identify and provide intervention and support for at-risk and underrepresented learners

### **NACE Career Competencies Supported**

- Career and Self-Development
- Critical Thinking
- Communications
- Technology

## 3. Project-Based Learning with Career Focus

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### **Blending academic rigor with real-life application.**

Project-based learning (PBL) challenges students to investigate real-world problems and create tangible outputs. When combined with professional and career development, it gives students a chance to practice decision-making, critical thinking, communicate their goals, and see their own growth.

Key Example:

**At the University of Alabama, first-year business students complete a multi-part personal branding project** throughout the semester with the help of *PathAdvisor*.

They reflect on their identity, build a LinkedIn profile, and present their “personal and professional brand” to their peers. This not only improves communication skills but deepens their understanding of how their traits connect to career paths in the business world.

When paired with tools like PathAdvisor, these projects also provide a before-and-after snapshot of student development—data that faculty can use to adjust curriculum and prove impact.

### **AACSB Accreditation Standards Supported**

- AACSB Standard 4: Basis for Judgment – Include relevant competencies that prepared graduates for business careers and foster a lifelong learning mindset;
- AACSB Standard 6: Basis for Judgment – Consistent, timely high quality advising; Identify and provide intervention and support for at-risk and underrepresented learners

### **NACE Career Competencies Supported**

- Career and Self-Development
- Critical Thinking
- Communications
- Technology

# Why These Practices Work

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- ✓ **Research-based.** Grounded in experiential learning theory, validated assessment tools, high-impact pedagogy, AACSB Accreditation Standards, and NACE Career Competencies.
- ✓ **Scalable.** Designed to work across large-enrollment courses with 1,000+ students per semester, where students complete required assignments.
- ✓ **Measurable.** Faculty and advisors receive data that shows student growth—and highlights who may need additional support.
- ✓ **Student-centered.** Engaging activities build confidence and clarity while honoring each student's unique story and potential.

## Evidence and Examples

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### Proving What Works, at Scale

Business schools across the U.S. and Canadian career services show that early, embedded professional development isn't just aspirational—it's highly achievable and impactful when implemented with the right tools and strategy.

From large, R1 public universities to globally ranked programs, these institutions are integrating reflection, measurement, and career exploration directly into first-year courses. The result?

Thousands of Gen Z students are gaining clarity, confidence, and a stronger sense of purpose—earlier in their academic journeys.

The following programs highlight how scalable, research-backed approaches like *PathAdvisor* and its two assessments *Career Decision Profile* (CDP) and *Career Key Discovery* (CKD) are being used to improve student outcomes, guide faculty impact, and build stronger institutional alignment with AACSB Standards and NACE Career Readiness Competencies.

# How Leading Business Schools Scale

The table below highlights high-impact programs that have embedded professional development in the first-year curriculum using *PathAdvisor & Career Decision Profile*.

These examples highlight diverse institutional contexts, scalability, measurable outcomes, and student/faculty benefits.

## Comparative Case Studies

Institution	Approach	Scale & Reach	Key Results	Highlights
<b>Texas State University McCoy College of Business</b>	Embedded PathAdvisor in BA 1310 (gateway first-year course) with reflection-based assignments.	900+ students in Fall 2024 Scaling to 1,000+ in Spring 2025	35% ↑ self-clarity 30% ↑ confidence in career direction 27% ↑ knowledge of majors/careers	Nearly doubled student impact in 2 semesters
<b>University of Alabama Culverhouse College of Business</b>	Required professional development course with a multi-part Personal Brand Project incl. PathAdvisor.	2,200–2,400 students per cohort; Over 50 faculty and advisors; 100+ sections	↑ student awareness of major/career options- ↑ satisfaction and engagement ↑ at-risk student identification	“There’s no way we could do this at scale without the use and technology of Career Key.”
<b>University of Minnesota Carlson School of Management</b>	CDP integrated into required BA 3000 career skills course; included in flipped classroom model.	1,000 first year students/year in required career/life design course	↑ student clarity and decision confidence Used in reflective interviews and advising	“The CDP is a core component—not an add-on. It shows us and our students what’s holding them back.”
<b>University of Toronto Mississauga</b>	Used CDP pre/post in first-year courses and counseling to assess faculty impact and student growth.	Multi-year use across student cohorts	↑ Statistically significant clarity, comfort, knowledge ↑ faculty engagement in mentoring	“CDP results gave us visibility into students’ individual needs so we could respond meaningfully.”

# AACSB Accreditation Readiness through NACE Competency Integration into Curriculum

## Lehman College School of Business (City University of New York)

Similar to Career Key's higher education partners, Lehman College's School of Business used learning objectives tied to NACE Competencies as a scaffold for career readiness curriculum design—aligning professional development across courses while advancing toward AACSB accreditation.

Faculty embedded clear learning outcomes around communication, teamwork, and self-awareness in classroom activities and advising touchpoints.

These competencies were mapped to career services efforts, classroom projects, and assessments, demonstrating a coherent institutional approach to professional readiness.

According to the NACE article “Competency Implementation Helps Lehman College of Business Develop Career Ready Grads, Advance Toward Accreditation” (Nov 2024), this integration allowed Lehman to strengthen both its student outcomes and its documentation for AACSB Standards 4 and 6.

It serves as a strong external validation that a competency-based, scaffolded approach supports accreditation standards.

“Mapping NACE competencies across our business curriculum allowed us to show clear learner progression tied to employability outcomes.”  
— *Lehman College faculty leader, quoted in NACE (2024)*



# Implications for Business Faculty

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## **What Faculty Can Do Now— and Why It Matters**

While mission statements and institutional commitment are important, faculty are the frontline agents of change when it comes to embedding early professional development. Fortunately, the shift doesn't require reimagination of an entire course.

Even modest changes—when grounded in validated tools and modern pedagogy—can have an outsized impact on student success outcomes, meeting accreditation goals, and deepening faculty impact.

### **Start Small—See Big Impact**

You don't need to be a credentialed expert or devote a large amount of class time to make a big impact.

In fact, most impactful changes begin with a single assignment or asynchronous activity. It can be designed to spark student reflection and conversation related to the industries or career paths covered in your course.

You serve as a catalyst for students get more support, from financial aid to academic advising and career services.

Examples include:

- A self-reflection journal or guided prompt about a co-curricular experience and how it relates to one's strengths, values, or goals,
- A pre/post use of the Career Decision Profile (CDP) to track growth in self-awareness and barrier identification, and
- A LinkedIn profile project tied to in-class presentations on personal branding.

These actions take minimal class time but signal to students right from the start that their professional direction and personal development matter.

It also gets first and second year students more prepared to apply for summer internships – they can more easily articulate their strengths and unique fit for an opportunity.

### **Leverage Data to Improve Instruction and Meet Accreditation Goals**

AACSB Standard 7 asks faculty to demonstrate how their teaching contributes to learner success. Tools like PathAdvisor make it easy to do this without requiring additional surveys or grading.

# Implications for Business Faculty - continued

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Faculty can,

- Gather data on student growth in self-clarity, decidedness, and comfort using cohort-level dashboards,
- Use that data to refine instruction based on common barriers or student characteristics,
- Document teaching effectiveness with quantitative outcomes for departmental reporting and accreditation, and
- Meet standards related to career advising and faculty/student engagement.

## **Deepen Faculty-Student Connection**

Early career exploration naturally creates space for more meaningful dialogue between students and instructors. These conversations build trust and help students feel seen—not just as learners, but as future professionals.

Using *PathAdvisor* as a foundation:

- Provides common language around decision-making, identity, and strengths.
- Surfaces hidden challenges—like financial stress or self-doubt, and
- Strengthens faculty’s advising and mentoring role, even in large lecture courses.

## **Build Bridges: Faculty as Connectors to Campus Support**

One of the most powerful roles faculty can play is that of a bridge-builder—guiding students toward the rich ecosystem of advising, career services, and student support that already exists on campus.

When professional development is embedded into coursework:

- Students are more likely to engage with institutional resources more frequently,
- Faculty gain insight into who needs support, and can refer students at key moments, and
- Stakeholders across advising and student success offices can align their efforts more effectively.

Tools like PathAdvisor support this cross-campus connection with:

- A custom Resource Page tailored to each institution, listing majors, support offices, and campus career tools, and
- A soon to be released AI Assistant, designed to route students directly to appropriate services based on their responses and readiness scores

Faculty don’t have to “do it all”—but they can facilitate students’ access to services that already exist but may go underutilized – particularly by first-generation students.

# Key Takeaways for Faculty

What You Can Do	Why It Works
<p>Embed a short reflection, project, or PathAdvisor module as a required assignment in Week 1 and at semester end; Use LMS grade syncing and rubrics to make tracking completions and grading easier.</p>	<p>Builds early momentum, identifies students' unique qualities and what they need to be successful – along with supporting Career Readiness Competencies</p>
<p>Use pre/post CDP data to evaluate course impact and sync with internal demographic data</p>	<p>Demonstrates teaching impact for AACSB standards and gathers robust student-success related data at a large scale</p>
<p>Refer students to advising and career services using PathAdvisor's resource tools</p>	<p>Drives familiarity and engagement with underused but critical, high-impact student services</p>
<p>Build feedback loops with advising, career and student success staff</p>	<p>Aligns instruction with institution-wide retention and student success goals</p>
<p>Scale your impact by using digital course materials across sections in an entire course</p>	<p>Reach more students in an affordable, accessible and secure way through your LMS</p>

# Future Outlook

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## A Generation “Flying the Plane While Building It”—Why Business Educators Serve as Navigators

The labor market and skills landscape Gen Z graduates are entering is changing more quickly than previous cohorts.

While business schools have historically emphasized preparing students for structured, upwardly mobile careers, today’s career paths are being reshaped by AI, economic volatility, and shifting skills at an exponential rate.

Business educators play a critical role in boosting students’ professional development in this environment.

### **The Evolving AI Impact**

Within five years, one in four jobs will be disrupted by automation and AI (World Economic Forum, 2023). Many of these are entry-level business roles in marketing, finance, and operations—exactly the types of positions undergraduate business majors pursue.

- 57% of employers believe some entry-level jobs could already be replaced by AI.
- 68% say current employees will need to reskill within five years to keep up (How Gen Z is Thinking About AI at Work).
- Gen Z is both excited and anxious: 35% of U.S. workers under 30 fear AI will reduce job opportunities.

What does this mean for business education? It demands a shift from reactive support to proactive career readiness, with curricula that incorporate:

- AI literacy,
- Self-awareness and adaptability,
- Reflection-based experiential learning to clarify goals and strengths, and
- Real-world problem solving and critical thinking that cannot be easily automated.

Early professional development can give students a crucial edge—not only helping them learn AI tools, but helping them leverage their unique human qualities and skills (creativity, emotional intelligence, judgment) in a knowledge workforce increasingly augmented with AI.

### **Gen Z Navigates an Uncertain Economy**

In addition to watching the development of AI, Gen Z must navigate labor market and industry impacts from recent changes in U.S. trade policy, government and education downsizing, and uneven post-pandemic recovery.

No matter your political affiliation, everyone can agree that interest

# Future Outlook - continued

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## Gen Z Navigates an Uncertain Economy for Their Professional Start

on the U.S. national debt and the future of benefit programs like Social Security will make the North American economy a roller coaster over the next 10 years. This is true even if tariffs and trade policy were not being remade in 2025.

While headline employment rates may appear stable or show “labor tightness”, Gen Z job seekers face volatile conditions:

- In early 2024, unemployment for 20–24-year-olds spiked to 8.3%, compared to 3.5% for older workers.
- Entry-level hiring has cooled dramatically, mirroring the slow rebound of the early 2010s (HR Grapevine, 2024).
- Many are starting careers in roles that underutilize their degrees—over 50% of new grads are underemployed one year after graduation (Strada-Burning Glass, 2022).

Economic instability, AI disruption, and inflation have made Gen Z cautious—and rightly so. Early development programs help buffer these headwinds by building:

- Work skills through internships, service learning, and co-curricular activities,

- Networking and mentorship relationships that can open doors when job markets tighten and career paths pivot,
- Adaptability and confidence, so students can pivot strategically when Plans A or B do not work out.

As in business, students are best served by a proactive, not reactive approach.

### **Purpose, Well-Being, and the New Graduate Mindset**

Gen Z is the most purpose-driven generation to date—but also one of the most anxious.

- 86% say purpose is vital to job satisfaction (Deloitte, 2024)
- Over 70% prioritize work-life balance and flexibility when job searching
- Yet 32% of recent grads say they felt unprepared to get a job after college (AMS, 2023)
- Many are still recovering from pandemic-era losses in communication, interpersonal, math and writing skills.

This means students crave status, meaning and agency—but often lack the skills and structure to realize them.

# Future Outlook - continued

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**Scalable early professional development bridges the gap between what students need to professionally thrive and the skills they have** by helping them:

- Know themselves and how their personality, interests, skills and values align with college majors and career paths,
- Engage in coaching, mentorship, and reflection from year one, and
- Experience purpose in action through applied projects and leadership roles.

In doing so, institutions build trust and connection with their future alumni facing big changes in the economy and world of work.

# The Gen Z Student Success Opportunity Scale, Measure, Empower

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Business educators know that in every challenge, there is an opportunity. Businesses, nonprofits and public sector organizations thrive when they operate according to that principle. Moving the needle on student success should be no different.

Leading institutions like **Texas State University, University of Alabama - Tuscaloosa, University of Toronto - Mississauga, and the University of Minnesota Twin Cities** have shown that **measurable, student-centered professional development can be scaled to thousands of students per year** – in one course, and **even in the first semester of adoption**.

With learning tools like PathAdvisor, institutions can:

- Identify students at risk of disengagement or underemployment,
- Track real-time growth in confidence, clarity, and career knowledge,
- Increase visibility of advising, mentoring, and support programs, and
- Align curriculum with research-based accreditation standards, emerging technologies in AI-era business education, and career readiness competencies.

In an era of accelerating disruption, the question isn't "should we integrate professional and career readiness into the curriculum?"

It's "how quickly can we integrate and scale what works – starting in the first year?"

# Appendix A: Sources & References

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For deeper insight into the research and trends cited in this report, explore the sources below.

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- → See **Standard 4:** Innovative Curriculum; requires relevant competencies that prepare graduates for business careers and foster a lifelong learning mindset.
- → See **Standard 6:** Learner Progression, Degree Completion, and Career Development; requires consistent, timely high quality advising and effective career development support.
- → See **Standard 7:** Teaching Effectiveness and Impact; requires measurable evidence of learner success and faculty instructional quality.

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### **About Career Key**

Career Key is a career well-being company dedicated to helping individuals and institutions align education, work, and purpose. Founded by a counselor educator over 25 years ago, Career Key has partnered with colleges, universities, and workforce organizations to deliver scalable, research-based solutions.

Our digital course material, [PathAdvisor](#), is an LTI 1.3 certified 1EdTech tool available in all major LMS systems.

As an AACSB Sustaining Business Member, [Career Key is proud to support AACSB-accredited business schools](#) in developing the next generation of professionals.

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