



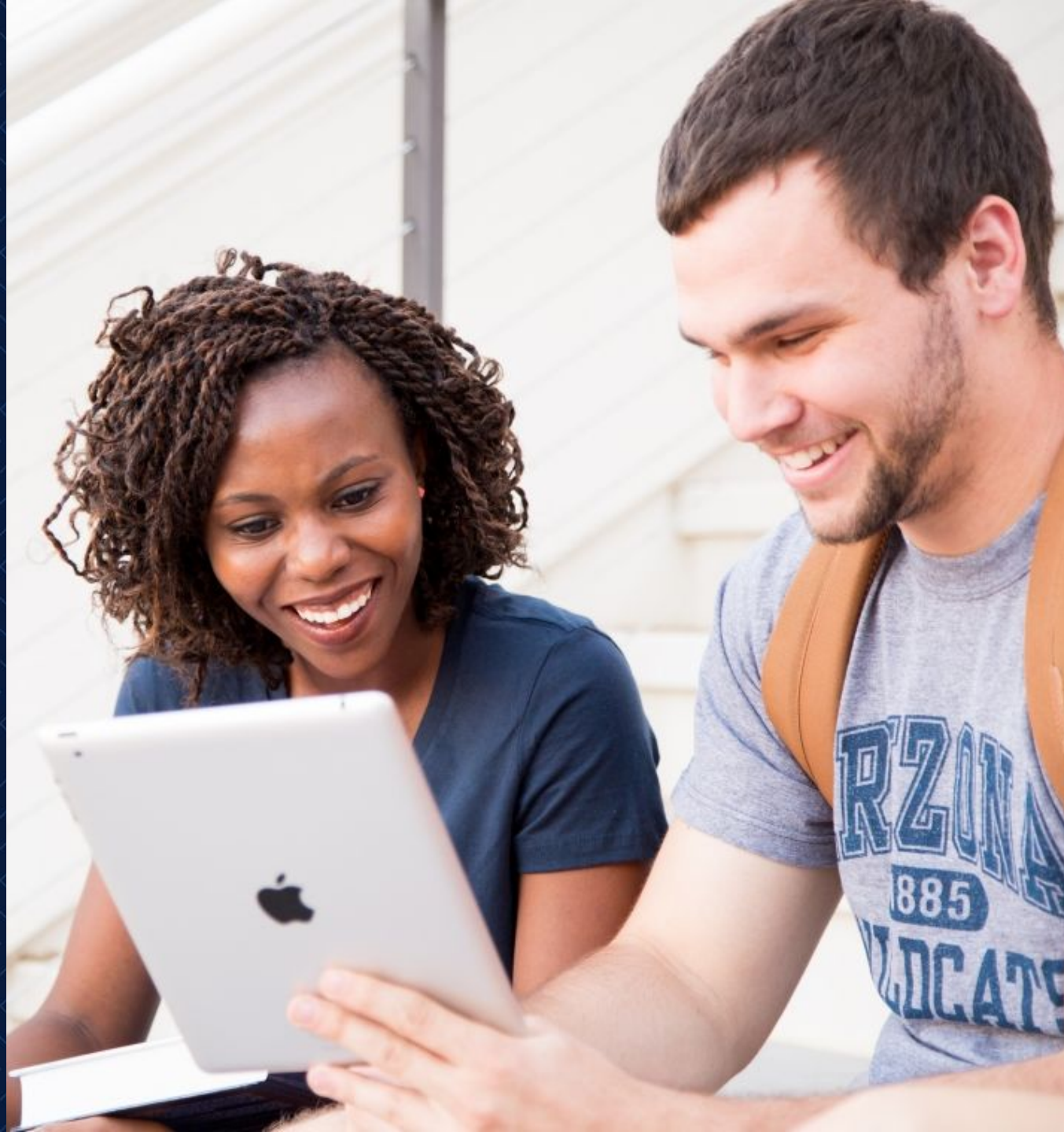
MENTOR  
COLLECTIVE

# Career Readiness Begins Here: *How Mentorship Builds the Skills that Matter*



# A guide to best practices and tips to make your virtual experience seamless

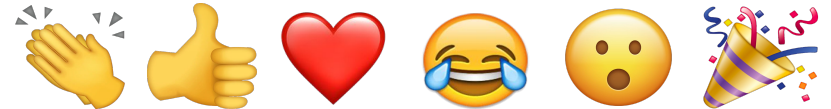
- Upon entry, audio is on mute
- Adjust your video layout to speaker view
- Chat your name and institution!



# Audience Engagement

**Submit your questions  
throughout the event and  
chat with attendees via the  
Chat feature in Zoom**

Like what you hear? Let us know  
with reactions!



# Today's Speakers

---



**Erin Mayhood**  
Chief Executive Officer,  
Mentor Collective



**James Winfield, Ph.D.**  
Associate Dean for FYE, General  
Education & Retention Strategies,  
Southern New Hampshire University



# During this event, you'll learn:

---

- The **top early indicators of workforce readiness**—and why they matter now more than ever
- How mentorship helps students build **career confidence, take action, and feel a sense of belonging**
- The critical role of mentoring in helping students **bridge the gap from college to career**
- **Real stories and data** from mentorship programs
- **Practical strategies to strengthen career development** at your institution



# Mind The (Employment) Gap

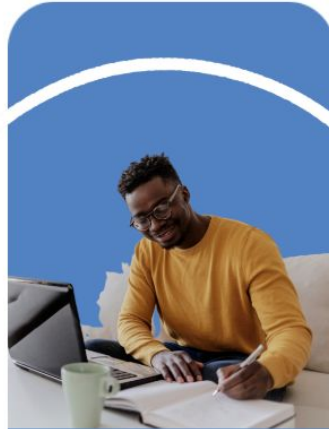
---

- **Skill gaps persist** in communication, critical thinking, and applied technical skills (BHEF, 2024a).
- **Over 40% of graduates are underemployed** in their first job, with long-term career impacts (Strada, 2024).
- **First-generation students and students of color are disproportionately affected** by underemployment and lack of access to career supports.
- **Internships reduce underemployment risk by nearly 49%**, yet many students lack access to experiential learning.
- **Only 1 in 4 community college grads and 1 in 5 four-year grads** receive personalized career coaching (Strada, 2024).
- **Relational strategies like mentorship are key** to fostering confidence, clarity, and career readiness at scale.



# Leading Indicators of Workforce Readiness

---



**Career  
Decision Self-  
Efficacy**



**Career  
Exploration &  
Preparation  
Behaviors**



**Sense of  
Belonging &  
Social Capital**

# About The Findings

---

## Mentor Collective Research

Data for this study was gathered from participants through the Mentor Collective platform between April 2023 and June 2025. Participants are college or university-enrolled mentees in mentorship programs designed to enhance their career readiness and post-graduate outcomes.

## Dr. Winfield's Research

Dr. Winfield's research focuses on first-generation college students and their experiences with peer mentorship. His findings highlight how culturally responsive mentorship enhances students' confidence in academic and career decisions while increasing their engagement in proactive career behaviors.



# Career Decision Self-Efficacy

---

## Definition:

Confidence in one's ability to navigate career decisions.

## Why it matters:

High self-efficacy correlates with proactive career planning, persistence through setbacks, and actual employment outcomes.

## Mentorship Impact:

Mentors boost self-efficacy by validating students' strengths, normalizing setbacks, and modeling pathways to success, helping students internalize the belief that "I can do this."

"Before talking with my mentor, I was very unsure on what I wanted to do with my major. After our first meeting, I **had a better understanding of what I could do** and what I should do to prepare for my future career. After a few more meetings, **I am now more confident** in my major and my future."

"My mentor has **helped me to feel less alone** in my journey. It's so nice to know **there is someone in my corner** who has been in my shoes and has come out the other side successfully. **It makes me feel like I could do it too.**"

# Career Decision Self-Efficacy Before & After Mentorship

Scale of 1 - 5; n = 1421 (Before), 420 (After)

People important to me have let me know that I am resourceful when it comes to gathering information needed to make career-related decisions.

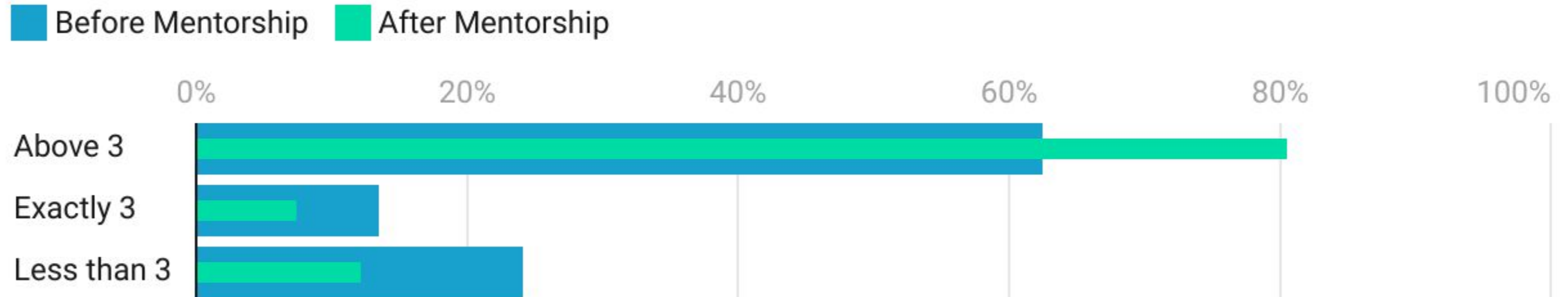
I have observed people I admire who are resourceful at gathering the information they need to make career-related decisions.

I have role models who have explained to me how they chose an academic major or career path.



# Career Decision Self-Efficacy Before & After Mentorship

Scale of 1 - 5; n = 1421 (Before), 420 (After)



Created with Datawrapper

**From your experience,  
what role do  
relationships with folks  
like coaches, advisors,  
and mentors play in  
developing career  
decision self-efficacy?**



### Sam's Experience:

"She's really helped me out...to get in contact with people who have been in the place that I have been. So, the classes I'm struggling [in] **she's helped to connect me to...her friends who've taken the courses** and ... [with] the Student Success Center [so] that **[I] can go there and get a tutor to get assistance.**"

### Monica's Experience:

"[I] like [that] you have...a **mentor to kind of keep you on track** [and SSS has] you...to meet [with] this person every month...The reason **I love it so much is because the person I was paired with...it's kind of like a friendship** that we have. I feel comfortable [with her] I can just...tell her how it's really going."

# Career Exploration & Preparation Behaviors

---

## Definition:

Taking concrete steps (resume building, networking, internships, job fairs).

## Why it matters:

Students who take concrete steps in career preparation have higher employment and satisfaction outcomes.

## Mentorship Impact:

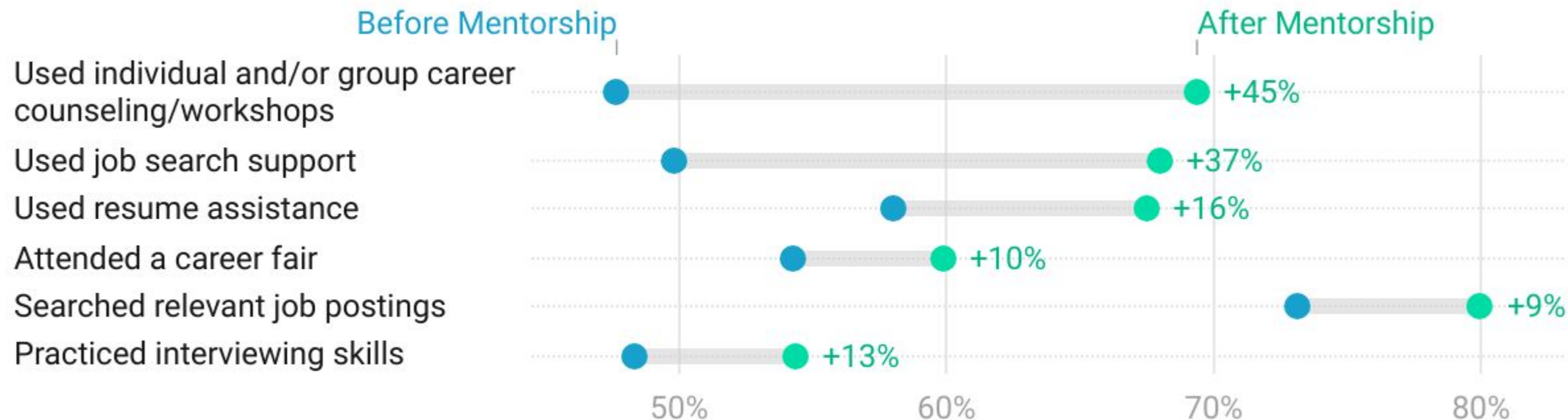
Mentors encourage action by demystifying steps, reviewing resumes or LinkedIn profiles, offering accountability, and sharing insights into effective strategies. They help students become aware of available resources and encourage them to use them.

"My mentor has been a **great help in my professional development**. He's helped me with my resume, my LinkedIn, and my general networking skills. **It's a lot less scary to reach out to people when you have someone in your corner to encourage you.**"

"I was struggling to figure out my next steps for after graduation, and **my mentor was a great resource**. She helped me **find workshops on campus for job searching** and encouraged me to attend a career fair, which **I ended up getting an interview** from."

# Use of Career Services Before & After Mentorship

n = 3,452 (Before), 807 (After)

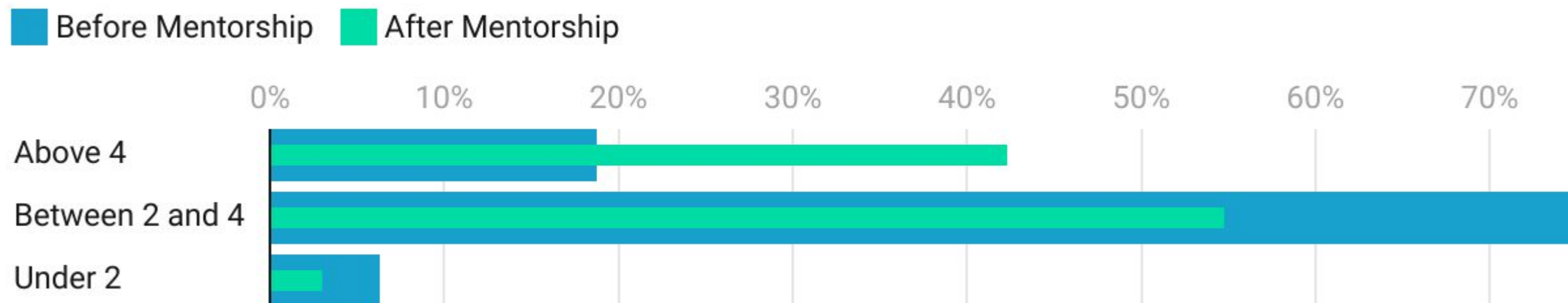


*Question phrasing: Have you (used service or done activity), either through your college/university or through some other source (e.g., another college, your job, a community organization)?*

Created with Datawrapper

# Professional Skills Before & After Mentorship

Scale of 0-5; n = 3,452 (Before), 807 (After)



Created with Datawrapper

# Professional Skills Before & After Mentorship

Scale of 0 - 5; n = 3,452 (Before), 807 (After)



To what extent have you begun thinking about, exploring, or planning your life after graduation, whether that includes more school, a job, volunteer work, or anything else?

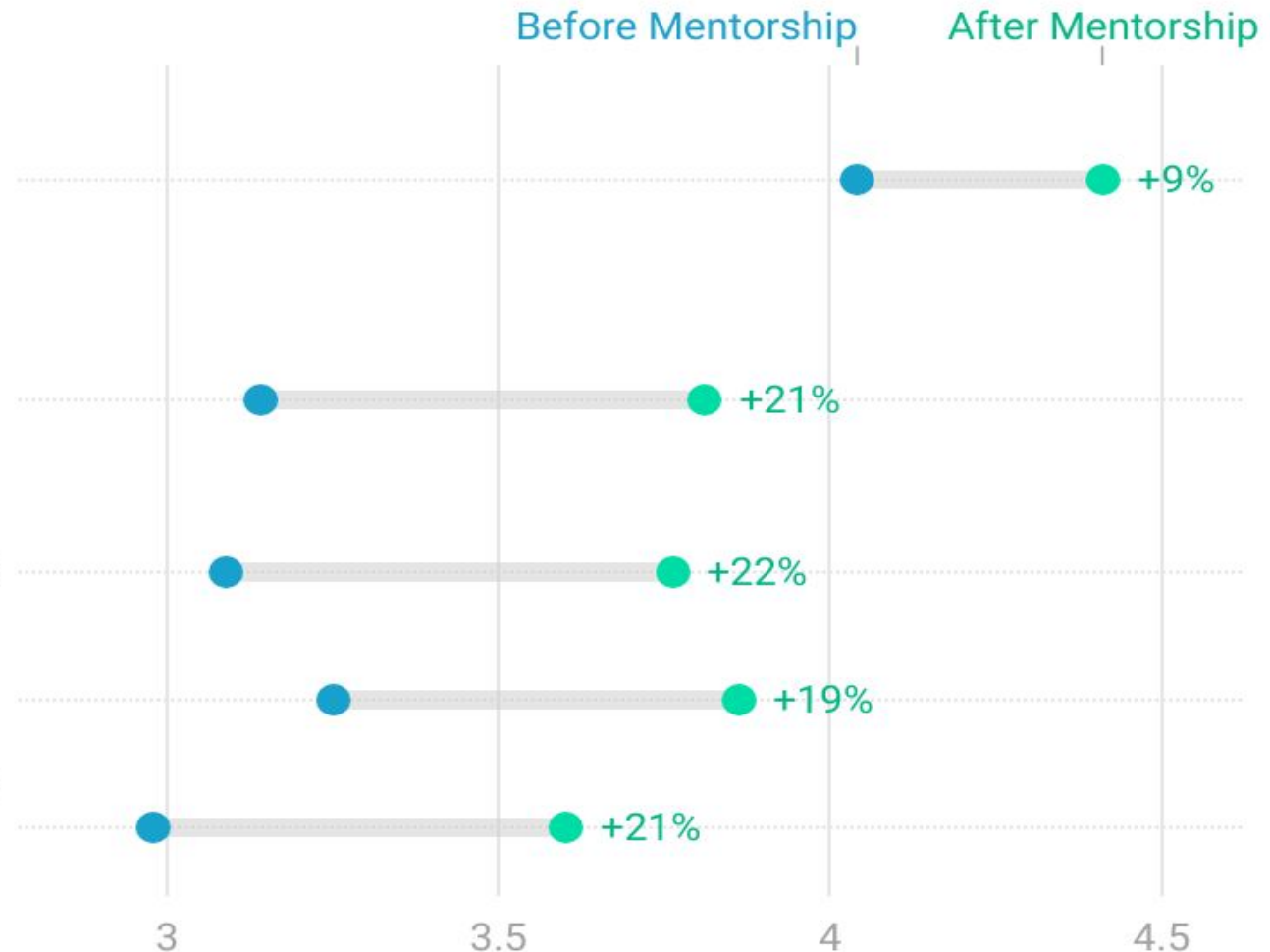
How confident are you in your ability to solicit help from an established career person to help chart a course in a given field?



How confident are you in your ability to develop realistic strategies for locating and securing employment?

How confident are you in your ability to meet new people in careers of interest?

How confident are you in your ability to use your social network to identify job opportunities?



**How can we help  
students "build the  
muscle" to articulate  
academic outcomes  
as employable skills?**



# Sense of Belonging & Social Capital

---

## Definition:

Feeling connected to the community (campus and industry); access to networks and insider knowledge.

## Why it matters:

Linked to persistence, confidence, and access to job opportunities. Brookings Institute (2022) reports that the “strongest predictor of a community's upward income mobility is the level of economic connectedness.”

## Mentorship Impact:

Mentorship builds a relational bridge that helps students feel seen and supported, while also expanding their networks through referrals, introductions, and insider knowledge.

"My mentor has **helped me to feel less alone in my journey**. It's so nice to know there is someone in my corner who has been in my shoes and has come out the other side successfully. **It makes me feel like I could do it too.**"

"I learned a lot from my mentor about **how to navigate my career path and build my professional network**. She helped me identify people to reach out to and even reviewed the emails I sent. **I wouldn't have known where to start without her.**"

# Professional Skills Before & After Mentorship

Scale of 0 - 5; n = 3,452 (Before), 807 (After)

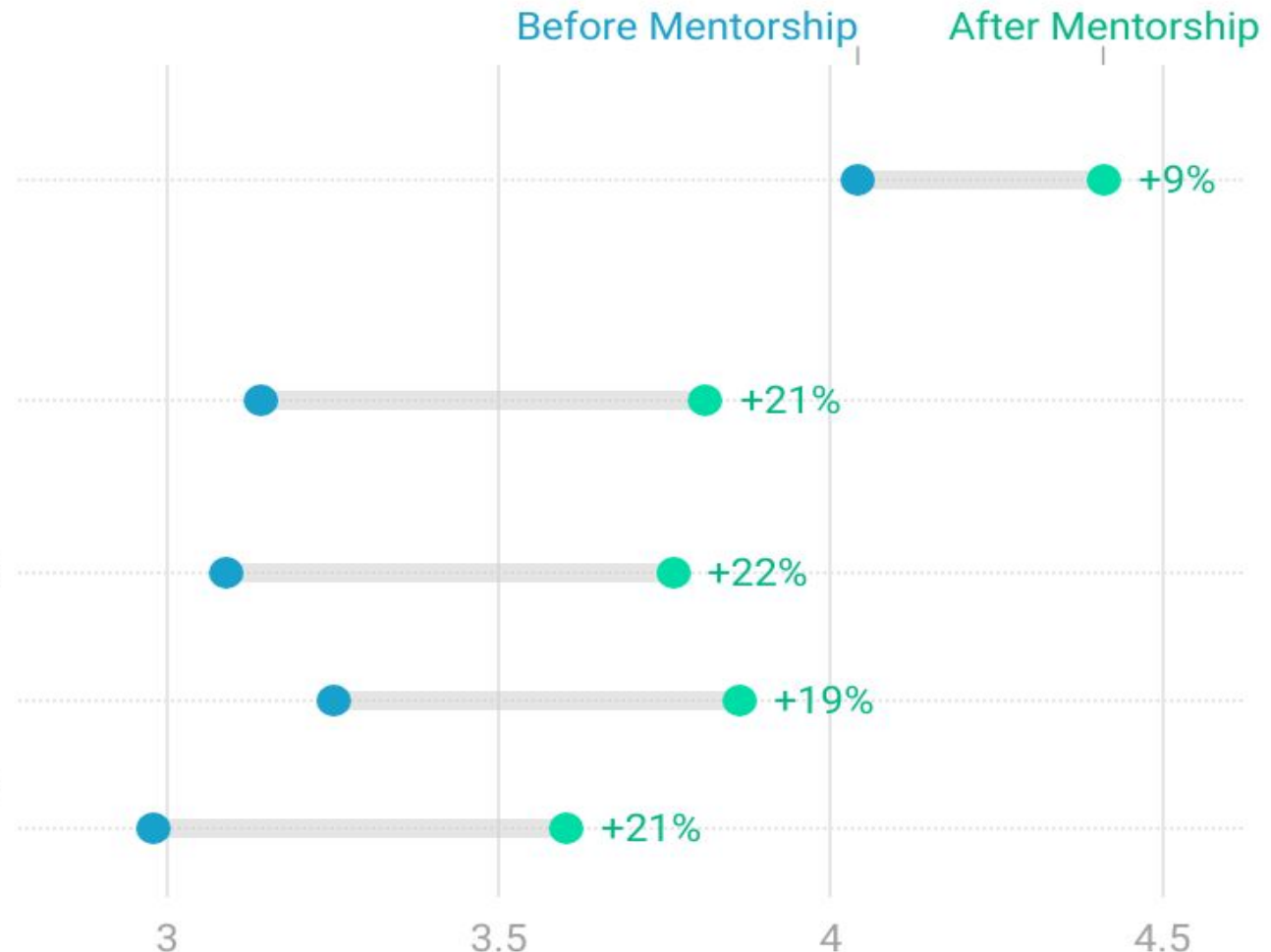
To what extent have you begun thinking about, exploring, or planning your life after graduation, whether that includes more school, a job, volunteer work, or anything else?

How confident are you in your ability to solicit help from an established career person to help chart a course in a given field?

How confident are you in your ability to develop realistic strategies for locating and securing employment?

How confident are you in your ability to meet new people in careers of interest?

How confident are you in your ability to use your social network to identify job opportunities?



**What are the  
consequences when  
this sense of  
belonging and social  
capital is missing?**



# Bridging The Gap

---

## Social Capital as a Career Prerequisite<sup>1</sup>

- First-gen students face unique challenges as they enter professional spaces unfamiliar to their families and communities.
- They often lack access to the "hidden curriculum"—social capital and professional norms.

## Gaps in Career Services<sup>1</sup>

- Fewer than 40% of institutions offer first-gen specific career support.
- Interview prep, salary negotiation, and networking remain underserved yet critical needs.

## Most Students Are Already Workers!<sup>2</sup>

- 70%+ of college students are working learners, balancing jobs and school.
- 54% of adult learners return to reskill or pivot careers, not just start them.
- Work shapes how students learn—career relevance matters from day one.

## Mentorship as a Bridge<sup>1</sup>

- Students want mentors who reflect their identities and experiences.
- Mentorship increases belonging, confidence, and access to resources.

<sup>1</sup> Karp, M. M., Lyons, S., Stalowski, N., & Fugate, M. (2025). First-generation college students' career entry: College perspectives [Landscape analysis]. FirstGen Forward. <https://www.firstgenforward.org/landscape-analysis-first-generation-college-students-career-entry>

<sup>2</sup> Carnevale, A. P., Smith, N., Melton, M., & Price, E. W. (2015). Learning while earning: The new normal. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/workinglearners/>

**How do we ensure we  
are keeping our  
minds and practices  
open and accessible  
for all types of  
learners?**



# Mentorship in Action: Partner Success Stories

---



## North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University Graduate School

- Goal to prepare students for diverse professional pathways.
- Over 400 graduate students engaged across disciplines.
- What specific outcomes or benefits did you gain from the program?
  - Guidance and support
  - Skill development (active listening, etc.)
  - Career & professional insights
  - Networking skills
  - Ability to give back (mentors)



## Community College of Rhode Island

- Goal to support first-generation, adult, and returning students in navigating academics and career readiness.
- Intentional matching through MC's platform, and targeted goal-setting, has created measurable impacts.
- Observable increases in career decision self-efficacy.
- Increased confidence in making academic and career decisions.
- Increased likelihood of seeking out career readiness support.

# Final Thoughts

**Q&A**



# What's Next?

---

- You will receive a **copy of the presentation and recording** shortly
- New: **The Six Elements of a Culture of Mentorship Whitepaper**
- Upcoming white paper on career readiness, featuring research from today's presentation
- Here's a look at our upcoming **virtual events**:
  - July 15 | Ask the Expert: Start of Program Survey Data (for partners)
  - July 31 | MC's Product Strategy: Shaping the Future of Mentorship in an AI-Powered World (for everyone)



**Pol**

**I**



# Thank you!



# **Cultivating Workforce Readiness: Key Indicators & Mentorship's Role**

