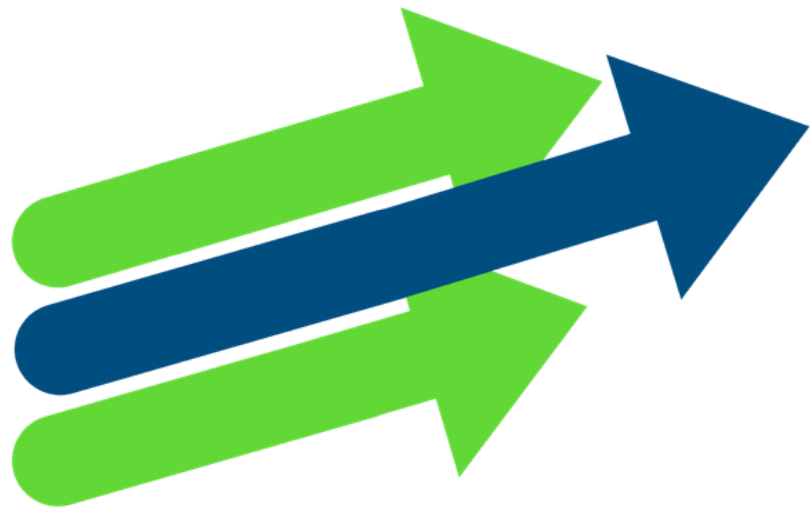
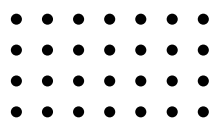




driving forward

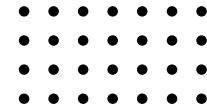
2026 Impact Report

Celebrating our 2026 program,
students, donors, and volunteers



DRIVINGFORWARD.ORG

Executive Summary



Driving Forward celebrated its seventh year in 2026. Our 28 outstanding undergraduate interns completed our flagship program. Our 280 program alumni reflect our impact on first-generation and under-resourced students. Over 201 have earned their degree and gone on to the workforce or graduate school. The remaining 79 are finishing their undergraduate degrees.

We are excited to share the results of this year's program, the students, volunteers, and supporters who made it happen, and our plans for growth.

Sections

Origins & Program Overview

Alumni Highlight

Why Our Work Matters

Intern Project Spotlights

Outcomes

Volunteering with Coaches & Mentors

Professional Development and Workshops

2027 Roadmap

Sponsors

Origins

In 2020, Driving Forward was founded because internship and career opportunities exist in abundance, but **access** to them does not. For **first-generation** and **under-resourced** college students, the path from campus to career is filled with obstacles. It is not about talent or ambition. It has everything to do with **networks, resources, and opportunity.**

Driving Forward was built to change that.

Since our founding, we have grown into a dynamic **professional development community.** We have supported **280 college students** by with professional work experience and mentorship to make a successful, **meaningful transition from college to career.**



Abby Hernandez, Winter 2025

"Being first generation doesn't just mean you're the first in your family to attend college, but the first in your family to navigate the corporate world. The first to navigate how to network for great opportunities. Which is something you need to be successful but something no one takes the time to explain. That's why Driving Forward changed my life as a first generation student"

Program Overview

Students work on a paid internship while gaining hands-on experience. Student teams conduct market research, analyze challenges, and present tailored recommendations, all while working collaboratively in industry-focused groups. They receive skills-based training, expert workshops, dedicated mentorship, and access to a lasting network of peers and professionals they can lean on throughout their careers.



Internship

10-week internship rooted in a business case and collaboration with peers



Mentorship

One-on-one coaching to develop soft skills, prep for interviews, & build a network



Training

Assigned curriculum and professional development workshops with industry experts

ALUMNI HIGHLIGHT:



LILY HUANG

Driving Forward Winter 2026

Illinois Wesleyan 2026, Applied Economics

As Lily entered her senior year, she was focused on pursuing finance roles. Her college career advisor suggested exploring consulting and the Driving Forward program. She learned more about the program from 2025 alum, Jason Flores.

In the 10 week program, Lily enjoyed learning about different business roles in the professional development workshops. She particularly enjoyed the creativity and complexity of Farmer's Fridge. She continues to leverage the storytelling tools from the Confident Communications session.

Through one-on-one meetings with her mentor, Lily discovered a fit in human resources, a vocation she had not considered. This summer, Lily is working as a Credit Analyst at Wintrust Bank. In the fall she will be attending the University of Illinois, pursuing a Masters in Human Resources and Industrial Relations, with a Data Analytics concentration.

"My mentor introduced me to Human Resources. Because of her, I discovered how to pair my interest in people with my passion for data analytics."

Why our work matters



"Participating in the Driving Forward program was an incredible opportunity that provided me with foundational skills for the workplace. I am deeply grateful for the experience"

Justin Nguyen

Winter '21

Virginia Tech, Finance & Business IT

Senior Consultant at Booz Allen

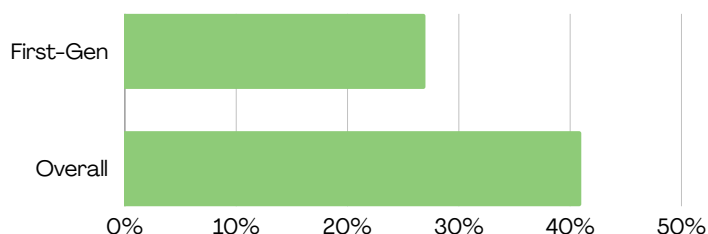
First-generation and under-resourced students face a **different workforce landscape**. They lack the **network, experience, and opportunities** of their peers. Driving Forward steps in to **provide the path to close these gaps**.

Percentage of undergraduates in four year universities that are first generation.

54%

firstgen forward

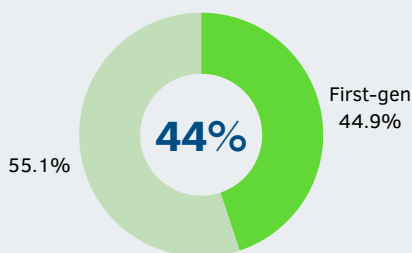
Internship Rate for First Generation College Students



27%

First-gen students are significantly less likely to complete professional internships

Gallup 2023



Only 44% of first-gen grads land a job requiring a bachelor's degree. First-gen students are more likely to be **working below their qualification**

Center for First-Generation Student Success (2023)

Why Internships?

Paid Internships ~double full-time job offers after graduation

1.61 vs **0.77**
avg. job offers paid interns vs avg. job offers non-interns

NACE (2024)

2026 Intern Project Spotlights

This year, six Driving Forward teams took on real challenges across finance, healthcare, hospitality, tech and more. Through research and collaboration they crafted solutions to deliver tangible impact.

ClearPath Financial Team



Sammie Chiu
UIC, 2029



Harper Wood
IWU, 2027



Eric Anastacio
UChicago, 2029



Ishaani Kusunam
UT Austin, 2029

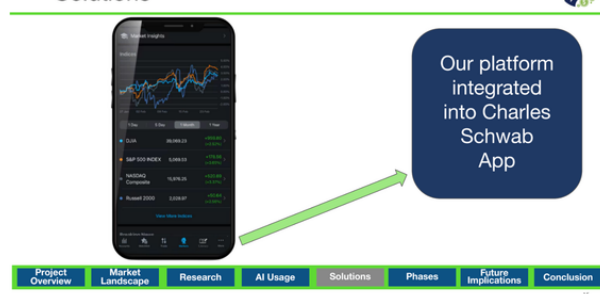


Minseo You
UMich, 2028

Winners of the **Best Overall Award**, **ClearPath Financial**, took on the challenge of helping a financial institution capture the Gen Z audience. They analyzed the financial literacy landscape, stakeholder ecosystem, and what actually resonates with the next generation of investors. Using AI to bring their vision to life, ClearPath delivered a fully functional waterfall budgeting tool, a short-form financial literacy content strategy, and a phased roadmap for integrating their platform directly into the finance app.



Solutions



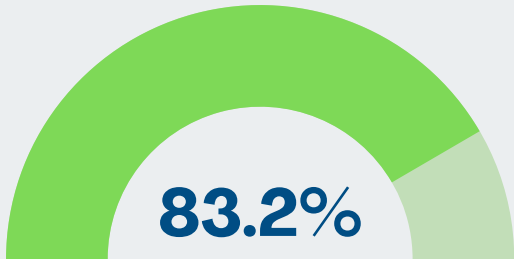
"I am a first-gen student who transitioned from a pre-health Biology track to pursuing a career at the intersection of healthcare, business, and technology. I initially felt behind in gaining professional business experience. I am very glad my first exposure was through Driving Forward as I was introduced to many resources, such as the mentorship program, that truly helped me gain clarity and confidence in my interests."

Simi Patel

Driving Forward 2026 Intern
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Class of 2028

Outcomes

Since our inception in 2020, 280 college students have completed the Driving Forward Flagship Program. 201 have earned their undergraduate degrees and have entered the workforce or graduate school. The remaining 79 are finishing their undergraduate degrees.



Placement Rate

Job/Internship/Grad school
since April 30th, 2026

280
Total Alumni

Attended Grad School

44

MBA, Masters, Phd

\$113,000

Average Salary

104

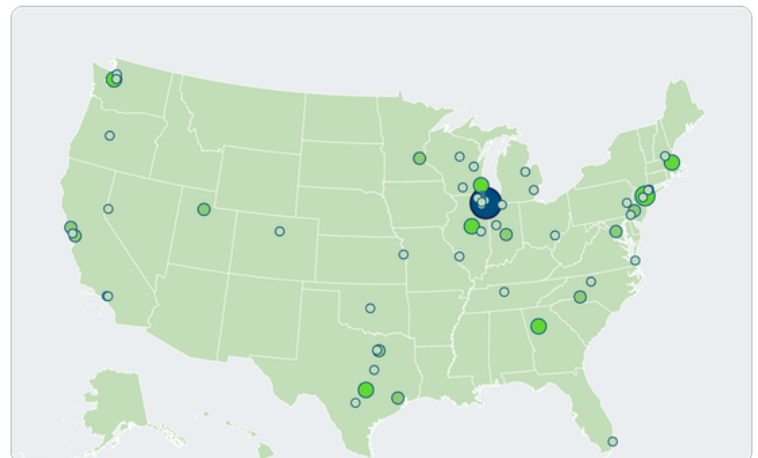
**Total Distinct
Colleges**

30+

**Alumni City
Presence**

Alumni City Presence:

● Chicago hub ● Major city (5+ alumni) ● City (2-4 alumni) ● City (1 alumni)



"I've frequently drawn on the lessons, approaching new challenges with confidence and shaping my personal brand. The skills have been invaluable in helping me grow professionally."



Mishwa Bhavsar

Driving Forward, 2022 intern
Illinois Wesleyan, 2023 grad
MasterCard
Software Engineer

Professional Volunteers

45

Professional
Volunteers

1,260+

Volunteer Hours

20+

Years Avg
Professional
Experience

Coaches:

Six coaches **supported the intern project teams** with project guidance in weekly meetings.



Frank Schulte



Fatou Dioum



Brandon Windham



Darma Satgunasingam



Nick Johansson



Nathan Wojtkiewicz

Mentors:

Mentors are dedicated professionals who provide interns with **individualized, one-on-one career support** throughout the program. Through personalized guidance, career coaching, and networking connections, mentors help interns explore career paths, build professional skills, and navigate their next steps with confidence. This year, **28 mentors** supported participants across the program.



"I started volunteering with Driving Forward in the summer of 2020. I joined because I wanted to pay it forward. Throughout my own career, I've been fortunate to have mentors who helped me land my first job, and every job since. Their guidance shaped not just my trajectory, but my confidence, my voice, and my sense of purpose. Volunteering with Driving Forward allows me to offer that same support to others."

Steven Piotrowski, Mentor

Professional Development Workshops

Interns participated in results oriented workshops supporting their projects, teamwork, communication, and presentation skills.



Project Management 101

Paula Virshek · Senior director, HCSC



Presentation Skills

Meghan Kane Benjamin · CEO, Studio Reinvent



Confident Communications

Randy Dojutrek · Proj. Engineering Exec. Director



Market Research

Jennifer Accera · Managing Partner, Otter Collective



Data in Decision Making

Emily Stucker · Vice president, Farmer's Fridge

Professional Development Workshop Panels

Interns participated in professional panels to learn about pathways in popular careers for college graduates.

Consulting



Morgan Faley
Premier, Inc.



Kathryn Khaw
*McKinsey &
Company*



Jordan Kelly
GEP Worldwide



Joe Reifel
*Insurance
Consulting Exec*

Product Technology



Ryan Jennings
SpaceX



**Natasha Price-
Lopez**
Google Gemini



Amy Schweiss
Quantified.ai

Finance



Patrick Phillips
*Private Foundation
Exec*



Trevor Hummel
*First Financial
Bank*

Career Skills Development

Driving Forward interns have access to Udemy, the leading online training platform. The classes support their project and career development.



Curriculum highlights:

Work From Home: Time Management & Productivity Techniques

Jamal Lazzar

Leading Effective Meetings: Beginner's Guide

Markus Amanto

Management Consulting Techniques, Tools, & Frameworks

Asen Gyczew

Write Better Emails: Tactics for Smarter Communications

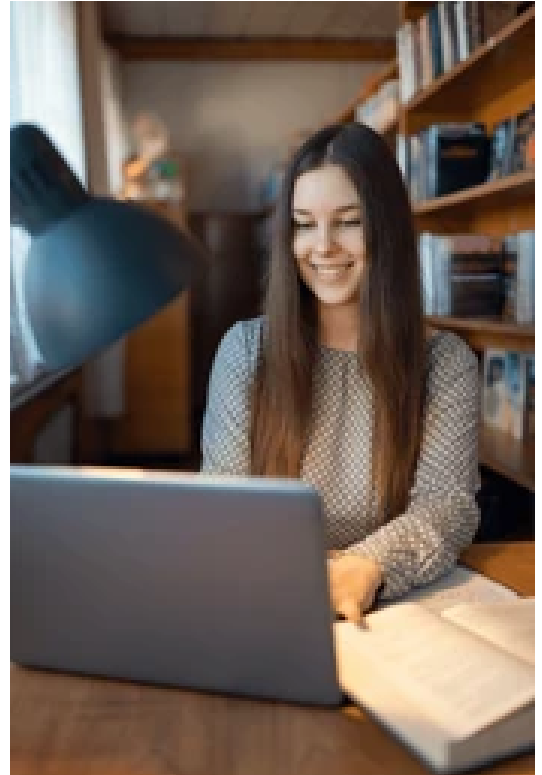
Hassan Osman

Job Crafting: Creating Meaning in Your Work

Amy Wrzesniewski

Communication Skills for Professionals

Alex Lyon



2026 Intern Project Spotlights



Vibe Coding Team



Ayush Awasthi
UT Austin, 2028



Andres Gonzalez
UChicago, 2028



Isha Patel
UIUC, 2028

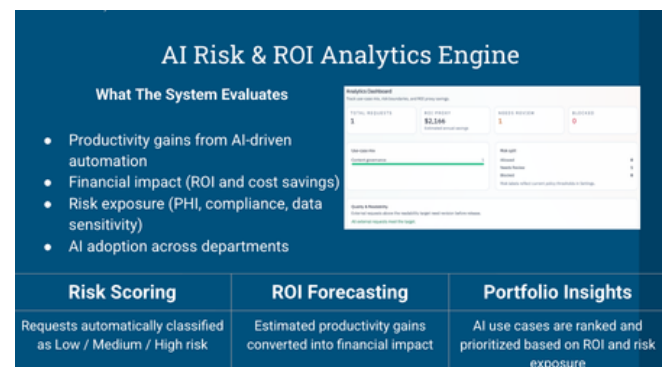
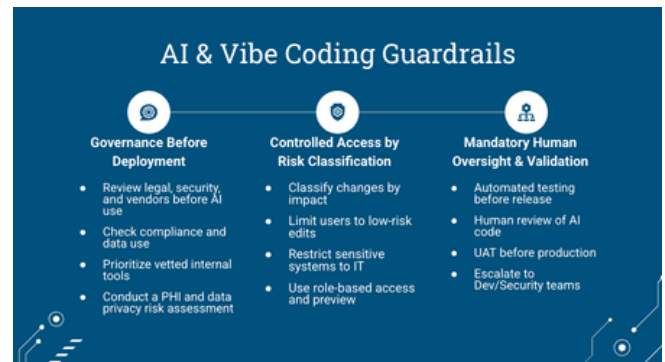


Melanie Nguyen
UIC, 2028



Aashvi Kenia
UMich, 2028

Winners of the **AI Impact Award for Most Creative Implementation of AI, Vibe Coding** tackled one of healthcare's most complex challenges: helping a healthcare institution harness AI responsibly and at scale. Sponsored by **Trexin**, they analyzed the health insurance market, explored AI and vibe coding guardrails, and built a working prototype of an employee intake portal. Their recommendation included an AI governance platform with risk classification, mandatory human oversight, and a strategic roadmap outlining short, medium, and long-term impact. Their work was grounded in a rigorous risk and ROI analysis.



"Driving Forward was an outstanding opportunity to explore consulting, collaborate with a team, and sharpen technical and soft skills. The Udemy coursework, weekly webinars, and three rounds of presentations to industry professionals created an engaging, feedback-rich process to grow as problem solvers and communicators."

Max Rivera

Driving Forward 2025 Intern
University of Chicago, Class of 2028

2027 Roadmap

Driving Forward Alumni Support - We are expanding support with access to a long-term career community. Alumni will have pathways to recruiting tools, live coaching, and the Driving Forward network of fellow alumni and 300+ volunteers.

2027 Flagship Program - In its 8th year, the program will support 30+ paid internships with substantive projects, mentors, coaches, training & workshops.

University Toolkit - Rollout of our career hub for specific universities. Students can query the Toolkit for university resources including career centers, alumni networks, professional clubs, internships, and full time roles.



"Completing Driving Forward, I truly saw how much I had grown --both professionally and personally. I learned how to effectively collaborate with a team of people I had just met, working toward a shared goal-- an experience that continues to guide how I show up in internships and future roles."

Iscleiry Pujols

2025 Intern

University of Illinois - Chicago, 2028

Support Next Steps

Donate

Donations support student scholarships for completing the internship and our career programming resources.

www.drivingforward.org/donate

Volunteer

We have many opportunities including interviewing prospective interns, mentoring interns, and coaching project teams.

www.drivingforward.org/volunteer

Sponsors

Our sponsors provide us financial resources and access to business professionals that support our interns' professional development and their projects.

Team Sponsors:



Opportunity Sponsors:



In Kind Contributions:



University Partners:



Donations support student scholarships for completing the internship and our career programming resources

Donate Now