



# 2026 Jobs Report



FALL 2023 FELLOW

RUTGERS  
UNIVERSITY-NEWARK

Angelina Vertiz

BOLD Women's  
Leadership Network  
Fellow,  
YWCA Northern  
New Jersey

&

Founder,  
LeadHer Roots

Together with our higher education and employer partners, we're proving what's possible when you empower the next generation of leaders with the skills, networks, confidence, and experience necessary to launch a strong career.



# What does this report cover?

Alongside our dedicated partners, Braven is reigniting the promise of the American Dream.

To date, we have worked with more than 15,500<sup>1</sup> Fellows across the country, and our momentum continues to build. By 2032, we aim to serve 80,000-100,000 students, serving 25,000 new students each year through the Braven course.



SPRING 2025 FELLOW

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY-NEWARK

**Oscar Alvarado**

Compliance Examiner,  
National Futures Association

Joshua Christie | Purpose Portraits

In this report, we spotlight the stories of the exceptional undergraduate students we are privileged to serve and examine Braven's impact through two central questions:

1

Are our Fellows securing quality career outcomes that put them on the path to the American Dream?

2

Are we supporting Fellows on the path to internships and college completion?

# Why our work matters



SPRING 2024 FELLOW

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY-NEWARK  
**Lance Simon**  
 Tax Consultant, Deloitte &  
 Master of Science in Business Management,  
 Rutgers University-Newark  
 © Joshua Christie | Purpose Portraits

Only about one quarter of the low-income or first-generation college students who enroll in college each year will graduate and secure a strong first job or enter graduate school.<sup>2</sup>



That's about **one million students** every single year who aren't on the path to the American Dream.

GRADUATE & SECURE A STRONG JOB OR ENTER GRADUATE SCHOOL

ARE NOT ON THE PATH TO THE AMERICAN DREAM



LOW-INCOME OR FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENT ENROLLEES EACH YEAR

# Mission

In collaboration with our higher education and employer partners, Braven empowers promising college students with the skills, networks, confidence, and experience necessary to transition from college to strong economic opportunities, which lead to meaningful careers and lives of impact.

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# Vision

The next generation of leaders will emerge from everywhere.



SPRING 2024 FELLOW

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY-NEWARK  
**Vaibhavi Patel**  
Field Operations Consultant,  
McDonald's

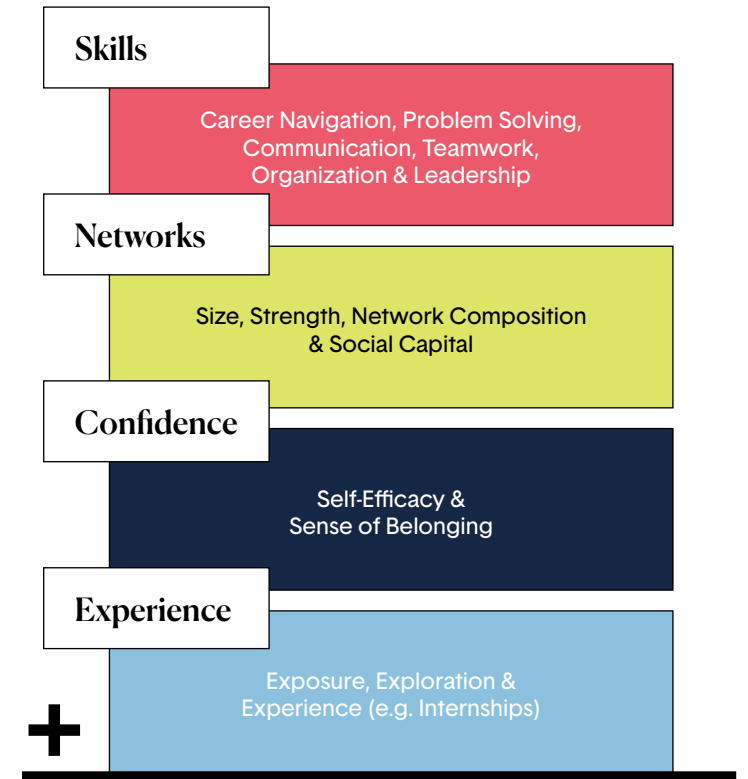
Joshua Christie | Purpose Portraits

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY-NEWARK  
**Priyal Patel**  
 Program Integrity Analyst,  
 Zigatek

# The Braven Equation

Braven provides career readiness for students earning a four-year degree, ensuring students graduate ready to secure a strong first opportunity.

The Braven Equation is the sum of four career-readiness factors—skills, networks, confidence, and experience—which add up to a career-ready college graduate.



## Career-Ready College Graduate

who secures a strong first economic opportunity or attends graduate school within 6 months of graduation

# The Braven Experience

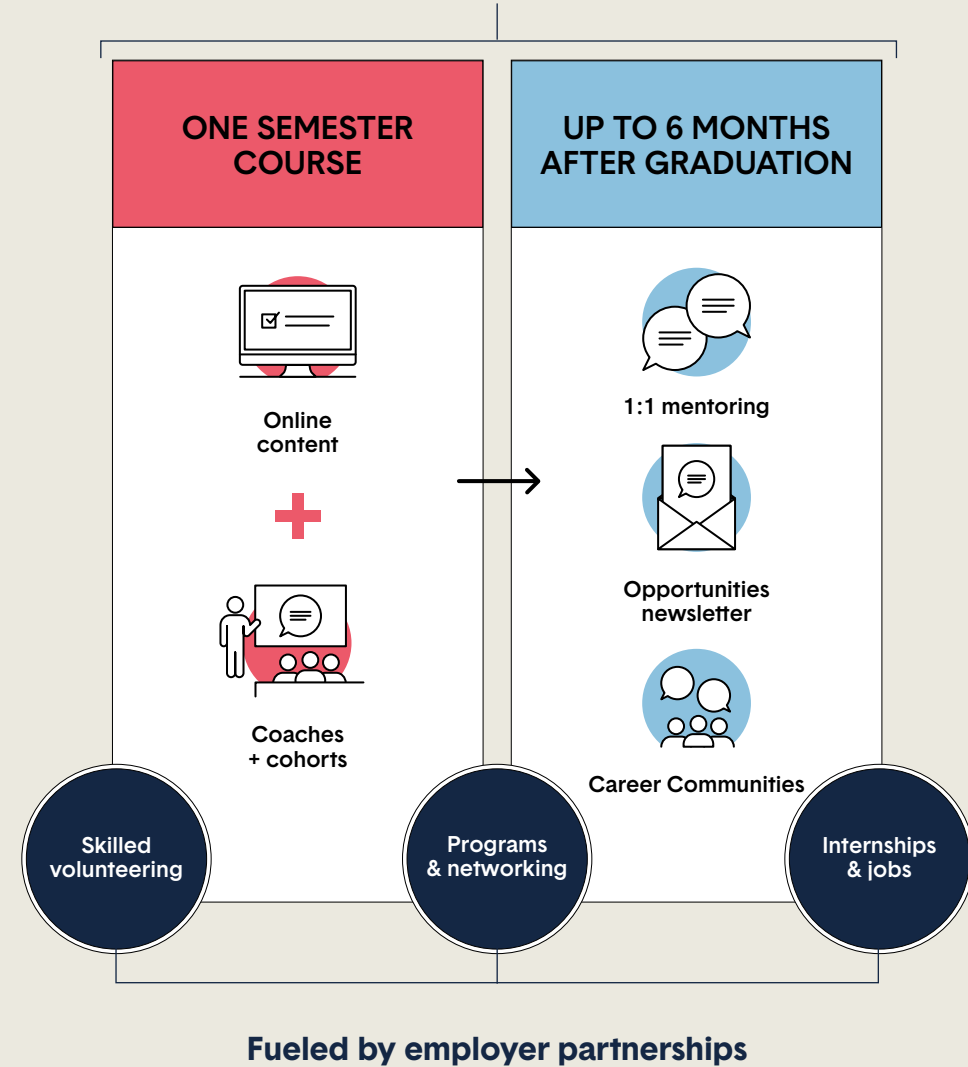
Braven equips promising college students on their paths toward quality economic opportunities through a semester-long, cohort-based course—developed with input from our students, volunteers, and higher education and employer partners—and support that extends beyond the course, continuing through six months after college graduation.

In our core higher education model, students take the course for credit. Students who come through BravenX via college success organizations receive a financial stipend in lieu of credit.

## OUR HIGHER EDUCATION PARTNERS



In partnership with higher education institutions and college success organizations



Section

1

Are our  
Fellows  
securing  
quality career  
outcomes that  
put them on  
the path to  
the American  
Dream?

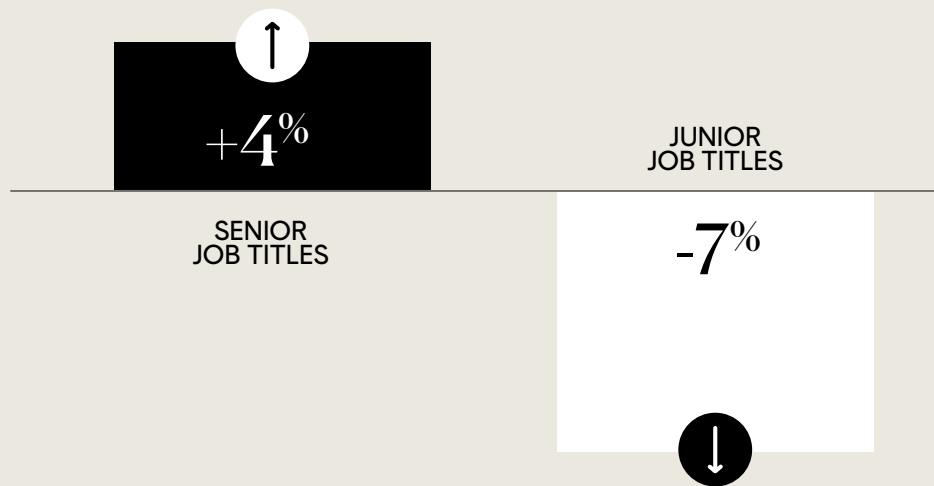




# New college graduates are experiencing an especially challenging labor market

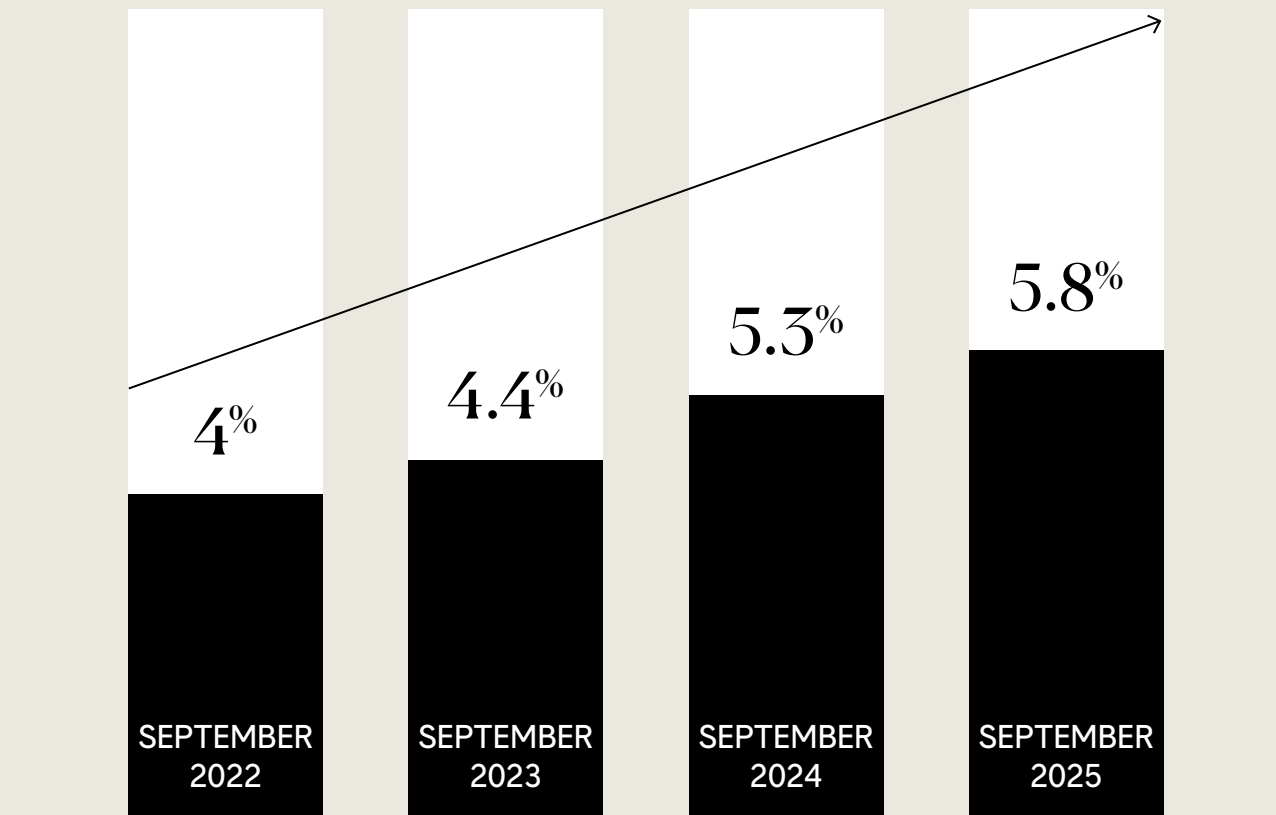
The entry-level market is tight. We have seen stagnation in entry-level job openings which, in part, is driving rising unemployment of recent graduates.

## STAGNATION IN ENTRY-LEVEL JOB OPENINGS



Year-over-year, senior job titles are up 4%, while postings for junior titles are down 7%.<sup>3</sup>

## UNEMPLOYMENT RATES FOR NEW GRADUATES (AGED 22-27) ON THE RISE<sup>4</sup>





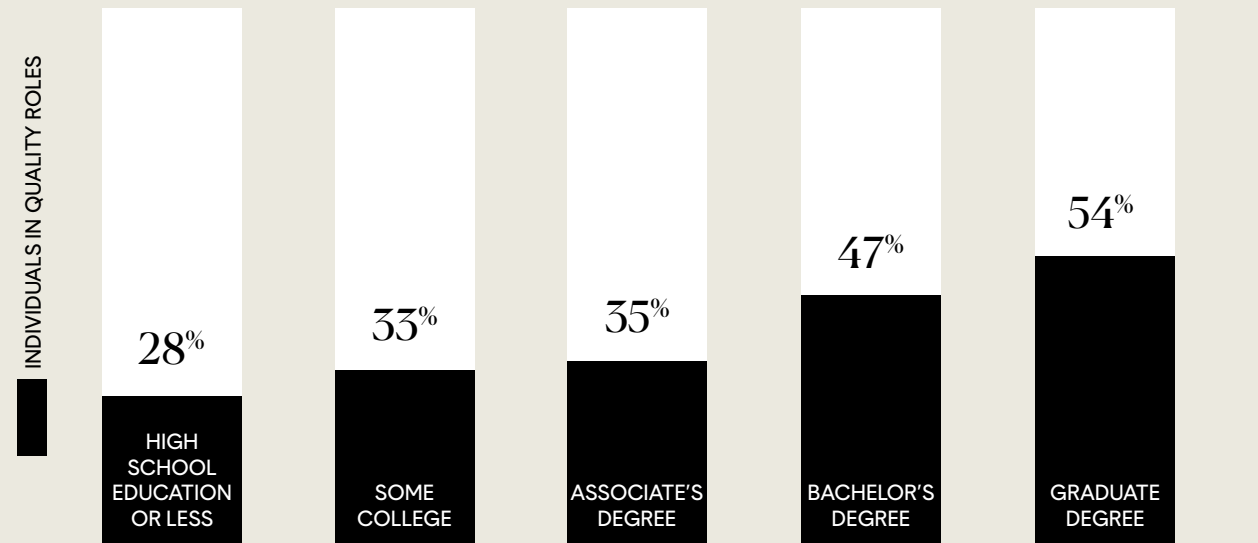
# Pursuing the bachelor's degree is still the surest path to economic mobility

Compared to high school graduates, bachelor's degree holders have higher employment rates, greater job security, and earn more over their lifetime.

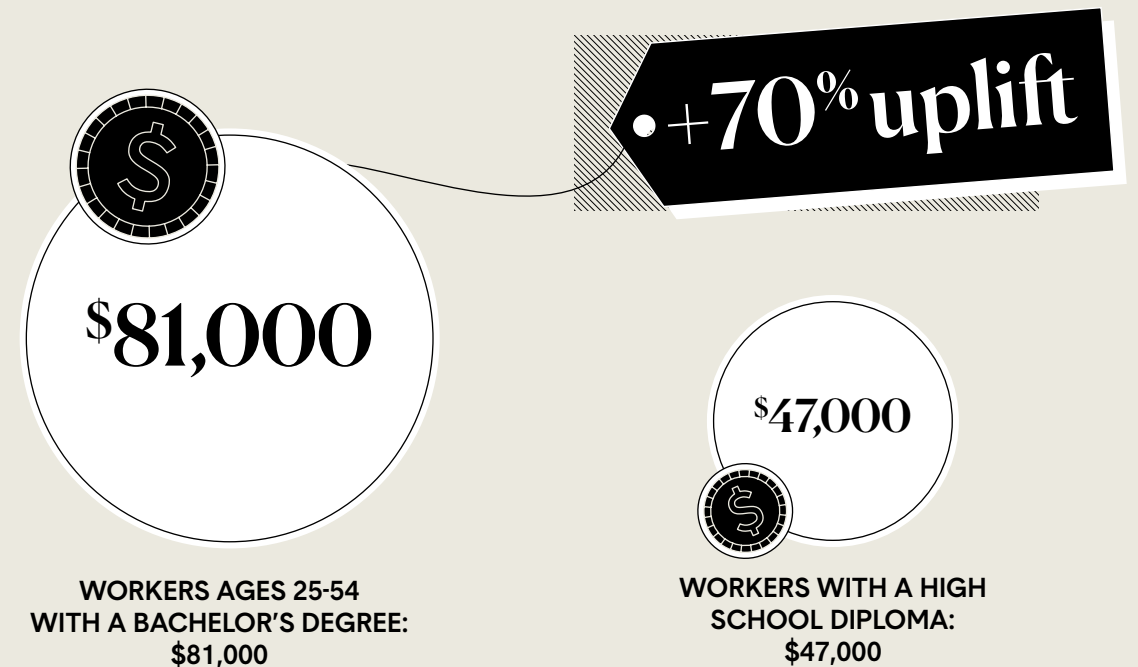
Employees with a four-year degree earn 70% more than workers with a high school diploma alone.

The bachelor's degree remains a strong predictor of job quality

According to The American Job Quality Study, employees with a bachelor's or graduate degree are more likely to have strong job quality than those with an associate's degree, some college, or a high school education or less.<sup>5</sup>



MEDIAN ECONOMIC OUTCOMES FOR WORKERS AGED 25-54 WITH A BACHELOR'S DEGREE<sup>6</sup>





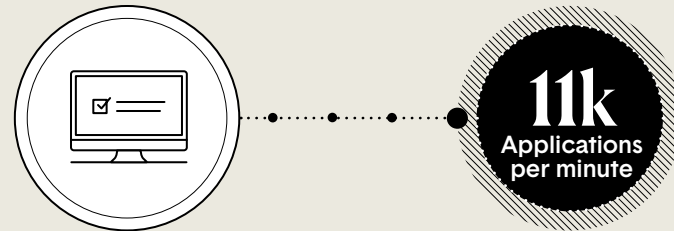
# AI reshapes expectations for early-career talent

The challenge today is not the value of the degree itself, but ensuring students can successfully translate the skills they develop in college into the skills needed in entry-level positions.

Although the long-term effects of AI on job availability are still emerging, its influence on the job search experience and hiring practices is already evident.

## Increase in job applications

AI is making it easier to apply to jobs. In June 2025, LinkedIn reported that the number of job applications surged more than 45% year-over-year, and the platform is clocking an average of **11,000 applications per minute**.<sup>7</sup>

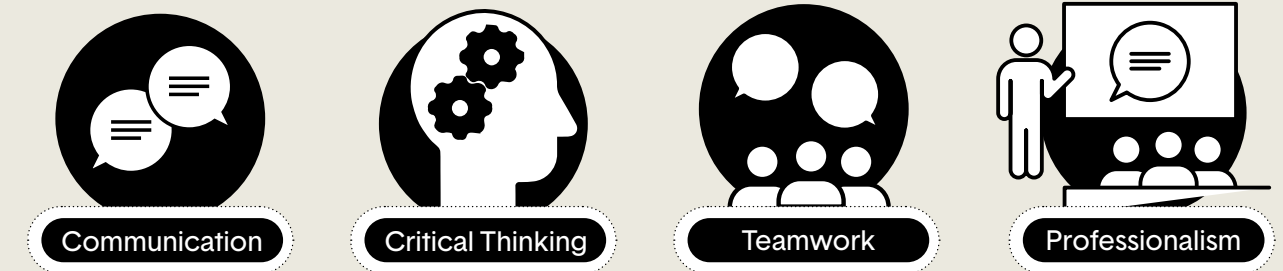


## AI's impact on job hunting

Twenty-six percent of candidates say AI has made it harder to stand out due to increased competition. Among Gen Z, that number jumps to 45%.<sup>7</sup>

Employers are prioritizing human skill competencies to distinguish the strongest entry-level candidates in an increasingly competitive applicant pool.

These include:<sup>8</sup>



These are closely aligned with the six career-readiness skills Braven helps students develop in the Accelerator course:

- Career navigation
- Leadership
- Organization
- Communication
- Teamwork
- Problem solving

In 2025, 153  
Braven Fellows  
graduated from  
Rutgers University-  
Newark

SPRING 2025 FELLOW

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY-NEWARK

**Sophia Estape**

Staff Geologist,  
Langan



# RU-N Braven Fellows secured quality opportunities after college

**24+**  
This new class is  
outpacing their peers  
nationally in quality  
outcome attainment<sup>9</sup>  
by 24 percentage  
points (69%<sup>10</sup> vs  
45%<sup>11</sup>) within six  
months of graduation.

**69%** 2025 RU-N BRAVEN  
GRADUATES<sup>10</sup>

**45%** GRADUATES WITH A BACHELOR'S  
DEGREE FROM PEER INSTITUTIONS  
WITH A SIMILAR CONCENTRATION OF  
PELL GRANT RECIPIENTS<sup>11</sup>

**49%** GRADUATES NATIONALLY WITH A  
BACHELOR'S DEGREE<sup>12</sup>



## RU-N BRAVEN CLASS OF 2025 DEMOGRAPHICS

**80%**  
students from  
low-income  
backgrounds<sup>13</sup>

**65%**  
first-generation  
college  
students<sup>14</sup>

Of the 153 Braven Fellows who graduated from Rutgers University-Newark in 2025,

88%

are employed or enrolled in graduate school

84%

secured quality or pathway outcomes

SPRING 2024 FELLOW

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY-NEWARK

**Diana Serquen**

EOF Student Support Assistant,  
Essex County College

# The strength of roles our 2025 graduates secured



## 2025 RU-N BRAVEN GRADUATES

### HOW WE DEFINE QUALITY ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES:

#### QUALITY OUTCOME

a full-time role that requires a bachelor's degree and includes some combination of promotion pathways, employee benefits, and a market-competitive starting salary, or enrollment in graduate school

#### PATHWAY OUTCOME

a role that does not require a bachelor's degree but helps students' financial sustainability, is aligned with career interests, and will likely lead to more career-accelerating possibilities through skill development

#### NON-QUALITY OUTCOME

a role that does not require a bachelor's degree, offers limited runway to additional career-accelerating opportunities, and is not aligned with students' career interests

69%

QUALITY ROLES OR GRADUATE SCHOOL

15%

PATHWAY ROLES

4%

NON-QUALITY

12%

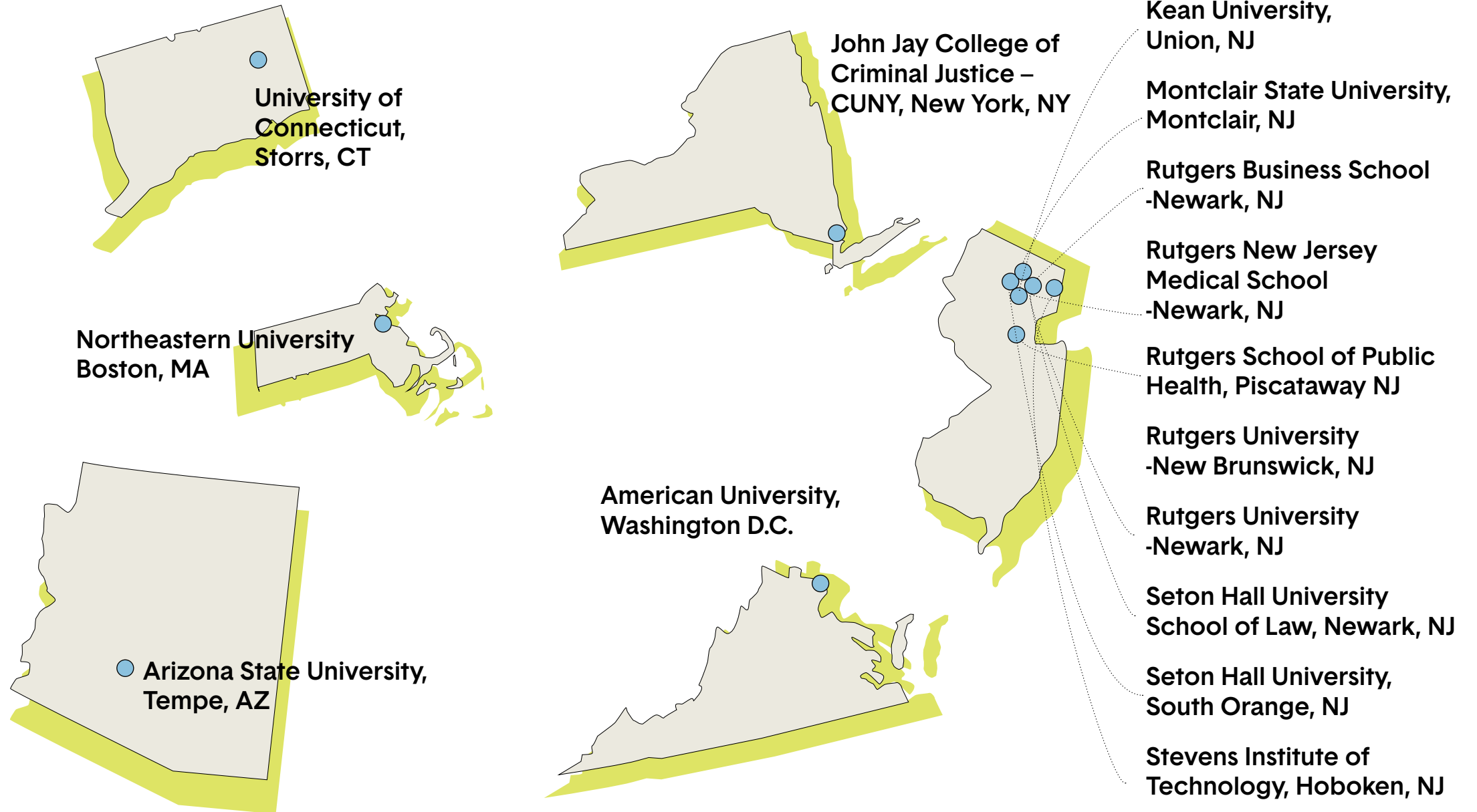
UNEMPLOYED

# RU-N Fellow enrollment in graduate school

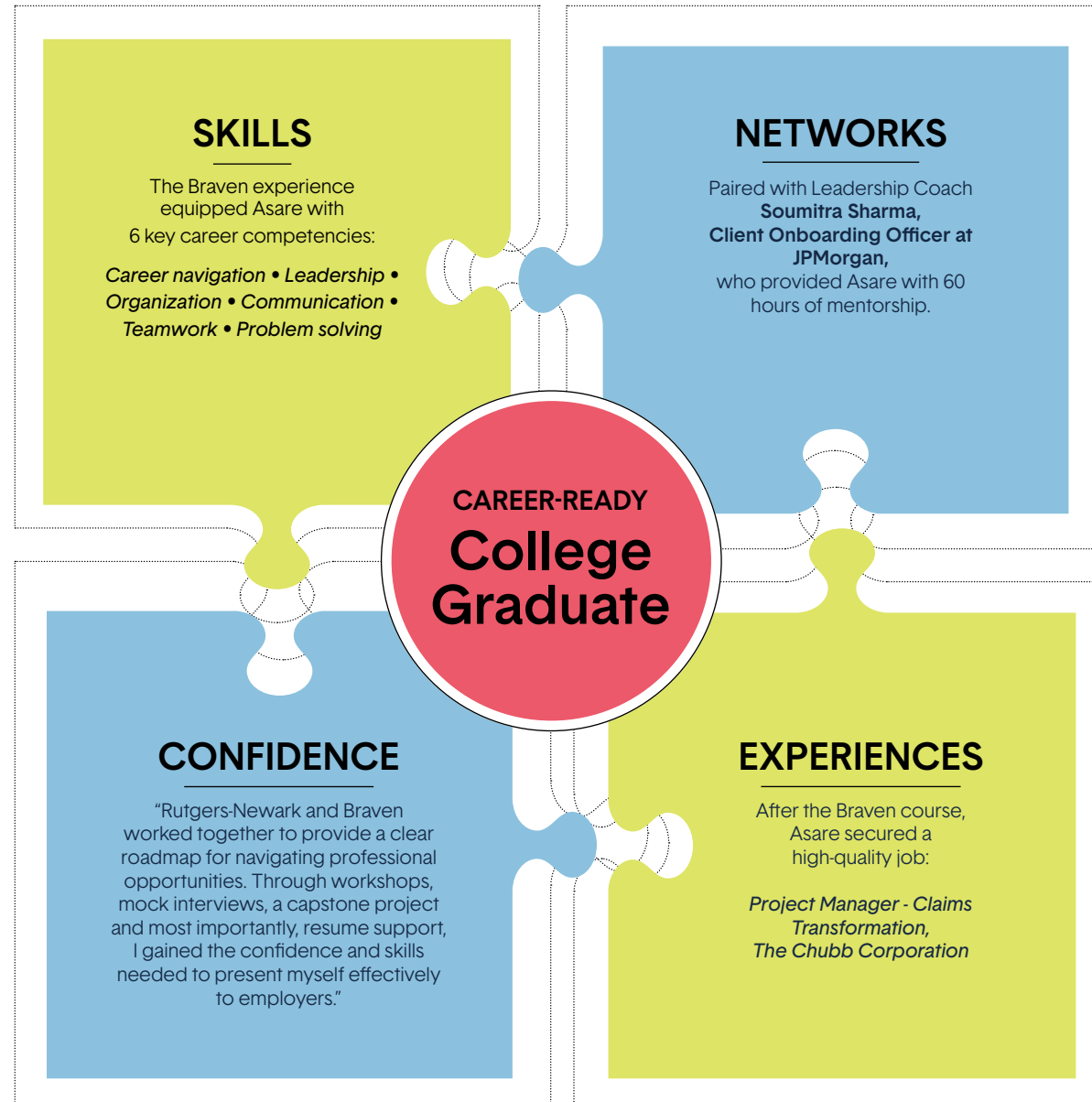
Enrollment in graduate school is one of the ways Braven defines a quality outcome.

# 21%

21 percent of our 2025 Rutgers University-Newark graduates went on to graduate school within six months of graduation.<sup>15</sup>



# With Braven's help, Asare Bampoe-Parry built the foundation to get on the path to the American Dream.



# The Braven Equation in action



FALL 2023 FELLOW

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY-NEWARK  
**Asare Bampoe-Parry**  
 Claims Examiner, The Chubb Corporation & Graduate Student, Master of Science in Business of Fashion, Rutgers Business School

# Building career wealth & health



SPRING 2024 FELLOW

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY-NEWARK

**Nicholas Rios**

Web Developer,  
GS-LSAMP Rutgers University-Newark

Joshua Christie | Purpose Portraits

A high quality first job helps individuals build long-term wealth and health. Braven defines a strong first job as one that requires a bachelor's degree and is full-time, and also includes some combination of promotion pathways, employee benefits, and a market-competitive starting salary.

Six months post-graduation, Rutgers University-Newark Braven Fellows in the class of 2025 are outearning the national average salary for early college graduates.

**\$67,333**

Mean salary of employed 2025 RU-N Braven graduates in the first 6 months after college graduation<sup>16,18</sup>

Compared to a national average of \$43,018 of recent college graduates aged 23-24 who were employed in 2024

+\$24.3k

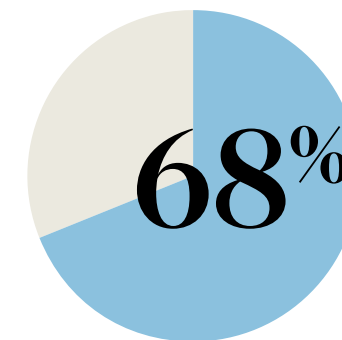
**\$72,808**

Mean salary of full-time employed 2025 RU-N Braven graduates in the first 6 months after college graduation<sup>17,18</sup>

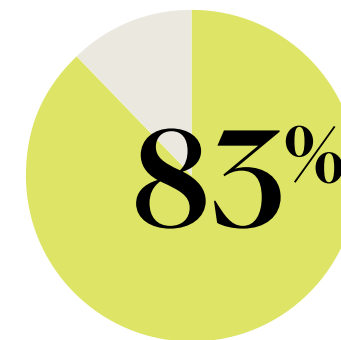
Compared to a national average of \$50,476 of recent college graduates aged 23-24 who worked full-time in 2024

+\$22.3k

## RECENT BRAVEN GRADUATES NATIONALLY



ARE IN ROLES ALIGNED WITH THEIR LONG-TERM CAREER INTEREST<sup>19</sup>



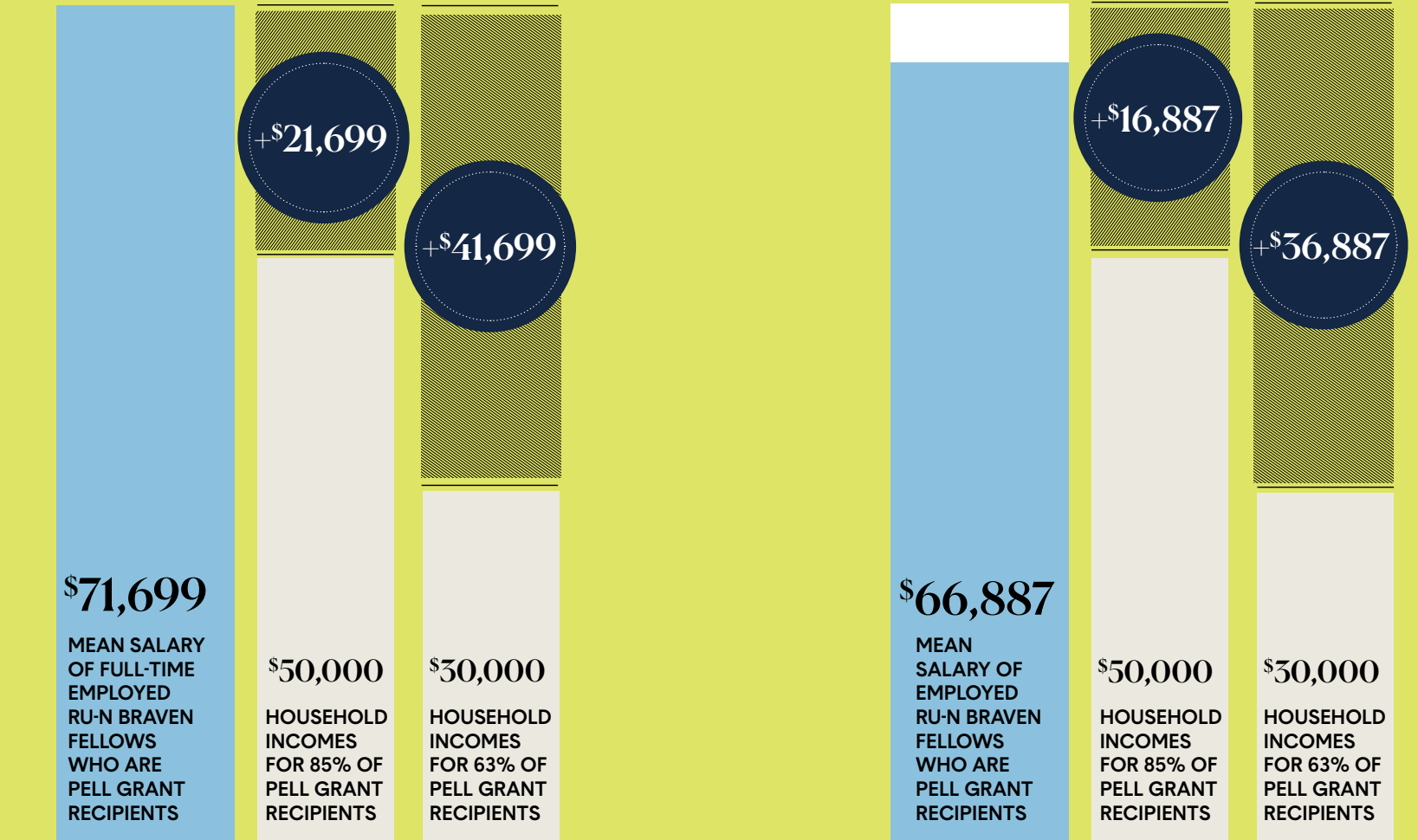
HAVE A JOB WITH EMPLOYER PROVIDED BENEFITS<sup>19</sup>

# The American Dream in action

Nationally, 63% of Pell Grant recipients come from families with annual incomes below \$30,000, and 85% come from families earning less than \$50,000 annually.<sup>20</sup>

In their first job out of college, RU-N Braven Fellows are individually outearning most families who receive the Pell Grant.

**74%**  
of RU-N Braven 2025 graduates are Pell Grant recipients



## MOST POPULAR INDUSTRIES FOR RU-N BRAVEN FELLOWS



**BANKING & FINANCE**



**TECHNOLOGY**



**HEALTH**



**PSYCHOLOGY & COUNSELING**



**LAW**



**EDUCATION**

Are we  
supporting  
Fellows on  
the path to  
internships?

Section

2a

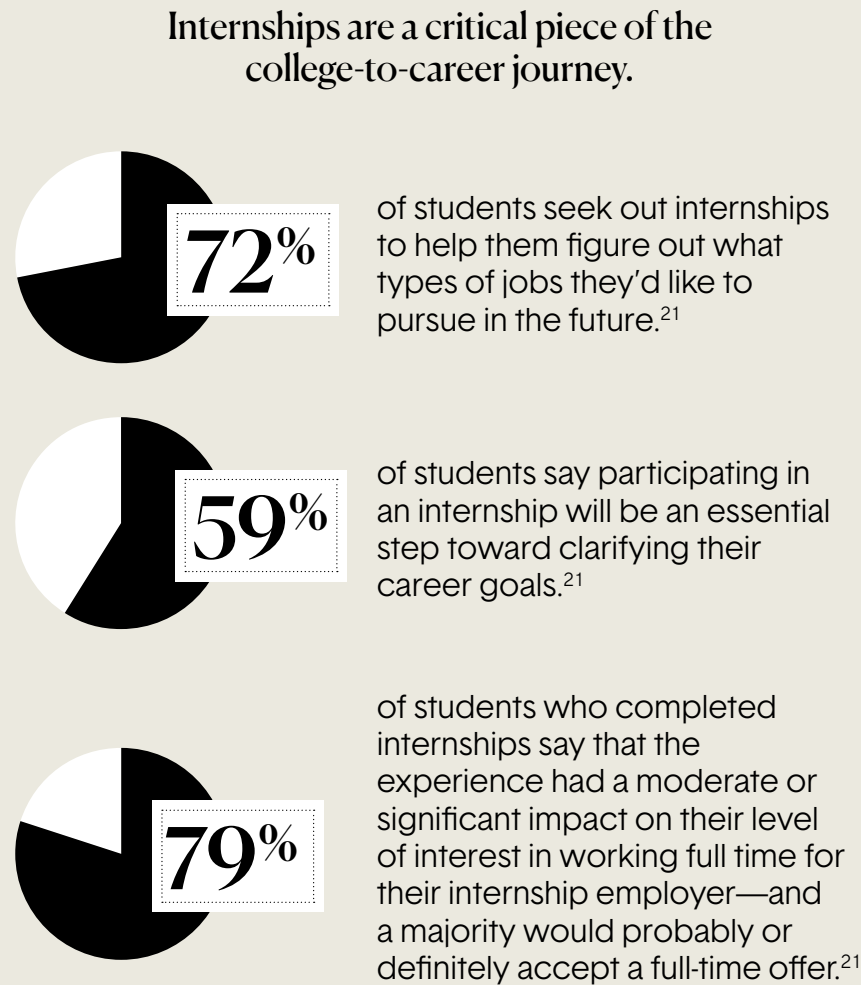




# Students are facing greater competition for internships

Internships help students chart their futures, but fewer opportunities and rising competition make them harder to secure.

According to Handshake's Internship Index 2025:

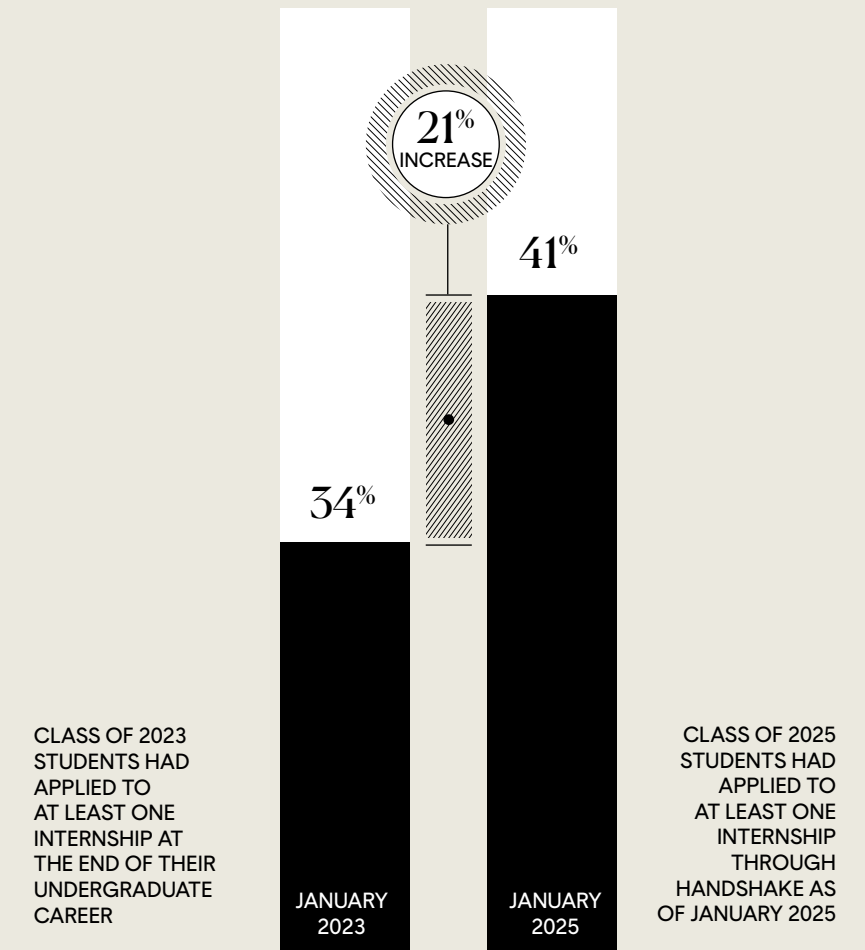


Internship demand is outpacing availability.

Nationally, internship postings declined more than 15% between January 2023 and January 2025. Meanwhile, internship applications surged.



INCREASE IN INTERNSHIP APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED<sup>21</sup>





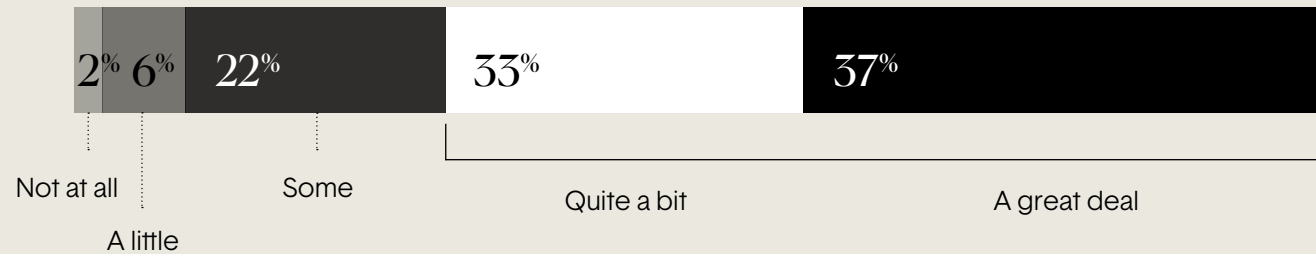
# Paid internships increase networks & mentorship

The National Survey of Work-Based Learning from Strada Education Foundation and the Center for College Workforce Transitions found that paid internships have positive career value in several domains including social capital and mentorship.

## NETWORKS



### To what extent do you think your experience expanded your professional network?

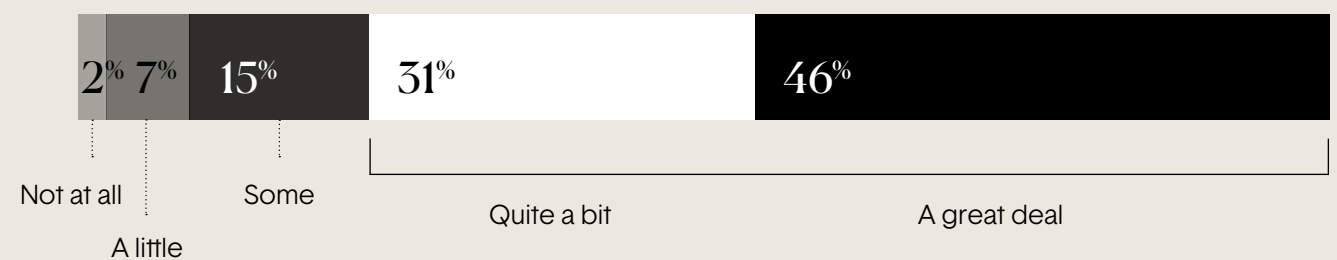


Seven in 10 students reported that paid internships substantially expanded their professional networks<sup>22</sup>

## MENTORSHIP



### To what extent did your supervisor provide mentorship to support your career goals?



More than three-quarters of students reported high levels of career-focused mentorship<sup>22</sup>

# Encouraging levels of internship attainment for RU-N Braven Fellows



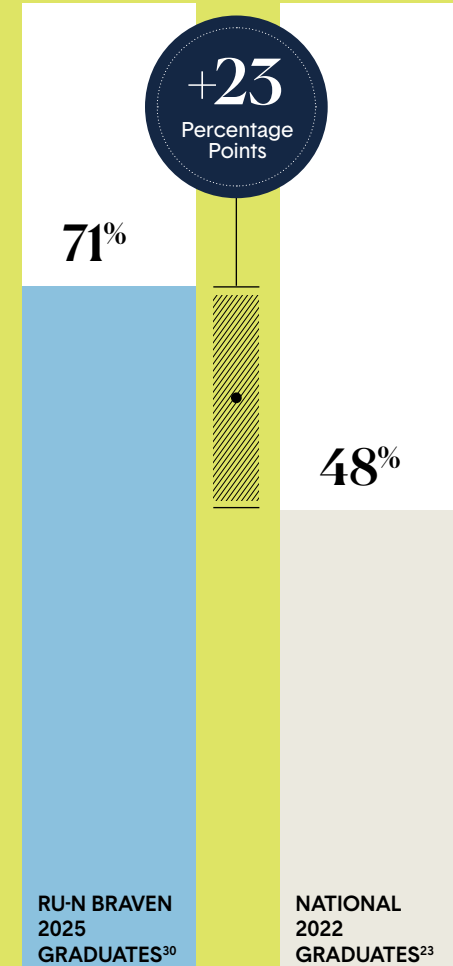
SPRING 2025 FELLOW

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY-NEWARK  
**Victoria Alegunlade**  
Tax Discovery Intern,  
Deloitte

Joshua Christie | Purpose Portraits

Compared with graduates nationally, Rutgers University-Newark Braven 2025 graduates were 23 percentage points more likely to have at least one internship during their college experience.

For college students, internships serve as critical proof points of experience that open professional doors.



# Are we supporting Fellows on the path to college completion?

Section

2b



# Encouraging levels of graduation



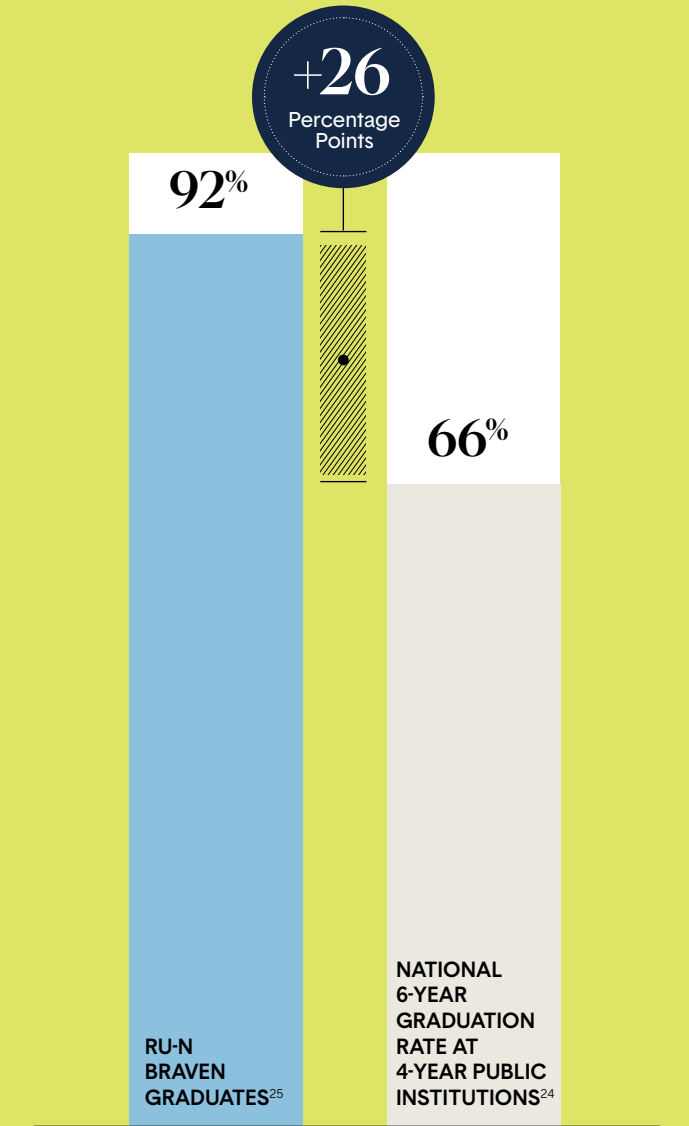
RUTGERS UNIVERSITY-NEWARK  
**Eboni Bugg**  
 Senior Program Coordinator,  
 Rutgers University Newark myRUN  
© Joshua Christie | Purpose Portraits

SPRING 2023 FELLOW

Nationally, only about 7 in 10 students graduate within six years of college enrollment.<sup>24</sup>

Braven Fellows, who typically join us during their sophomore or junior year, are graduating at encouraging rates.

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY-NEWARK BRAVEN FELLOWS ACHIEVED A 92% SIX-YEAR ON-TIME GRADUATION RATE



**HIGHER EDUCATION PARTNERS & EMPLOYER PARTNERS**

**Higher Education Partners**

Chicago State University (BravenX)  
 The City College of New York  
 Delaware State University  
 National Louis University  
 Northern Illinois University  
 Rutgers University - Newark  
 San Francisco State University (launched Fall 2024)  
 San José State University  
 Spelman College  
 University of Massachusetts Lowell (launched Spring 2026)  
 University of North Texas (launched Spring 2026)

**BravenX Partners**

5 Strong Scholars Foundation  
 Achieve Atlanta  
 Arkansas Commitment  
 Ascend Public Schools  
 Associated Colleges of Illinois  
 Augustana College  
 Breakthrough Kent Denver  
 Carmen Schools of Science & Technology  
 Chicago Scholars  
 Chicago State University  
 City Year Chicago  
 Coney Island Prep Public Schools

Cooperman College Scholars  
 Coral Academy of Science Las Vegas  
 Cristo Rey Network  
 DREAM Charter School  
 DSST Public Schools  
 Evanston Scholars  
 Excel Academy Charter School  
 Excellence Community Schools  
 Freedom Preparatory Academy Charter Schools  
 IDEA Public Schools  
 Judson University  
 KIPP Metro Atlanta  
 KIPP Forward  
 KIPP NJ  
 Lehman College  
 LISA Academy  
 National Association for Urban Debate Leagues  
 Newark Youth Career Pathways Program  
 North Central College  
 Noble Schools  
 Rivet School  
 SEEDS  
 The Academy Charter School  
 The Wight Foundation  
 Uncommon Schools  
 Uplift Education  
 UtmostU

**Employer Partners**

**LEAD**  
 (\$250K+ and programmatic support)  
 Adobe  
 Apollo Opportunity Foundation  
 Barclays  
 Blackstone Charitable Foundation  
 Deloitte  
 JPMorgan Chase Foundation  
 LinkedIn  
 Morgan Stanley  
 NBA Foundation  
 Prudential Foundation

**ANCHOR**

(\$100K+ and programmatic support)  
 CIBC Foundation  
 Cognizant US Foundation  
 The College Board  
 Salesforce

**KEYSTONE**

(\$25K+ and programmatic support)  
 Audible  
 Berkshire Hathaway Specialty Insurance  
 Blackbaud  
 Nerdwallet  
 nvp  
 Panasonic North America  
 Pathward N. A.  
 PwC  
 Silver Lake  
 Taco Bell Foundation  
 UBS  
 United Airlines

**INNOVATION**

(\$10K+ and programmatic support)  
 Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey  
 J&L Companies

**IMPACT**

(\$5K+ and/or programmatic support)  
 Bain and Company  
 Brown Advisory  
 Catalina  
 Cisco  
 Devils Youth Foundation  
 Equal Space  
 Harris Blitzer Sports & Entertainment  
 IQVIA  
 Jacobs Levy Equity Management  
 Micron Technology, Inc.  
 NJPAC  
 Philadelphia 76ers  
 Synchrony  
 Teach For America  
 Unacast  
 Vanguard  
 Visa

**PHILANTHROPIC SUPPORTERS (\$10K+)**

Anonymous  
 Arbor Rising  
 Barberry Foundation  
 Deloitte Foundation  
 Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation  
 Impact100 Essex  
 John & Wendy Cozzi  
 Leon and Toby Cooperman Family Foundation  
 Linda & Brian Sterling  
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 Jackie Rider  
 Lynn Selassie  
 Solomon Steplight

1. 15,563 Fellows have completed the Braven Accelerator course to date; this includes core sites (City College of New York, Delaware State University, Northern Illinois University, Rutgers University-Newark, San José State University, and Spelman College) and non-core sites (BravenX, San Francisco State University, Lehman College, and National Louis University).
2. The percentage of students not on the path to the American Dream is an estimate of the percentage of Pell-Grant or first-generation students who have graduated but have not secured a quality job post college. This cohort is based on the latest data available and is the total fall 2022 enrollment of first-time degree/certificate-seeking students in degree-granting postsecondary institutions (NCES 2023 Digest of Education Statistics table 305.10) and the total fall 2021 enrollment of 2YR > 4YR transfers (NSC Research Center Fall 2023 Transfer and Progress Report). Based on this cohort, the percent of students not on path to the American Dream is calculated leveraging the following sources: "Percentage of Undergraduates Receiving Pell Grant in 2022-2023" NCES 2023 IPEDS Trends Generator; "Number of Full-Time, First-Time Degree/Certificate-Seeking Undergraduate Students... by Type of Aid Received" NCES 2020 IPEDS Data Explorer table 20; "Total Undergraduate Fall Enrollment in Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions, by Attendance Status, Sex of Student, and Control and Level of Institution: Selected Years, 1970 through 2031" NCES 2023 Digest of Education Statistics table 303.70; Trends in First-Generation Students: College Access, Persistence, and Postbachelor's Outcomes NCES 2018 First Generation Students Report; Trends in Pell Grant Receipt and the Characteristics of Pell Grant Recipients: Selected Years, 2003–2004, 2015–2016 NCES 2019 IPEDS Trends Generator; NACE 2025 First Destination Survey and September 2025 Federal Reserve Bank of New York Underemployment Rate.
3. "The Labor Market for Recent College Graduates: Unemployment Rates for Recent College Graduates versus Other Groups." Federal Reserve Bank of New York, 2024, [www.newyorkfed.org/research/college-labor-market#:~:explore=unemployment](http://www.newyorkfed.org/research/college-labor-market#:~:explore=unemployment). Accessed 24 Feb. 2025.
4. Shrivastava, Allison. "September 2025 Labor Market Update: The Squeeze on New Entrants Mirrors a Marketwide Decline." Hiring Lab, 25 Sept. 2025, [www.hiringlab.org/2025/09/25/september-labor-market-squeeze-on-new-entrants/](http://www.hiringlab.org/2025/09/25/september-labor-market-squeeze-on-new-entrants/). Accessed 24 Feb. 2026.
5. Blankenship, Molly, et al. The American Job Quality Study: 2025 State of the U.S. Labor Force. Jobs for the Future / Families and Workers Fund / Gallup, Oct. 2025, [www.jff.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/AmericanJobQualityReport\\_Final\\_10142025.pdf](http://www.jff.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/AmericanJobQualityReport_Final_10142025.pdf). Accessed 24 Feb. 2026. For the accompanying graph, a quality job is defined as one that allows workers to meet their basic financial needs, feel safe and respected, grow their skills, have a voice in decisions that affect them, and exercise some control over their time and work.
6. Morris, Catherine, et al. The Major Payoff: Evaluating Earnings and Employment Outcomes Across Bachelor's Degrees. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2025, [cew.georgetown.edu/major-payoff](http://cew.georgetown.edu/major-payoff). Accessed 24 Feb. 2026.
7. Kessler, Sarah. "The Rise of the Robot Job Seeker." The New York Times, 21 June 2025, [www.nytimes.com/2025/06/21/business/dealbook/ai-job-applications.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/21/business/dealbook/ai-job-applications.html). Accessed 24 Feb. 2026.
8. Job Outlook 2025. National Association of Colleges and Employers, Jan. 2025, [nacweb.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/2025/publication/research-report/2025-nace-job-outlook-jan-2025.pdf](http://nacweb.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/2025/publication/research-report/2025-nace-job-outlook-jan-2025.pdf). Accessed 24 Feb. 2026.
9. Braven defines quality outcome attainment using the following methodology:
  - a. Quality outcome: Fellow enrolls in graduate school or secures a job that requires a BA/BS, is full-time, and is paid.
  - b. Part-quality outcome: Fellow secures a job that is paid, aligns with long-term career interests, and meets at least one of the criteria below:
    - i. Requires a bachelor's degree
    - ii. Is full-time
    - iii. Offers employer-provided benefits
    - iv. Earns >35k per year
    - v. Builds record of achievement/resume
    - vi. Builds transferable skills, especially within career interests
  - c. Not quality: Fellow secures a job that is paid, but does not meet the criteria of a part-quality or quality job.
  - d. Unemployed: Fellow is unemployed.
10. 69% is the percentage of Rutgers University-Newark Fellows who secured a quality job or enrolled in graduate school. All outcome percentages are based on Rutgers University-Newark Fellows for which their post-graduation outcome is known (80% or 123 out of the total 153 Rutgers University-Newark Fellows' outcome is known).
11. Braven's 45% peer benchmark is calculated by taking the NACE 2024 full-time employment rate for students at institutions with a high concentration of Pell Grant recipients (40-60%) from the NACE 2025 First Destination Survey, adjusting it for underemployment (using Federal Reserve of New York and U.S. Census data), and adding the percentage of students pursuing graduate school education.
12. Braven's 49% national benchmark is calculated by taking the NACE 2024 full-time employment rate from the NACE 2025 First Destination Survey, adjusting it for underemployment (using Federal Reserve of New York and U.S. Census data), and adding the percentage of students pursuing graduate school education.
13. Low-income means the Braven Fellow identifies as low-income or a Pell Grant recipient.
14. First-generation means the Braven Fellow identifies as a student who is the first in their immediate family to attend or graduate from a four-year college or university.
15. 27% is the percentage of Rutgers University-Newark Fellows who enrolled in graduate school. This percentage is based on Fellows for which their post-graduation outcome is known (80% or 123 out of the total 153 Rutgers University-Newark Fellows' outcome is known).
16. Braven employed salary average is the approximated salary average for Class of 2025 Braven Fellows at core sites who secured any job (quality, part-quality, or not quality).
17. Braven full-time employed salary average is the approximated salary average for Class of 2025 Braven Fellows at core sites who secured a quality job.
18. U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey. Data filtered by age (AGEP 23-24), income (PINCP > \$1), hours worked (WKHP > 35 or WKHP > 0), employment status (ESR Civilian employed, at work), and educational attainment (SCHL Bachelor's degree). U.S. Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs>.
19. Data is based on 380 Post-Accelerator Fellow survey responses pooled from Fall 2021 - Fall 2025 across both core and non-core sites.
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24. The National Comparison represents the six-year graduation rate for the 2018 cohort of full-time, first-time Pell Grant recipients at four-year public Title IV institutions. This rate is adjusted to account for year-over-year persistence from freshman through junior year. Data is synthesized from the NCES IPEDS Data Explorer (2024), the Digest of Education Statistics (2021), and American Institutes for Research (2023).
25. Six-year graduation rate of RU-N Braven Fellows includes students who enrolled as first-time freshmen, not including those who took Braven as seniors, transfers, or international students. RU-N is included in the six-year graduation rate calculation because the university reached a threshold of graduates to date (200+) for which we have both valid enrollment and graduation data.

