



Higher aims fulfilled: The Social Capital Academy as a means for advancing underrepresented students in comprehensive university business schools



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Abstract Current research underscores how a college education can reflect broader social inequality via the disproportionate flow of resources to elite universities and advantaged students. In contrast, underresourced comprehensive universities disproportionately serve minority, first-generation, and working-class students. This article argues that the comprehensive university is uniquely positioned to reduce social inequality and that the comprehensive university undergraduate business school (CUUBS) should test a new approach to education. The article also advocates a substantive response to social inequality by (1) focusing on undergraduate business education within comprehensive universities rather than MBA programs in well-funded, elite business schools, (2) implementing a strategic emphasis on career-related jobs (CRJs) for underrepresented students, and (3) helping students pursue CRJs via the development of a Social Capital Academy (SCA). This article describes the benefits of an SCA for underrepresented students, its requirements and benefits for universities and business communities, and the possibilities for scaling the program to address social inequality. Future applications of the SCA to STEM-related fields are also explored.

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1. The landscape of social inequality at comprehensive university undergraduate business schools

For many students, business schools are seen as accelerators for mobility, even as we witness reduced availability of corporate careers and a far more precarious labor market (Davis, 2016). Business schools are also traditionally believed to facilitate elite opportunities and compensation. Yet, while the elite MBA degree has become the symbol of the business school, the undergraduate business degree has become pervasive in the US—accounting for 80% of business enrollments in the Americas and 72% globally (Robinson, 2018). Moreover, the National Center for Education Statistics (2021) revealed that undergraduate degrees in business as a percentage of all US undergraduate degrees constitute 19% (390,600 degrees in 2018–2019), far surpassing the next largest categories: health professions (12% or 251,400 degrees) and social sciences and history (8% or 160,600 degrees). With the rise of the undergraduate business degree comes an increased awareness of the unfulfilled opportunity for universities to better leverage that degree as a source of economic mobility.

This article addresses the deep problem of social inequality faced by underrepresented, first-generation undergraduate students at comprehensive universities. A comprehensive university is generally defined as a nonelite and relatively low tuition multischool university with a limited number of doctoral programs. A comprehensive university offers more inclusive admissions but has less access to the broad funds available to prestigious private and state research-focused universities such as Harvard, Stanford, and the University of Michigan. On average, as compared to their research-focused counterparts, comprehensive universities serve substantially more first-generation students from underrepresented minorities, who tend to have far less wealth, socioeconomic status, and exposure to white-collar work through parents who work in these professions.

1.1. The general problem

The academic literature has ratified this economic inequality as one of society's most pressing problems (Amis et al., 2020; Piketty, 2013). In this context, substantial literature (e.g., Jack, 2019; Stephens et al., 2014) has explored how social class influences educational success and job-

related outcomes such as income and prestige. This inequality problem extends to how people gain employment, are promoted, and are compensated within organizations (Ingram & Oh, 2022; Khattab et al., 2020).

The roots of this inequality can be tracked both at the university and student levels within higher education, starting with the distinction between elite and nonelite institutions and their graduation rates. Graduation rates are a relative nonissue at elite undergraduate institutions where, on average, wealthier students live on campus, are more insulated from financial challenges, and place more focus on their studies. As a result, the four-year graduation rate for many of these schools can hover around 88% to 90%. In contrast, only one of 22 California State Universities (all comprehensive universities) has a four-year retention rate above 50%—and 11 have four-year graduation rates below 20%. Thus, graduation is no small accomplishment for such institutions' students, who are often the first person in an extended family to receive a college degree. But a student from an underrepresented or first-generation (i.e., no parent has completed either a two- or four-year college) background confronts significant additional challenges beyond graduation to secure a promising professional career.

In examining the sources of and solutions to social inequality in education, several authors (Fisher & Fisher, 2018; Putnam, 2016) point to an educational opportunity gap between underrepresented students and networks of support and expertise. There is limited data about the uneven outcomes for underrepresented and first-generation students (Fisher, 2022), but first-generation students attend less-selective four-year institutions compared to their continuing-generation peers (Fry, 2021). They are also less likely to graduate (Maietta, 2016), less likely to secure work requiring a bachelor's degree (NASPA, n.d.), and secure significantly lower salaries (Eismann, 2016; Fry et al., 2021). In 2018, an EPI (Geary, 2022) study indicated that white workers had higher incomes than Latino/a and Black workers at every educational attainment level.

The mechanisms that lead to such disparities are complex but merit closer inspection (Fisher, 2022). One study (Leigh, 2021) indicated that first-generation students and students of color are significantly less likely to participate in networking with alumni and professionals or to interview or shadow a professional. Another of Leigh's findings indicates that first-generation students in their senior year are significantly less likely to have completed an internship than continuing-

generation students, a formative experience that [Gray \(2022\)](#) found counted more in hiring decisions than did recent graduates' major or GPA.

1.2. The business strategy class at California State University Fullerton (CSUF): A case study

The business strategy class taught at CSUF's undergraduate business school is referred to as the capstone class because it concludes students' journey via the business school's multiple disciplinary pathways (e.g., accounting, finance, marketing, management, or operations). My extended study of students in this class over a 2-year period indicates that when most students are about to graduate, they are often not fully engaged in the active job searches traditionally associated with graduating college students. This is partly because approximately 75% of my students work while they go to school in full- or part-time jobs. Prior to graduation, however, only a limited number of these students had secured a new, career-related job (CRJ), which I define as a job related to a student's emerging career interests that, if not explicitly professional, exposes them to the kind of work they might pursue as part of their long-term career interests. Moreover, less than a third of these students were actively looking for work, while more than a third had yet to start looking for work and/or planned to pursue a job search after they graduated. A handful indicated they were satisfied in their current jobs, even if these jobs did not represent an advancement over their university work history. Even more telling were students' tentative comments regarding their potential careers: they identified broad professional areas of interest (e.g., marketing, accounting) or vague objectives (e.g., "moving into the corporate office" or "management"). Few had a strong sense of a chosen professional arena with direct exposure to jobs in that profession or any sense of how to navigate a given professional terrain. In addition, few had the benefit of a single sustained conversation with a professional in one of those arenas.

I refer to this predicament as a lack of aspirational literacy (i.e., a kind of knowledge concerning the reading and writing of one's career). Aspirational literacy includes students' capacity to understand and converse about the different professions and job paths open to them in the world. This capacity, in turn, positions them to make knowledgeable choices about how to explore careers they might want to pursue. Ideally, students begin to acquire aspirational literacy before they

select majors and develop that knowledge as they approach graduation via early, sustained contact with business professionals and by completing internships to explore potential professions. For an upper-middle-class student, aspirational literacy may begin at the dinner table in elementary school.

Based on my research, CSUF students who work 20 to 50 hours per week on top of their full course loads operate in a radically different context than those of more advantaged undergraduates from middle-class backgrounds. They often pay their own tuition bills and cover living expenses for themselves and, often, their families. Many also shoulder other familial responsibilities (e.g., caring for parents, grandparents, or children), leaving them with less time, energy, and focus to fully engage in their studies. Research corroborates the limited parental guidance and support that underrepresented minority and first-generation college students receive ([Maietta, 2016](#)). In this context and without the benefit of crucial forms of social capital ([Bourdieu, 1986](#); [Coleman, 1988](#)), a sustained job search that includes dialogue with professionals and employers in different professional domains is often out of reach—something that is often postponed until either after graduation or ultimately not at all. My interviews and qualitative survey responses revealed the extent to which students are unprepared to think systematically about their careers and engage with professionals, even in their final semester.

1.3. A general solution

A programmatic approach toward greater access to professional opportunities (i.e., CRJs and their associated increased promotion and compensation opportunities) can offer a substantive response to social and economic equality. A clue for how such a solution can work emerges in a social capital study of 72 million adults published recently by Harvard economist Raj [Chetty et al. \(2022a, 2022b\)](#). Chetty found that only one variable, economic connectedness, predicted upward economic mobility. *Economic connectedness* was defined as the extent to which students from the lowest quartile in socioeconomic status (SES) had friends among students in the top SES quartile (i.e., the degree to which poor students are friends with rich students). Unfortunately, Chetty and his colleagues proposed only broad, long-range, and difficult-to-implement policy solutions, including restructuring schools, colleges, and neighborhoods to foster more cross-class interaction. These

prescriptions, unfortunately, will likely take decades to implement and measure.

A groundswell of new programs, however, suggests mechanisms by which economic connectedness can be accomplished—within and across universities—that empower students to sharpen their stories, pursue internships, and partner with mentors to better prepare for internships and job searches. These programs vary by institution type (e.g., elite private and state research universities, comprehensive universities) and by the age of the student served. The University of California, Berkeley, an elite state school, offers the program BOOST, which acclimates high school students to professional life before they enter college. Rutgers, a state university with an official social justice mission, has a multitude of programs to support underrepresented populations from the time students start as freshmen. One such program, B-STAR, selects high-performing freshmen from underrepresented backgrounds for support throughout their college careers. Another program selects students for an Honors Living-Learning Community, from which they might progress to the Prosocial Entrepreneurship Program as sophomores. In many of the Rutgers programs, students apply and are accepted into developmental programs on a selective basis. Outside the university setting, nonprofits like Career Launch serve many universities, with a portfolio of content that includes a student assessment, video programming, and virtual coaching, through which 2- and 4-year colleges can foster student networking and internship and job searches.

These impressive intraschool programs, however, often emerge in isolation, one business school at a time, and almost always better funded at wealthier business schools. Programs like Career Launch are not nearly enough to address the approximately 147,000 students—68,000 of which are underrepresented minorities—who graduate from CUUBS every year.¹ Systemic programming is required to introduce large numbers of students into the professional world and help them learn how to network and navigate their career paths. More broadly, they need to cultivate the social and cultural capital for their job searches and careers ahead. Immersion in programs that offer this exposure will allow students to build on their university experience and supplement traditional career services to expand their professional opportunities.

¹ These numbers are provided courtesy of the Carnegie Classification System and exclude private, for-profit colleges and universities.

If comprehensive universities systematically enacted such an approach, they could leverage the broader accessibility of CUUBS to address social inequality on a larger scale. Toward that goal, the AACSB—which provides accreditation to business schools—has indicated in its new 2020 Guiding Principles and Standards for Business Accreditation an expectation that all accredited business schools indicate how their actions make a “positive impact on the betterment of society.” These standards indicate both societal impact and diversity and inclusion as two of the 10 Guiding Principles and Expectations for Accredited Schools. In addition, many other AACSB standards address these issues. The sixth principle, Learner Progression, requires policies and procedures that address post-graduation success. The AACSB emphasis on this social imperative for business schools has created a profound impetus for business schools to achieve accreditation via achievement in these expanded social dimensions.

1.4. The opportunity for organizations

Organizations have strong motivations to support and partner with programs that serve underrepresented and first-generation students, starting with the social imperative to address the increasing gulf between the haves and the have-nots (Piketty, 2013). Research also offers evidence that more diverse workforces perform better: a recent McKinsey study indicates that companies in the top quartile for racial and ethnic diversity are 30% more likely to have financial returns above their respective national industry medians. Another study of 177 national banks in the US indicated that increases in racial diversity were related to enhanced financial performance (Phillips, 2014).

At an individual level, the underrepresented and first-generation students who disproportionately emerge out of CUUBS offer a uniquely resilient and capable workforce. One study about “social class transitioners” argues that those who move between social classes acquire tools to adapt to different contexts, relate to different groups, and better foster work interdependence and connection (Martin & Côté, 2019). Other empirical work suggests that individuals with lower social class origins are less self-centered, which positions them to be more effective leaders (Martin et al., 2016). There is also a general argument that a more diverse workforce increases an organization’s capacity to match and respond to changes that emerge from a more diverse international customer and partner base (Kauppila & Obstfeld,

2022). Minority buying power in the US, for example, has increased dramatically, and Asian-American and Black consumers now account for 17.2% of the US total buying power (Deloitte, 2022). Finally, research has argued the importance of “transformational mentorship” (i.e., relationships that offer something powerful for both the mentee and the mentor; Nour, 2022), and employees who serve as mentors are more satisfied with their rates of advancement (COQUAL, 2019). A metaanalysis of mentoring studies (Ghosh & Reio, 2013) showed that mentors display greater job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job performance, and career success.

There is an important, unrealized potential in the capacity of organizations and individuals to act as social network brokers or connectors (Obstfeld, 2005, 2017; Small, 2009; Small & Gose, 2020) who can meaningfully engage and advance underserved students to new forms of professional opportunity. Indeed, the rollout of the Social Capital Academy (SCA; i.e., a program that offers effective network building, social skills, and career engagement alongside traditional university coursework) including major participation from Johnson & Johnson employees (over 30 professional volunteers). Most of these mentors continue to participate and even teach in the program as it grows. Our mentors indicate that the program expands their understanding and awareness of social issues while providing a deep sense of making a difference. It also provides an opportunity for leadership development and community engagement. In the remainder of this article, I propose how the SCA can supplement a traditional CUUBS educational program. I describe the program’s key components and benefits and explain how comprehensive universities can implement and scale it at a relatively low cost while systematically enlivening university outreach to the surrounding community in forms that lead to mentoring, internships, jobs, and superior alumni and community engagement.

2. The case for the Social Capital Academy: Key concepts

Modern MBA and undergraduate business school programs, like most other college programs, are usually defined by coursework on the assumption that it prepares students for the working world. Yet once they enter the real world, students often realize this assumption is misguided as they, for the reasons described above, lack any direct

professional exposure before they select a major. Early required coursework, while invaluable, is unlikely to foster sufficient knowledge of any professional arena to help CUUBS students make informed choices about a provisional area of interest, let alone a well-conceived career choice.

While CUUBS have various advising and career centers, advisors are unlikely to bring hands-on familiarity with the voluminous and rapidly evolving domains of work for which students ultimately make crucial career choices. Further, due to their work-intensive off-campus lives, many commuter students do not frequent the career center or only do so in their senior year during a formal job search. That off-campus orientation also means that students often do not take advantage of clubs and other professional-oriented programs. Students might complete a major in marketing, for example, without ever meeting or engaging a single professional in that field. In this context, CUUBS students are highly unlikely to carve out meaningful professional aspirations and exposures well-matched to the complex world in which they hope to find work. Prioritizing CRJ outcomes suggests the need to continually develop greater aspirational literacy and social capital related to the knowledge crucial for entering the professional community and, therefore, to underrepresented students’ success.

Individuals generate and leverage social capital when they catalyze their social network and social skills to access information, influence, credentials, and social support that can help them achieve personal and professional success (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Lin, 1999). *Social networks* refer to the pattern of relationships (i.e., social network structure) and network practices that characterize an individual’s social activity. *Social skill* refers to interpersonal perceptiveness, relation-forming capacity, and the influence of network activity (Riggio, 1986). People employ social skills either by working effectively within established cultural systems or by forging new action pathways that lead to academic and professional success. As such, social capital represents a crucial lever for educational attainment and, ultimately, success in the employment arena (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988).

Social capital is particularly useful for understanding the origins of inequality between advantaged and underrepresented college graduates who hold roughly equivalent degrees. A student raised in a home with the network and resources afforded by college-educated parents is at a

distinct resource advantage compared to those raised in less-advantaged circumstances (Calarco, 2014; Lareau, 2003). Students from upper-middle-class families have access to better networks, better social skills, and better social capital than underrepresented students. Research also indicates that differences in middle- and working-class beliefs and practices may compound networking challenges (Stephens et al., 2014). For example, underrepresented students are most likely to feel that networking for instrumental purposes is distasteful or inauthentic (Casciaro et al., 2014), indicating the crucial need to support the development of underrepresented students' networking activities. In sum, the evidence is overwhelming that who people know and how they manage their relationships strongly impacts the opportunities available and their ability to take advantage of them. The question is, how can we help CUUBS students catch up?

Organizational practices play a key role in social actors' networking processes (Johnson et al., 2022; Obstfeld, 2005, 2017; Small, 2009; Small & Gose, 2020). Specifically, the educational literature has acknowledged the university's ability to mobilize key connections, resources, and opportunities on behalf of students (Chambliss & Takacs, 2014), and substantial research is exploring how students respond to the specific practices of colleges and universities that foster social capital growth. Moreover, underrepresented students achieve greater success when universities address these gaps (Mehta et al., 2011). Universities that have excelled at increasingly high rates of underrepresented student graduation and retention have created climates that support cultural awareness, diversity, and inclusion (Murphy et al., 2010). Thus, because a student's ability to facilitate networking constitutes a critical skill that can be influenced by their learning environment, we must recognize the means by which the larger university environment fosters such behavior via management practices, formally structured programs, and organizational culture.

To guide students to CRJs, CUUBS must thereby help students develop social capital, aspirational maps of careers/career paths available, and meaningful engagement with the people who occupy those worlds. The SCA addresses these crucial gaps by drawing from emerging research and connecting students to professions and economic mobility anew, which will address social inequality.

3. The Social Capital Academy: A professionalization project to address social inequality

The SCA involves a strategic shift in business schools away from emphasizing MBA degrees for advantaged students and toward creating a pathway to CRJs for underrepresented minority undergraduate students. In so doing, the SCA provides a model for how a CUUBS can substantially influence these students' success and interrupt the replication of social inequality. This vision, to some extent, revisits the history of the establishment of business schools and their mission in the US, which Rakesh Khurana (2007) framed in terms of three phases:

1. *Professionalization phase*: began during the creation of the first business school at Wharton in 1881, initiated a set of norms and values that assured practices conducted by business managers balanced public benefit with personal attainment.
2. *Managerialist phase*: began after World War II and replaced professional ideals with the development of knowledge and expertise as expressed by management academics.
3. *Marketization phase*: began in the 1970s and strongly influenced by economists, emphasized the managerial pursuit of profit as the highest good, independent of considerations of public good or growth of knowledge.

Per Khurana (2007), the original professionalization project was driven by the pursuit of legitimacy for the management career. The SCA serves as part of a new, more literal professionalization project that can elevate the CUUBS mission to help underrepresented and first-generation students to obtain CRJs, thereby initiating a new strategic phase for the business school. This new, fourth phase of the business school's evolution would finally match its long unfulfilled social aims along with its objective for practical—yet progressive—work-related education. This potential fourth phase is particularly opportune because it addresses both the social impact emphasis now advocated by AACSB and a widely observed downturn in elite MBA applications (Graduate Management Admission Council, 2022; Symonds, 2022). One source of that downturn involves the cannibalization of the full-time MBA market by the

success of undergraduate degrees, as noted above (Byrne, 2019).

I envision the SCA as a companion program that operates alongside and amplifies the traditional undergraduate business education, as well as develops students' social capital, professional contacts, social skill, and aspirational literacy. As described in detail below, the basic SCA comprises four three-hour modules in students' junior year, while providing more grounded knowledge of the professional landscape from which their pursuit of CRJs will emerge. The SCA emphasizes the development of social and cultural skills and knowledge through a well-developed, brief, and cost-effective program. To this end, the SCA fosters sustained engagement with working professionals and professional organizations alongside students' integration into the university and working communities. The program's success is measured through the attainment of internships, CRJs, and intermediate networking behaviors.

The overriding operational challenge for the SCA is to engage CUUBS students in the program without further taxing the intense demands of their work, school, and family lives. The academy's four 3-hour modules aim to accomplish the following goals: (1) forging a resilient life story that takes stock of a student's past, present, and future; (2) engaging in conversations with successful professionals in potential areas of interest; (3) understanding and leveraging the dynamics of social networks; and (4) building a plan for pursuing internships, professional clubs and networks, and, ultimately, a CRJ. Through this work, ideally, students will begin to acquire aspirational literacy before they select majors and forge in-depth knowledge before their final semester. Via sustained, early contact with business professionals in multiple professions, students' aspirational literacy evolves, allowing them to explore career choices more thoroughly. This literacy—along with social and cultural capital—helps students pursue and obtain CRJs.

4. The Social Capital Academy: Specific activities

The SCA is offered in the junior year when continuing 4-year students who began at CUUBS as freshmen merge with transfer students arriving from surrounding community colleges (a significant source of CUUBS student enrollments). Students are, therefore, at the same stage of academic progress, and their overall focus and preliminary career interests are beginning to solidify. The

program convenes underrepresented students and successful volunteer professionals in a series of well-structured interactions to foster aspirational literacy and concrete plans of action that can meaningfully emerge only in the context of sustained, in-depth conversations.

4.1. Module 1: The job story and team assignments

In the first module, three or four students are assigned to a *career mentor*, or a successful professional who, on a volunteer basis, meets with their group (e.g., Learning Team) for each 3-hour module over an 8-week period. This initial module guides students to create a core narrative that encompasses the key episodes that shaped their life that they can draw on in personal and professional interactions. It also provides a grounded compass for the remainder of the SCA. Once formulated, a life story is something a student can refer to, translate for different audiences, and refine as they approach mentors and employers.

4.1.1. Coat of Arms (COA)

As a fundamental first step, students capture their life stories through the Coat of Arms (COA) exercise. The COA is ultimately a two-by-two chart whose four quadrants denote four different times in a student's life: 10 years old, 5 years ago, today, and 10 years from now. Students summarize key life episodes by drawing sketches in each of the four quadrants and then discuss their COA in small groups. To set the stage, a successful professional from a working-class background talks through her completed Coat of Arms. In our pilot, Dr. Sarah Lopez—an MD, MBA, and UCLA professor—guided students through her Coat of Arms. As a first-generation Latina professional, Dr. Lopez addressed several episodes of adversity and success from grade school, college, and the current day, which students later deemed to be an inspiration in completing their own COA. During the exercise, students are encouraged to identify “nuggets” in which they can take pride and bring into informational and job interviews. The core nuggets emphasized are (1) working while they go to school, (2) taking care of family while in school, and (3) overcoming personal adversity. These are all experiences that students too often dismiss or even hide rather than use to illustrate strengths that employers will admire. When the exercise concludes, students are notably energized, often describing it as one of their most impactful college experiences.

Students find the COA impactful for three reasons. First, underrepresented students face a disproportionate share of life challenges, often in isolation. For students, having their stories heard and valued by peers and mentors can be particularly validating. Second, career mentors can help students powerfully and positively reframe their stories as not just those of adversity but also of resilience in which students have overcome work, family, and resource challenges. Third, the 10-years-later quadrant provides students with a structured opportunity to think proactively about their future. In the Module 1 debriefings with students, we underscore the importance of conveying crucial aspects of their stories and creating a succinct statement of their skills and resilience—which are assets of tremendous interest—to employers or internship opportunities.

4.1.2. Establishing mentors/peer teams

The second core function is the creation of mentor-led, three- and four-student learning teams. Career mentors for these teams are chosen from the professional community, with a strong representation of mid-career professionals from diverse backgrounds. The career mentor's role is to provide students with the opportunity to forge a bond with a successful professional who works with their assigned students for the remainder of the semester. This will create a sustained, practical, and career-oriented action perspective as the mentor provides the professional contact typically unavailable to CUUBS students.

4.2. Module 2: Professions

For Module 2, the SCA shifts to emphasize network connections in actual career tracks that are of potential interest to students. For CUUBS, SCA identifies nine professional business tracks: accounting, data analysis, entrepreneurship, finance and economics, human resources, information technology management, marketing, operations and supply chain management, and sales. Students select two business professions of greatest interest to them and engage with career experts in these two professions (e.g., accounting and marketing).

In this way, Module 2 directly addresses the CUUBS students' lack of aspirational literacy regarding possible careers and how to pursue them before they commit to a major. Students engage with relatable, diverse professionals who can speak judiciously about the field of interest. For example, five SCA students with an interest in marketing may meet for 45 minutes to explore the field with one or two successful marketing

professionals. In addition, career experts are coached to discuss their career experience in accessible, motivating ways and to draw out students' curiosity, life experience, interests, aspirations, concerns, and questions. This format brings professionals and students beyond the fleeting interactions typically associated with casual, unstructured mixers that offer limited opportunities for learning and thoughtful knowledge exchange. Rather, this approach fosters meaningful conversations that impart better understanding to both students and professionals, positioning students to engage in subsequent conversations with budding poise and confidence. Moreover, students can reconnect with existing career experts or start conversations with new career experts via Zoom meetings before the SCA concludes.

4.3. Module 3: Making connections to build social capital

In Module 3, students are introduced to a staple of the MBA world: sophisticated social networking skills. Students are guided on how to develop a strong introduction, ask effective questions, and then revisit one nugget from their COA life story first created during Module 1. Students are advised to use that nugget to communicate a crucial asset they often overlook (e.g., resilience in working, taking care of family, or overcoming personal adversity while going to school). Resiliency is a quality that employers often find more compelling and important than a high GPA. With their career interests and the associated employers in mind, students practice articulating their resilient life histories in their learning teams, refining ways to communicate that resilience to potential employers and in internship applications. Finally, SCA students are guided to analyze their social network structures and the opportunities that the analysis reveals in terms of social network practices that can lead to professional success. When properly coached, students emerge better prepared to leverage their networks to great effect.

4.4. Module 4: Build a plan for career success

Module 4 integrates work from the first three modules into a plan for career advancement not at graduation but in the junior year. This module takes stock of their interests and how to pursue them in school as well as the outside world. Chief areas of focus are (1) a plan to engage university clubs and professional associations that advance

their interests; (2) specific goals, tactics, and timing to secure internships throughout the remainder of their college education (often a major untapped opportunity); and (3) how to systematically engage the network of prospective employers. This preparation benefits the students via positive cycles of knowledge, action, and confidence.

At the conclusion of the SCA, students will have jumpstarted their aspirational literacy by fashioning a personal narrative of success, receiving more extensive in-person professional support and engagement, experiencing better learning and feedback toward their professional interests (e.g., rigorous feedback on their networks and social skills), and forming a plan for how to pursue a CRJ for the remainder of their college life. They will also leave with a cohort of peers for support and multiple ties to successful professionals (often connected on LinkedIn.)

4.5. Extensions of the primary SCA

Other opportunities can follow the core SCA program using follow-on programming. Specifically, the SCA supplements the core four-module experience with an interactive digital platform on Discord, where students can meet, exchange information, and get support. The SCA also offers a monthly follow-on Zoom meeting that draws on successful professional coaching topics (e.g., using LinkedIn, dealing with stress, time management, and accessing books or podcasts of interest). In each of these cases, the SCA plays the same role of connecting students with higher-powered professionals in meaningful ways. As we complete SCA cohorts, more SCA alumni can join the follow-on programming.

5. Implementation: SCA leadership, community support, measurement, resources, and scaling

The first four-module Social Capital Academy was piloted in Fall 2021 at the CSUF College of Business and Economics with 30 juniors and 29 career mentors and experts. The third SCA included approximately 50 juniors and over 50 career mentors and career experts who participated via Zoom from around the world. In total, 116 students have completed the program as it continues to grow. The SCA program received extraordinarily positive reviews from both participating students

and the volunteers who assisted as collaborating professionals from major corporations like Johnson & Johnson, IBM, and Ernst & Young. Analysis of rigorous survey data administered to participating students and a control group both before and after the first two SCAs indicated significant improvement in students' career decision-making, career mentoring, job-seeking behavior, person/university fit, social reassurance of worth, and networking self-efficacy. Over time, the academy's expanding, longitudinal data collection will validate program, internship, and job-seeking success for students.

The successful CSUF implementation creates an opportunity to expand the SCA to other CUUBS throughout the country. Incremental growth in the program over its first three semesters allows for effective tuning of the program and its operations, which sets the stage for substantial growth to multiple campuses. SCA leadership within a given university would require a supportive dean, an active faculty member (probably with a course release), and administrative support. Implementation also relies on the strong participation of professionals and organizations in the surrounding community. The SCA can energize a business school's surrounding professional, alumni, and donor community through powerful bonding experiences with students who, in turn, gain access to local internship and employment opportunities.

The SCA can be developed rather quickly and cheaply in its initial form as a beta test for 20 to 50 students. Starting small validates the relevance of the SCA model within a given university context and ensures proper integration with other programs (e.g., advisement and the career center). With sufficient funding, the CSUF pilot organization could serve as a centralized hub to assist in new university adoption, providing content, instructional support, and the operational know-how developed over the three-semester experience with the program. Under these circumstances, other campuses can pilot the SCA program with approximately 3 to 4 months lead time—a rapid adoption compared to a formal degree program course that can take years to develop and approve. The cost of this program is comparatively low, relying on Zoom to implement it. Serving as a hub, the CSUF program could also continually refine materials for distribution while sharing knowledge from other SCA programs nationally. The hub could also hold conferences to share the SCA and broader programmatic efforts that serve underrepresented students. Finally, the hub could

help coordinate a network of professionals and coaches who, in some cases, would enjoy working with students as career experts and career mentors on multiple campuses.

The SCA could also scale to more elite R1 and R2 undergraduate business schools and the approximately 143,000 underrepresented minorities they serve. Additionally, the SCA can be adapted to address constrained opportunities in other disciplines, including STEM (Fry et al., 2021). Three of the four SCA modules are immediately applicable to all professions. The second module that mobilizes professionals in college-specific disciplinary arenas can easily be tailored to engineering, computer science, biology, chemistry, and physics. We have also piloted the SCA in the CSUF College of Engineering and Computer Science with excellent results. The implications for scaling the SCA, therefore, are dramatic.

6. With the SCA, CUUBS students can level the playing field

Beyond addressing the social capital challenges that currently inhibit underrepresented students, the SCA is particularly effective due to its (1) motivational impact on students, (2) ability to be rapidly implemented and scaled, and (3) relatively low cost. The SCA offers a motivational logic to students that is more powerful than simply completing a degree with a vague sense of how life might improve as a result. Students' emerging view of a specific potential job and career can propel them through their coursework with a "pull" rather than a "push" logic. Whereas the traditional academy often reflects a relative absence of community and relevance for underrepresented students, the SCA can immediately influence students' imaginations. Through the SCA, CUUBS can focus on elevating underrepresented undergraduate students to help them gain a foothold in organizations and, in doing so, expose them to seemingly unobtainable careers and professional lives. This elevation includes students' awareness of the potential for a CRJ, the excitement of the numerous opportunities available, the powerful associations forged through dialogue with professionals in their fields, and a community for support and encouragement as they explore career possibilities.

The sustained engagement of underrepresented CUUBS students through the SCA ultimately targets the attainment of CRJs as a direct response to social inequality. The SCA concept augments the traditional academy by jumpstarting social capital

at the college and community levels. The DNA of the SCA is its ability to create aspirational literacy (i.e., a rich sense of possibility, career choices, and career moves) and the ability, with ample support, to construct professional careers.

As students progress, they will simultaneously complete coursework and potential internships while consolidating their understanding of careers and collaborative, esteemed networks. Ultimately, they will move toward a fitting CRJ to launch their full-time work life. In this alternative approach via the SCA, the business school presents the search for a career to underrepresented students as coherent, supportive, sustained, and accessible—rather than as a highly individual, arduous undertaking—that continually engages students (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). The combination of the SCA and the traditional academy cements a culture of support while students attend school and provides scaffolding for their careers long after they exit campus life. Finally, a critical mass of participating universities portends the ultimate realization of the goal for business schools to become a driving force behind economic mobility and social equality.

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