



CAREER READINESS DESIGN LAB INSIGHT REPORT

OCT 2025

Presented by Ourmedia, in partnership
with EVC Hawk Gaming
Presented to Evergreen Valley College

INTRODUCTION

Ourmedia partnered with EVC Hawk Gaming to host a Career Readiness Design Lab with student and recent graduate participants to **identify key areas of need among students transitioning from learning to employment**. We centered students' lived experiences and expertise to shape solution-finding around some of the core career readiness challenges students identified as paramount.

The findings are clear: students crave **accessible, low-barrier opportunities for networking and mentorship**; they need **flexible, blended learning models** that combine peer support with **professional exposure**; and they seek tools that **personalize career pathways** through relatable role models and clear skill-building guidance.

Prototype concepts for solutions including a mentor networking app, a near-peer career hub, and a mindset-cloning tool were enthusiastically received, providing tangible directions for career readiness services at Evergreen Valley College. These results speak to the importance of centering student voices in learning design, especially when preparing students for a career readiness landscape impacted heavily by AI technologies.



METHODS & APPROACH



Design-Thinking Lab: Students engaged in human-centered design-thinking to produce prototypes of solutions to the core challenges they identified. Facilitator synthesis across groups and multiple workshops revealed converging themes: networking, mentorship, and blended support models. After being introduced to human-centered design concepts, participants were offered structured opportunities to collaboratively identify key areas of need and design solutions through the day.

The structure of the lab was:

1. Conduct User Interviews and Empathy Mapping
2. Identify Problem Statements for Users
3. Rapid-Fire Sticky-Note Solution Ideating
4. Develop Prototypes of Solutions
5. Feedback and Iteration of Solutions
6. Wrap-Up and Share-Out

Why: Co-design puts students at the center, surfacing authentic needs and lowering risk of misaligned solutions.

KEY FINDINGS



Converging Themes

Across multiple groups, post-it syntheses, and student testimonials, three themes dominated:

1. **Networking & Social Capital** – Network building is central but requires multiple modes (digital hubs, casual peer groups, structured shadowing).
2. **Mentorship Access & Trust** – While mentoring relationships are highly desired, many students find the first interaction daunting. Suggestions included lowering barriers by highlighting shared personal interests beyond professional goals.
3. **Skill Mapping & Personalized Pathways** – Students crave tools to identify skill gaps, explore pathways, and connect training to outcomes.

Persistent Pain Points

Students lack reliable access to opportunities for professional networking, finding mentors, and career-exploration resources. They struggle to demonstrate transferable skills in ways employers value.

- *“Danny needs a way to diversify his skillset because he needs to prepare for the uncertainty of different industries”*

Networking as a Bridge

Networking consistently ranked highest among students as a first step toward career readiness. Informal, low-pressure environments (coffee chats, clubs, co-mentoring groups) lower anxiety and often precede successful mentoring relationships. Near-peer networking emerged frequently as an initial way for students to begin building networking skills and finding mentors.

- *“We need to make use of our opportunities ... Going outside to the local area with the communities that support us and our career.”*
- *“Just get started now. Once you find a connection with someone from Adobe, start messaging them, and they might invite you to go do a tour, and then you get that meetup and boom, that's how you get inside that network.”*

Blended & Flexible Support Models

Students voiced preference for hybrid engagement that balances in-person social support with scalable digital tools. Building a bridge between online and offline communities and opportunities was a key area that students felt was underserved.

Mentorship: Desired but Daunting

While professional mentorship is highly valued, students report fear of judgment, difficulty finding a “right fit,” and uncertainty in first interactions. Lowering barriers by matching on shared interests—not just career goals—emerged as a promising solution.

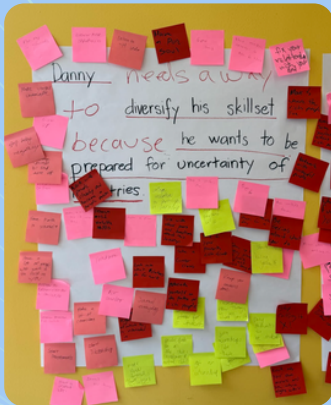
- *“Maybe it'll be a little bit hard to connect with people of different ages, of different experiences and backgrounds at these clubs or whatever. Like it could be intimidating with their suits and their professional business attire”*

PROTOTYPES & CONCEPTS



In the co-design session with participants at Evergreen Valley College, groups developed prototypes of solutions that resolve the most significant barriers to successfully entering the job landscape. Some notable examples include:

CLONING MINDSET MACHINE



Problem Statement: Danny needs a way to diversify his skillset to prepare for the uncertainty of industries.

The **"Cloning Mindset Machine,"** was a metaphorical device that allowed users to clone the traits, habits, and perspectives of people they admire or aspire to become. Each "clone" represented a distinct skillset or mindset drawn from role models across different domains, symbolizing the idea that growth and adaptability come from **internalizing diverse perspectives**.

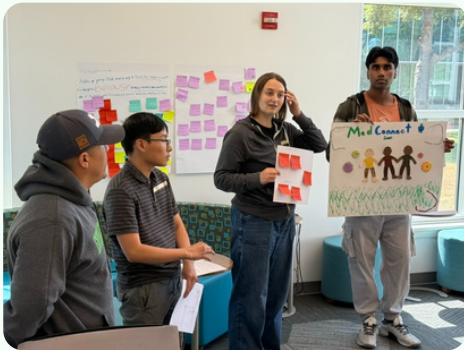
The team framed *perspective* as the bridge between college and industry, suggesting that exposure to multiple mindsets equips students to navigate uncertainty. They were inspired by the saying, *"you are the average of the five people you spend the most time with."*

They likened this "cloning mindset" to **code-switching**, and proposed that cultivating this "clone-switching" ability would help students navigate diverse professional environments and build **mental adaptability**.

To make the idea more tangible, the team introduced **'Moti App'**, a short-form motivational content platform designed to help users access curated perspectives and motivational "clones" digitally — a metaphorical and practical extension of the cloning mindset to support **continuous learning and inspiration**.



MEDCONNECT

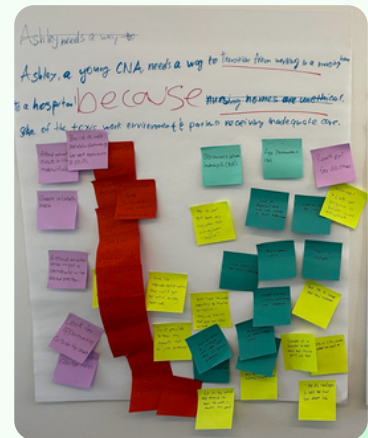


Problem Statement: Ashley, a young CNA, needs a way to transition out of working in a nursing home to a hospital because of the toxic environment and patients receiving inadequate care.

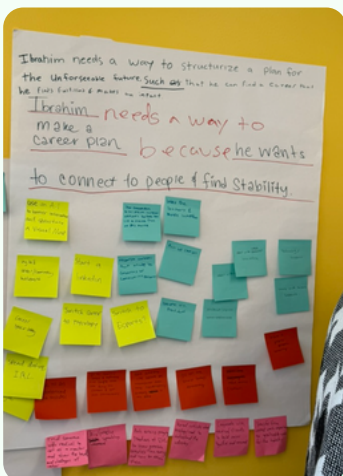
The group's prototype, **MedConnect for Good**, is a social networking platform designed to help medical professionals and students build meaningful connections across roles and institutions. The concept centers on networking and mentorship as pathways for career mobility and improved workplace well-being.

The proposed platform organizes users — from CNAs to doctors — into **role-based clusters** that encourage both peer support within specialties and cross-role learning across the healthcare ecosystem. Users can share posts, showcase work experience and resumes, and engage in community discussions aimed at **career growth and ethical care**.

After receiving feedback, the team refined their idea to emphasize **outreach and inclusivity** — adding new clusters for students and career changers entering healthcare, and expanding access for older professionals who may be less active online. Their updated model incorporates **in-person engagement**, such as booths and sponsorships at medical conferences, and features to host **virtual meetups and mentorship events**. These updates transform MedConnect for Good from a digital platform into a **hybrid community for connection, mentorship, and equitable opportunity** in healthcare careers.



“TINDER FOR NETWORKING”



Problem Statement: Ibrahim needs a way to make a career plan because he wants to connect to people and find stability.

The group's prototype centered on a career connections system that helps students like Ibrahim build relationships with mentors and professionals through shared interests. The concept began with the idea of a **personalized business card** that facilitates introductions to mentors — such as professors and industry contacts — who can guide students toward career opportunities and stability.

Incorporating feedback, the team expanded the idea into a **structured matchmaking** process for mentorship. They proposed using an **“interest form”** — a digital questionnaire where participants share hobbies or universal interests (like tennis or food) to make cross-generational networking less intimidating and more approachable. These shared interests serve as a bridge for authentic conversation before professional dialogue begins.

The team likened the system to “**Tinder for networking**” — a playful yet practical way to connect mentors and mentees based on mutual interests, fostering **trust, accessibility, and belonging** in career development contexts.



LESSONS LEARNED & SURPRISES

There were some takeaways from our session that stood out as areas to explore further:

- **Networking is not just professional—it’s deeply personal.** Students emphasized shared identity, culture, and passions as key to meaningful connections.
- **Low-barrier spaces matter.** Informal, fun, peer-led settings are not “nice to have” but essential to reduce intimidation and spark engagement.
- **Peer-to-peer is powerful.** Engagement and creativity soared when students worked collaboratively without faculty or adult oversight.
- **Offline-online bridge-building is essential.** The value of networking, mentoring, and professional development experiences is significantly strengthened by tying online resources and support to in-person, off-line communities and experiences.
- **Existing campus resources can be jumping off points.** Some students noted that their existing counselors, faculty, and campus resources could be key initial touch-points into developing the skills and connections needed to find mentors and build their professional network.

CONCLUSION



Over the course of a day, Ourmedia worked with a group of Evergreen Valley's student community to surface core areas of need and potential solutions around career readiness. Students identified challenges relating to job mobility within a field, connecting to mentors, and developing the right skills for an uncertain employment landscape. They produced prototypes of solutions that spoke to the importance of near-peer networking and mentorship, lowered barriers to connecting with mentors, and their desire to adopt the right skills mindset to navigate various opportunities in the workforce.

While student participants were compensated for their time, most attended the session for the potential to develop themselves professionally; follow-up surveys reveal that this discussion based, hands-on co-design format was well received by participants. The human-centered design-thinking angle provided them with key opportunities to practice collaboration, creative thinking, problem-solving, interviewing, and leadership. Future explorations could focus on AI's implications for student career readiness or what near-peer networking opportunities look like in practice.

ABOUT OURMEDIA

Ourmedia.org is a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering Generation Z with the knowledge, skills, and networks needed to thrive in a rapidly changing future of work shaped by artificial intelligence and technological transformation.

Ourmedia's programs — including AI & Career Readiness Workshops, Career Design Labs, and Student Listening Sessions — blend hands-on learning, storytelling, and design thinking to help students build confidence, digital fluency, and professional networks. Each engagement generates qualitative and quantitative data that inform reports, frameworks, and tools aimed at creating more equitable and inclusive systems of education and employment.