

# Reimagining Internships: Virtual Models for Equitable Work-Based Learning Programs

Nicole Pizzato  
Allison Koelzer Nelson  
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# What is your WHY?



**As you come in, please sit with people you'd love to collaborate with, and take a moment to answer the question on Mentimeter**

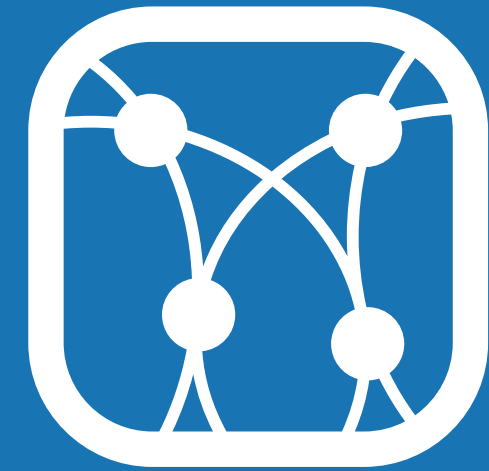
**<https://www.menti.com/alp6dqkwcvr9>**



**Allison Nelson**



**Nicole Pizzato**



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**VIBRANT**health

**Thank you for joining us!**



**Amber Adams**

# Session Outcomes:

Participants will:

- Understand the “why” behind student-driven virtual internships
- Explore two real models (Media + Community Health)
- Identify practical ways to implement/adapt
- Leave with concrete next steps for virtual internship development



## About Us:

**The CAPS Network is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and global community of educators and partners advancing profession-based learning.**

**The Network connects and supports affiliate K12 and Post-Secondary programs to share best practices, troubleshoot challenges, and celebrate as new innovations emerge that provide students with authentic experiences that drive self discovery.**

**We are a Network of Innovators with incredible industry partners, and that includes our core team at the National level. That's the story we're here to share today.**



# CAPS Around the World

**WEST: 6** Programs

**MIDWEST**  
**66** Programs

**UPPER MIDWEST**  
**20** Programs

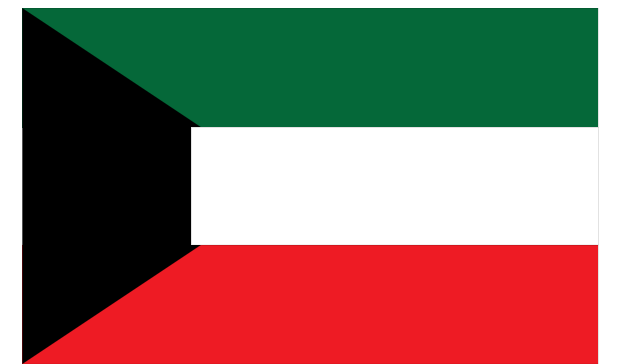
**NORTHEAST**  
**7** Programs

**SOUTHWEST:**  
**24** Programs

**SOUTHEAST:**  
**10** Programs



**INTERNATIONAL: 4** Programs



# What Sparked Virtual Internship Opportunities?

*How do we get students working across the country together? How do we get CAPS Network students collaborating and having shared experiences as another iteration of what is possible within a network like ours?*

# Our Mindset: Why Virtual Internships?

- Iteration over perfection
- Entrepreneurial mindset: Run the experiment!
- Organizational high tolerance for ambiguity/risk
- Embrace system constraints from K12 affiliates

# What do these experiences have in common?

- Industry experience and mentorship
- Opportunity to practice and gain Profession Skills
- Intro to Design Thinking: opportunities to practice empathy, iteration, prototyping, and testing.
- No formal grade
- Opportunities for self-reflection
- Students are self managed, minimal educator engagement
- Using Slack as the main hosting platform



# Digital Media Agency

# Student Voice



**NEW EPISODE**  
Featuring Associates from our Student Media Agency!



Lauren M. from Andover CAPS    Mikayla O. from Uxbridge High School

**THE CAPS NETWORK**  
**STUDENT MEDIA AGENCY**



The Network introduces profession based learning and the educational model developed by the Center for Advanced Professional Studies (CAPS...)

The Network

## Episode 83 - The CAPS Network Student Media Agency

May 01, 2024 • The CAPS Network • Season 5 • Episode 83 Share



15 30 1x 0:00 | 24:07

Show Notes

Lauren M.  
Andover CAPS  
Spring 2024 Media Agency



# Digital Media Agency Story

- Started first iteration by our K12 Director whose professional background was in Film and Media, so it was an easier lift than other industries.
- Could work for and be mentored by CAPS Network National Team.

## Original Pilot:

- Identified programs that had media classes or were general CAPS courses that weren't industry specific and had teachers register students.

**Question:** *What does a meaningful internship in Digital Media involve? How do students expand their knowledge and professional network? How can we use our organizational Communications needs to create authentic experiences for students?*

# Digital Media Agency Overview

A virtual experience with weekly real-world projects to develop both durable and technical skills. Interns navigate the workflow and demands of a Media Agency

## Skills Gained

- Project Management
- Social Media Marketing
- Professional Feedback
- Presentations
- Client Relations
- Caption Writing
- AI/Canva/Loomly

## Target Students

- Graphic Design
- Marketing
- Photography
- Film/Digital Media
- Business
- Any students undecided but desiring exploration

# V.1 Fall 2023

## Pilot

- 10 students creating social media content for CAPS Network
- Students from 5 programs: Utah, Minnesota, Missouri, Massachusetts & Kansas

## Internship Results

- Students gained portfolio building experiences
- Professional Skills like emailing, collaboration, and time management.

## Revision for V.2

- More industry experience required
- More hands on facilitation required
- Assumptions about social media as a jumping off point for student work were unrealistic

# V.2 Spring 2024

## New Facilitators

- New team member with industry experience to facilitate
- Industry contractor hired to assist with student coaching, give guidance on skill-building, and ensure industry relevance

## Diverse Group of Interns

- Mix of 25 students from urban, suburban, and rural CAPS affiliate programs

## Revision for V.3:

- 25 students was A LOT - need to decrease number of interns.
- Not all high schools students know how to use social media
- Students struggled with writing captions.

# V.3 Fall 2024

## Deeper Industry Connections

- Career features and Q&A sessions with professionals
- Focus on skill-building with content creation:
  - Brand guidelines training
  - Video editing
  - Graphic Design
  - Caption writing

## Raised the Stakes

- Utilized bigger Comms needs like the branding for our national summer learning conference, Summer Huddle

## Challenge:

- Difficulty with student responsiveness

## V.4 Spring 2025

### Expanded technology and platform training opportunities

- AI training
- Enhanced Canva Training
- Loomly (social media scheduler)

### Challenges:

- High capacity from facilitators required for authentic learning
- Spring is a challenge for seniors
- Needs to be labeled as internship for resume purposes and for learner stakes

## V.5 Fall 2025

### Hired new contractor with extended contract hours

- Focused on 8 week timeframe instead of 12-16 weeks
- Refined marketing for teachers and students in the application process
- Weekly career feature conversations with other professionals

### Challenges:

- We may need to migrate away from Slack
- Students don't feel urgency around the experience unless they see what they are gaining

○

## V.6 Currently On Pause

# Pros

- **Build and/or organize a professional portfolio of client-ready work**
- Develop confidence in presenting creative solutions
- Gain real-world feedback from professionals in the media field
- Strengthen teamwork and agency-style workflow skills
- Discovery unique and high-demand careers under the Digital Media / Marketing umbrella

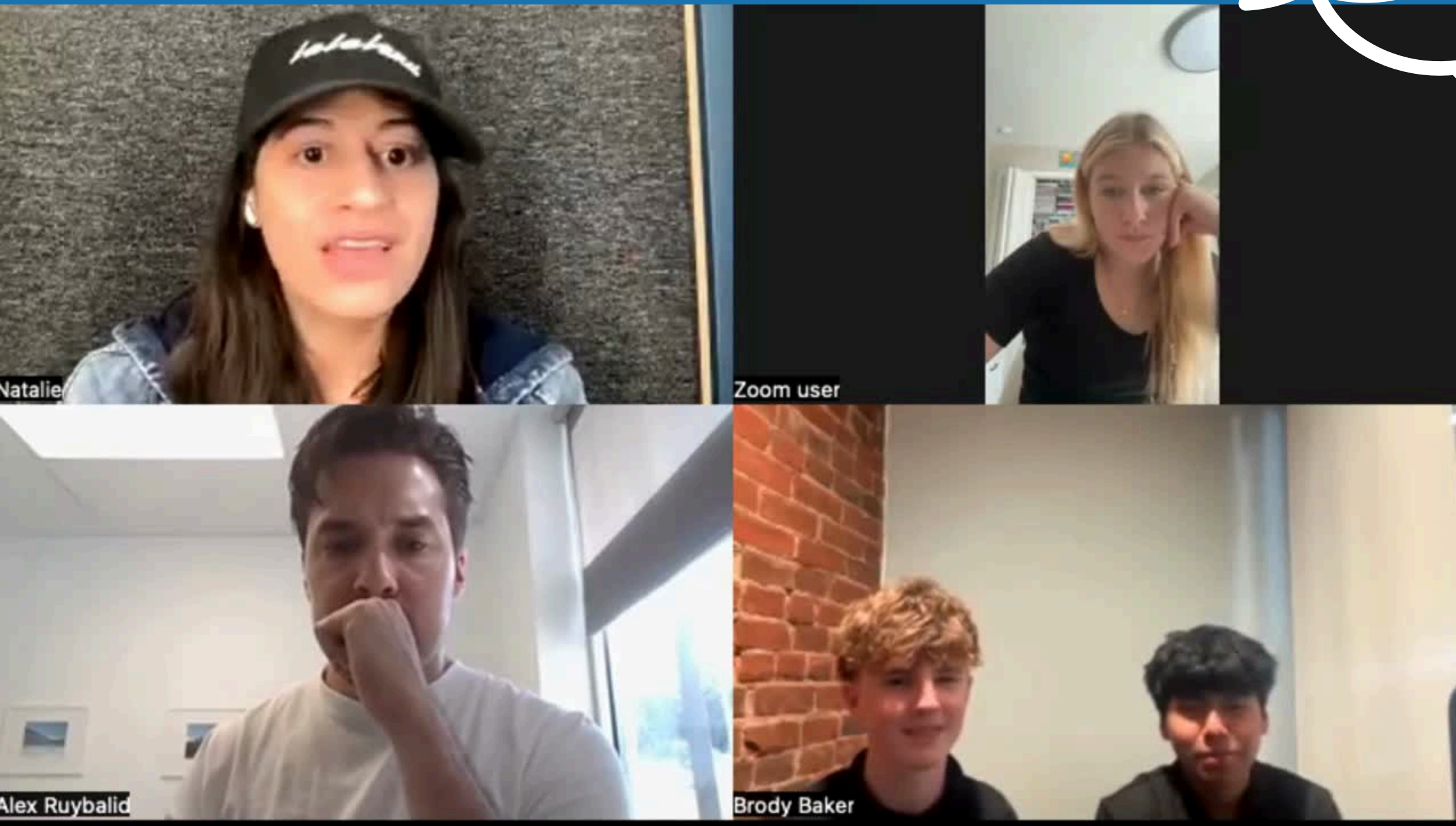
# Cons

- **Student retention during spring semesters drops, especially with Seniors.**
- **Teachers need more touchpoints with interns (skills, access to platforms, coaching, etc.)**
- Not all students understand social media or social media marketing, despite exposure.
- Slack may not be the best platform for student access despite its industry usage
- Time and capacity required to facilitate well (~4-12 hrs/wk)

# Student Voice Meets Industry Advice



## Weekly Industry Career Features via Zoom



Notice the student's energy and attentiveness.

How do we coach and explore after these conversations?

**Alex Ruybalid,**  
Media Mentor for Media Agency Fall 2025

**Brody B. and Allan A. from**  
Pittsburg, KS CAPS Program  
**LAUNCH**

*Career Interview with Industry professional,  
@NatalieMicalaSchultz, and the Fall 2025 Student Media Agency*

# Discuss at your tables:

What parts could you implement now?

What would need to change?

What risks are you willing to take?

Industry role: where do they lead vs. where do you step in?

How do you center durable skills + self-discovery?

The logo features a solid blue vertical bar on the left side. The background is a vibrant orange color with a network of light orange lines and circles. One circle is positioned at the top left, another at the bottom left, and a third on the right side, partially overlapping the text. The text 'Community Health Agency' is centered in a bold, white, sans-serif font.

# Community Health Agency

# Community Health Agency Story

- Originally intended to be a virtual Client Connected Project with industry
- Expanded beyond clinical careers so all students could access opportunities in their community

## Anticipated Applicants:

- Students from urban who didn't have access to transportation
- Students from rural communities who didn't have access to hospital or clinical experiences near program
- Students from Health Science pathways

**Question:** *What does a meaningful internship in health careers look like when you don't have access to labs or patients? How do students expand their knowledge and professional network?*

# Community Health Agency Overview

A virtual experience to develop skills and understand the world of Public Health

## Skills Gained

- Explore the 5 pillars of Public Health
- Conduct original research project (CHIP)
- Explore professional networking opportunities

## Target Students

- Biomedical
- Health Science
- Social Work/Teaching
- Public Admin/Business
- Agriculture (suprise!)
- Undecided/Exploring Health students

# V.0 (Planning) Fall 2024

## Picking Industry Facilitator

### Things to consider:

- Experience in field
- Time commitment
- Network connections

## Building an experience together

- Mapping out 12wk experience
- Gaining buy-in from schools/teachers

## Student Recruitment

- Informational sessions offered
- Recruitment flyers

## Application Selection Criteria

- Interview for students
- Selection Ranking
- Learned from Media we NEED an App

# Launch Spring 2025 V.1

## Meeting Platform

- Ensuring students have access to communication channels such as Slack and Zoom

## Meeting Times

- Synchronous and Asynchronous Working times
- 1 morning/1 afternoon meeting time for students to choose from
- Office Hours available upon request

## Student Accountability

- Onboarding required
- Participation in meetings
- Questions for guest speakers
- Final project to turn in
- Students earned Recommendations



Sylvia Olivera

CAPS  
**OVERDOSE  
FACTORS**

**Sylvia O.,**

**Community Health Agency**

**Intern Fall 2025**

**CAST, San Antonio, TX**

***How did completing this project and participating in the Community Health Agency influence your career goals?***

# Fall 2025 V. 2

## Student Recruitment

- Had 33 applicants for 15 spots!
- Word had spread - high quality applications
- Shortened experience to 10 weeks
- Pathways of interest narrowed
  - Health Science
  - Undecided

## Application Selection Criteria

- Kept process due to effectiveness, but it is time consuming

## Higher Students Engagement & National Showcase Experience

- Shared final projects with professionals and other interns via Zoom

# Spring 2026 V. 3

## Student Accountability

- Shortened experience to 8 weeks
- First incidents of dismissal from experience for non-participation
- Lack of communication
- Lack of engagement
- No National Showcase Experience

## Networking Concerns

- Students not attending guest speaker calls = don't want to waste time/burn bridges with other industry partners

## Fall interns returned for additional mentoring

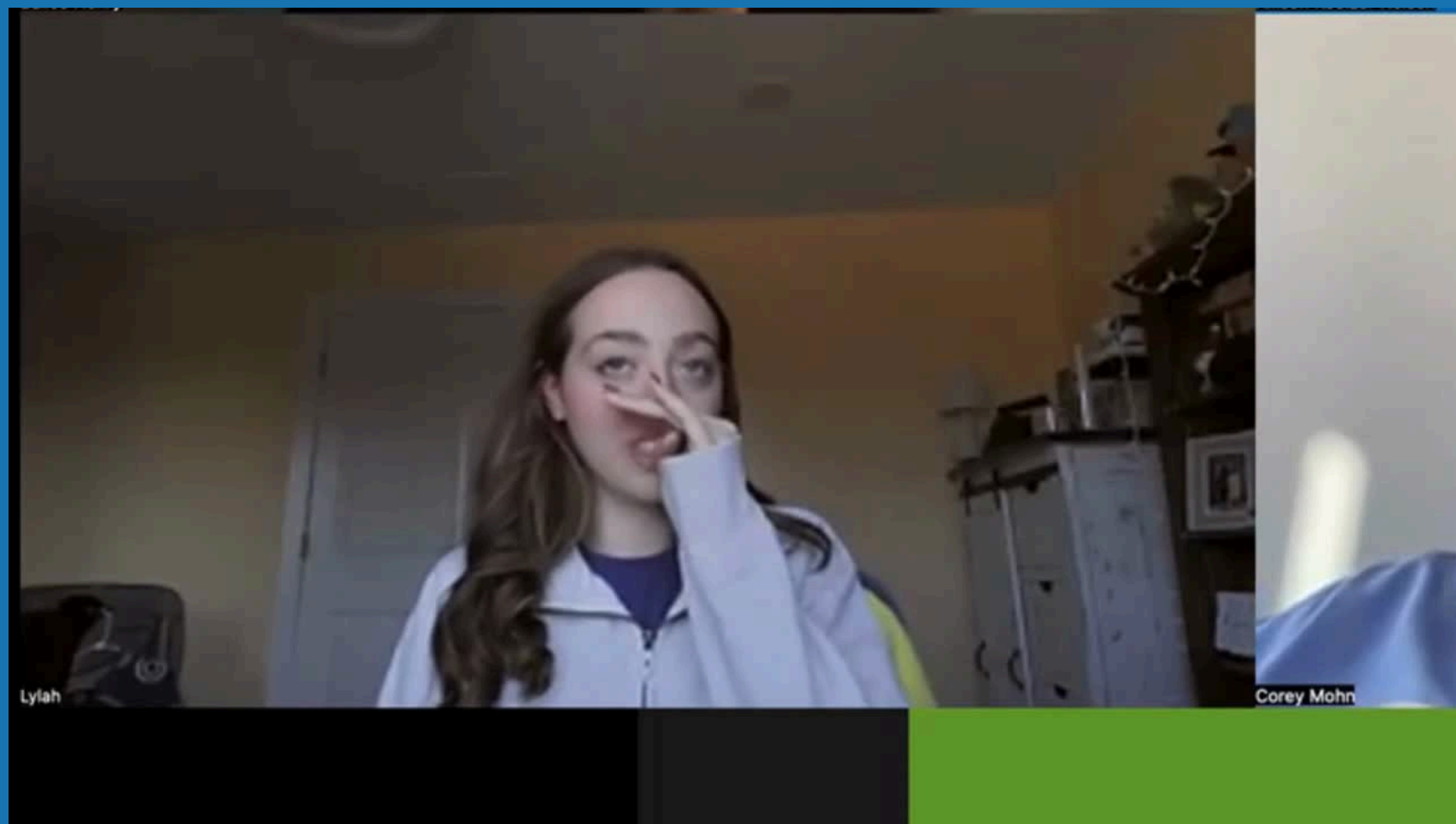
- 4 chose to continue mentoring for their Capstone Projects

# Pros

- **Exposing Students to various healthcare careers**
- Bridging the gap between real-world issues and student engagement
- Having an industry-based professional mentor for the experience
- Increased professional networking opportunities
- Streamlined application and onboarding process

# Cons

- **Student retention during spring semesters**
- Fair student accountability
- Not all students access asynchronous opportunities (i.e recorded interviews, other students' presentations)
- Difficulty collaborating across programs
- Time required to facilitate well (~4-12 hrs/wk)



**Lylah C.,  
Community Health Agency Intern  
Fall 2025,  
Andover CAPS, Kansas**

*What challenges did you have to overcome in your project? How has this influenced your interest in the topic you chose for your CHIP?*

# **ANIMAL OVERPOPULATION**

**Presented By: Lylah Covey**

What strategies can communities use to decrease animal overpopulation without high euthanasia rates?

# Discuss at your tables:

What parts could you implement now?

What would need to change?

What risks are you willing to take?

Industry role: where do they lead vs. where do you step in?

How do you center durable skills + self-discovery?

# Resources and Tool kit

Resource Folder



Virtual Internship  
Planning Template



# Best Practices:

- Build with industry, not around them - run the experiment together
- Use student voice continuously to inform and refine
- Define your “North Star” - use your WHY to keep focused
- The more it mimics an in-person internship, the more invested interns are.



# Additional CAPS Resources



# CAPS Playbooks

## Building & Growing Community Partnership



## Diving Into Profession-Based Learning



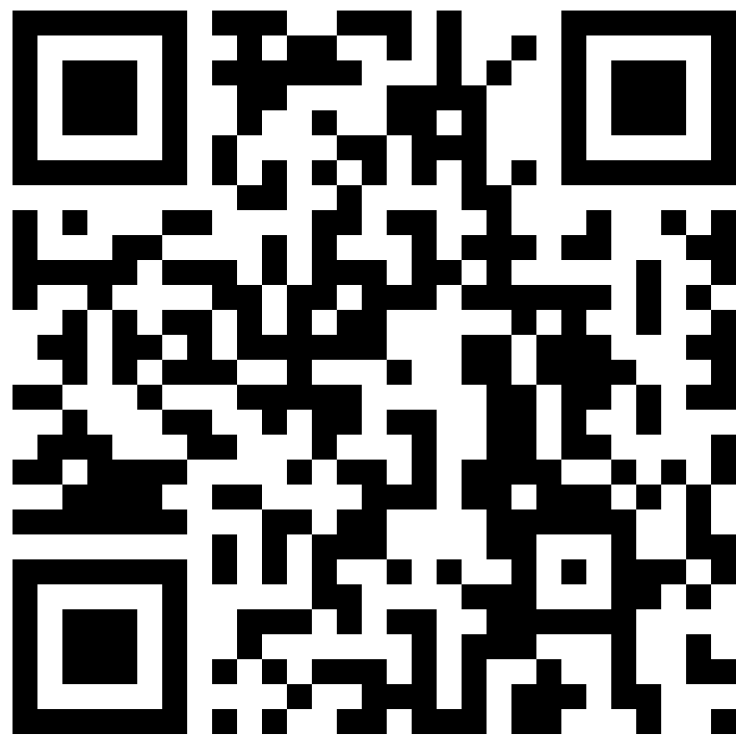
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## Innovating Education for Careers of the Future



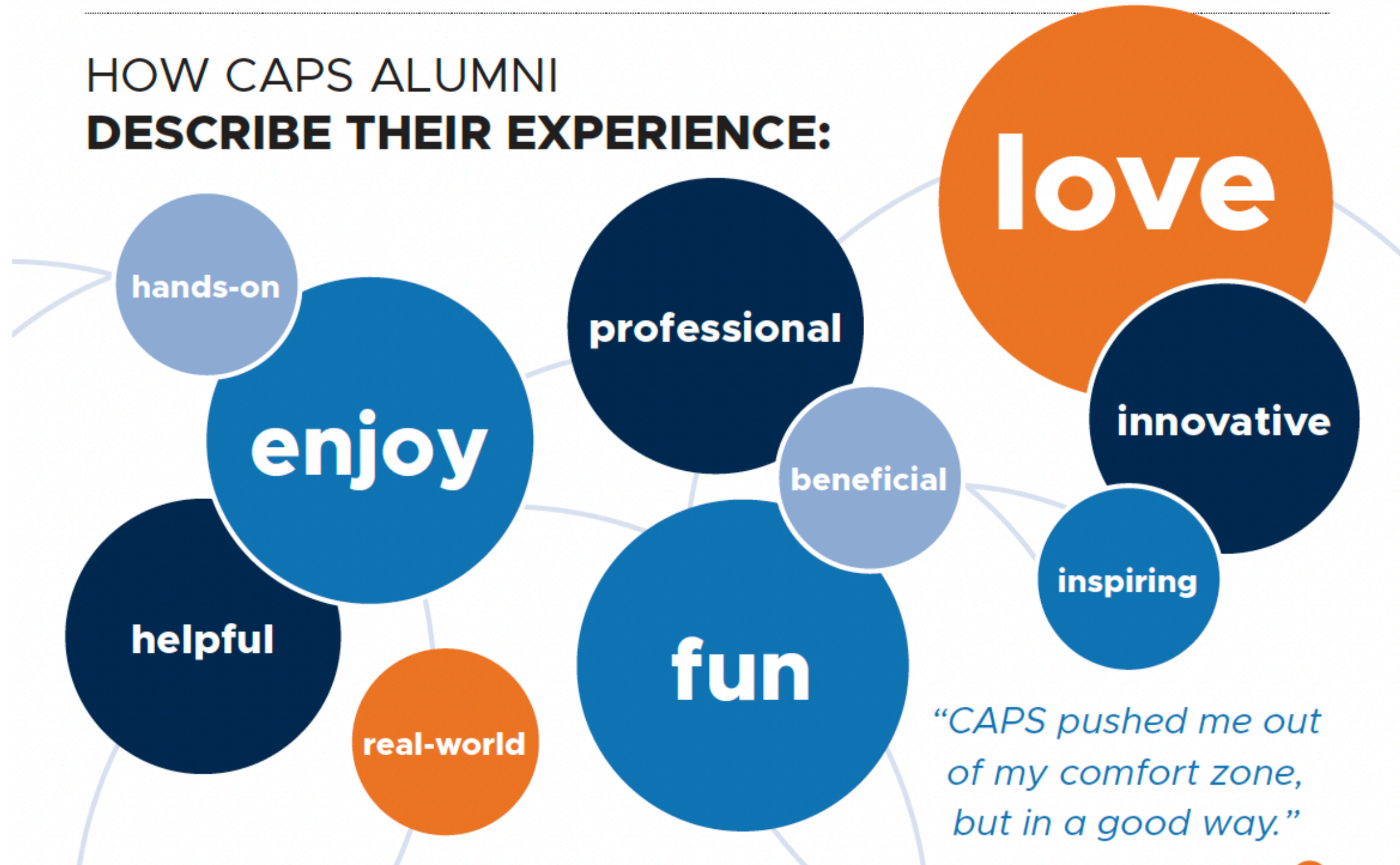
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# CAPS Alumni Impact Report - 2025

HOW CAPS ALUMNI  
DESCRIBE THEIR EXPERIENCE:



[yourcapsnetwork.org/alumni/](https://yourcapsnetwork.org/alumni/)



# experience.work

WHAT IS PROFESSION-BASED LEARNING? experience.work

### Characteristics & Elements of Profession-Based Learning

	Problem Based	Project Based	Profession Based
<b>Time Frame</b>	Short, with one to two class periods	Longer, will require several class periods over several weeks	Longer, will require meeting in and out of classroom several weeks
<b>Relationship</b>	Student & teacher	Student & teacher	Student & client
<b>Number of Participants</b>	Individual effort, typically not a team activity	Individual or team effort, can be organized either way	Team effort, groups of three students optimal
<b>Curriculum Type</b>	"Off the shelf" not always customized	"Off the shelf" or customized, can be organized either way	Designed by the client
<b>Skill Type</b>	Single technical skill, lower range of Bloom's taxonomy	Multiple technical & soft skills - middle range of Bloom's taxonomy	Multiple technical & soft skills - high range of Bloom's taxonomy with emphasis on critical thinking
<b>Focus</b>	Equipment, lecture content	Can be client structured real-world problem	Real problems with solutions that could be implemented by the client
<b>Method of Assignment</b>	"fun of" work	"fun of" work	Differentiated, promote options for students to choose
<b>Method of Assessment</b>	As usual, used the traditional with emphasis on public presentation of demonstration to client	Client based subjective evaluation	Differentiated, subjective evaluation
<b>Example</b>	A remedial problem involving the use of Excel	Identifying poverty in the local community	Developing a social media strategy for a non-for-profit organization

What is Pro-BL?



HOW DO I FIND MEANINGFUL INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS? experience.work

### How do I find meaningful industry partnerships?

**Expand the boundaries of learning beyond the traditional classroom.**

Building relationships with business, industry and higher education partners is critical to the success of profession-based learning (PBL). Deepening connections with your local community means more employment pathways for students and the opportunity for them to explore careers beyond their immediate circumstances. The first step is finding partners that align with your program culture and student needs.

**IDENTIFY KEY ROLES**

Developing community partnerships in a PBL model requires dedicated management. Often, this looks like a designated coordinator or business development specialist who understands partners, explores the program, provides tours, facilitates introductions and manages relationships. If hiring a full-time coordinator isn't feasible, consider forming a committee of interested individuals and parents to lead the effort. Schools can also leverage outside community organizations to learn up on staffing for industry outreach. Check with your local chamber of commerce or economic development council to inquire about a partnership.

Regardless of the approach, successful community partnerships depend on strong leadership and collaboration.

How to Find Partnerships



HOW DO I CONNECT WITH INDUSTRY PARTNERS? experience.work

### How do I connect with industry partners?

**Establish and nurture relationships with industry partners to create learning environments that are engaging and fun.**

As an educator, you want to create meaningful experiences for your students. Profession-based learning (PBL) programs present a unique opportunity to create a win-win relationship in which both students and business partners realize something of value -- a foundation other than a paycheck.

**CREATE MUTUAL BENEFIT**

When considering potential partnerships with businesses in your community, here are helpful questions to ask:

- What are their business or industry needs?
- What skills and qualities are they looking for in their future workforce?
- What opportunities can we provide to students that would give them an advantage when entering the workforce?

Do your research and understand an industry partner's motivations for participation. Consider meeting with multiple businesses and organizations throughout your community to learn what you can:

- What are their most pressing issues?
- What concerns them the most about workforce development?
- Do they see this as a public relations opportunity?
- Do they simply want to give back to the community?

Once you have answers to these questions, you can tailor your partnership proposals to align with their goals and demonstrate the mutual benefits of collaboration. Follow up with, "I understand you need... Here are some ways we could engage?"

Connect to Industry



*Thank you for  
joining us!*

Please rate our  
session on SCHED.

Get in touch with our team.



**Nicole Pizzato**



**Amber Adams**



**Allison Nelson**



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