



W O R K S H O P U

Workshop U is a bold new postsecondary program for students ages 18-24. Through coursework, personalized coaching and internships, Workshop U students develop a vision for what they want their life to look like now while building the skills they need to make that vision a reality. Currently in a pilot phase, Workshop U is a one-year, credit bearing program, at the end of which students either continue on to earn a bachelor's degree at another institution, enroll in a job training program, or pursue a career with a family-sustaining wage. While the program is open to all students, over 90 percent of Workshop U students come from communities adversely affected by poverty and racial discrimination.

The Workshop U model builds on research in the science of adolescent development (including emerging adulthood), the values and attitudes of today's emerging adults, trends in the labor market, and factors affecting postsecondary success. We know that the brains of emerging adults [are wired for connection, identity formation, exploration and risk-taking](#). We know that a typical 18 year old is very much a work in progress, their interests, values and goals [still forming with experience](#). Yet our entire postsecondary system assumes that they are ready and able to make high-stakes life decisions. We know that while young people certainly have anxiety about their economic future, they also seek a [deeper sense of purpose](#) and [meaningful relationships with others](#). We know that [employers value "durable" skills](#) such as collaboration, problem solving, emotional intelligence, and self-directed learning, and that [neither college students nor employers](#) think higher education is equipping them with those skills. Relatedly, we know that these skills serve students and employees well across fields and careers, yet the majority of workforce development programs instead emphasize field-specific technical skills. And finally, we know that emerging adults are well aware that a high school degree is not enough to secure their future, but are [skeptical about the value proposition](#) of a traditional college education.

Workshop U is designed for journey through emerging adulthood. It assumes that students are still figuring out who they are and what they want to be, and treats these universal questions as subjects worthy of rigorous study and examination. As students' view of themselves and their future becomes clearer, we help them build a deep and flexible skillset to help them shape the opportunities they want to pursue, excel when given the chance, and learn and grow from each successive experience.

The Workshop U experience spans an academic year, broken into three trimesters, each with a distinct theme. In trimester one, students **shape a vision** for what they want their life to look like. They learn to tell the story of how they arrived at this point in their life and where they are going. They dive deep into the experiences and relationships that shaped them and examine their core beliefs about themselves and the world. Through an approach called Life Design, they learn to widen the set of possible futures to which they aspire and weigh the likely benefits and challenges of each. And they focus on the unique importance of relationships in both our personal and professional lives, with an emphasis on how to deepen the connections that matter most. By the end of trimester one, students can tell a powerful

story of how they got here, what they value, and what they are looking for from life. They also form close bonds with one another.

In the second trimester, students learn how to **create opportunity** around their vision. They discover that the best opportunities aren't simply waiting to be found—they must be created. Students focus on research, networking, and problem solving, applying their storytelling and relationship-building skills to connect with professionals whose work aligns with their vision. They master decision-making strategies: weighing options, assessing risks, and committing without regret. Crucially, they develop resilience by learning to overcome setbacks through self-awareness and problem solving. By trimester's end, students have secured paid "life prototype" experiences that allow them to test a potential future path.

In the third and final trimester, students **prototype** a version of the life to which they aspire. Their academic work during this term focuses on how to be maximally effective in their role, which includes relationship building, emotional intelligence, and learning workplace norms and culture. But it is also intensely reflective: as they move through their internships, students are comparing the experience to their assumptions and expectations, and using that to update their vision and understanding of where they want to go next. By the end of the term, students have expanded their network, gained critical experience, and defined their next step, whether that means continuing to a college degree, training for a career, or moving directly into a job with a family-sustaining wage.

Each trimester is divided into a series of intensive courses ranging from four to eight weeks in duration. Each is tied to specific competencies, and produces evidence of students' growth and capability in those skill areas. Beginning in the second trimester, students are paired with a professional, certified coach with whom they work for the remainder of the year. The coach is not a mentor or an advisor; their role is to help students tap into their own strengths and skills, identify needs and opportunities, and build capability and agency for an independent and thriving adulthood. Over the course of the year, student work from courses, coaching, and work-based learning accrues in portfolios that can earn students up to 15 college credits and be shared with prospective employers as evidence of their capabilities. Additionally, students may earn industry credentials if they align with their internship goals or next steps following completion of the program.

Workshop U is currently in the second year of a pilot phase, serving 18 students. Our goal is to continue to refine the curriculum and model with small cohorts of students while operating on a lean budget, with the goal of developing materials and systems that can ultimately scale with increased demand. To that end, we are actively seeking additional funds to extend the pilot and strategies to align with public funding streams in workforce development, higher education and violence prevention.