

A Qualitative Evaluation of the Braven Accelerator Course 2018-19

Submitted to:

Braven

Submitted by:

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Introduction and Purpose

This report concludes a two-year qualitative study of the Braven Accelerator program at San José State University. The purpose of this evaluation is to examine the implementation and the perceived impact of the course and student-perceived growth in developing career-related competencies. The evaluation also highlights student and leadership coach perception of five important components of the program, including online modules, learning labs, one-on-one meetings with leadership coaches, projects, and workshops.

The findings suggest that the development of job search skills, confidence and a sense of empowerment to achieve career goals were among the strongest areas of impact of the Braven Accelerator program. Mentorship relationships between coaches and students were also valuable but may not be ubiquitous across the program. Among the expected course outcomes, students noted most growth in the areas of networking and teamwork. In describing these skills, we highlight impactful experiences noted by students and coaches. The findings provide insight into future areas of study and exploration to assist in the ongoing design and development of the program.

Data Collection and Analysis Strategy

Data were collected during the fall of 2017 and 2018. The primary source of data was information gathered through interviews with current and past student participants and their leadership coaches. In addition, we conducted observations of the Braven Accelerator course.

Our initial strategy for conducting interviews was to select current leadership coaches with previous Braven experience and match them with a sample of their students who are current students, alumni of the program and Braven alumni of SJSU. We encountered some difficulty matching students to coaches as designed due to low response from students invited to participate in interviews. Consequently, we broadened the original student sampling and interviewed several students whose coach was not also interviewed during the data collection period. In total, we conducted 34 interviews. The actual interviews and observations completed are presented in the tables below.

Students and coaches were contacted initially by Braven staff via e-mail and were sent follow-up messages by text via LinkedIn. All interview participants were offered an Amazon gift card as an incentive to participate in the interview. In 2017 the value of the gift card was \$20. Because of the difficulty we experienced securing student interviews in the first year, the card value was increased to \$30 in 2018. Classroom observations were scheduled through current coaches via e-mail.

As requested by Braven staff, we made minor modifications to the interview protocols from 2017 to reflect changes in program terminology. [We also added an additional question about perceived barriers to graduation and how students' experience with Braven might impact their persistence as college students.]

Data Collection by Type

Type of Data	Year (number)		
	Fall 2017	Fall 2018	Total 2017-2018
Student Participant Interviews	12	15	27
Leadership Coach Interviews	3	4	7
Classroom Observations	2	3	5

Breakdown of Student Sample

Type of Student	Year (number)				
	2017		2018		Total
	Non transfer	Transfer	Non transfer	Transfer	
Current SJSU and Braven Fellow	1	3	3	3	10
Current SJSU and Braven Alumni	4	0	3	3	10
SJSU and Braven Alumni	3	1	3	0	7
Totals	8	4	9	6	27

All student interviews and all but one coach interview were conducted via Zoom. Classroom observations in 2018 took place at Adobe, Google and SJSU. With participant consent, we recorded all interviews and sent the recordings to a third-party transcription service. We stored all files in password-protected folders to preserve interviewee confidentiality and hand stripped identifying information from the data during analysis. Given the small data sample, in 2018 we hand coded the interview transcripts using keyword searches based on the themes identified in the interview protocols. It should be noted that all quotes in this report are from interviews conducted in 2018, and references to findings in 2017 are based on the report from that year. We recommend reviewing the reports from both years to get a richer view of student experiences in the Braven Accelerator during this time period.

Evaluation Findings

We found that interview responses from students and coaches in 2017 and 2018 were quite similar. The consistency of the data provides strong evidence that the findings across years can be pooled together for evaluation purposes. In this report, we discuss analysis of data from the current year and note corroboration or distinctiveness with findings from 2017.

Overall, the experiences of students interviewed in 2017 and 2018 reveal that the Braven Accelerator provided them with opportunities to develop tangible job search skills and competencies. Student and coach perceptions of the program are mostly positive across multiple components of the program. In terms of perceived outcomes, the development of confidence and a sense of empowerment to achieve career goals was particularly noted by both students and coaches. Students cited the career competencies of networking skills and teamwork as the two most clearly developed by their participation in the course. The data capture only a small sample of student experiences of

the program, and further inquiry would be needed to understand the pervasive impact of the Braven program across all participants.

Understanding the Job Search Process and Acquiring Job Search Skills

Similar to 2017, students most often noted that their experience with the Accelerator gave them the skills and a framework to find a job. The most valuable experiences cited by students were strategic interpersonal skills, such as networking via LinkedIn or speaking with professionals in informational interviews. Students also valued the opportunity to have a personal connection with their leadership coach, who serves as a mentor and role model and as a bridge from student life to the professional world of Silicon Valley.

In 2017, students particularly emphasized that the online modules and the Hustle to Career project equipped them with the job finding skills they needed to implement the steps in their career roadmap. In 2018, students highlighted conducting interviews and learning to use LinkedIn as two especially valuable activities in helping them build job search skills. In the following sections we describe student and coach perspectives on these three activities.

Informational and Mock Interviews

Braven students are required to complete informational interviews as part of their Hustle to Career project. They are given access to the Braven network to select people with whom they would like to interview to gain an understanding of a company, a job, and/or an industry. Most students had never participated in an informational interview and researching, preparing, scheduling and conducting an informational interview gave some students their first-ever interview experience. Students valued the interviews as insightful experiences but also saw value in the networking opportunity they provide by virtue of access to the Braven network.

I didn't know anything about informational interviews, so I thought that was a great skill to have. What I like about Braven is that they have this network; it's like a database of all the people you connect with who are professionals. And then also I had a leadership coach connect me to somebody from LinkedIn as well. Having that experience and being able to talk to other professionals is really a great opportunity and probably the biggest strength that Braven has. – Past Braven Fellow and Current SJSU Student (2018)

Although mock interview experiences are available at the university career center, all Fellows participate in them in the Learning Lab. Students viewed mock interviews as a low-risk way to practice and learn how to interact and comport oneself in a job interview.

I think the mock interviews were probably the most helpful . . . I work in a family business, so I've never had a real interview. . . And so being able to practice instead of going to a real interview and then just failing miserably, being able to practice, get some tips back about it, and then being able to take that into a real

interview. I think that was probably the most helpful. – Current Braven Fellow (2018)

An alumna directly attributed the skills she learned with the mock interviews, particularly “how to network and how to end your conversation with an ask, and make sure you give them your contact or get their contact” as very helpful for both her interview for graduate school and in her graduate program. Both informational and mock interview experiences helped students develop and practice specific interview skills and understand the value of expanding their professional network.

Using LinkedIn

During observations in the learning labs we observed that within the normal flow of conversation students mentioned a variety of social media, apps, and online platforms they use daily to connect with friends, classmates, professors, and university services. However, interview data showed that before enrolling in the Braven program, many students were not familiar with LinkedIn. As part of their Hustle to Career project, students are required to create a LinkedIn profile, which they immediately recognized as a valuable job search and networking tool. One student stated:

I had never heard of LinkedIn before, and that has helped me. It's another good resource to be able to connect with people and employers. I was recently contacted because of my LinkedIn and got a job offer at US Bank, and they told me they were looking into my profile . . . And I was like, “Oh wow, I never thought that actually these things really do happen . . . I never experienced something like that before. –Current Braven Fellow (2018)

Another student, who admitted to being overwhelmed with working and trying to get through her college course load was grateful that Braven required her to network even though the skill does not come naturally to her:

I wouldn't have a LinkedIn at this point in time if I hadn't taken Braven . . . I just want to focus and finish my courses. So Braven's really helped me connect myself to the outside world . . . I went to a conference just about a week ago, and people have LinkedIns and were looking at your LinkedIn based on connections there. I think it's just been really useful for that. – Current Braven Fellow (2018)

The value of a LinkedIn profile was extremely tangible to students and they directly attributed as a Braven outcome. It is interesting to note, that in 2018, of the fifteen students and four coaches interviewed, thirteen students and all four coaches have listed Braven somewhere in their LinkedIn profile. All coaches and the majority of these thirteen students have prominently emphasized the program in their profile, providing detailed descriptions of their accomplishments and acquired skills such as teamwork, communication, and project planning. For students with limited professional experience, the Braven Accelerator sets them apart.

The Development of Work Readiness Competencies aligned with Course Learning Outcomes

The Braven program emphasizes five course learning outcomes: Leadership, Networking and Communicating, Working in Teams, Problem-Solving, and Operating and Managing.¹ In 2017, out of the five learning outcomes, Teamwork and Networking Skills were the two areas of competency that were discussed with most detail by students. Similarly, in 2018 students described in most depth their experiences with Working in Teams and Networking and Communicating.

Working in Teams

When asked about working in teams, students and coaches in both 2017 and 2018 referred to the Capstone Challenge project as the experience that most contributed to the development of their teamwork skills. Interviews and classroom observations indicate that the main factors shaping students' perception of successful teamwork during the Capstone Challenge were: (1) the ability of a diverse team of students from different majors, backgrounds and personalities to work together effectively; and (2) their coach's involvement, role modeling, and empathy. For example, a student who was working with a team for the first time described benefits to both his interpersonal skills and self-confidence.

As an artist, I'm used to working alone by myself, so working with a team is something that's really new for me. When I was working with my cohort, each person has their own opinion . . . So when I speak up and someone disagrees with my idea, I feel a little bit uncomfortable . . . But thanks to my cohort, I think they really care about me . . . so sometimes when they didn't hear my opinion or my idea they asked me, "Oh, how do you think about this? Can you give us some opinion? And they try to push me to speak up, they try to push me out of my comfort zone. That's something that helped me build not just teamwork but also helped me build my confidence and communication skills as well. – Past Braven Fellow and Current SJSU Student (2018)

While most students reported that working with their cohort was an overall positive experience, some struggled to work effectively as a team. One student, now in graduate school, expressed that while she enjoyed her cohort and had fun with them, they experienced challenges that required the skill of her coach to facilitate better communication.

A lot of us had so many things going on, so it was hard to communicate with one another. Our team is so diverse, so sometimes there can be conflict with how we approach things. Like someone from a different culture can be non-confrontational. There were fights. . . . When our group was in a mess, when everyone didn't communicate with one another, [our coach] actually took each

¹ Appendix 1-Braven Course Outcomes

one of us aside and just explained why that person might have reacted that way, and he would help us be better classmates. – SJSU and Braven Alumnus (2018)

Coaches played an essential role in setting the tone for the team by building rapport with the students and helping them work through tough spots. All coaches interviewed said that they have learned when to let students work out problems on their own and when to intervene. One coach, who several students described as being very empathetic and personal, related the following:

It's been really enjoyable to watch as a Leadership Coach. I'm stepping back in the Learning Labs and the fellows are really stepping up to feel empowered to own their section of the Capstone Challenge. And I was actually concerned that once we got to this portion of the project [when] . . . I as a Leadership Coach would stand back, that then you would see some of the potential tendencies that come with all types of students . . . And I was worried I would have to work and navigate through some of that, especially with individual coaching with some of the fellows, but so far it's been encouraging to watch my fellows rally around each other and the project to make it a success. – Coach (2018)

Students who had the most positive experience with their team cited hard work and commitment on the part of students, empathy and availability on the part of the coach, and some degree of good luck in the grouping of personalities within the cohort. One aspect of helping students to work in teams that evident to coaches was that their role was not only in providing them the interpersonal skills of teamwork, but also mentoring students through individual development and growth through their experience of working in teams.

Earlier on it's providing a little bit more guidance at being the facilitator and the coach, and then through the semester, shifting that role to help the students lead and facilitate and take more ownership. So I think [my role] changes, and I think it's really about guiding and helping guide them to self-discovery. That's what coaching is all about—helping them overcome personal barriers and moving closer to their own goals. – Coach (2018)

One past fellow, who is on track to graduate with a job waiting for him, summed up the importance of learning teamwork skills when he said, “I think employers are looking for . . . if you can work well in a team and adapt to new things and be eager to learn, and that's something I've picked up through my experience with Braven.”

Networking and Communicating

Students frequently emphasized that Braven helped them develop networking skills. Generally, students entered the Braven program with little to no networking experience. Based on responses from 2018 interviews, their level of experience could loosely fit into three categories: (1) students who had never considered the importance of networking in planning for their career; (2) students who knew that networking was important but did not have any formal networking experiences, and

(3) students who had some networking experience already. Very few students in our sample fit into the last category.

As part of their Hustle to Career project, students were required to attend a networking event. Braven suggests resources such as meetup.com where students can find events, and then students choose an event to attend. One self-described shy student described her first networking experience as formative, discovering that getting out of her comfort zone was a valuable learning experience.

That was the first time I went to a networking event. I was the youngest one there. They were all in their thirties, forties, fifties, and I was the only 20-year-old student there. I was just terrified! I did talk to a few people, but it's not how I normally would have wanted to see myself. But I learned from that experience that it's okay to feel uncomfortable in a situation. It's okay to observe people around you and learn from them. It's okay to not know all the information and go into a room and learn. Because I did learn. That experience made me realize that if I did stick in there, I can actually make it through. – Current Braven Fellow (2018)

One alumnus who works in media content creation said that although he enjoyed being social in college, he did not see the importance of networking and was not good at it. When he joined the Braven Accelerator during his last semester at SJSU, he realized, “Well, I should have been networking a while ago.” When asked if participating in Braven helped him get his first job out of college he responded:

Absolutely. Networking. That's exactly how I got the job. I networked with an old classmate of mine who I saw was working at a company . . . We went out for lunch once, and I was asking her about the job. I wasn't being pushy, but then I asked a couple of questions here and there, and I just put it like, “Oh hey, if you have any positions available let me know because I'm looking around.” And then sure enough, eight months later she tells me they have a position open. And I was lucky enough because I already had a resume built up from Braven, I had my LinkedIn all set up and my cover letter. And also through Braven I learned that having a portfolio is important, and so I had made a website and had all that ready. – SJSU and Braven Alumnus (2018)

While most students felt that Braven helped them develop networking skills, in both 2017 and 2018 several interviewees expressed the opinion that more opportunities to network between cohorts would have been valuable. Once students recognized the importance of networking, they wanted to expand their Braven network. They appreciated the Braven structure that made networking more feasible for them. Although the program does provide some opportunities for students to network across cohorts, students admitted they were very busy with school and work and often did not make time on their own to attend events. Whether it would be helpful to create additional opportunities

for networking across the wider Braven program or perhaps requiring students to attend existing events may be an area for further consideration.

Braven Course Outcomes

In both 2017 and 2018, learning outcomes of Leadership, Operating and Managing, and Problem-Solving were less often noted by students or described with the same detail as Working in Teams and Networking and Communicating. Given the limited reach of the qualitative sample, we do not suggest that students and coaches perceived Braven to be less effective in achieving these outcomes. However, it may suggest that these outcomes are less explicitly built into the course and that it may be more difficult for students to perceive growth in these areas. In addition, we noticed that students and coaches were less familiar with the Braven terminology used in discussing Operating and Managing and Problem-Solving. Below are highlights from student and coach responses on the three remaining learning outcomes.

Leadership

When asked what leadership meant, most students said that being a leader means leading by example, listening to the ideas of others, and learning how to keep a team on task. Several students cited leadership opportunities afforded by the program and talked about their role in the Capstone Challenge as valuable experiences. For example, students volunteered for roles such as project manager, which they found both novel and challenging.

One way I'm learning how to be a leader is taking the role of being the project plan manager. That's required me to make sure that I'm on task on everything, making sure that everybody's doing what they need to do to . . . solve this problem, emailing the people in my group to make sure, "Can you get this done, or have you done this?" and being there to make sure that everything's okay. And then also letting them know that they can rely on me if they have a problem. So that alone is a new experience for me because I've never taken a leadership role like that. I'm always the person that follows the leader, but now I'm taking this role. It's different, but it's a good challenge. – Current Braven Fellow (2018)

Another student explained that he took on the Lead Prototyper role for the project and that his cohort won first place in the 2018 Capstone Challenge competition. He gave credit to the camaraderie of his team and their success in taking turns leading. He said, "We really connected with each other. We were more like a real team."

Coaches were explicit about their role in developing leadership skills, through leading by example, sometimes in the background, as well as allowing students to work through problems.

I see myself literally as a coach, like a guiding light. When I first started, I think it was harder to step back. You see them going down a path that's not the best way--recognizing that's part of the experience they have to go through---I try to

step back as much as possible. And so I would let them fumble through it, because I think that's part of the process. – Coach (2018)

Operating and Managing

When asked to describe operating and managing, in both 2017 and 2018 students and coaches were generally unclear about the connection between this learning outcome and the Braven experience. They provided a variety of answers, including improving their time management, logistics, project management, and using a Google calendar. One student viewed operating and managing simply as getting things done.

Operating and managing--I think it is just making sure that you get your tasks done. For example, as Project Manager I have to write down a list of things to we needed to get done, a list of the people that have to get it done, when it is due, and make it as detailed as possible. Just writing it down and then knowing that it's not just for me, it's for everybody, . . . making sure it works for everybody's schedule . . . I've never had to do that. So for me, it's all new. – Current Braven Fellow (2018)

In 2017, we noted that from the coaches' perspective, the connection between the course and operating and managing was less clear. All the coaches interviewed that year felt it was the course outcome that was addressed the least in practice. However, some saw opportunity in the Capstone Challenge for the development of this competency, for example, when cohorts were required to self-manage without their direct support.

Problem-solving

When asked how Braven helped them develop problem solving skills, students shared a variety of experiences, such as overcoming a teamwork challenge or working through a personal problem such as a challenging assignment. Most students and all coaches referenced the Capstone Challenge project as an experience that develops problem-solving skills. Some honed in on the learning curve presented by using the framework of design thinking. Design thinking is introduced over several online modules and coaches are trained to use it with their cohorts. Speaking of using design thinking to problem solve, one coach said that, "it's a lot to digest at first." This coach further explained that he sometimes faces the challenge of knowing when to step in and when to allow students to work through problems on their own:

It's difficult to know what the right thing to do is. It's difficult to know when to jump in and when to watch. What I've tried to do is, if I see them swerving, just metaphorically, just let 'em swerve. And that's okay. But if I see them really start to veer off the road and drive into the bushes, then I'll try to stop in and help them course correct. – Coach (2018)

One student understood problem solving in terms of his personal challenge with career planning. He learned from Braven how to make five-year and ten-year plan as part of the Design Your Career project. He said that before he joined the Braven accelerator, he approached solving a problem with “the first thought that pops into your head.” During the Capstone experience, he learned that there are “multiple steps” to problem solving. He explained:

It was first brainstorming what the problem means to us . . . And then after coming up with the problem statement, we also brainstorm again to come up with a product we can provide to our users. And even though my first opinion didn't get used, at the end it ended up making sense to me. So, it made me learn that it doesn't have to be the first thought that comes to my head to solve a problem. If you collaborate with others, it could actually become something better. – Current Braven Fellow (2018)

Overall, in both 2017 and 2018 students felt that Braven offered them opportunities to problem-solve. The differences in responses came from the perceptions of what problem-solving meant, since interviewees viewed this learning outcome through the lens of the unique challenges they faced during the Braven experience.

The Development of Career Confidence

In both 2017 and 2018, most students were positive about the impact of Braven on their career confidence, describing an increase in both their personal and social self-confidence. For example, students noted specifically an improved ability to speak up in a group and to successfully handle a networking situation or informational interview. One coach said that the three business skills Braven develops best are, “networking, interviewing, and overall increase in confidence in their abilities.” This coach's viewpoint is echoed by the statements of a past and current Braven fellows:

After I took Braven, my confidence improved a lot . . . They taught me how to do presentations. They trained me to go to talk with some professor or some student in school—like for the interview. That also trained my confidence. When I was in the team they pushed me to open up even when sometimes I was nervous or scared because I don't know what to say. So because of that my confidence has improved. – Past Braven Fellow and Current SJSU Student (2018)

I think Braven definitely had an effect on [my confidence], because before that I was so shy to talk to people. I didn't know how to talk to people. And I realized after doing Braven, I'm not shy to go up to anyone. I can be in a professional

setting, I know how to talk to someone and be professional. Braven really opened that up for me. – Current Braven Fellow (2018)

Another aspect of career confidence is the ability to define and assess realistic career goals. In the Design Your Career project students create a career timeline that backward plans from 5-10 years. Then, they link that timeline that to a college roadmap that helps them focus on short-term goals such as finding an internship. One student said that this process helped him understand that achieving his career goals would take longer than he had thought, a valuable insight.

[My] long-term goal down the line, according to the 10-year plan that I learned from Braven, is that I'm hoping to become a physician's assistant. I kinda had an inkling of what my goal was, but until Braven, I didn't actually write down my goals and what my milestones were along the way. And because of this course, it's opened my eyes to what realistically I cannot achieve. [In] my 10-year plan from now, I'll be in a hospital if I follow this timeline. So, they made it a little bit more realistic. – Current Braven Fellow (2018)

Coaches play an essential role in helping students breakdown career planning into realistic and doable steps. Coaches also help students increase their confidence by teaching them time management skills. One student said that before Braven, his goal was simply to graduate. With the help of his coach who, “made me understand the importance of personal organization,” he now sees the value of having short and long-term goals. In his words, “setting goals has shined a light on my path.”

Leadership coaches also quickly identified the impact of Braven on student career confidence. They attributed this confidence in part to career planning. As one coach told us:

I think you can see throughout the program a certain level of confidence. And it's like from the start to finish, it's like night and day. A lot of the students could barely speak, or they were just not very comfortable. And by the end they're practicing in front of me. And also, having a better path of what you want to do makes you feel more confident with the decisions you are making. – Coach (2018)

Student Experiences with Five Program Components

In this section we will discuss five main components of the Braven Accelerator: online modules, learning labs, one-on-one meetings with leadership coaches, projects, and workshops. We asked students and coaches to briefly share their experience with each of these components. We found that overall, students responded with more detail about one-on-one meetings and projects.

Online modules

In both 2017 and 2018 students had mixed responses about the online modules. Some found them to be engaging and full of useful information while others thought they were too long or tedious. Some students acknowledged that they did not have time to absorb all the information in the modules. Among students who actually completed the modules, most said they helped them prepare for the learning labs, and they could usually recall at least one module that they found useful. Some of the module topics they remembered were time management, resume building, design thinking, crafting an elevator pitch, the importance of empathy, and interview skills. Several students mentioned that they enjoyed the videos in the modules, including TED talks. One student said the modules were like a “checklist guide.” Significantly, alumni had a harder time remembering specifics about the modules.

In both 2017 and 2018 a few students and alumni also shared that they appreciated being able to download and access Braven materials even after the course had ended, especially sample resumes and cover letters.

In general, our interviews from both years of data collection seem to reveal a trend that students who liked the online modules and received the most benefit from them were those who had spent the most time using them, while students who rushed through or skipped modules did not have a very positive impression of them. With the present evaluation, we are unable to distinguish whether experiences with online modules are related to the time they spend on them or their actual content and form.

Learning labs

Student classroom experience during the Braven program takes place in weekly learning labs. In 2018 we conducted a total of three observations at Adobe, Google and on campus at SJSU. Students had less to share about actual discussions that took place during learning labs and more to say about the experience of working with their leadership coach. Several current and past fellows who had the opportunity to meet offsite at their coach’s company emphasized how much they enjoyed that aspect of the learning lab.

We were at LinkedIn. Just going there and being in that environment and having hands on activities like writing things on the board . . . or editing resumes . . . just having that collaborative space for us to move around, get snacks, get dinner--was very, very nurturing and enriching. – Past Braven Fellow and Current SJSU Student (2018)

Students recognized that their coach-led cohort was an important networking opportunity in and of itself and reflected on the uniqueness of the opportunity to get a glimpse inside a Silicon Valley tech company. One Braven fellow, an international student with several years of professional work experience in his home country, related the following:

I feel more serious about the whole thing since we are at the real company. It helps you ignore the fact that we're in school. [My coach] is very, very helpful—a very nice guy. He's always here for us when we have any questions. And since he already is a leader of his team at Google, he's very helpful for our project. He cares about each of us and how we develop our skills. – Current Braven Fellow (2018)

During observations of the learning labs, it was noted that the two cohorts who met at the coach's company were more energetic and engaged seemed to have a stronger sense of teamwork than the cohort that met in a classroom shared with another cohort at SJSU. This perceived difference in the learning lab atmosphere could be due to several factors, including the mix of personalities in the group and the teaching style of the coach. However, the impact of being on-site in the workplace appears to be very tangible to students.

One-on-one meetings with coaches

All students across both years of the evaluation expressed that having a coach to mentor them through the Braven experience and help position them for job interviews was invaluable. Students meet with coaches to set goals and reflect on progress. In addition, resume help is one of the areas where coaches seem to have a big impact. Many students said that receiving help with their resumes during one-on-one sessions made a significant difference in preparing for job interviews. One student noted that Braven “forced me to think from an employer’s perspective about my resume.” Another student thought she had a good resume before she started the Braven program, but the things she learned to change in her resume were “very, very helpful.”

One coach described the productive one-on-one coaching sessions he held experienced with his students:

For the most part, five of my six came prepared with questions, and they gave me a copy of their resume and a cover letter for feedback, and they were great. They had targeted questions, which I appreciated . . . They were really interested, really invested, and really engaged in those 30 minutes. They seem to appreciate having a professional [coach]. – Coach (2018)

Another coach recalled that three weeks into the course, one of the students referred to her as a mentor, which signaled to her how much the student valued this relationship. Another coach echoed this perspective, noting that what students like most is meeting offsite in a business setting and connecting with her. In fact, she noted further, she is the only professional some of the students know. The student perspective also characterizes the meetings as a practice of mentorship, and perhaps more so when the relationships become more informal.

She is such a genuine, passionate person that really cares for you. I feel like I never had someone like her for a mentor. She really makes time out of her day, whether it's through texting or meeting up . . . one-on-one just to talk about my

goals. She really taught me a lot about time management, because she has a busy schedule herself. Me being able to watch her, it was like I was following her, and I was making time to have time management. – Current Braven Fellow (2018)

All coaches interviewed expressed enthusiasm for their role as mentors, and their comments demonstrated commitment to the students and evidence of being available for them outside of formal Braven meetings and after hours. In fact, one coach admitted that he did not expect the role of Braven coach to be an “emotional investment.” Comparing himself to a school teacher he explained, “It’s not for the pay because we enjoy this part of it. I didn’t expect that to happen, but I enjoy watching the growth of these fellows.”

Projects

The Hustle to Career and Capstone Challenge projects were often noted by students as important or influential experiences with regard to their career readiness. Interview responses from both years clearly indicate that the Capstone Challenge was a major project that stretched students and sometimes overwhelmed them. Students encountered difficulties grasping the design thinking process, working with their teams, fulfilling their assigned roles, and meeting deadlines all while managing their college course load and jobs. Although the project was difficult, most students acknowledged that it was a unique and mostly positive learning experience. One alumnus whose successful cohort made it to the final round in the Capstone competition said it was his favorite project in college: “We were all invested to the point where even if we had a specified role, we all shared the same work.” Coaches were cognizant of the challenge presented by the Capstone as well, but as this coached noted, they see it as preparation for challenges students will encounter in their future jobs :

The Capstone is the hardest team activity that any of these students have had to do. I try to tell them, “This is real life. You’re going to be at work and you’re going to have people that you don’t get along with or people who have different views.” And so I try to have it as a teaching moment even when it is challenging. And I let them know upfront it’s going to be hard. I don’t think they realize it until they get into it. But I think it’s the normal forming, storming, norming, performing. You can see that trajectory because every year they manage to spit out the final thing, and I’m always like, “Whoa, everyone came together. They made it work.” – Coach (2018)

It should be noted that in both 2017 and 2018 several students expressed concern that Braven projects were heavily geared towards tech industries and business management. Students with majors in other fields or who were planning to attend graduate school after graduation did not always find the content of the program relevant to them.

Workshops

The majority of students we interviewed did not recognize workshops as an Accelerator activity. However, several students voluntarily talked about the Storytelling as Leadership (SAL) workshop. While they were not aware that the storytelling event was a workshop per se, they did remember the experience of preparing and sharing their personal story with a group of people who was new to them. Most students who mentioned the storytelling event found it to be a very positive experience that helped them connect with their Braven cohort and build rapport and trust with each other.

During observations, one cohort seemed to demonstrate a higher level of productive teamwork, good rapport and ease with each other. One member of this cohort said that her cohort, “felt like they’re family.” She explained:

We had to create an essay about our personal life, . . . about who you are. I think that was the biggest challenge I encountered. . . . Just figuring out yourself is probably the biggest problem you can deal with. So I think that was something that was uncomfortable, but it was important to know who you are as a person. . . . That was one activity that brought us together . . . That’s why we’re probably closer, because we know so much about each other. – Current Braven Fellow (2018)

It is worth noting that at least one student disliked the storytelling event and felt uncomfortable sharing personal experiences in a “business” setting. This student was from Europe, and his experience raises the issue of variance in cultural norms and expectations that may impact student experience.

I just need to accept that in the business world here in America it is very important that people tell their story. But I don’t see the point . . . When I go to another guy and want to work with him, the only story he wants to know is how successful my company is working . . . I don’t think he cares how I grew up and what my family looks like. As nice as it was to hear so many stories from different people and their struggles, I don’t feel it’s very important. – Current Braven Fellow (2018)

In the previous year evaluation, students also mentioned the storytelling workshop as the one they remembered most and that this workshop helped students see the individual talents each of their peers brought to the cohort. They cited the workshop as important for strengthening relationships that fostered teamwork throughout the Capstone project. It is interesting to note that the workshop was recognized most often for its impact on student community, which may contribute to a career skill such as teamwork, rather than a first-order skill for career development.

Post-accelerator Support

In 2017 and 2018 about half of Braven alumni mentioned being engaged with Braven after completing the program. Their engagement consisted of participating in post-accelerator activities, connecting socially with cohort members, and maintaining some degree of contact with leadership coaches. Some students expressed a desire to attend post-accelerator events but said they could not make the time. Others did not feel that the events were very compelling. One past student said he had discussed post-accelerator events with other fellows and reached this conclusion:

I feel like after the course is over, there wasn't too many things planned. There were definitely some social events . . . I think there was leadership positions—kinda like a Braven club . . . I feel like it would have been a lot easier or more appealing to go if you had other members of your cohort going. For a lot of people, there weren't too many incentives to go especially when you have . . . other things to juggle. – Past Braven Fellow and Current SJSU Student (2018)

Although some students benefited from post-accelerator support, most did not perceive this as a strong aspect of the program. Data collection did allow full exploration of this topic across all students, however, so we do not draw strong conclusions about the post-accelerator activities.

Considerations

As in the previous report, we provide considerations for programmatic changes to be reviewed alongside the quantitative analyses and the knowledge and expertise of the Braven staff. The following considerations take into account and update those provided in the 2017 report.

1. We reiterate the recommendation to consider how the program may be currently structured to benefit primarily tech-focused students. Both coaches and learning lab opportunities may be less relevant and less effective for students with aspirations for careers outside of the tech sector. Consider expanding the breadth of industries, networking opportunities, and coach backgrounds to cater to broader student interests.
2. We also reiterate consideration for developing more networking opportunities between students, especially across Braven cohorts. Students see value in those networks despite finding it difficult to connect to them.
3. Consider developing more off-campus learning lab sites generally and specifically across a number of industries.
4. Consider structuring opportunities for the development of closer coach-student mentoring relationships. Relationships require investment, and those students with closer relationships with their coaches reported tangible value during and after the program.
5. Consider re-designing the curriculum to more explicitly develop competencies in leadership, operating and managing, and problem-solving. Students' lack of understanding of the nature

of those outcomes and how course activities were designed to develop them illuminate a clear opportunity to improve.

Appendix I -Braven Course Outcomes

CLO 1 – Leadership: Students demonstrate strong sense of self, own personal growth, lead from core values, and take initiative to do and find what is necessary to achieve their goals.

CLO 2 – Networking and communicating: Students present themselves and their ideas through clear, compelling, and effective communication, they inspire action, and they are actively building their networks.

CLO 3 – Working in teams: Students add value to a team and its culture, maturely handle interpersonal challenges, manage projects effectively, and are able to navigate difference.

CLO4 – Problem-solving: Students approach challenges and ambiguity as opportunities with solutions-based curiosity, resolve, and resourcefulness; they see the big picture and apply disciplined and creative thought to identify root problems and implement effective solutions.

CLO 5 – Operating and managing: Students manage themselves and projects, they set vision and goals, they plan and prioritize effectively to achieve goals, and they get things done.