



Evaluation of workshops, training courses, and discussion panels in applied colleges at Saudi universities: A student perspective

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Abstract

This study evaluates the effectiveness of workshops, training courses, and discussion panels organized by colleges at Imam Abdul Rahman bin Faisal University from the perspective of students. The study population consisted of 1,511 male and female students from three main faculties: Administrative Sciences, Finance Sciences, and Computer Sciences. A sample of 950 students, representing 70 percent of the population, was surveyed. A questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale was developed, covering two key areas. The first examined the qualities of a successful and engaging discussion panel through nine statements, while the second assessed speaker characteristics through 12 statements. The findings indicate that students from the Applied College highly valued the effectiveness of seminars and discussion panels, particularly in addressing issues relevant to university life. At a significance level of 0.05, statistically significant differences were found in student attitudes based on gender, with female students demonstrating higher levels of approval. The study recommends incorporating entertainment elements into discussion sessions and training courses to enhance engagement. Additionally, it suggests directing students toward training sessions aligned with their academic and personal development needs to maximize the benefits of these initiatives.

Keywords: Applied colleges; discussion panels; evaluation; training courses; workshops

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1. INTRODUCTION

Training has become a central objective for numerous institutions, including academic institutions, as it represents a critical mechanism for shaping and developing students' competencies while addressing gaps in their skill sets. Training programs are designed to equip participants with advanced knowledge, practical skills, and contemporary methodologies that enrich their specialization and enhance essential life skills. Moreover, these programs aim to foster positive behavioral and attitudinal changes, ultimately improving performance and efficiency for the benefit of the academic system and its stakeholders (Law et al., 2024; Dwivedi et al., 2024; Chun et al., 2024).

A fundamental challenge in training initiatives is the evaluation of training programs for university students. Effective training requires continuous assessment by trainers, who must critically reflect on their pedagogical practices and instructional activities based on student feedback (Barefoot, 2002). Similarly, instructional material developers must rigorously evaluate the adequacy and relevance of their resources. Supervisors, in turn, must systematically review their training objectives, instructional methodologies, program structure, and seminar effectiveness. Likewise, assessors must refine their evaluation techniques, tools, and assessment methodologies to enhance training effectiveness and address existing gaps, obstacles, and challenges within these programs (Abu Al-Wafa et al., 2013; Baboolal & Singaram, 2023).

At Imam Abdul Rahman bin Faisal University, the Applied Colleges are committed to enhancing the quality of education through a range of academic and professional development programs. These colleges actively engage students in evaluating the effectiveness of various initiatives, including training programs and discussion panels. Discussion panels serve as interactive forums in which students and faculty exchange ideas and information on academic matters that influence students' persistence in the Applied College and their overall academic success (Keup & Barefoot, 2005). These sessions are conducted throughout the semester for each discipline and specialization, ensuring ongoing academic engagement.

Given the significance of these programs, the present study aims to assess their effectiveness, identify key strengths, and address potential weaknesses. By doing so, the study seeks to contribute to the continuous enhancement of these initiatives, particularly in light of students' recognition of their benefits in achieving academic excellence within the Applied Colleges.

The training programs and discussion panels at the applied colleges at Imam Abdul Rahman bin Faisal University aim to provide an environment that allows students to express their opinions and ideas on a specific topic by exchanging opinions, where they learn through research, exploration, exchange of opinion, and critical thinking. Training programs and discussion panels are an essential feature of effective online learning environments that contributes to limiting learners' alienation and help them formulate their knowledge and develop their skills (Reid, 2009). However, these programs and discussion panels are distinguished by the fact that they allow students to communicate at any time and in any location within time constraints. They also develop learning communities and a communication archive for the course, as well as offer students time to ponder, investigate, and explore before forming an opinion. It also defines the role of the supervisor (speaker) or trainer in the courses, training programs, and discussion sessions by establishing the course topic, discussion, and objectives, as well as providing discussion instructions such as (evaluating what others say, not cutting and pasting directly from the Internet) and expressing his opinion as one of the participants and encouraging positive attitudes. He paraphrases what the students say to ensure that their point of view is understood. He also compiles the different opinions, forms the conclusion, and works to stop the side discussions. However, training programs for university students can significantly enhance their acquisition of generic competencies, both intrapersonal (dealing with personal growth and introspection) and interpersonal (dealing with communication and teamwork (Crespi & Ramos, 2021).

Training programs are a fairly diverse educational structure with a clear and focused objective to improve student retention rates (Jennifer & Keup, 2011; Busse & Maué, 2025). Several studies on this subject indicate the existence of a positive, continuous, and statistically significant relationship between applied colleges, academic participation and college achievement, and high rates of diligence and self-development

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(Inmaculada & Beatri, 2020). Studies on evaluating training programs and discussion panels showed a variety of large methodological cases that demonstrate the importance of preparing students in the first and second year of university to enter the university (Elsherief, 2016). In addition, it has been observed that a few studies conducted by educational institutions are concerned with evaluating training programs and discussion panels in the first year (Reid, 2009). Although training programs and discussion panels are not new in the field of higher education, the United States has attached great importance to them for the past three decades, as they facilitate the transition of new students to the university level. National data indicated that 95% of colleges and universities in the United States over 4 accredited years offer training programs and at least one seminar for students and that more than the other half of them offer at least one seminar in the preparatory year, i.e., by up to 92% or more than US Universities (Barefoot, 2002; Jennifer & Keup, 2011).

Training programs, courses, and discussion panels are the main focus for refining professional ideas through various group discussions. These programs are characterized by several key aspects. First, they function as a communication process in which participants exchange opinions and offer mutual assistance, fostering collaborative learning and understanding. Second, they represent a fundamental social process where individuals interact, leading to core social dynamics such as forming alliances, resolving conflicts, exchanging ideas, and engaging in collective problem-solving. Lastly, these programs serve as an administrative and developmental process, showcasing essential management skills related to planning and organizing discussion forums. This includes training participants, structuring roles, and coordinating the responsibilities of forum members to ensure effective discussions and productive outcomes (Khudair, 2007).

Training programs, courses, and discussion panels function as a well-defined, integrated, and social system with several key elements, as outlined by Al-Miliji and Reda (2019). First, as a social structure, these programs consist of members and the relationships they form with one another, fostering interaction and collaboration. Second, these relationships follow a structured hierarchy, where social ranks and responsibilities define the roles within the group, ensuring organized participation. Lastly, the system is governed by fundamental principles that regulate behavior within training workshops and discussion panels, maintaining coherence and integrity. These elements collectively contribute to the effectiveness and sustainability of the system, promoting structured learning and professional development.

Workshops are well-known means of preparing and instructing students in a variety of disciplines. However, they are identical in terms of performance, which negatively impacts the trainee's final output. As a result, a technique of creating and delivering workshops based on each trainee's absorptive ability is introduced, and the trainees get the greatest value from the workshop and its evaluation. The elements of programs, training workshops, and discussion panels can be divided into four interconnected parts based on the components of the open system, and each part is important for this format to perform its function and achieve its goals (Khudair, 2007).

The study's problem stems from the fact that the provision of workshops, training programs, and discussion panels in applied colleges may not be subject to quality standards, thus, their characteristics and standards had to be evaluated to achieve their required goals. Thus, the study intended to address the following questions:

1. What is the effectiveness of the programs, training workshops, and discussion panels offered by the Applied College at Imam Abdul Rahman bin Faisal University from the viewpoint of students of the preparatory year?
2. Are there statistically significant differences in the effectiveness of the programs, training workshops, and discussion seminars offered by the Applied College of Imam Abdul Rahman bin Faisal University at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) from the students' viewpoint attributed to the gender variable?

The study's theoretical importance lies in the following :

1. Demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of the courses, workshops, training programs, and discussion panels at Imam Abdul Rahman bin Faisal University's Applied College to determine the extent to

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which these programs are appropriate for the levels and characteristics of the presented category to make appropriate decisions about them.

2. Identifying and resolving challenges encountered by these programs from the perspective of Imam Abdul Rahman bin Faisal University's Applied College students.

3. The evaluation of courses, workshops, training programs, and discussion panels is a key step in determining whether the direction in which it is progressing is correct. It also encourages a rethinking of the goals established, as well as the methods employed in the rehabilitation and development of cadres based on these programs.

1.1. Related studies

Abdul-Rahim (2019) conducted a study aimed at evaluating the training workshops in the mechanical engineering departments in the faculties of engineering in Sudanese public universities in the state of Khartoum from the trainers' point of view. The researcher used the descriptive-analytical approach. A questionnaire was used as a tool for collecting information. The research samples were confined to the cadre who implement the practical programs and are the trainers in the workshops (technicians and technicians) in those colleges within the state of Khartoum. The results of the study revealed that the training programs in mechanical engineering departments in faculties of engineering in the state of Khartoum are not keeping pace with the scientific and technological development of the field. The study of Na'ash & Zohur (2018) aimed to identify the impact of the educational workshop strategy in developing the skill performance of paperwork among fifth-grade children by constructing training units for the skill of paperwork (the art of origami) according to the educational workshop strategy. A total of 65 male and female fifth-grade primary school students participated in the study. Various statistical methods were employed to analyze the data and achieve the study's objectives. The findings indicated that the implemented strategy effectively reduced challenges faced by teachers and minimized instructional effort while significantly enhancing students' educational outcomes. Similarly, Abdullah (2018) conducted a study to examine the issue of student indiscipline within training groups. Utilizing the social survey method, the study included 33 training group leaders and 133 students engaged in practical training. Research instruments comprised questionnaires administered to both group leaders and students. The findings identified several obstacles limiting the effectiveness of training courses, including the short duration of the courses, a predominant focus on administrative and sub-professional aspects, insufficient course content, a lack of practical workshops for hands-on experience, and scheduling conflicts that were incompatible with participants' working conditions.

Al-Moajil (2018) aimed to reveal the role of the workshops and training courses offered by King Saud and Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz Universities on the performance of faculty members inside the classroom. And in the use of modern technology and the work of scientific research from their point of view. The results revealed that the faculty members benefited from the courses and workshops to a medium degree (2.7), which is considered a weak degree. Their performance in the classroom got 2.9, which is also a medium degree. Where their use of modern technology was 2.8. While scientific research work (2.6) is considered a low degree. The findings also showed statistically significant differences according to the university variable in favour of Prince Sattam University, as well as the presence of differences according to the variable number of courses in favour of those who obtained more courses, while there are no statistically significant differences due to the gender variable and the years of experience.

In a study conducted by Khudair (2007), he aimed to evaluate the role of the scientific seminar for the Community Service Department in achieving sustainable scientific and professional development for members, and the researcher used the comprehensive social survey approach. For faculty members and their assistants from postgraduate students. The researcher prepared a questionnaire, and it was administered to faculty members and their assistants. The findings showed some shortcomings in the field of organizing the seminar and recommended some suggestions that must be considered when holding the seminars, and also recommended to link the discussion sessions to the practical reality in terms of the style of discussion and focus on the important issues.

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Andrade (2006) conducted a study titled “The First-Year Seminar for International Students”, which aimed to examine the policies and procedures related to English as a Second Language (ESL) programs in universities. The study explored institutional policies on ESL education in the United States, university administration, time management, computer skills, regional American culture, and appreciation for diversity. The findings indicated that discussion panels had a positive impact on student participation, encouraged active learning, and played a crucial role in facilitating students' transition to university life. Similarly, Rigby et al. (2021) conducted a study to assess the extent to which the primary school principal training course met its objectives, with a focus on enhancing its strengths and addressing its weaknesses. Using a descriptive research approach, the study identified several shortcomings, including a disconnect between course content and real-world school settings, a lack of effective follow-up for trainees after course completion, and deficiencies in training and evaluation methods. The study emphasized the importance of aligning course content with the realities of school leadership, diversifying training and assessment methods, and carefully selecting trainers from qualified faculty and experienced professionals to improve the overall effectiveness of the training program.

1.2. Purpose of study

The present study aims to evaluate the courses, workshops, training programs, and discussion panels offered by the Applied College at Imam Abdul Rahman bin Faisal University from the perspective of preparatory year students for the academic year 2021/2022. The study seeks to achieve this by identifying the strengths and weaknesses of these educational initiatives as perceived by the students. Additionally, it aims to explore the challenges and obstacles encountered in workshops, training programs, and discussion panels. Furthermore, the study examines the alignment between the program's objectives and the methods used to train and qualify participants, assessing whether the direction of these courses, workshops, training programs, and discussion panels is effectively meeting the intended educational and professional development goals.

2. METHODS AND MATERIALS

2.1. Research design

The descriptive survey method was adopted, as this study seeks to evaluate the workshops, training courses, and discussion panels prepared by the Applied Colleges at Imam Abdul Rahman bin Faisal University from the students' viewpoint for 2021/2022.

2.2. Terminology of study

Training Programs: are organized procedures that form a comprehensive and objective picture of the feasibility of the training program in all stages, as a foundation for the process of change and development, by measuring the extent to which the training program's goals have been met and identifying weaknesses and shortcomings to benefit from them in working on developing training and upgrading it to the best levels.

Discussion panels: These are seminars based on discussion between students and their professors to exchange information and ideas. These seminars cover both academic and non-academic aspects that affect the student's continuation in the preparatory year and his success at the university

Male and female students at the Applied Colleges: They are the male and female students who have participated in the study from the Applied Colleges after fulfilling the conditions for admission to Imam Abdul Rahman bin Faisal University.

2.3. Participants

The study population consisted of all male and female students registered for the academic year 2021/2022 AD, the first semester, who study at the Applied Colleges at Imam Abdul Rahman bin Faisal University distributed according to majors and gender (see Table 1).

Table 1

Study population and sample at the applied colleges

Major	Administrative Sciences	Finance Sciences	Computer Sciences	Total
Male	40	30	11	81
Female	780	300	350	1.430
Total	820	330	361	1.511

2.4. Data collection instrument

A questionnaire was prepared by the researchers to evaluate the training program and the discussion panels prepared by the Applied College at Imam Abdul Rahman bin Faisal University from the students' viewpoint for the academic year 2021/2022 AD. This instrument represents a suitable scientific tool that achieves the goals and obtains accurate responses from college students. It consists of two main dimensions, namely, the discussion panels (9) statements about and trainers (11) statements. A five-point Likert scale (strongly agree - agree - no opinion - disagree - strongly disagree) was adopted. Scores are ranked as follows: 5-4-3-2-1 (Annex 1).

To check the validity of the questionnaire, it was presented in its initial form to a committee of specialized professors in the field of teaching methods, measurement, and evaluation to examine the extent of language clarity and their representation of the instrument items.

2.5. Statistical analysis

Descriptive analysis, including arithmetic means and standard deviations was obtained. The TWO-WAY-ANOVA test and F-test were used to show the differences between the study variables: gender and major. Tukey's HSD and LSD tests were used for Post Hoc Comparisons.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Results of the first question

“What is the effectiveness of the programs, training workshops, and discussion panels offered by the Applied College at Imam Abdul Rahman bin Faisal University from the viewpoint of students of the preparatory year at Imam Abdul Rahman bin Faisal University?” Descriptive analysis was obtained to answer this question for the two dimensions and items of each field as shown in Tables (2.3.4) below.

Table 2

The effectiveness of the discussion panels by study variables

Dimension	Mean	SD	%
Workshops & Training programs	3.50	0.88	70%
Trainers	3.54	0.84	78%
Total	3.85	0.86	74%

The percentage of students' satisfaction with the “discussion panels” domain was 70%, and their percentage of satisfaction with the “trainers” was 78%. The overall satisfaction rate with the discussion panel program was 74%, which is considered a fair percentage. Accordingly, the results demonstrated students' satisfaction with the importance and effectiveness of the discussion panels and the topics raised by them, which is mainly related to their university life. It also reflects the students' satisfaction with the trainer “speaker”, which may be attributed to their competence and the experiences in the field of counselling. These results are consistent with the study conducted in the current year 2021/2022 on students at the Applied College at Imam Abdul Rahman bin Faisal University, in which the student satisfaction rate was (74%) for the discussion seminars in general, which indicates the importance of these seminars and the necessity of their continuity to develop them.

Table 3

The effectiveness of the discussion panels by their items

Items	Mean	SD	%
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9	The place of discussion is appropriate	3.90	1.085	79%
3	It is organized and tidy	3.55	1.118	71%
1	It is clear and balanced	3.54	1.048	70%
4	It addresses useful topics	3.52	1.115	69%
5	Uses appropriate illustrations means	3.44	1.080	68%
7	Held in an appropriate time	2.99	1.357	59%
8	The duration of the discussion panel is appropriate and comfortable	2.98	1.286	58%
2	I achieved my expectations and goals.	2.90	1.150	58%
6	fun and rich	2.88	1.201	52%
	Total	3.24	0.81	65%

Table (3) indicates the effectiveness of the “discussion panel” domain according to its affiliated items, as the evaluation rate ranged between (52%-79%) with a total mean of 65%. The statement “The place of discussion is appropriate” obtained the highest percentage, due to the selection of the appropriate area for students in terms of space, lighting, air-conditioning and all the necessary facilities. The “fun and rich” got the lowest percentage due to the topics that were raised and because of the university’s laws, regulations, and instructions that students must adhere to, and perhaps because they are also undesirable for the student.

Table 4

The effectiveness of the discussion panels the trainers, “speakers” domain

	Items	Mean	SD	%
1	Encourages positive attitudes in the discussion.	3.80	1.02	76%
9	Listens carefully to others’ opinions.	3.61	1.10	72%
10	Master the topic of the discussion.	3.57	1.06	71%
2	Presenting the discussion goals appropriately.	3.57	1.05	71%
6	Coordination between speakers (distribution of roles)	3.56	1.06	71%
3	He takes initiative when expressing ideas.	3.56	1.03	71%
7	Create opportunities for everyone to participate.	3.54	1.15	71%
11	Stop the side discussions.	3.53	1.08	70%
8	Boosts responses.	3.47	1.09	69%
4	Choose the right time to give information.	3.46	1.02	69%
5	Expressing his opinion as one of the participants.	3.42	1.08	66%
	Total	3.53	0.82	72%

Table (4) shows the effectiveness of the trainers, “speakers,” by their affiliated items. The evaluation ratio ranged between 66% and 76%, with a total mean of 72%. Item one, which reads “Encourages positive attitudes in discussion” obtained the highest ratio, this may be due to the academic level of the trainers, “speakers”. The majority of them have doctorate and master’s degrees in majors such as counselling, educational administration, and administration, as well as due to their experiences in the field of counselling. In addition to their mastery of the topics being discussed and the style of presentation. Item 5, which reads “expresses his opinion as one of the participants,” got 66%. This is considered a good percentage, but generally, it is not a very high percentage. This may be attributed to the difference in the educational level between the trainer and the audience and the number of new topics that require more time to be clarified by the speaker.

3.2. Results of the second question

“Are there statistically significant differences in the effectiveness of the programs, training workshops, and discussion seminars offered by the Applied College of Imam Abdul Rahman bin Faisal University at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) from the students’ viewpoint attributed to the gender variable?”.

To answer this question and find the significant differences between the gender variables (male, female), the descriptive analysis (arithmetic means and standard deviations) and TWO-WAY-ANOVA analysis were used as shown in Tables (5, 6).

Table 5

Descriptive analysis of the effect of gender variable

Gender	Major	Mean	SD
Male	Administrative Sciences	3.2325	.87339
	Finance Sciences	3.2200	.88395
	Computer Sciences	3.3536	.72245
	Total	3.2390	.81285
Female	Administrative Sciences	3.5475	.69312
	Finance Sciences	3.8531	.70046
	Computer Sciences	3.5420	.68692
	Total	3.5637	.69446
Total	Administrative Sciences	3.4657	.74939
	Finance Sciences	3.2171	.90167
	Computer Sciences	3.4240	.71444
	Total	3.4056	.77068

Table 6

Testing the interaction between gender and major variables

Source of variance	SS	DF	MS	F value	Sig
Gender	32.328	1	33.328	59.739	0.000*
Major	2.698	2	1.349	2.418	0.090
Mutual effect (gender *major)	7.112	2	4.056	7.270	0.001*
Error	622.885	1138	0.558	-	-
Total	13946.8	1144	-	-	-

*Significance at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$).

Table (6) demonstrates a clear discrepancy in the means between the attitudes of females on the one hand and the attitudes of males on the other hand, as the arithmetic means of the females' attitudes was (3.23) with a standard deviation (0.69), while the mean of the males' attitude was (0.3.22) with a standard deviation (0.81). The results of TWO-WAY-ANOVA analysis indicated in Table (5), exhibited statistically significant differences in students' attitudes attributable to gender variable in favor of females, where the value of F was (59.74) and this value is statistically significant at the level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$), because females' interest in achievement is often higher than males, and therefore females are interested in asking about details more than male students. Furthermore, females' verbal fluency and eloquence allow them to fearlessly inquire about whatever they want to know without hesitation or fear, whereas males struggle with articulating their views and opinions.

4. DISCUSSION

The present study sought to evaluate the effectiveness of the courses, workshops, training programs, and discussion panels offered by the Applied College at Imam Abdul Rahman bin Faisal University from the perspective of preparatory-year 1 students. The findings indicate that students demonstrated a moderate level of satisfaction with these academic and professional development initiatives, highlighting both strengths and areas for improvement.

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The effectiveness of discussion panels was rated at 74%, with trainers receiving a slightly higher evaluation at 78%. These results align with previous studies, such as Andrade (2006), which emphasized the role of discussion panels in fostering active learning and student engagement. The findings also reinforce those of Khudair (2007), who identified organizational shortcomings in academic seminars and the necessity of aligning discussion sessions with practical applications. The current study similarly suggests that while students recognize the value of discussion panels, there are organizational and content-related challenges that need to be addressed to enhance their overall effectiveness.

Furthermore, the results revealed that students were most satisfied with the suitability of the discussion environment, including facilities such as lighting, air conditioning, and seating arrangements. However, lower satisfaction rates were observed in aspects related to engagement and enjoyment. The statement “fun and rich” received the lowest evaluation (52%), indicating that students found the sessions less engaging, possibly due to rigid university policies or a lack of interactive elements. These findings suggest that incorporating more dynamic and student-centered learning approaches could improve engagement.

The assessment of trainers demonstrated a generally favorable evaluation, with an overall effectiveness rating of 72%. The highest-rated aspect was the ability of trainers to “encourage positive attitudes in discussion” (76%), a finding consistent with Rigby et al. (2021), who emphasized the importance of trainer selection in ensuring effective professional development. However, the aspect “expressing their opinion as one of the participants” received the lowest rating (66%), suggesting a potential hierarchical gap between trainers and students. This highlights the need for fostering a more interactive and participatory discussion environment where trainers act as facilitators rather than authoritative figures.

A key finding of the study was the statistically significant difference in perceived program effectiveness between male and female students. Female students exhibited a more positive attitude toward these programs compared to their male counterparts, a discrepancy that may be attributed to differences in communication styles, academic engagement, and willingness to seek clarification, as suggested by prior research. These gender-based variations underscore the necessity of adopting differentiated strategies to meet the diverse learning needs of both male and female students.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study affirms that while the discussion panels, workshops, and training programs at the Applied College are generally well-received, there remain notable gaps in engagement, content relevance, and interactive participation. The findings suggest that discussion panels and training programs play a significant role in student development, yet improvements are needed to enhance their effectiveness. Organizational shortcomings, limited student engagement, and the hierarchical gap between trainers and participants were identified as areas requiring attention. Additionally, gender-based differences in attitudes toward these programs indicate the need for tailored approaches to accommodate diverse learning preferences.

To address these challenges, it is recommended to incorporate interactive teaching methods, ensure content aligns with student needs, extend discussion durations for deeper topic exploration, and implement gender-sensitive teaching strategies. Furthermore, refining trainer selection and training is crucial to fostering a more engaging and participatory learning environment. By making these improvements, the Applied College at Imam Abdul Rahman bin Faisal University can enhance the overall impact of its educational initiatives, ensuring they effectively support student academic and professional development. Future research may explore the long-term impact of these interventions on student success and career readiness.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval: The study adheres to the ethical guidelines for conducting research.

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