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Analysis of Four Factors Predicting Quality Employment Outcomes

Executive Summary

All four career-readiness factors show statistically significant but modest relationships with quality role attainment. The correlations are weak and clustered (ranging from 0.109 to 0.158), suggesting no single factor dominates. When examined independently, Confidence and Skills show virtually identical correlations (0.158 and 0.157). However, in a combined model controlling for all factors simultaneously, Skills emerges as the strongest independent predictor ($\beta = 0.299$), followed closely by Confidence ($\beta = 0.267$) and Experience ($\beta = 0.226$). Notably, Networks shows a negative coefficient in the combined model despite positive bivariate correlation, suggesting it may work through other factors rather than having direct independent effects. Overall, these findings suggest career readiness is multifaceted, and no single factor provides a 'silver bullet,' and success appears to require developing all four dimensions together.

FACTOR	CORRELATION (R)	MEAN DIFFERENCE	P-VALUE	COHEN'S D	COEFFICIENT (INDIVIDUAL)	COEFFICIENT (COMBINED)
Confidence	0.1575	0.252	0.0000 ***	0.319	0.3214	0.2671
Skills	0.1569	2.383	0.0000 ***	0.318	0.3297	0.2991
Experience	0.1179	0.433	0.0007 ***	0.238	0.2709	0.2258
Networks	0.1093	0.229	0.0016 **	0.220	0.2202	-0.0237

Statistical Significance Levels:

***   p < 0.001 (highly significant)
**   p < 0.01 (very significant)
*   p < 0.05 (significant)

Research Question

*What is the relationship between four factors of career readiness—**skills** (academic performance), **professional networks**, **confidence** (self-efficacy), and **experience** (internships)—and students' ability to secure quality employment within 6 months of graduation?*

No Single "Silver Bullet" Factor Exists

Analysis of graduating students who completed Braven's career readiness programming reveals that all four factors show statistically significant but **weak and remarkably similar correlations** with quality employment outcomes:

- **Confidence**: r = 0.158 (strongest bivariate correlation)
- **Skills**: r = 0.157 (virtually identical to confidence)
- **Experience**: r = 0.118
- **Networks**: r = 0.109

The correlations cluster within a narrow 0.05-point range, indicating that **no single factor dominates**. All effect sizes are small (Cohen's d ranging from 0.220 to 0.319), suggesting modest individual impacts.

Success Requires Integration, Not Optimization

Students who secured quality roles were not exceptional in any one dimension; rather, they were **competent across all four**:

- **2.4 GPA points higher** (90.2 vs. 87.8 on a 100-point scale—both B+ students)
- **0.43 more internships** (1.4 vs. 1.0 internships on average)
- **0.25 points higher confidence** (5.3 vs. 5.1 on a 7-point scale)
- **0.23 points higher network strength** (5.9 vs. 5.7 on a 7-point scale)

These differences are statistically significant but **modest in magnitude**, suggesting that quality employment requires achieving "good enough" thresholds across all domains rather than excellence in any single area.

Factors Work Together, Not in Isolation

When controlling for all factors simultaneously in a combined logistic regression model:

- **Skills** emerged as the strongest independent predictor ($\beta = 0.299$)
- **Confidence** showed the second-strongest effect ($\beta = 0.267$)
- **Experience** maintained significant impact ($\beta = 0.226$)
- **Networks** showed a *negative* coefficient ($\beta = -0.024$) despite positive bivariate correlation

The combined model achieved 60% prediction accuracy, better than any single factor alone. Network's positive correlation but negative regression coefficient suggests that **professional networks may work *through* other factors** rather than providing direct independent benefits. Networks may be most valuable when students also possess the skills, confidence, and experience to leverage them effectively.

Implications for the Field

1. Systems Thinking in Career Readiness

The college-to-career field has long debated which factor matters most: grades versus experience, networks versus confidence. Our data demonstrates this is the wrong question. Career readiness programs must shift from single-solution interventions ("get an internship!" "boost your GPA!") to **integrated development models** that deliberately build all four factors simultaneously.

2. Design for Baseline Competence

Students with quality employment averaged:

- 90.2 GPA (B+, not A)
- 1.4 internships (not extensive experience)
- 5.3/7 confidence (moderate, not exceptional)
- 5.9/7 network strength (above average, not exceptional)

Rather than pushing already-successful students toward perfection, institutions should **ensure all students, especially first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students, reach baseline competence** in each domain. This represents a fundamental shift from excellence competition to equitable access.

3. Elevate Confidence from "Soft Skill" to Core Outcome

Confidence showed the strongest bivariate correlation and second-strongest independent effect, yet it's typically treated as a supplementary "soft skill." Given its consistent impact across analyses, **confidence development should be embedded as a core curriculum** that is measured, tracked, and resourced like academic outcomes, not relegated to career workshops.

4. Rethink How Networks Are Built and Activated

Our results challenge field assumptions about networking. Current approaches emphasizing transactional "speed networking" and contact accumulation may be ineffective. Instead, programs should focus on:

- Building relationships through shared meaningful work
- Teaching students to *activate* networks, not just build them
- Developing purposeful mentorships, not maximizing contact lists

Critical Considerations

Data Limitations: This analysis excluded 414 observations (33%) due to missing data on one or more factors. If students with missing data differ systematically from those included, results may not generalize. Future research should investigate patterns in missingness and employ techniques to address incomplete data.

Sampling Considerations: Note that the survey was given to program participants who elected to take the Career Readiness Course. Therefore, there may be a response bias between those sampled and not sampled because the sample surveyed is already motivated to take a course that supports their career. Future surveys may sample employment outcomes of participants who did not participate in the course.

Measurement Considerations: This analysis examined *quantity* of factors (GPA scores, number of internships, network size) rather than *quality*. Two students with identical GPAs may have developed very different skill sets; two internships may provide vastly different learning. Future research should explore qualitative dimensions of these factors.

Recommendations for Practice

Prioritize Skills Development as the Primary Independent Driver

Recommendation: Given that Skills emerged as the strongest independent predictor when controlling for all other factors, institutions must ensure that the development and signaling of academic/job-relevant skills remain the highest priority.

- **Actionable Step:** Integrate Applied Learning. Mandate project-based learning, capstone courses, and real-world simulations across the curriculum. Focus on teaching students how to articulate their specific skills gained from coursework (not just their GPA).
- **Rationale:** The high beta value suggests that when a student possesses the same level of confidence, experience, and network strength as their peers, a higher level of skills (academic performance) is the most powerful differentiator for securing quality employment.

Elevate Confidence (Self-Efficacy) to a Core, Measured Outcome

Recommendation: Treat Confidence development not as a supplementary "soft skill" or workshop topic, but as a core curricular outcome that is measured, tracked, and resourced with the same seriousness as academic performance.

- **Actionable Step:** Embed confidence-building exercises—such as structured public speaking, reflective journaling on achievements, and deliberate practice with low-stakes failures—directly into core academic and career courses. Use a consistent scale to track student confidence scores over time.
- **Rationale:** Confidence had the strongest bivariate correlation and the second-strongest independent effect in the logistic regression model, demonstrating its consistent and powerful impact on employment outcomes.

Future Research

Future research should strategically expand the scope of this analysis to address critical contextual variables. Key investigations should focus on the impact of academic major and demographics, analyzing whether the established integrated model holds across different disciplines and if certain student groups are funneled into majors with predictably lower quality role attainment. Simultaneously, studies must incorporate geographic and economic context by controlling for regional factors like labor market strength and student mobility, which are likely external predictors of success. These contextual layers are essential for creating a comprehensive understanding of career outcomes that goes beyond individual student factors.

Furthermore, a dedicated research effort must be made to isolate the program's specific influence, particularly on the highly correlated factor of Confidence. Future studies should employ a pre- and post-test design to quantitatively measure the change in self-efficacy and confidence scores among participants of the career readiness course. This specific analysis will validate the program's ability to drive a core, measurable outcome and provide essential evidence to support the recommendation that confidence development should be elevated to a curricular priority rather than remaining a mere supplementary "soft skill."