A CASE STUDY

Closing the Opportunity Divide for Young Adults

yearup BAY AREA + T LAB

AUGUST 2018

Year Up

Five million young adults have no access to economic advancement.

For many young adults in the US, economic opportunity is simply not available. Failing schools, unstable home environments, lack of local job training and openings mean that millions of youth who might enter the skilled workforce never get a real chance. This isn't just an issue for them and their communities; it's also a challenge for employers, who struggle to find new workers who have the skills they need to thrive.

Intensive training programs like Year Up are effective at bridging the opportunity gap.

Year Up is a year-long training, mentorship and internship program, active in dozens of low-income communities throughout the US. Through intensive, one-on-one staff interaction and a deep commitment to community building, Year Up achieves extraordinary outcomes.

WITHIN FOUR MONTHS OF COMPLETING THE PROGRAM, 90% OF GRADUATES ARE EITHER EMPLOYED (AT AN AVERAGE ANNUAL SALARY OF $38,000) OR ENROLLED IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION.

But Year Up's hands-on nature makes them difficult to scale.

The intense personal interaction that sets Year Up apart also makes it expensive, and difficult to replicate at scale. Fewer than 4,000 students per year participate in Year Up nationally, not for lack of interest, but because of limits to the model's infrastructure, delivery, and associated cost.

To create impact on a larger scale, this project looked for aspects of Year Up that could be effective in more traditional education environments.

Many aspects of the program, do have the potential to scale. Year Up has already pursued a co-location model in partnership with community colleges as a path to reach more young adults. Year Up partnered with frog design to extend this effort by identifying elements in Year Up's model that could be formalized and replicated.

Through a series of micro-pilots, the team found four ways to replicate the *Year Up Effect* at scale, and they're worth the investment.

Year Up is also difficult to scale because it does so much at once, combining professional skills and technical training in a single curriculum. But in a formal educational environment, like a community college, technical training is well-established, which led the team to focus specifically on identifying means of scaling professional skill training. Through research, co-creation and iterative prototyping, the team created a series of micro-pilots that brings some of Year Up's life-changing approach to the academic mainstream.

These micro-pilots tested four approaches:

1. COMBINING ONLINE LEARNING WITH LIVE CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION
2. USING NEW DIGITAL TOOLS FOR FEEDBACK AND COMMUNICATION
3. SHIFTING FROM INSTRUCTOR-LED TO GROUP-LED LEARNING
4. ENGAGING A NON-YEAR UP INSTRUCTOR TO TEACH YEAR UP CURRICULUM

Each micro-pilot was designed to emulate Year Up's core elements of professional behavior modeling, community support and sophisticated pedagogy, and offers the possibility of large-scale implementation with further development.

TIPPING POINT COMMUNITY   **T LAB**

Tipping Point works to break the cycle of poverty for individuals and families in the Bay Area. We leverage the resources and expertise of our community to invest in solutions that prevent poverty: a nurturing early childhood, strong education, gainful employment, and secure housing. Our Board covers 100% of operating costs, so every dollar donated goes where it's needed most. Since 2005, Tipping Point has raised nearly $200 million to support the 1.3 million people in the Bay Area who are too poor to meet their basic needs.

Since 2013, Tipping Point has invested in Research & Development to fill gaps in the non-profit sector and develop new poverty-fighting ideas. Known as T Lab, our R&D team exists to research, prototype and test new social services in partnership with our grantees and the Bay Area community at large. Risk capital—which most Bay Area companies have built in to their budgets—is incredibly rare within the sector. T Lab is starting to shift this norm, proving the importance of giving non-profits the opportunity to think big, try, fail, and learn.

T Lab uses human-centered design methodologies, a creative solution to problem-solving that begins by information gathering from the users of the new products and services themselves, and progresses through a community-led approach toward solutions tailored to a community's specific needs.

Our Partners
These insights were drawn from an R+D project funded by Tipping Point's T Lab and Google.org. This work was led by Year Up Bay Area (YUBA) and frog design, with extended support from Year Up's national office, Mission Economic Development Agency (MEDA), and Lynda.com (now LinkedIn Learning).

All photography by Sotheara Yem.

Closing the Opportunity Divide

How might we empower more young adults in the Bay Area to achieve economic mobility in a year?
America's young adults face an Opportunity Divide. At the same time, America's employers face a skills shortage.

It's a failure of the American promise of *work hard, get ahead*, and a threat to the economy as a whole. As millions of Baby Boomers retire, their skills are leaving the workforce, but outdated and underfunded schools often fail to replenish them.

5 MILLION YOUNG ADULTS
WHO ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY PEOPLE OF COLOR FROM LOWER SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS
ARE OUT OF SCHOOL AND OUT OF WORK
WITH NO ACCESS TO THE ECONOMIC MAINSTREAM.

IF THINGS CONTINUE UNCHECKED
12 MILLION JOBS
REQUIRING POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION
WILL GO UNFULFILLED IN THE NEXT 10 YEARS.

Addressing these issues of economic inequality and immobility is both a moral imperative and an economic necessity.

Scale a Proven Program for Bringing Underserved Young Adults Into the Economic Mainstream

Over the past 13 years, Tipping Point Community has worked to close this opportunity gap in the Bay Area by supporting high-impact non-profits such as Year Up.

Year Up serves Opportunity Youth—young adults who are disconnected from the workforce and education system. The Year Up program empowers low-income young adults to enter a professional career track in a single year through its intensive training program.

In 2015, Year Up began exploring ways to scale their program model to reach a wider audience.

> *Growing up in Bayview-Hunter's Point in San Francisco, I was expected to become another statistic. [At Year Up] I learned to never give up, that I can truly achieve my professional goals and that work can actually be a lot of fun. The road to success is never easy, but with the right support I know now I can make it and achieve my dreams.*

Simone Mackey
Year Up Bay Area Alum

YEAR UP CURRENTLY SERVES
4000+ YOUNG PEOPLE
PER YEAR ACROSS THE UNITED STATES

100%
100% of qualified participants are placed into internships at over **250 companies**.

NINETY %
OF YEAR UP GRADUATES ARE EMPLOYED OR ATTENDING COLLEGE FULL-TIME WITHIN FOUR MONTHS OF GRADUATION

YEAR UP GRADUATES ARE EARNING AVERAGE ANNUAL SALARIES OF
$38,000

Year Up young professionals in class.

Research

Designing a less resource-intensive alternative
Year Up's instructors, staff coaches and external mentors are uniquely dedicated, and willing to form personal, year-long relationships with every participant. Replicating this at thousands of new locations would require a degree of change and investment that few formal educational structures (primarily community colleges) could bear.

Year Up has already partnered with community colleges to make its program more accessible, but resource demand remains an obstacle. By learning from Year Up's successes, the team created a series of experimental programs, then tested and iterated them in hopes of bringing a version of the Year Up experience to a larger number of Opportunity Youth.

The project unfolded in three phases:

1. A RESEARCH PHASE
to learn what type of students Year Up was serving,
and what key attributes made the program so effective.

2. A PROTOTYPING PHASE
to develop educational concepts based on these insights, but tailored for use in more accessible settings, like community colleges and existing educational non-profits.

3. A MICRO-PILOT PHASE
in which each of these concepts was implemented in a controlled environment, with close monitoring to assess how their effectiveness compared with the existing Year Up curriculum.

AUDITED
THIRTY-FIVE ORGANIZATIONS
WITH COMPARATIVE MODELS TO UNDERSTAND INDUSTRY TRENDS IN EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

SPOKE TO
14 STAKEHOLDERS
AND SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS

INTERVIEWED
40 STUDENTS, YEAR UP FACULTY AND BAY AREA EMPLOYERS

Through interviews, audits, observations and conversations, the team sought to answer two crucial questions that would inform the prototyping phase:
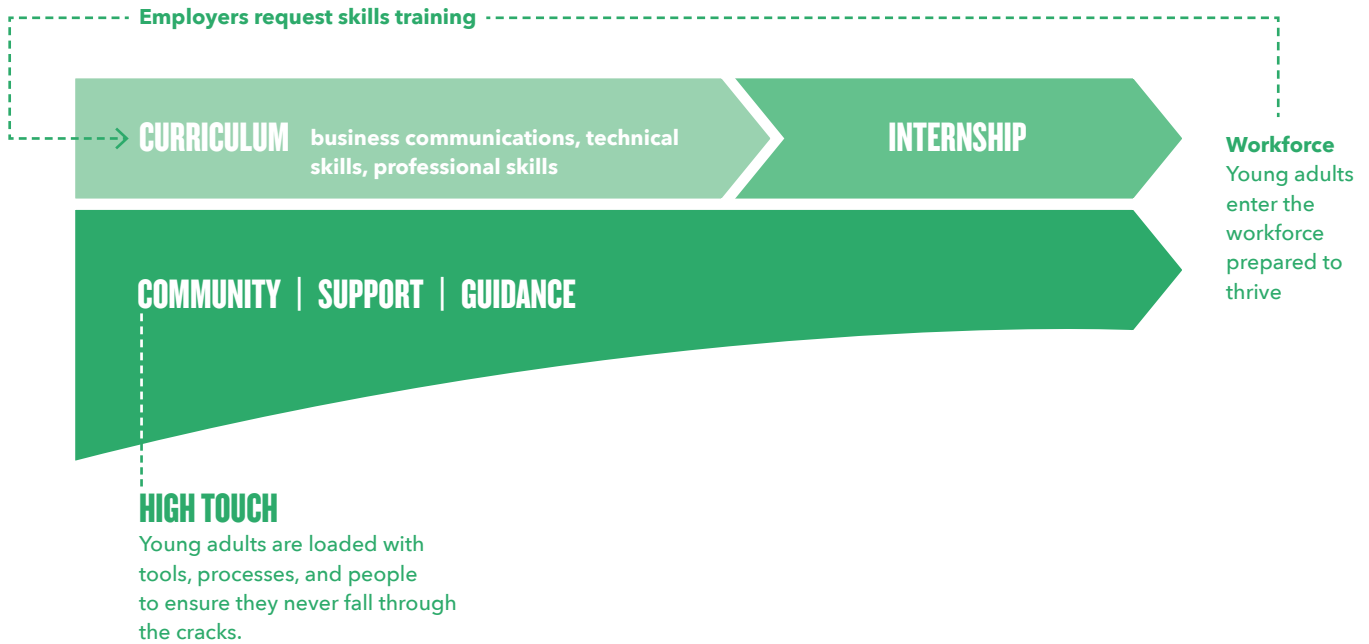
1. WHAT ELEMENTS OF THE YEAR UP PROGRAM MAKE IT SO EFFECTIVE, WHEN SO MANY OTHER WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT NON-PROFITS FAIL?
The team was especially interested in identifying elements that don't necessarily depend on a high staff-to-student ratio, making them good candidates for implementing at scale.

2. WHAT TYPES OF STUDENTS TEND TO ENTER THE YEAR UP PROGRAM, AND HOW DO THEIR NEEDS DIFFER?
Every student is unique, of course, but by spotting common interests, needs and learning styles, the team could create personas that allow for more targeted solutions.

Research: Why the Year Up Model Works

Employers request skills training

CURRICULUM business communications, technical skills, professional skills	INTERNSHIP

Workforce
Young adults enter the workforce prepared to thrive

COMMUNITY | SUPPORT | GUIDANCE

HIGH TOUCH
Young adults are loaded with tools, processes, and people to ensure they never fall through the cracks.

1. IT CONNECTS YOUNG ADULTS WITH THE SKILLS EMPLOYERS NEED.

When planning curricula, Year Up staff start by interviewing local companies to learn what skills they need but struggle to find, then develop six-month training programs to address those needs. Combined with professional development in skills like business communication and customer service, and a six-month internship, this approach helps ensure participants emerge ready to enter the workforce.

2. IT MODELS AND EXPECTS PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIORS THROUGHOUT.

Students don't just take classes where they learn about professional skills and behaviors—they're expected to manifest them every day. Program staff, staff coaches, external mentors, and instructors reinforce these behaviors from start to finish, helping students build work habits that carry over from academic program to internship, and beyond. Behaviors include professional attire and body language, time management, networking, and requesting support.

Year Up taught me so many of the skills that I use on a daily basis at Facebook: professionalism, communications, business skills—how to be comfortable and thrive in a demanding office environment.

Gurneet Sandhu
Year Up Bay Area Alum

A View From The Classroom
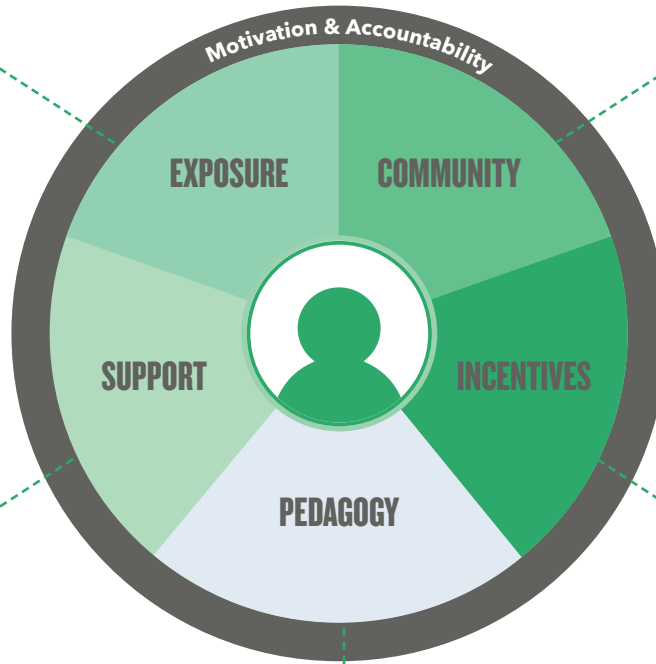Year Up Bay Area Business Communications class.

Research: Why the Year Up Model Works

EXPOSURE
Participants are immersed in the professional world throughout the program, through guest speakers, job shadowing, and professional mentors relevant to their career path.

COMMUNITY
Students develop community from day one through Orientation and cohort-based activities. Every student has space to connect and be vulnerable, and a network of up to 120 other students providing encouragement and support.

Motivation & Accountability

EXPOSURE · COMMUNITY · SUPPORT · INCENTIVES · PEDAGOGY

SUPPORT
Year Up staff and instructors are always accessible to provide robust in-person feedback and encourage discussion. Every student has an advisor, mentors, social services staff, and community partners, who provide resources and check in regularly through email, text, meetings, and events.

INCENTIVES
Students receive incentives in the form of stipends, potential college credit, and a guaranteed internship upon successful completion of the six-month long Learning and Development (L&D) phase. All students sign a contract that holds them accountable, with consequences ranging from a reduced stipend to exiting the program if expectations are continually not met.

PEDAGOGY
Students get ample opportunity to practice their skills through simulations and real-world immersion. This happens inside and outside of the classroom, including a weekly all-hands Friday Feedback session—a safe space for reflection, ecouragement and goal-setting.

3. IT GETS BETTER OUTCOMES WITH THE RIGHT MIX OF SERVICES.

Year Up's model succeeds by balancing five key elements in its on-site program delivery: Community, Support, Pedagogy, Exposure, and Incentives. The program explicitly focuses on training students in the technical skills employers need, but in practice it goes much further, with unique expectations for student-staff relationships, and an immersive, interactive approach to feedback and professional skill building, both inside and outside of the classroom. These less tangible components are as crucial to Year Up's success as the technical training it offers.

> *In Year Up's classes, aside from learning more about technical, business communication, and professional soft skills, I learned a lot about myself. I have to say that learning about myself and making lifestyle changes was the hardest part because it forced me to step outside of my comfort zone.*

Terrence Thompson
Year Up Chicago Alum

Research: Personas –
The Students of Year Up

Personas	Thrives With Structure	Values Advisors	Values Group Interactions	Thrives With External Motivation	Values Non-Traditional Learning
THE APPRENTICE Thrives with frequent support and consistent guidance	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH
THE CONDUCTOR Utilizes the peer cohort to support their own learning and progress	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	MID	MID
THE SELF STARTER Highly motivated and goal-oriented, but lacks clear steps to success	HIGH	HIGH	MID-LOW	HIGH	MID

PERSONAS

Designing a successful new curriculum starts with understanding who enters programs like Year Up, and how their needs differ. All Year Up students come in motivated, and most face external financial and social pressures that make it a challenge to succeed in academic programs. But not all students are the same. Different participants require different levels of structure, support and guidance. To better understand what they needed for success, we looked at interviews, audits and observations, and identified three recurring student personas that encompass a majority of Year Up participants.

Area of focus: Apprentice

The team chose to focus on the Apprentice persona. Of the three personas, Apprentices need the highest level of support and have the highest risk of failing. If we could enable them to persist in a lower-touch program, then other personas would likely succeed as well.

THE APPRENTICE
Thrives with frequent support and consistent guidance

Disillusioned from the past, this individual requires strong support from both staff and colleagues to unlock their motiviation and desire. They are often the followers in a group, thus experience the greatest transformation through the rigorous guidelines and expectations set by the Year Up program.

Thrives in Interactive and Engaging Learning Environments
Traditional education formulas don't resonate for the Apprentice. They need to be engaged, participate in activities, and interact with their colleagues to foster their critical thinking skills.

Thrives with Cohort Support
The Apprentice leverages the Year Up community and their cohort for both emotional and social support, which in turn provides a safe, productive, and structured place to focus on learning.

Guidance is HIGH: *Requires transparent and definitive rules to succeed*

Social is HIGH: *Community and camaraderie create a strong support network*

Diligence is LOW-MID: *Studies with peers when possible, struggles on own*

Confidence is LOW: *New program, new rules, new people, little trust*

Prototyping

Community colleges and community-based organizations (CBOs) already offer training in many technical areas that Year Up covers, such as software development and IT. This offers the possibility of creating a Year Up-style program to focus on crucial professional skills like communication, collaboration and customer service, something community colleges rarely offer. This is where the team focused their initial prototyping efforts.

Year Up's existing community college program, called Professional Training Corps (PTC), shows that this approach is feasible. PTC offers a co-located version of the core Year Up (YU) model by placing Year Up staff in offices at participating community colleges, and using dedicated classrooms to teach classes and hold cohort-based meetings, activities and feedback sessions. It's an effective approach, but still labor- and resource-intensive.

One of the team's hypotheses was that a YU-inspired professional skills program could be scaled to impact a much larger student population by using online educational channels. Online learning offers tremendous promise, but also presents challenges.

Studies have already shown that community college students in online classes are more likely to drop out of class—and school altogether—than their peers who are in face-to-face courses.[1] Finding the right balance of online to in-person learning was crucial.

Developing professional skills also requires on-demand coaching and sustained modeling of professional behavior: two things that aren't always present in community colleges and CBOs.

To address these challenges, we first developed two new one-and-a-half hour lesson plans that cover giving and receiving feedback in the workplace—skills the Year Up Program covers during their last day of student Orientation Week and then reinforces throughout weekly Friday Feedback sessions as well as two 360 reviews mirroring performance evaluations. Each test class was conducted at a community-based organization called Mission Economic Development Agency (MEDA), and included instructor presentations, practice sessions where students took on the role of IT support staff troubleshooting customer issues, and a reflection activity focused on how to apply these skills. The team also trained the instructor in the specific material and, more generally, in facilitating in the Year Up style.
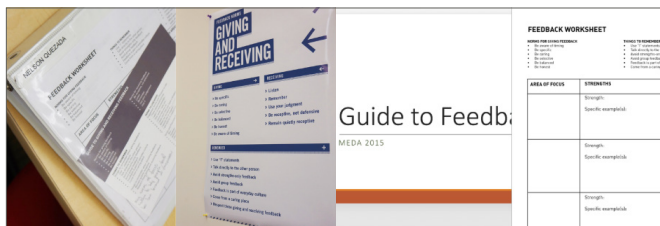
Lesson Plans
For the Feedback lesson plans, the team developed the instructional design and instructional aides including: feedback reference cards for students, class poster about feedback norms to encourage a class culture of giving and receiving feedback, class presentation for the instructor to introduce the concept of feedback in the workplace, feedback worksheet for students to record feedback for their peer after each activity.

Insights
Testing these lesson plans made a few things clear:
- Students found hands-on learning and role play especially engaging for practicing new skills.
- Regardless of who delivers the new curriculum, the model must allocate time and space for community building to foster students' confidence, motivation, and sense of accountability.
- Instructors are stretched thin, especially at CBOs and community colleges, so lesson plans need to be designed for easy implementation.

It was fun role playing because we got to try out the things we learned in the video.

Mission Techie at MEDA

Prototyping Classes
Mission Economic Development Agency's Mission Techies with instructor, Leo Sosa.

1. Bettinger, E., Fox, L., Loeb, S., & Taylor, E. (Forthcoming). Changing Distributions: How Online College Classes Alter Student and Professor Performance. American Economic Review.

Micro-Pilot

Using insights gained through the prototyped lessons, the team created a pair of longer micro-pilot programs to specifically teach professional skills, drawing on actual Year Up lessons as well as implicit skills practiced through cohort events and meetings. The micro-pilots were taught by the respective organization's instructors, to enrolled students, in two different venues: Year Up Bay Area (YUBA) and MEDA.

MISSION ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AGENCY
MICRO-PILOT

ONE
INSTRUCTOR

THIRTEEN
COHORT SIZE

THREE
WEEKS

SEVEN
MICRO-PILOT CLASSES

YEAR UP BAY AREA
MICRO-PILOT

ONE
INSTRUCTOR

FORTY
COHORT SIZE

SEVEN
WEEKS

EIGHT
MICRO-PILOT CLASSES

Each micro-pilot covered a range of professional skills topics:
• Work Roles
• Giving and Receiving Feedback
• Teamwork and Intrapersonal Skills
• Time Management
• Management Styles
• Critical Thinking
• Building Relationships and Networking

The micro-pilots also allowed the team to gather data on students' and instructors' usage of digital tools like Lynda.com, Slack and Schoology—a learning management system Year Up already used— and to conduct surveys and interviews throughout the program to get more detail about the tools' effectiveness.

Through these analyses and direct observation, we sought to answer two crucial questions:

1. HOW FAR CAN TECHNOLOGY REDUCE THE STAFF-TO-STUDENT RATIO WITHOUT SACRIFICING LEARNING OUTCOMES?

2. WHAT RATIO OF ONLINE TO IN-PERSON LEARNING OFFERS THE BEST BALANCE OF SCALABILITY AND EFFECTIVENESS?

Four Alternative Approaches

At this point, the team knew that achieving Year Up-like outcomes in these new environments would require some fundamentally different approaches that leveraged technology and new classroom structures and took full advantage of the expertise of MEDA and YUBA staff. This boiled down to four key strategies to implement and test:

- Combining online learning with live classroom instruction
- Using new digital tools for feedback and communication
- Shifting from instructor-led to group-led learning
- Engaging a non-Year Up instructor to teach Year Up curriculum

1. COMBINING ONLINE LEARNING WITH LIVE CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

Tested at: YUBA and MEDA

In current Year Up programs, multimedia serves only a small supporting role, with the bulk of instruction delivered in-person. Community colleges and CBOs don't typically allow for the same number of instructional hours, making it harder to incorporate the hands-on learning and practice that professional skill development requires. To address this challenge, the team used a Flipped Classroom technique: students were introduced to the topic independently, using Lynda.com videos (now LinkedIn Learning), then attended class already familiar with the content. This format allowed teachers devote precious in-person hours to supporting students as they practiced and mastered new skills.

Questions raised by this approach:

- Are young adults engaged with digital learning about professional skills?
- Is the style and pedagogy of Lynda videos relatable to students and aligned with Year Up values?
- Does it matter where digital learning happens?
- What kind of support do Apprentices need if the classroom is flipped?

Watch, Reflect, Practice
Students watch online lessons outside of class and reflect on the lesson in a digital journal. In class, students co-facilitate parts of the lesson to practice their professional skills.

2. USING NEW DIGITAL TOOLS FOR FEEDBACK AND COMMUNICATION

Tested at: YUBA and MEDA

The Year Up program gives students opportunities throughout the week to receive feedback and support from staff via email, text, or in-person. At community colleges and CBOs, though, this availability is rare, prompting us to explore technology as a way to facilitate feedback and support. This involved getting students and staff on a single communication platform to build cohort community and model professional behavior online. Slack was an obvious candidate for cohort building—it's pervasive in the tech community and allows extensive privacy control customization—while instructors additionally used Google Docs to provide feedback on student work.

Questions raised by this approach:

- Can instructors provide appropriate and timely feedback and effective communication in a digital format?
- How effective is Slack as a tool for building community?
- Does the student feel supported?
- Do digital tools actually save time, compared with in-person feedback?
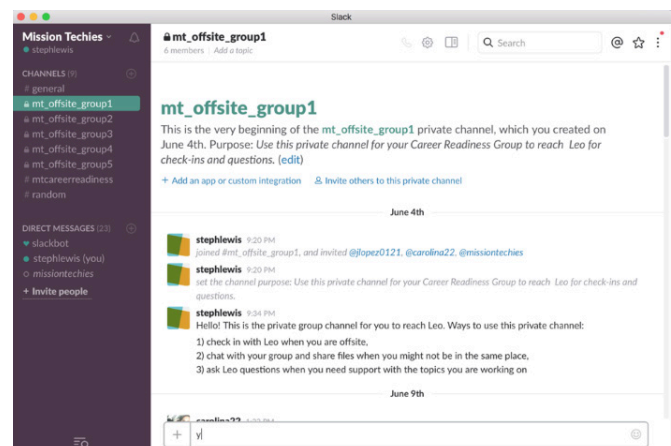
Testing the value of a digital communications tool to increase support and community
The micro-pilot used Slack as the single communication tool for students and instructors to use outside of class and during off-site group work.

3. SHIFTING FROM INSTRUCTOR-LED TO GROUP-LED LEARNING

Tested at: YUBA and MEDA

At the time of this micro-pilot, Year Up incorporated some group work, but it's not central to their pedagogy. For this micro-pilot we hypothesized that we could supplement reduced instructor hours with group work in and out of the classroom. This would give students more "hands-on" time with the learning material, while simulating work situations and allowing for critical community development.

Questions raised by this approach:
- How much structure do groups need to succeed in their course work?
- Given that some topics could be loaded and have racial and gender undertones, how much social and emotional support do groups need?
- Which lessons should be learned within a student-led group, versus directly from the instructor?
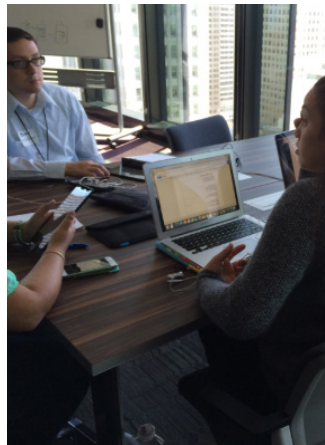
4. ENGAGING A NON-YEAR UP INSTRUCTOR TO TEACH YEAR UP CURRICULUM

Tested at: MEDA

Year Up's culture is infectious: its staff are consistent in how they work, model professional behaviors, teach and mentor. It's easy to argue that YU staff are the program's *secret sauce*, although this culture had never been codified—new hires learn it on the job. If Year Up is looking to scale its impact, the program will need to rely on people outside YU to teach professional skills.

Questions raised by this approach:
- How much of a difference is there between a non-Year Up instructor and a Year Up staff member?
- How much training and immersion does a teacher with established abilities and teaching style need to deliver a professional skills curriculum in the Year Up style?
- How far can a Year Up curriculum be adapted before it stops producing the *Year Up Effect*?

Off-site group-led learning

Non-YU instructor to lead YU curriculum.
When conducting the micro-pilot at MEDA, established Mission Techie instructors first spent three hours shadowing current YU classes, then another five hours reviewing and practicing the curriculum in order to maximize their acceptance and expertise in this unfamiliar terrain.

Key Insights

Through monitoring these micro-pilots closely and discussing their outcomes with instructors and students alike, we were able to draw some useful and sometimes surprising insights.

1.
ONLINE LEARNING
ALONE ISN'T ENOUGH.

Opportunity Youth are more deeply engaged in hands-on learning and the ability to practice new skills in a classroom environment that's safe and nurturing. Digital learning is most useful as a way to introduce a topic and a supplementary tool for teaching professional skills.

84% OF YUBA STUDENTS
said they would want even more hands-on experience.

2.
A FLIPPED CLASSROOM
MODEL IS A VIABLE OPTION FOR INCREASING CONTACT HOURS WITH COURSE MATERIAL.

MEDA STUDENTS COMPLETED 80% OF THE VIDEOS
when in groups off site.

> " " *I liked the mix of watching the Lynda videos on my own time and working with Ellen and in groups during class.*
>
> **YUBA student**

3.
STUDENTS PREFER MULTIPLE OPTIONS
FOR LEARNING MODALITIES.

Personalize the content delivery by offering students multiple modalities and ways to access the digital learning content (e.g. audio/video, audio-only/podcasts, transcripts). The micro-pilot used Lynda learning content. 32% of students preferred to read the video transcripts over watching the videos, citing that they are visual learners and that the videos were too long. Each lesson plan included three to four short videos, none longer than five minutes at a time. Total video run time for a class was on average 18 minutes total.

> " " *I read mostly transcripts instead of watching the videos because I'm a visual learner.*
>
> **YUBA student**

> " " *Some of the challenges I may have with self-paced learning was that I could not ask any questions if necessary (while watching Lynda videos).*
>
> **YUBA student**

4.
SHOW YOUTH SITUATIONS
THAT REQUIRE PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIORS.

In online learning content, demonstrate concepts through scenarios, rather than actors talking at a camera. Interactive components and animated storytelling can increase engagement and aid content comprehension. Personal brand videos, using animated storytelling and visual cues, were completed by 100% of YUBA students, compared to a ~60% video completion rate overall.

> " " *I liked the personal brand videos because they weren't just people saying stuff. It was more engaging…(describing animated style with text-based takeaways on screen).*
>
> **YUBA student**

5.
SELECT ONE COMMON DIGITAL COMMUNICATION
PLATFORM TO BUILD COMMUNITY.

Too many channels (email, texting, Slack, GroupMe, etc.) fractures the community. Consider what existing channels are already in use, and formalize them on day one. Instructors must adhere to and model the communication norms through seeding conversation prompts with the young adults.

OVER 50% OF MEDA STUDENTS USED SLACK
to crowdsource questions, provide words of encouragement, and check in with the instructor.

75% OF YUBA STUDENTS DIDN'T USE THE SLACK CHANNEL,
likely because they already established strong communication channels and community prior to the pilot.

6.
CLARIFY APPROPRIATE CHANNELS
FOR SUPPORT.

Students needed clear guidelines regarding what feedback should happen in-person versus digitally and what questions are best handled by the instructor, peers, or the college itself. Most students in the micro-pilot believed that both social/emotional and performance feedback were best delivered in person.

Instructors found that delivering written feedback in a digital format (email, Schoology or Slack) took too much time—up to eight additional hours per week—and the MEDA instructor opted out completely.

> *Personal feedback should be delivered in-person.*
>
> **YUBA student**

> *I'd like the feedback to be another norm (in our class), it should be a part of the debrief of each class.*
>
> **MEDA instructor**

7.
DEVELOP A COHORT FEELING
FROM DAY ONE.

A cohort model offers the strongest opportunity for building community and thus retention. Creating a cohort in a community college or other channel will require special activities outside of a typical weekly class such as a bootcamp and networking events. The group work from the pilot worked well to practice professional skills but didn't indicate it was going to be critical to building community.

8.
OFFSITE GROUP WORK IS VALUABLE
BUT NEEDS INSTRUCTOR INVOLVEMENT.

Students were given off site group work, with the instructor only available via Slack to answer questions and check in on progress. More diligent, task-oriented students found these activities to be most valuable, but many students had a hard time paying attention and staying on track without instructor supervision, even with the structure provided in the instructional aids.

Additionally, the team observed that group work focusing on intrapersonal skills were only effective if the instructor was present to help students process sensitive or nuanced topics that surfaced. For example, during a lesson on microaggressions, the instructor played a critical role in creating a safe place where students could share experiences and ask questions about navigating situations in a culturally appropriate way.

9 OUT OF 12 MEDA STUDENTS PREFERRED CLASSROOM
over off-site group sessions in contrast to YUBA students who had mixed experiences.

> *I really liked that we had the freedom to work outside of the classroom… it gives you chance to engage with your colleagues more and build those relationships… It also teaches you to be responsible and aware of time, making sure you get deliverables done on time.*
>
> **YUBA student**

> *I enjoy the in class environment much more. I like the structure and the discussion. Ellen works to facilitate and keep the conversation going. Working in small groups can be difficult, as the conversation dies off and it's hard to stay on task.*
>
> **YUBA Student**
> From YUBA Student Survey

9.
TRAIN INSTRUCTORS TO MODEL PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOR
DURING CLASS INSTRUCTION, FACILITATION AND THROUGH DIGITAL CHANNELS.

Year Up has a consistent approach to behavioral modeling, extending across all staff and student interactions. Instructors who teach similar material in a community college, however, may have different teaching styles and approaches to the same subject matter. Feedback from the MEDA instructor indicated more than five hours was needed to practice lesson plans, along with coaching to discuss how to model the behaviors being taught.

When digital channels constitute a significant component of the learning environment, students also benefit from seeing consistent levels of professionalism carried across all mediums, or it leads to a sense that the need for professionalism depends more on context than audience. Even after coaching, the non-YU instructor was inconsistent in the level of professionalism on Slack. This sent mixed messages to students about how to behave with superiors on digital platforms versus in-person.

Conclusion

Summary

Whether new Year Up programming is delivered at community colleges, community based organizations or on the job, it will necessarily be operating with fewer resources and fewer teaching and advising staff than in the original stand-alone core program. That said, there are several key insights that came out of the research and micro-pilots that offer some clear answers to the two questions originally posed at the outset of the project:

1. HOW FAR CAN TECHNOLOGY AND OTHER DELIVERY CHANNELS REDUCE THE STAFF-TO-STUDENT RATIO, WITHOUT SACRIFICING LEARNING OUTCOMES?

- **Communication and feedback should be frequent, open and safe.** Opportunity Youth often have few venues for giving and receiving feedback, crucial for transformation and growth, without fearing negative consequences. Digital channels are critical for communication and community building in a community college setting, since there's less face-to-face time, but it shouldn't be a primary feedback channel, as it takes more time for instructors and doesn't support the unique needs of the highest-risk young adults.

- **Offsite group-led learning is valuable, but not for teaching professional skills.** While some students lack the skills to stay focused in unsupervised group situations, a bigger issue is having an instructor available to help students with potentially charged topics and to check for understanding. Offsite group work is still a viable way of reducing staff-to-student ratio for certain learning objectives, but tends to sacrifice learning outcomes when teaching more emotionally-sensitive skills.

2. WHAT RATIO OF ONLINE TO IN-PERSON LEARNING OFFERS THE BEST BALANCE OF SCALABILITY AND EFFECTIVENESS?

- **Online learning isn't enough on its own.** Opportunity Youth need to practice new skills in a classroom environment that's safe and nurturing. Digital learning is most useful as a way to intro a topic and a supplementary tool for teaching professional skills.

- **The instructor is still the linchpin of the curriculum.** They must model professional behavior at every moment, and play the role of the caring adult. Non-YU instructors are crucial for scaling, but will need an in-person train-the-trainer program to be effective. This isn't the type of program that can be delivered out of the box or through online training if Year Up hopes to maintain a pedagogy and culture that leads to high learning outcomes.

- **Practice makes perfect.** Shift the learning experience from theory in the classroom to actual implementation of skills through hands-on application and immersive experiences in the professional world.

Next Steps

The completion of this work in 2016 lead to the creation of Nest, Year Up's in-house R&D lab. The partnership with T Lab, Google. org, and frog design laid the foundation for Nest to explore outstanding research questions necessary to take the work to a pilot:

- **What is the minimum amount of time and the best format for building a cohort amongst a group of young adults?**

- **What topics are most critical to include in a new professional skills program?**

- **What characteristics does a community college need to produce successful student outcomes for a blended professional skills program?**

With these questions in mind and previous insights established, the Nest team has developed a 40-hour curriculum product, Career Labs, and other new products from Year Up's Professional Skills Methodology are in a nascent form. These new concepts have been going through a cycle of micro-pilots and are preparing for a broad-scale pilot that brings the advantages of Year Up to a far wider range of students than ever before.