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IBM SkillsBuild Project Snapshots

Two anonymized examples of real IBM SkillsBuild projects, each showing what one employer asked for and how three students answered it differently.

Snapshot 1: A marketing campaign, three ways

The employer: A global entertainment and media company

The ask: Pick one of our current offerings, define an audience, and build a campaign for it. Use AI for research and ideas, but make every final creative decision yourself.

What came back from each student:

- A one-page campaign brief: objective, audience insight, core message, call to action, and two success measures
- Three social posts, a promotional email, and a short-form video concept, each with a one-line rationale
- A promotion plan with timing, channel choices, and a low-cost message test
- A two-page brief on how they used AI, what they rejected, and how they checked facts

Three students, three different campaigns

	Student A	Student B	Student C
What they promoted	A livestreamed music festival on the company's streaming service	A critically praised limited series that viewers overlooked	A seasonal theme park event
Audience	College students priced out of traveling to the live event	Lapsed fans, ages 20 to 34	Families and young adults
The big idea	You don't need a plane ticket to be in the front row	The show you skipped deserves a weekend	You're never too old for Halloween
Message test	Proposed comparing two caption openers for 24 hours, then using the winner	Proposed comparing two caption openers for 24 hours, then using the winner	Not included

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In their words

From Student A's promotional email:

> *You know that feeling: pulling up flight prices, doing the math on a hotel split four ways, and then closing the tab because rent's due next week? Good news: you don't need any of that this time. [...] Same stage. Same set. Zero flight to [the venue].*

From Student B's AI brief, on cutting a statistic an AI tool suggested:

> *Nobody could trace where that number came from, not a search, not a source, not anywhere. If a number can't survive someone asking "tripled compared to what?", it doesn't belong in a campaign with [the company's] name on it.*

Why it matters

The employer got three distinct strategies for the same brief. Two included a ready-to-run message test. Student A built and then dropped an entire campaign after deciding a different offering would reach more people, and documented why. Student B caught and removed an unverifiable claim before it reached the final draft.

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Snapshot 2: Competitive research, three ways

The employer: A national financial services firm

The ask: Using only public information, compare our company with two major competitors on products, customers, positioning, pricing, and recent strategy. Use AI to organize research and challenge conclusions, then verify every finding against original sources before recommending one action.

What came back from each student:

- A competitive comparison table across seven dimensions
- A two-page strategy memo with one recommended action, its evidence, tradeoffs, and implementation considerations
- A one-page executive summary built for a two-minute read
- A two-page brief on what they asked AI to do and which claims needed correcting

Three students, three different recommendations

	Student A	Student B	Student C
Key finding	Low-cost trading is now standard, so the real competition is over the whole customer relationship	Basic prices have converged, and most retirement savers don't understand all of their options	Customers need trusted guidance at major life moments
Recommendation	Use the firm's workplace retirement reach to deepen relationships when people change jobs	Pilot a neutral decision tool that explains every option without steering people toward the firm's own products	Build a guidance hub organized around life moments
How they scoped it	A phased pilot with decision points at 30, 90, 180, and 360 days	A narrow pilot with success measures beyond asset retention	Built-in compliance guardrails, refined after asking for feedback on a draft

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In their words

From Student A's executive summary:

> *Feature parity will accelerate. [The firm] should not respond with a larger feature catalog. The defensible layer is a connected experience that uses context across workplace, brokerage, planning and advice to surface the next high-value action at the right moment.*

From Student B's executive summary, on avoiding a misleading comparison:

> *These measures differ. My assessment: they support separate descriptions of each company's scale, not a size ranking.*

Why it matters

The employer got three executive-ready recommendations, each backed by sourced evidence and each taking a different strategic angle. All three students labeled which statements were sourced facts and which were their own analysis. Their AI briefs document corrections, such as fixes to pricing figures and economic assumptions, made before anything reached the final draft.

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What you'll notice about each student

Beyond the deliverables, a project shows how each student works. Employers record what they notice in a short scorecard and feedback for each student, and these projects show the kinds of insights that stand out.

What you'll notice	What it looked like in these projects
How they frame the problem	One student ruled out an event that required costly travel, then built the whole campaign around removing that barrier
Whether they check their facts	A student cut a statistic that no source could support
How they use AI	Every student documented what AI suggested, what they rejected, and why
How they write for leaders	Executive summaries built for a two-minute read, with sourced facts labeled separately from analysis
How they respond to feedback	Two students asked for feedback on a draft and revised before submitting
How they weigh risk	Research recommendations used narrow pilots and compliance guardrails instead of big launches

Seeing several students side by side is what makes these differences easy to spot.