

Student Spotlight: Saidi Ishmail – Building a Future Beyond Borders

Meet Saidi Ishmail, a standout student leader whose dedication and drive have left a lasting impression across multiple ACI programs. A true ACI “Triple Threat,” Saidi has served as a Peer Mentor in the ACI Peer Mentoring Program, a BravenX Fellow, and was a featured attendee at the 2025 ACI Breakfast Forum. He continues to exemplify the power of preparation, purpose, and perseverance. At the Forum earlier this month, he impressed everyone he met—including ACI’s corporate trustees and partners—with his thoughtful engagement, professionalism, and passion for meaningful change both on campus and beyond.

Saidi’s journey began in Lusaka, Zambia, and led him across continents in pursuit of education and opportunity in the United States. After arriving in 2015, his family initially settled in Anchorage, Alaska—a dramatic change from his life back home. Eventually, they moved to Rockford, Illinois, to be closer to extended family. Today, Saidi is a sophomore at Rockford University, proudly pursuing a double major in Financial Economics and Accounting as a first-generation college student.

His path has been anything but easy. From adapting to new environments to navigating college without a clear family roadmap, Saidi has faced each challenge with determination and grit. *“My experiences have taught me resilience, purpose, and the value of community,”* he reflects.

Motivated by these experiences, Saidi has stepped confidently into leadership roles. He launched a Toastmasters chapter at Rockford University and was recently elected Treasurer of the Student Government Association. As part of the ACI-sponsored Peer Mentoring Program, he also became a Peer Advisor, where he played a key role in supporting other first-generation students. Through regular group check-ins and peer support meetings, Saidi helped reduce feelings of isolation and strengthened his mentees’ sense of belonging. He also developed personalized Student Success Plans for five mentees—efforts that contributed to an impressive 15% GPA increase by the end of their freshman year.

One of the most transformative parts of his college experience has been participating in BravenX, a 14-week career-readiness fellowship. *“I thought it was just going to be like another class, but it really focused on career readiness,”* Saidi shared. *“I felt the program was an investment in my professional future and not just my academic success.”* The fellowship helped him clarify his career direction, build a concrete plan, and fully recognize his own potential.

Today, Saidi actively seeks out opportunities to grow professionally, one of the reasons he chose to attend the ACI Breakfast Forum. For him, it was not just a chance to network with professionals but also to express gratitude for the programs that have supported his journey.

Saidi Ishmail’s story is a powerful testament to perseverance, leadership, and the life-changing potential of education and community support. His ambition, paired with a heart for lifting others, makes him a shining example of what’s possible when opportunity meets determination.