



The Marketed University

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[The Marketed University] [What inspired you to conduct this research on career funneling?

AMY BINDER: We moved into a new phase of our research together. [Amy Binder, PhD, Professor, University of California, San Diego] We had gotten this paper, more or less, off the ground. And Dan, I think you were just a second year student when we started selling students and, or maybe even a first year and you were taking my field methods course,

AMY BINDER [continued]: and so we wanted to build on the findings of selling students. We knew that there was this high level of structured recruitment on elite campuses. And so we wanted to see what career services look like on other campuses, as well. We wanted to know if there was this level of recruitment. If career services really was stuck

AMY BINDER [continued]: in the dark ages of trying to help students figure out what color is your parachute, and just help them find their passions, and not really do much for them. We wanted to see the expanse of this. So we wanted to expand the sample of our campuses beyond just the private elites. And Dan was taking a field methods class

AMY BINDER [continued]: that I was teaching and then was heading into a practicum class where he could really continue to work on the project. And so we teamed up on this one, and Dan collected all of the data for this, and really drove this research.

DANIEL DAVIS: And so the questions that were sort of behind this were- [Daniel Davis, PhD Candidate, University of California, San Diego] after the recession there's all these student anxieties about the job market, employment was higher. And so we were curious what are career centers doing to respond to this. And so at first I went into this shadow career counselors

DANIEL DAVIS [continued]: and watched them do career counseling. Went to dozens of career services events, from workshops to career fairs and so forth. But while I was in there, I found out that there's this whole new profession growing inside the career counseling world that's different than the traditional career counselor role. And so I've never seen this before.

DANIEL DAVIS [continued]: And so the original questions, were just how are career centers responding to these post-recession students anxieties but the project went in a different direction when we saw this sort of new interesting organizational form that we called corporate partnership programs. And so that's what we ended up exploring more. [What are corporate sponsorship programs?]

DANIEL DAVIS: So corporate partnership programs are these, almost like third party headhunting services, where the career services center will have this separate group of staff whose job is to go after corporations that they want to place their students with and offer them a host of services.

DANIEL DAVIS [continued]: Literally menus with bronze, silver, and gold tiers of buy-in membership perks and stuff. Everything from preferred parking and interview room space, to better placement at career fairs. I mean, some of these campuses-- campuses have come up with 20 more different services. Just finding anything they can to bundle as this package.

DANIEL DAVIS [continued]: And the idea is you pay us money, we give you all the services and we're able to meet almost all of your need for new talent each year. And so, these programs they can be good for students right, if you want to work for this company. And they've really made it easy for me to get hired there.

DANIEL DAVIS [continued]: But one question-- lingering question I have, is what are the unintended consequences? So what happens when a bunch of colleges make these contracts with companies--

so what happens when you are a student at a college that doesn't have one of these? [What was your research question? What were your findings?]

DANIEL DAVIS: Yeah, so the methods for this one was largely qualitative. But it was mixed methods in that I did participant observation, so job shadowing with career center folks, there was interviews and follow up interviews, and attended a lot of events. So it was blend of fieldwork, observational work,

DANIEL DAVIS [continued]: and interviewing. We discovered that there's this whole other profession inside of the career center world that had been growing called corporate partnership programs. And so at one campus, there were a couple of campuses we looked at, but at one campus they even literally separated the traditional career counselors from the corporate partnership officers, who have a really different jobs. So that career counselors interface with students,

DANIEL DAVIS [continued]: it's your traditional like resume building and stuff that Amy had mentioned before. But the corporate partnership folks, they're sort of focused on recruiting corporations to the university. And so they go out and they have to-- they have to decide which companies do we want to send our students to. And they pick a few and then they

DANIEL DAVIS [continued]: try to cultivate these relationships. And ultimately the goal is to get that corporation to do almost all of their hiring for new talent from this one college and to pay the career center for the privilege to do it. And so the career center gives them a host of services, literally these bronze, silver,

DANIEL DAVIS [continued]: and gold menus-- they call them menus of things they can buy to get access to students. And the-- the idea is that it saves them money from their HR department having to hunt for talent right. So we looked across the country at where this practice was spreading and indeed, it is very much taken off at a variety of campuses.

DANIEL DAVIS [continued]: Typically larger campuses with more resources to do this because it's beneficial to the company to be associated with the college and the college to be associated with those companies. But a lingering question for me, is what happens when you are at a college that can't afford one of these programs or that just doesn't have one. And maybe your student that wants to apply to company X and you're highly qualified

DANIEL DAVIS [continued]: but they have a contract with this other school and almost all of their hiring is going to happen through it. So even if you're more qualified, you're basically getting locked out. And these kinds of things have happened for years with elite schools and elite companies but corporate partnerships shows a spreading of that practice, down the tiers to an additional layer

DANIEL DAVIS [continued]: of colleges, and so it could potentially create just greater stratification, inequality, and the labor force processes.

AMY BINDER: And I-- another kind of byproduct of looking at these kinds of programs, is that we think that this is another sign of the corporatization of universities. So there are lots of ways that universities have been becoming more corporate or financialized. Actually there's a young student, named Charlie Eaton,

AMY BINDER [continued]: who just got his PhD at Berkeley and is doing a Postdoc at Stanford, and he's been studying the myriad ways that universities have financialized, by growing their endowments, by raising tuitions, by having these kinds of relationships with corporate entities, outside the university. And this was one place where nobody

AMY BINDER [continued]: had noticed this kind of corporatization before. Where you're taking corporate money, and remember it's really the wealthy firms that can do this best. They have more

money to attract not only the computer scientists for Qualcomm in our area, but also they can get the liberal arts

AMY BINDER [continued]: majors who are majoring to work in their business development and so forth. So we see this as an element of corporatization. Dan and I actually have had a lot of disagreements or friendly, friendly discussions about whether we think this is more good thing or a bad thing. And obviously, the world is not black and white and so there's both.

AMY BINDER [continued]: I mean, I see it as a good thing in some ways, because career services and career counseling and has for so long been, and I'm sorry to my colleagues who work in this area but kind of a joke. There are very few of us who felt like we really got much out of career services, whether you're student now or you're a faculty member watching your student trying

AMY BINDER [continued]: to get help from career counseling. So the fact that there are new professionals in career services who are doing more to try to link with local employers. That's good. That's really good. And I like it too that they're looking for jobs for the sociology majors in addition

AMY BINDER [continued]: to jobs for the engineering majors and they can bundle those students. On the other hand, as Dan was saying, who knows how ham-fisted they'll be about this. Who knows if they'll just attract the entities with the most money. And there is this kind of cascading problem of the institutions that can't

AMY BINDER [continued]: afford this kind of thing. So it's really, as in so many things with higher education, it's a mixed bag.

DANIEL DAVIS: It's a mixed bag. I mean, it can be good for some students and it shows what a different proactive approach by the career services offices, which is great. But I think part of the problem is that, the career service centers themselves are under a lot of pressure. One they've got to prove their value, that they can actually get students jobs

DANIEL DAVIS [continued]: and so they want to get better at that. But also, for the first time, they're increasingly expected to subsidize themselves financially. So as these different units on campus, part of us financialization process and marketization process, as they're supposed to start thinking like their own little entrepreneurial units, they have to come up with ways to make money. And so this is a way that works.

DANIEL DAVIS [continued]: So they can fund some of their other services through these corporate partnership programs. But that means they kind of have their hands tied in needing to go after companies that can pay these bigger fees. So I think it could be even-- could be better if they didn't have to raise as much money themselves. If the university would subsidize

DANIEL DAVIS [continued]: more of their activities, then they could be productive, not just for as a few firms that can afford it but they can go after a bigger variety of nonprofits and impact fields and such. And so in that case, then I think it could just be better all around. We'll see.

AMY BINDER: And something just came to mind too, as there are more units on campus that show that they can self-subsidize, I think there's more pressure on all kinds of other units on campus to have to do that, including academic departments, like literature. And some of most distorted ways that this is happening now

AMY BINDER [continued]: is that departments like literature, like sociology, like anthropology, are looking for ways to make money to support themselves. They're not getting the kind of support from the university that they need. So they're creating, master's programs for example, and I'm very much against that in most cases,

AMY BINDER [continued]: especially in the humanities and social sciences where I don't think a master's is very useful to somebody. I'm not going to say that in a blanket way but these are just ways of making money off full freight students and I find that very problematic. And so the more the university corporatizes in this area,

AMY BINDER [continued]: the more of a model that might be for other parts of the university. And so, slippery slope.