

Higher Ed Rewired

Season 2, Episode 4

From Jobs to Careers: Transforming Student Employment

Host: Annet Rangel

Guests: Amelia Parnell, Debra Hammond and Grey Madain

On-campus student employment opportunities have long been a source of a financial resource for a college student while providing key skills for career preparation and resume building. It also is instrumental in building the student's sense of belonging and connection to the campus community. Both these are key levers supporting student support, especially for low-income students. Campuses can leverage the student employment experience to decrease equity gaps and improve college completion by implementing strategies that link student employment as a high impact practice to student success.

Higher Ed Rewired spoke with Amelia Parnell, NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education and Debra Hammond, California State University Northridge University Student Union on their recommendations of maximizing the student employment experience as a student success strategy.

Amelia Parnell, Vice President for Research & Policy, NASPA Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education

Debra Hammond, Executive Director, University Student Union, California State University, Northridge

Grey Madain, Alum, California State University Northridge, Visual Designer, Golden Hippo Media

[AMBI - mouse clicks, keys typing]

Grey Madain: So, we're creating this new brand. And I got to be the lead on it.

Annet Rangel: This is Grey Madain, pronouns they/them.

They're a professional visual designer who works at one of the leading marketing companies in the nation.

A job they landed just after graduating from California State University, Northridge.

Grey Madain: So from creating the mood boards to creating like the feel and vibe for it and choosing like what kind of paper we want to. So I get to create like the whole entire thing from scratch

[MUSIC FADE UP]

Grey Madain: So I think that like is like kind of a big accomplishment from where I've been because previously just working there, like I kind of help these higher up designers and they would just kind of like teach me along the way. So kind of being on my own right now, it's kind of still scary. But it's like super also exciting.

Getting a good job is one of the top reasons people go to college. It's also one of the scariest challenges for students approaching graduation. Where do you even start?

Grey Madain: I started with illustration printmaking, sculpture, and I wasn't that very good at it. So I decided to go to a field where I could kind of grow and challenge myself in that way and also make a living...So I decided to dabble in graphic design...

[MUSIC FADE DOWN]

Higher ed institutions are reimagining how to better prepare students for the post-college job search by reinventing what student employment looks like.

The ideal opportunity would check off three criteria:

-Allow students to feel out what appeals to them academically

...while exploring possible careers of interest...

-AND paying them a good wage that would help them with college expenses.

Grey Madain: I saw the job opportunity on campus as a graphic designer. And then I was like, oh, yeah, I'm gonna get this. So, I worked on my portfolio so hard.

[Music post]

And then I had an interview and then [BEAT] I didn't get it (laughs).

[THEME MUSIC FADE UP]

Annet Rangel: We're just getting started with Grey's story...

[Higher Ed Rewired is a production of the California State University. The CSU is the largest, most diverse four-year public university system in the country, and an engine of social and economic mobility. Each episode examines exciting innovations taking place across the nation that has the potential to improve student success and to positively change the environment in which we teach, learn and discover. Each episode examines ground breaking research and exciting innovations take place across the nation that is transforming the landscape of student success]

<BEAT>

I'm Annet Rangel, your host for season 2

Today, we are talking about that barista job you had at your campus cafe...all those essays you proof-read at the writing center, the summer you worked as an orientation advisor— that's right—this episode is all about student employment. And how some colleges and universities are completely rethinking the campus job.

<THEME MUSIC POSTS>

Gone are the menial tasks and busywork that no one else wants to do. Student employment is now envisioned and advertised as jobs that offer real experience and marketable skills — preparing students for their first step into the post-graduation job market.

And this switch has had an unforeseen positive impact: When students do work they view as valuable and challenging, the student body becomes more engaged and connected...

<THEME MUSIC FADE OUT>

And even with colleges transitioning into online learning due to the Pandemic ... schools are still hiring and still conducting business.

The value of student employment can be measured in two ways:

through the skills students gain for a future career...

AND through the relationships fostered with faculty and administrators.

When done right, it goes *beyond* the campus and beyond the position—

Debra Hammond: We employ about 400 students on an annual basis. And the responsibility is to figure out how we can develop students. This is not just a job.

This is Debra L. Hammond. She serves as the executive director of the University Student Union at CSU Northridge— the same university Grey attended.

Debra Hammond: We have an expectation that students will actually develop a certain set of skills once they are engaged with our department.

This is not a self-guided process for the students.

Each semester, CSUN faculty works with their students, mentoring them, making sure jobs and academic interests stay aligned ...

Debra Hammond: One of the things that's come out is the whole factor of social mobility, that when students come to our campus it improves their ability to move up in social ranks. And one of the things that's important about that is having skills that allow them to get into these positions and see the connection between a student employment position and what they're going to do in their future.

[MUSIC STARTS]

Annet Rangel: This is an important step — helping students understand that these are real skills valued by employers...

Debra Hammond: I think the thing that's really important about all of this is that they have to see that what they do here is not isolated. It is part of an integrated whole. And say you once you gain these skills, you'll never lose them.

we do a program called G.P.S. which is Graduate Preparation Seminar, and that we offer that to all graduating seniors the semester before they graduate. One of the workshops is how to take your strengths and use them and on your resumé and how you build a resume. We also talk about things about how to negotiate. Nobody is taught how to negotiate. You just go on the job and the first, especially as a student, you're like, Oh my goodness. I'm so happy to have a job. And you

just take that job. But nobody tells you that you can negotiate and what you should negotiate for.

Hammond says that investing in student employment is vital to engagement and success. But, like everything on campus, there's never a shortage of budget and funding challenges.

[music ends]

Debra Hammond: I think it has such a tremendous positive impact on students. The other part, I think, is that we need to really extend and expand our training program, not just for the students, but also for the supervisors to show them how to be better coaches for students and to actually personalize it a little bit, to develop rapport and relationship with students so that they trust them so that they can share if something's going on, because all it takes is one course correction to keep a student involved, and engaged, and in school. And that's what we see our job is. It is that connection that's deeper that goes to actually keeping students engaged.

[MUSIC STARTS]

Annet Rangel: There's a story Hammond told me that sort of encapsulates everything she talks about ... how a meaningful job for one particular student ... increases his engagement ... and translated to success after graduation.

Only the story doesn't quite start in the way you'd expect.

Debra Hammond: The student was involved in something that he should not have been doing. So, we had to terminate him.

And, you know, about a month later, he came back to me and said, you know, I've learned my lesson. I really want to come back. I know I blew it. And I said to him, I said, I need to really know that you learned your lesson so I can't hire you back for at least a year.

And a year to the day he came back, he put in his application. He said, you know, I've learned my lesson. I really want to work for this organization. I realized what the organization provided for me. And I actually blew it. And he shared that story in his interview with the interview team. And I think that they were so astonished with his candor and his ability to be so highly self reflective that they

hired him back. He advanced to one of the highest-level positions that we have in the organization. And before he left, he was one of the student employees of the year. So, I know that he learned from that experience. But he was also really persistent and resilient and had the ability to come back.

Annet Rangel: The job along with the guidance and support of faculty and staff motivated him and kept him focused... which really, is what student employment should achieve when it's done right.

Debra Hammond: Our job is always to make sure that a student is developed in such a way that they are stronger, more resilient, more talented than when they came in. So that's what we want to see. And that's our mission, is to help them realize their educational goals.

[MUSIC RINGS OUT]

Grey Madain: I think my first impression on college was. Just like how? Honestly, just like how big everything it was and how, like kind of like my world kind of expanded a little bit from there I was kind of excited because you kind of have this, like, newfound freedom to kind of just like venture off and do your own thing.

Annet Rangel: This is Grey again. You heard them at the beginning of this episode.

Grey worked all throughout college.

Their first job was off-campus...and it didn't have much to do with their academic pursuits....

Grey Madain: My first job ever was working at a movie theater [...] I was really stoked on it, because it was my first job. As a kid, I seen like people working at movie theaters and I was like this is awesome. I want to do that. And it was really flexible with my schedule so I could go take classes on weekdays and then work on the weekend. And from there, I think between like movie showtimes, you have free time. So in between that, I would work on my art and work on my portfolio

But eventually, Grey found a job that WAS more in line with their career aspirations...

Grey Madain: I saw the job opportunity on campus as a graphic designer. And then I was like, oh, yeah, I'm gonna get this. So I worked on my portfolio so hard. And then I had an interview and then I didn't get it.

[MUSIC change]

So the next thing I saw another job interview for another design position on campus. And I was like, OK. So I revamped my portfolio. And I like applied. And they're like, OK, you got it. So then it kind of, I was working in between jobs. So I was still working at movie theater. But then also working at my first job as a designer

Annet Rangel: Tell me about why you sought a job on-campus versus off-campus?

Grey Madain: Honestly, it was all for accessibility, and I kind of wanted to. I've heard people working on campus and how the benefits were really good and how they're just like really flexible with your classes. I was kind of worried about the flexibility of kind of going externally rather than like internally ends, obviously kind of if you're working in on campus, they're going to kind of be more lenient and understanding to your experience or what you're going through...

[MUSIC FADE DOWN]

Dr. Amelia Parnell: I think that's probably not going to be debatable, that higher education itself, the enterprise, the field, the functioning will be dramatically different for at least the next two years.

Annet Rangel: This is Dr. Amelia Parnell. She's the vice president for research and policy for the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, or NASPA.

Dr. Parnell and her team recently published a study looking at student employment on campuses across the nation that examined why some programs have a higher impact on student success than others...

According to her findings... student employment is often under-used or underdeveloped:

Dr. Amelia Parnell: The biggest myth is that people often times use it synonymously with federal work studies like, oh, we have work study students or we have students who do our answering of the phones, or filing papers and things like that. So, there was this notion that student employment automatically got reduced to something administrative, that it had to be something that was an extra task that needed to be done.

But I think it became quickly obvious when we saw some examples of good practice that when we start to hear those narratives say, actually, we got some examples where you that show that it can be that, but it could be so much more.

Dr. Parnell's study found that there are five elements needed to make student employment impactful:

Leadership engagement, equitable hiring processes, growth and professional development opportunities, student learning outcomes, and providing meaningful feedback.

Dr. Amelia Parnell: I think using examples like what we saw at Clemson University, where it could be a faculty member, it could be an administrator, someone who is regularly engaging with the student and giving them a bit of a curriculum that includes everything from figuring out how they want to do their own professional branding. How do they want to up their LinkedIn profile? Things like that. That really does take it from being more than just a transactional experience of come do X number of hours, X number of tasks and moves into something that's more transformational to say after this on campus student employment experience, you should be picking up skills and abilities that you can actually transfer into any other type of role that you have an interest in. The degree to which it happens. It will probably vary. But I think that those will be my top two things the framing of what a student employment opportunity should be. And the second is the role of the supervisor or the mentor and making that actually a really highly engaging experience.

[MUSIC STARTS]

In terms of what makes a meaningful relationship with a mentor and a student or supervisor or student, is that understanding that you can come back with questions? So, their role as a mentor probably expands to be part listener, part coach, of course, part person to help them figure out their day to day task, but really part resource. I can't imagine what it's like to be a student right now, that

can't physically go to a campus. And they have to get all of what they need by either email or phone or what have you. So, the role of the mentor truly is an access point.

Annet Rangel: The NASPA research lays out the markers of success, but what does it all look like in practice?

Dr. Parnell shared one of her favorite examples from Clemson University.

It started as a homegrown approach that soon embedded itself into the very DNA of the campus:

Dr. Amelia Parnell: So, students are placed in roles that can range from an academic department all the way to a functional unit in student life. And so we got to see examples of a full color magazine that was completely run by students. They had full on events that students managed. They have an ice cream shop on campus and students work that may run that way. They create the flavors. They create the marketing for it. And so it was a really great example of how they have made on campus employment a part of the fabric of the campus. So everybody's interested in it. Students are very, very knowledgeable of it. And it's something that I think when it comes to those evergreen skills, they do that in a very holistic way.

Annet Rangel: And now, because of, you know, the pandemic, educators are thinking about how to achieve those goals with student employees working remotely.

[Music ends]

Dr. Amelia Parnell: Student employment itself, I think, can still thrive. I think there will still be new roles that campuses will picking up and that students can fill those roles. And I think that the role of a supervisor will still be there. I think the acquisition of skills and campuses will be there. And I think that even remodeling how we might do some first cousins of to implement like internships and short-term assignments and things like that, though I don't think that we should look at student employment as something to put on the shelf for the next two years. I don't think that means, oh, man, we call this on-campus employment. There's no on campus resembles what we used to have. So, let's just pause it. I would actually do the opposite. I know that we're still moving in a direction where you want to see college as something that delivers a high-quality skills and

experiences. We just have to transform how we do that in a day to day format until we can resume and a more completely, fully in-person environment.

Annet Rangel: Right, so what do you think the real impacts of COVID will be for higher ed institutions and for the jobs available there?

Dr. Amelia Parnell: as the functions that have to be completely changed go, so do the positions that we associate with that. So, for example, if there were a housing department on a campus that previously had 20 student employees, but now we don't have on campus housing at that great degree, I wouldn't be surprised if the housing department said they either need to shift those positions or pause the funding for those roles until we can resume a place where we have great need for that.

So, I think the most obvious example is that there are certain functions that simply because they don't operate the same in a virtual environment, positions that were previously there can't be there. I think it's in terms of budgeting for student employment. So goes the campus. And so there are going to be across the board cuts. I mean, we're talking about campuses who've been furloughing employees or even doing reductions in staff completely. So I don't know that a student employee will be something that is completely held harmless because there won't be as many professionals for them to engage with.

But for example if you had a communications office on campus and they need to be constructing some tweets for their social media platform, I can easily see a student, you know, drafting some of those things or if they need someone to monitor the live feed on Instagram, something like that. I could easily see a student doing those types of roles from a virtual environment. The example I've given before, let's say a student is working with a marketing professor who has a client that's the local restaurant or bakery, and they are now doing to-go delivery only, not in person, they want to completely change their website. I can see a student working with a professor to help that client create a different social media strategy. So, I realized that in some instances, roles that are much more heavily in-person, you know, to be delivered those would probably have to transform completely. But I don't think that we'll see the complete elimination of student employment. We may have to pause the on-campus phrasing of it, but I think that there are probably lots of roles that relate to students being able to give their creativity and expertise to a function that's already existing. Not every campus function will go away, even in the middle of Covid 19.

[MUSIC FADES IN]

Grey Madain: I first had a good interview with our boss at the time. And those are one on one interview and I was like, really nervous. And then I had a second interview with the team, the design team, to see if I would fit in.

Annet Rangel: Grey took all the skills they had learned and cultivated through their on-campus design job and applied for their first post-grad position.

And you can probably guess what happened next...

Grey Madain: I think a week later I got I was just like laying down a long time, at my mom's house at the time. And then I got this email saying, like. Hey, Grey. We want to offer you this position, so basically the offer letter was showcasing their offer of pay and then also like the job position titles. And then I was like. At the time, I was like, oh, my God. I was like, I'm an adult now.

The challenge of student employment remains the same — pandemic or not — create opportunities for students that *prepare* them for new job markets.

With or without stay-at-home orders.

Debra Hammond: There's always a silver lining. And I think it's made us be much more innovative, creative and open. And I think you have to be open to hear other people's ideas. It's made us listen to each other at a whole different level. So I think we are actually doing what we should be doing in terms of serving students. We'll continue to do that.

[THEME MUSIC FADE UP]

[Closing credits]

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[THEME MUSIC FADE DOWN]