

VC: Hello, I'm Vanessa Corwin

KK: And I'm Kathleen Kaan

VC: For recent college graduates during Covid, landing that first job can be daunting. But there is help. Joining us today is Zavi Gunn, director of the Center for Engagement and Internships at Queens College, City University of New York. Welcome to the podcast.

VC: Zavi, could you tell us about your background and the Center for Engagement and Internships at Queens College? What exactly do you do and what services do you provide to the students:

ZG: Sure. So I've been in higher education for over 20 years working in career engagement and development of college students helping them find their career path and their career passion and so Queens College Center for Career Engagement and Internships' mission is to engage, educate and empower students for career opportunities in a transforming global workforce. So it really starts off first with self-assessment. Who are you as a student? What are your interests? Your values? Your personality and skills? And being able to help the students connect those opportunities to do internships. So they kind of get to test out what they like as a career and what they may not like, and also helping them to take those internship experiences and build their resume, right? So they can then apply for career opportunity jobs. And so we help students with mock interviews, resume prep. We also help students with connecting them with alumni so that they get to connect with professionals that have gone to their college and learn more about the field that the alumni are currently studying in. We also partner a lot with employers to provide informational sessions for students on their companies, career opportunities and also even developing certain skills that they would need for working in different sectors. So I'd say we help students from A to Z with their career development.

VC: So that's pretty comprehensive. Do a lot of students take advantage of this resource?

ZG: I wish more students took advantage. The unique thing about our career center is that we do have a "World of Work" course which is a 1,2 or 3 credit class that a student could take while they're in college to learn about the world of work, to prepare their skills, and find jobs and internship opportunities. So we offer

that class each semester. In addition, our services are optional to students, so we have about 8,000 students that use our services each year. Of course, I would love more students to use our services but they have a choice of whether or not they want to engage in career services.

KK: You certainly give them this incredible opportunity. With all this information that you give to them do you actually help them find jobs?

ZG: Yes, what we do, it's like that saying, you teach someone to fish, right? I can't just give them the fish, right? They have to go in the water, they have to reel that fish in, and they have to learn the skills. So we give them the tools that they need so that they could successfully interview and apply and secure a job opportunity. So that is the goal for all of the services that we do, is to help students find their career passion and have access to these opportunities.

VC: That's terrific. In your view, what is the current job market like for the class of 2021 and are they competing with the graduates from the class of 2020? Because they graduated during lockdown. How do you see the market these days?

ZG: I think the market; the job market is very good for the class of 2021. They have options, right? They can get multiple job offers, and then make an informed decision on why it is they want to work with that company. So compared to the class of 2020, NACE, which is the National Association of Colleges and Employers, shows that employment, employers are up 7% recruiting and hiring. So there are job opportunities out there and so I think what is important for students to do is also retool. So there are different organizations that provide, like micro credentialing, or they provide upskill training so actually at CUNY we started the upskilling workshop, or training seminar with different employers and so some students in this upskilling seminar, they learn data analysis skills, right? Which employers are saying, these are in demand, we can't find people to fill these positions. But now here, our students in CUNY, they're taking this training in addition to their academic work and they're getting those tools, skills that employers say that they need for specific jobs like data analysis.

VC: That's great. Again, that is a wonderful resource for these students to make them competitive, to make them more competitive.

ZG: And a couple of other things I'll mention that at Queens College our employer partners, they include [Co-Op Careers](#) which provides data skill training but then also media skill training for recent college graduates so even our seniors as they were graduating they were taking training sessions to work with Co-Op Careers employers and so their big push is really providing diversity candidates for some of these employers by providing training programs. There's also another partner which is [Streetwise Partners](#) that we work with that helps students get the business and financial skills that they need to work within these particular organizations as well and there are several other nonprofits that provide some of those professional skills training but technical training and then connect them with their employer partners.

KK: It sounds like, well obviously, they're totally well-rounded when they leave. When they are looking for jobs and accepting positions, do you find that they're asking more or demanding more from their employers than in past years because of Covid and because of what they know now?

VC: And because they've been remote, they have been remote for so long, they're quite accustomed to that.

ZG: Yeah, I think it depends on personality, right? So many of our students, they're very humble, they don't necessarily want to go and ask too much in negotiating, but that's what we do as career educators, we empower students to, like, listen, negotiate. Ask for particular benefits, like be sure you read, or speak to the folks in human resources and in benefits and compensation so you understand the total compensation package for working with that employer. During the pandemic, many of our students, they got accustomed to doing remote internships so many of our students are still looking for remote work or hybrid mix, right, being able to come into the office two or three times a week and then work the rest of the days remotely. So some students are negotiating that, some employers are offering that as part of the incentive, because guess what, now they're not just narrowed to geographical location on candidates. They can create a wider net in candidates that they can actually hire if they offer some sort of remote work to candidates.

KK: That would make the competition even greater, wouldn't it?

ZG: Yes, it does. It does make the competition greater. But there are jobs. I want folks to know, like, be optimistic. There is a job out there for you. It may take time, like before the pandemic it would have taken at

least, say nine months to find a job, so you still have to be patient in being able to go on interviews, negotiate offers, because there is a right job out there for each of our students.

VC: Do you find that the 2021 graduates are in competition with the 2020 graduates, because those students graduated during lockdown?

ZG: Yes, they are in competition but I think it's a healthy competition, right? There are a lot of jobs out there and so yes, there is a wider pool of candidates that employers could choose from but I think it's important for our college graduates to realize, like having that degree gives you that additional credential that you need, right? Some of the things that we're hearing, especially on LinkedIn Learning, on LinkedIn itself and some of the articles and workforce development research that the LinkedIn community has been doing, is that it's so important for students to be flexible, right, so being able to talk about flexibility, being able to talk about your digital skills, your communication skills, working on a team remotely, like those are things you can take into any industry. So I think for our class of 2020, being able to say, how did you pivot during the pandemic, and for our class of 2021 there are opportunities for you, yes, you're competing, but it's a healthy competition. There are jobs out there.

KK: Zavi, tell us, what are the top fields? What jobs are these graduates looking for? Is there a top five, top ten?

ZG: Absolutely. I would say technology is important. It doesn't matter if you're working at a technology company, or you're working in education, you're working in healthcare, technology skills are very important, computer software engineers, data analysis, those are really important. So technology is one industry that's important and then I will also mention education. So Queens College, we're known as educators, right, we graduate the top folks working in the education area within the metropolitan area, so we found that education is very important especially within special education. Those areas have been in demand during the pandemic, so we continue to see a growth there. I will also mention healthcare, right? We have a nutrition program and many of our students are working in hospitals doing their field work, right? And so just within healthcare in general, we know how the pandemic has affected everyone so healthcare is a really good area, with technology, with finance, with accounting within the health sector as well, so it's not just the traditional health sector but it's also within administration, within technology within the health sector as well. I will also mention

marketing. It's really important. Digital marketing, social media marketing is absolutely in demand and employers are willing to train you how to do that. So it doesn't really matter what you studied in school. They'll give you a training session either using LinkedIn Learning or using their company educational software and they would teach you those social media skills. For marketing I find it in demand as well and finance has done pretty well, you know, during the pandemic so finance is another sector where we see our graduates still being steady in that area and I'll mention too, consulting, right? Because many businesses have to rethink the way they operate, the way they meet their consumers, right? And also their processes. So I find, like, consulting for recent graduates, being able to come into a company and just have a different take on the way they operate. Those are some of the areas, the industry and the type of jobs that I find recent graduates can really wrap their arms around and get a head start in their career.

VC: That's great. What about job sites like Indeed? Do you recommend that students use those? Do you think they work? What's your take on that?

ZG: Well, for Queens College, we use Simplicity which is a career management system. We post our jobs, internships, and any sort of career opportunities on that website so Queens College students, they have access to that. And some of the other CUNY schools also use Simplicity as well.

VC: Is this a proprietary system within the city universities?

ZG: Within Queens College, so some of the CUNY campuses do have Simplicity and other campuses in CUNY use Handshake, so that's another career management site for college students and entry level employees as well, so those two systems are really good for students to find career opportunities. I recommend Indeed, especially if you want to work in a non-profit area, I think that's a really good way to look at Indeed.com. LinkedIn is amazing. So LinkedIn has jobs, right? You can actually look up alumni from your school who work at organizations you may be interested in and connect with them on LinkedIn and say, "Hey, I notice there's a job posting, I would like to just talk to you a little bit to learn more about the company culture, to learn more about that department. I'm thinking about applying to an opportunity at that organization. So LinkedIn is really good for jobs. They actually have like a nice report on top employers, and what jobs are in demand as well and there's so many other websites. But those I would say, Simplicity, Handshake, LinkedIn Learning, Indeed, those are really some good websites as well for students to find opportunities.

KK: Since everything is changing daily with the pandemic and we talked about students happily working remotely and employers accepting that, what happens if the employers want you to be on site and request vaccinations? What have you found your students feeling about that?

VC: Yeah, is there any resistance to this?

ZG: To my knowledge, there hasn't been any resistance to this, I think most people want to be in a healthy environment, most people are willing to follow whatever the safety and health protocols are within that particular organization, so I haven't found any resistance to that. As a matter of fact, in CUNY, when the fall semester starts back, all CUNY students must be vaccinated to take classes on campus, so I haven't heard of any students or any alumni who graduated resisting whatever the protocol is for that particular company in regards to vaccination.

VC: Do you have any advice, just general advice for students and recent grads out there who may be listening and they're looking for a job. Do you have any tips?

ZG: Persistence, optimism, very important, right? So it's like finding a job is a job in itself. So the amount of time and energy you put into it, that's what you're going to get out of it. So being able to tailor your resume to the specific job description is very key, right, you can't just have one resume and think that's going to fit all the jobs you're applying for. It's not. Being able to look at the job description, the responsibility, tailoring your resume to that is very key. Please make sure you have a LinkedIn profile because on your LinkedIn profile you can put that you're open to work, there's a badge that goes up on your profile. You can actually customize your header to say what type of positions you're looking for, right? I think that's really, really key to do, so have your online profile updated, have your resume updated. Connect with your alma mater. For our students at Queens they have access to using our career services for free up to a year after graduation. So come to our career events, meet with our career educators, so that we could come up with a job search strategy plan for you. And most colleges do provide those services for alumni. If they don't they might just charge a nominal fee, right? And you also have workforce development centers that offer free job search for folks within the community. So there are resources out there. Even the library has a career coach, a counselor that could help students within their job search. Do your research on the organization, and on the department. So when you're developing

your resume and getting ready for that interview you know why it is that you want to work for that specific organization. And of course, your network, right? Connect with alumni at your school. Connect with faculty. Connect with staff at your colleges that you had a good relationship with. Just send a nice message, "Hey, I've graduated, I'm looking for a job, let me know if there are any opportunities," and they'll refer you to opportunities as well. So I think patience is also important. I know it can be challenging, folks get discouraged, but also just practice, practice your interview strategy. Practice your, what we call elevator pitch, which is about 30 seconds of your telling someone who you are professionally. I think those are things that are really key. Go to virtual networking events, right? There are a lot of virtual networking events. Now they are also starting in person networking events. So go to those, get business cards, follow up with people, and reconnect with them on LinkedIn after you get their card. So those are just some of the ideas that I have. There is a job out there for you. You just have to put the time and effort into finding it.

KK: Your excitement and enthusiasm is contagious and I think that people who are listening will feel that too.

VC: So also, Zavi, do you advise students also to kind of like clean up their social media image?

ZG: Absolutely. Yes, you want to have a positive social media outlook, you don't want to have social media images where you're like partying too much, right? Like let's say if you do volunteer work, put that on your social media. If you do tutoring, put that on your social media. So yes, I think most employers nowadays, when they get your resume whether it's through an application system, before they even decide to like, okay, let's invite this person in for an interview they're going to just google you, right, and they're going to see what comes up. So I recommend for folks, google yourself and see what comes up. Do you like the images that you see? Would your grandmother be impressed with the images that you see? (laughter) If not, clean up your online presence.

VC: That's excellent, excellent advice, in my view, even for people who are more advanced in their job search, these are excellent, excellent tips that everybody should pay attention to. So Zavi, thank you so much for being with us and sharing all of your expertise and knowledge and I'm sure you'll be helping a lot of people out there.

ZG Thank you Vanessa, thank you Kathleen and anyone on this call, you can connect with me on LinkedIn, my name is unique enough, I'm the only Zavi Gunn on LinkedIn and I'll be happy to help folks out in their job search, refer them to great resources.