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WEBINAR

THE CAREER ARTS: SUPPORTING EQUITY IN CAREER SKILLS AND SOCIAL CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

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UNCORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

FIRESIDE CHAT:

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**MEYER:** Thank you for joining us today. I'm Katharine Meyer. I'm a fellow in the Brown Center on Education Policy and Government Studies at the Brookings Institution. I'm delighted to be hosting our panel today on the career arts, a conversation on education, social capital, and workforce skills. You know, over the past few years, there have been increasing number of headlines that share the political discourse focused on the value of a college degree, with the American public reporting increased skepticism about whether or not going to college is really worth it. However, there's been very little deep discussion about what 'worth it' means. You know, what are students gaining from college that translates into well documented higher wages and greater employment stability that college graduates enjoy? Today, we have a slate of experts in higher education and labor force here to dive into what exactly young adults need to succeed, not only on their first job but throughout their career, and how college and other institutions can help build that foundation.

We'll start today with a conversation with Ben Wildavsky about his new book, "The Career Arts: Making the Most of College, Careers-- of College, Credentials, and Connection." We'll then shift to a panel moderated by Goldie Blumenstyk, a reporter with the Chronicle of Higher Education on broad trends in skill and social capital development. Please send in your questions. You can reply to us on Twitter at BrookingsGov using hashtag the career arts, or email us at events@brookings.edu, and we'll share those with the panelists as they come in. And we're so glad to have you with us today. Ben is a--.

**WILDAVSKY:** Good to have you, Katharine.

**MEYER:** It's so good to have you. I feel like I'm saying welcome home. Ben is a former Brookings guest scholar, currently visiting scholar at the University of Virginia School of Education, who spent numerous years as a higher education journalist, as well as a faculty member and leadership positions with institutions such as U.S. News and World Report, the College Board, Strata Education Network. You also host what I think is an incredibly insightful podcast, Higher Ed Spotlight, which is focused-- featured a lot of the panelists that we're going to have with us today. And in "The Career Arts," you're drawing on all that experience and the conversations that you've had to think about the skills and resources that young adults need to be successful in life. I'll say for the audience at home, I have read through my copy multiple times. If you'd like to get your own, it's available through Princeton University Press, and they have generously shared a discount code with viewers. So if you enter WILD30!, you can get 30% off your book when you purchase it there. Ben, welcome. I'd love just to start by hearing from you why you found it important to write this book now and who you think about the audience for this book being.

**WILDAVSKY:** Well, thank you so much for having me. I'm just delighted to be to be doing this again with Brookings. You know, you touched on this in your introduction, Catherine, which is we're in a funny

moment where there is sort of a paradox. There is, on the one hand, a record number of Americans now have four-year college degrees. The economic returns that accompany those degrees are close to an all-time high. And yet, Americans' confidence in higher education is at a new low. It was 36% in a recent Gallup poll. So, I really have been sort of wrestling with this, why there is such high skepticism, when I feel as though some of the the economic evidence that I'm aware of seems to point pretty clearly in one direction. And so this really led me to think about the combination of factors that go into making a successful career and why people may be concerned, but also why I think they can be reassured both about the value of degrees but also about some of the alternatives that are coming up if they're thoughtfully approached. And if we mix the ingredients together in the right way, I think we have very good reason to be hopeful.

**MEYER:** But I love the premise of this book, and I love how clearly you outline the various career parts — what, what exactly those skills are that people need. And I love that the first one is 'go to college,' because I think you and I both agree that college is going to be a place well-suited for setting students up for, like, a lot of success. But of course, as we talked about, there's public skepticism and students do face real cost to going to college. How should prospective students think about the higher education investment, and what are the structures of the higher education students should be taking advantage of when they think long-term how they're going to invest in their education?

**WILDAVSKY:** Well, I'm glad you said long-term because I found myself thinking, you know, this really is about-- it's not an accident that I, I call this, "Career Arts." That's the title of the book, you know, not the liberal arts. Although I love the liberal arts — you know, I was a comparative literature major back in the day — but I didn't call it the liberal arts. I didn't call it the vocational arts, although certainly, those kinds of targeted skills have their place. But I called it the career arts because it's really about people's desire for sort of satisfying work and professional success and economic success over a lifetime. And what I really ended up concluding is that there are really three major ingredients that I think go into this. And the one that we tend to associate with college degrees is broad education, and that really has to do with the transferable skills, the core skills that will help you not only in your first job, but it will help you navigate what are likely to be, for many people, as we all live longer, a series of career changes and job changes where some of those core liberal arts skills we think about — the ability to synthesize information, to communicate, to assess what's in front of you, and to make decisions based on changing circumstances — those are really important.

At the same time, we know absolutely the targeted skills are extremely important. Whether you're studying something like nursing or teaching or engineering or accounting, those are things that you really need. Computer coding, of course, is another, you know, commonly used example. And those are really important. Those are important for many jobs, but those skills tend to change quite often. They have what

people would call a short half-life. You know, the computer language I-- when I was a first-year college student, you know, back in the dark ages, you know, I took an intro to programming class, and I learned to program some stuff in basic. I'm not even sure if people were using that computer language by the time I graduated or a couple of years after. So things change quickly. So I think we have to approach skills as, yes, something that's essential, but something that we need to think about refreshing — people use the terms 'reskilling' and 'upskilling' — over your lifetime.

But there's a third element that is extremely important for long-term success, and that's what is called social capital. It's a sort of a sociology term, but it's really important because it really has to do with building and accessing networks — the kinds of personal networks that turn out to be extremely important for careers. And because that has to do with finding out about information from people that you know, and also, it has to do with, you know, somebody actually who will be joining us later, Aimée Eubanks Davis, says, "It's not just who you know, it's who knows you." So it's getting to build a professional network of people who have seen your ability — you perhaps you have, you know, a good work ethic or certain talents —and they can vouch for you. And that's a huge part of how those broad skills that I talked about, the targeted skills, those really get put into practice in a job market using professional networks. So you really need to combine those three now.

**MEYER:** Thinking about the long-term, I think that's really the theme of the book. As we pointed out, this is about long-term planning and long-term thinking throughout. As you said, a career, obviously one of the major sort of drivers of how students engage with training, higher education, and occupational choices, or employers themselves. What do we know from employers about how they think about these career paths? And then, maybe building on that, what's their role in supporting employee development?

**WILDAVSKY:** Well, look, part-- I mean, I am aware partly one of the things that I was struck by early in my research was some research done by a labor market analytics firm. It was then called Burning Glass Technology. It's now been rebranded as Lightcast. And they do really fascinating analysis using millions and millions of job records, looking at job listings showing what employers are looking for. And what they found is very high growth in jobs that they called, in a report a few years ago, they called these hybrid jobs. And these are jobs that sort of combine what you might call right-brain social skills and left-brain technical skills. And that-- they found in this report, they found much faster growth in those jobs than in other kinds of jobs. And if you-- for example, one of the examples they gave was, you know, if you have-- you're in an advertising job, but you also have data science skills — like there's a database program SQL — and with those combination of skills, you might make a salary of \$100,000 annually rather than the \$70,000 a year made by somebody who does the marketing or the advertising but does not have the data science skills. So employers are really

looking for this combination. That's where a lot of the fastest growth is, which is one reason why I think it's a mistake to be looking too narrowly at gathering, you know, whether it's in a degree program or in a non-degree program, gathering just the technical skills that you-- that are, that are needed for the jobs right now. It's really the broad mixture that helps you get ahead.

**MEYER:** You know, what — building on that — is the role of employers in supporting their employees' development. You know, particularly, if you, you know, if you hire someone and they come on board with technical skills, what can employers do to support this upskilling process throughout [inaudible] career? And do you have examples of places or corporations that are really doing this right?

**WILDAVSKY:** Absolutely. I mean, I do think that's very important, and frankly, that's, I think, one of the reasons why, you know, a lot of these things are still works in progress. You know, some of this change is going to be incremental. But when I actually, you know, the-- my final sort of takeaways in the book, the eight career arts which I discuss in the final chapter, one of them is take advantage of employer-funded education benefits because they're-- some of these have been around for a long time. They were not always structured in the best way. There's been a lot of realization that you need to structure them so employers, employees are not having to pay money upfront to take an extra class, to build a skill, and then get reimbursed later. That's a huge disincentive to even do it in the first place. Many more people are aware that you've got to give people the funds up front, give them, you know, access to classes, sometimes it's flexible work scheduling. One of the things Amazon has is a big program called Career Choice that has done a lot of important work on this, where a lot of frontline workers have access to classes. Ardine Williams, who was in charge of this for a long time, described those kinds of benefits as the new minimum wage. Because it's really, especially right now, we're in a very tight labor market, to recruit employees, to retain employees, you really need to show them that you're going to make it easy for them to invest in themselves by getting more education, by getting more skills. So, there is something that employers can do. And of course, there are some large, well-known places like Walmart that do that do the versions of this — McDonald's, of course; I mentioned Amazon.

It's also, in some cases, it's literally providing classroom space for frontline workers. So maybe you can get off a shift and go and take a class, and not with the expectation that you're going to put everything aside and go and get a four-year degree in some sort of, you know, small college town somewhere. That's not the reality for many people. You have a lot of working adults who are very interested in making progress, but they don't have time and money to do that kind of classic four-year route starting when they're 18. Maybe they'll take a class while they're working. Maybe they'll take an online class. Maybe they'll get to develop a specific skill that's in demand, will give them a raise, or perhaps get them a promotion. But what's really ideal

is that there's something called stackable credentials, which is when you take some of these sort of bite-sized short-term credentials that can be useful on their own terms. But you don't want to send people into a dead end where they just do one credential and maybe they get that one raise, and that's it. You want to try and get credentials that can be combined, that can be stacked so that eventually you can get a degree or something that's going to have longer lasting value.

**MEYER:** Yeah, that's, I think, that's so important and so important to impart on employers, you know, why this is the right thing to do. Both because it increases employee productivity, it's going to make employees happier, like you said. It's gonna attract high quality employees. But also, because it's the right thing to do. You know, it's the good thing to do to invest in your employees, even if it doesn't have an impact on your bottom line. I think it probably does, but, you know, even that aside.

**WILDAVSKY:** Yeah, I would consider it enlightened self-interest. You know, it really does, it is — I mean, I don't want to sound corny — but it is kind of a win-win. You need a better a better trained workforce. You need, especially in this tight job market, you need people to stick around. That's, that's really one reason why these these benefits just have a lot going for it.

**MEYER:** Yeah, absolutely. Well, thinking a little bit earlier, you know, we've touched on what folks can do to gain and reevaluate these skills once they're in the workforce. When we think about these, these skills that are going to work well for these hybrid jobs, these skills that can help individuals adapt, you know, what can colleges do and what should college students do to build those skills, you know, while they're in a program?

**WILDAVSKY:** Well, you know, while you're in college. I mean, I think, you know, in a way, there's two ways to answer that. The-- in the ideal world, which is, you know, I'm certainly-- I have plenty of criticisms of higher education, and things don't always work out that well among many, many other challenges. And we have very disappointing graduation rates, so a lot of students don't complete and get stuck with sort of debt and no degree, which is kind of the worst of both worlds. But if you're looking at students who are going through college and you're making progress, you know, in the best cases, you know, college can be sort of a one-stop shopping experience where you get the broad skills and you get the targeted skills. and you also may build networks. You may get that social capital. And, you know, one of the reasons— particularly in the U.S. college system where we don't specialize in the single subject as they do in some-- many other systems around the world when you're 17 or 18 — you'll say you want to be a lawyer or a doctor and you're still in our system, going to take a range of classes. You know, the general ed classes your first couple of years, and then the subject major. And what this means is that you should be developing some

of those the writing skills, the analysis skills, the critical thinking skills through a range of classes, but then you're also going to be specializing.

And of course, we have the the ivory tower stereotype of college. But, you know, most people are not spending four years sitting around a seminar table debating Plato — as much as that can be a great experience, and I'm not knocking it. But we have to remember, and I think this gets lost sometimes in this kind of false choice people present it as, sort of college, the ivory tower, versus going out and getting practical, real world work skills. But, you know, some of the most popular majors are all kinds of business majors, you know, whether that's accounting or finance or marketing, things like teaching, things like law enforcement, things like nursing, engineering, computer science — you know, the list goes on. So there are many, many people who will go to college and who will pick up this mixture of broad and targeted skills and networks as part of that experience.

But to answer your question in a second way, I do think that there are... This certainly does not work perfectly for everybody. And there's a lot of evidence, for example, that first-generation, lower-income students, college students, do not get as many — they report in surveys — they do not get the same kind of networking opportunities or opportunities to develop networks and to really be coached on those skills that they would like to get when they're in college. That's definitely an area for improvement. There's also a lot of evidence that various kinds of job-related experiences can be really useful for undergraduates. That can be part-time jobs; it can be internships, you know, ideally paid intern internships, because there are students who just don't have the luxury of taking an unpaid internship. But those are things that, of course, they give you the a taste of different career possibilities. Maybe it's what you're, what you're going to fall in love with, or what you're going to decide you're just never going to go near that kind of job in the future. But that gets you to see what your-- how your classroom studies translate into the kinds of jobs that are out there. So maybe you're studying literature, and you discover that maybe it's marketing or advertising has a real need for some of those skills. Or you're doing biology and you're doing kind of core science stuff, but you end up working in biotech, and you learn something about how these kinds of-- the manufacturing and the marketing process of certain products works.

There's just a lot of interest, I think, that students have in drawing connections between the academic work that they're doing and what they might do afterward. And I think that that does not undermine the mission of colleges. I think that ought to be part of their mission because most people go to college to get better jobs. That's this-- that's just the reality. And I think it doesn't mean you have to walk away from the core academics, but I think it means that colleges need to if they're trying to deliver better value — and

everybody's kind of skeptical about value — one of the things they can do is to make sure that more students get those experiences. Learning and earning during college is great.

**MEYER:** Yeah, I completely agree. And just to hammer home your point, just the idea that your out of classroom experiences really enrich your in-classroom experiences, and they can work together to make for sort of a multiplier of what you're learning in college.

**WILDAVSKY:** For sure.

**MEYER:** I'll close out. We had a question from the audience that wants to ask about, "Even earlier than college, if you had advice for high school students or high school counselors or parents advising their high school students, what should they be looking for as their sort of the next step that's going to best set them up for long-term success?"

**WILDAVSKY:** Well, I'm so glad that somebody asked that question because, of course, I would love this book to reach, you know, students, high school guidance counselors, parents — you know, people who are trying to gather, in pretty compact form, some of the information that students are going to need for the future. I think that, you know, there is the one, the one broad, you know, I suppose, piece of advice would just be to be aware of these long-term goals. You know that you can get very hung up on what's, what's the demand in the market, the job market, you know, this week or next month. But I think if you really try to bear in mind this idea of long-term navigation skills and networks, as well as, you know, of course, developing your interests, I think that's great.

What I do worry about is, you know, there is a lot of interest in-- you know, people sometimes talk a little bit nostalgically about, you know, going back to the days of more voc ed options for high school students, and we've moved away from that. I'm really worried about that, because the reality is the history of some of that has been really funneling students into less desirable, basically various kinds of subfields with less, with less good job prospects, with less good income prospects. Not that there's anything wrong with these. And many of these fields, of course, like auto mechanics, have to do like-- you have all kinds of technology and stuff. There's definitely a lot; those can be rich careers. But I think that when you look at the fact that a lot of lower-income students, a lot of black and Latino students are disproportionately funneled into those. I think there is a kind of romanticization of the low-tech stuff that really worries me. And that's not because everybody has to go to a traditional four-year college, but I think that it's really good for people to be college-ready so that they have their options open. Whether it's community college, you know, which can be a great option for many people; whether it is one of the many, many public relatively open-access institutions out there; or whether it's one of the places that, you know, get all the news attention, all the elites — whether it's, you know, the Ivies or the state flagships — there's a lot of different ways to go to college. And I think



that one thing I would love is for just high school students to understand that it doesn't have to be four years. As I said, four years in an ivory tower campus in the middle of nowhere, that can be great for many people, but that is not what college has to be. So I think being aware of options and being aware of the long-term mixture of broad and targeted skills and networks is really what high school students need to be starting to think about.

**MEYER:** Yeah, I love that. You know, I'm struck by the statistic that was in the Council of Economic Advisors recent report, that when you think about, like, if you were asked what's a stereotypical college student, most people would think about somebody right out of high school going to a four-year college, living on campus. That's 13% of college students. You know, the rest of the college students are doing college in a different, more flexible way at a different point in their lives. We need to build a higher education system that's working for that vast majority of college students. And I love your call to keep options open. You know, I think if I, if I had to summarize "The Career Arts," it's keep options open and keep yourself flexible for whatever might come your way. I think that's a great note to end on for our little fireside, not by the fireside, chat. Ben, thank you so much for writing the book and speaking with me.

**WILDAVSKY:** Thank you, Katharine. Thank you, Katharine.

**MEYER:** Thank you. I'm going to switch now to hand over the reins to Goldie Blumenstyk, who is a senior writer with the Chronicle of Higher Education. She's going to be moderating our panel. I'll also introduce our panelists who are going to be joining us today as they start coming online. We'll be joined by Anthony Carnevale, who's a research professor and director of the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, and Aimée Eubanks Davis, who is the founder and CEO of Braven, who Ben gave a shout-out to you before. Thank you all for joining us, and thank you, Goldie, for taking the lead in moderating tonight.

**BLUMENSTYK:** Hey, thanks, Katharine. That was a great conversation that you and Ben had. I found myself writing a few notes here, particularly about this whole question about the public confidence of higher education and public perceptions. I want to start with that conversation, but I thought I would, I would just note The Chronicle's also been doing a lot of interesting polling on this. And one that we found is that actually, people who graduated from college do feel more positive about higher ed than those who didn't. But it tends-- the people who are-- who tend to be more positive are those who are in better paying positions, better paying jobs, and also who don't have as much student debt. So I think even-- I think we have to think about this in that context as well. Hey, Aimée, Tony, glad to have you guys join us. I want to talk about this bit right now with all the dunking that's actually going on about higher education right now. Tony, starting with

you — but I'd maybe like to hear from all of you — how much of this is, you know, sort of you think sincere concern, questioning about the value of college, and how much of it is political posturing?

**CARNEVALE:** Most of it is half-truth, which in some cases is worse than a lie. President Biden talks about jobs for high school graduates who will make \$130,000 a year. Even with the infrastructure law, which is gonna build a lot of stuff, that's less than 1% of all the jobs in the American economy. So what we have here is that both parties are heavily invested in working-class votes, especially male working-class votes. If you're a Democrat and you're going to maintain the blue wall, the northern tier of states. and hold the White House, and maybe move on the House, maybe not the Senate, but you're going to have to get working-class votes in those states. If not, you lose. In the case of the Republicans, they have full command over the white working class in America. And if you're going to retain them, you're not going to sell them education. You're not going to sell, you're not going to sell any adult worker education unless it's for their children. They know, through experience, that a job is the best trainer. So if you're running for office, you sell jobs to grownups. You sell education to their children. You only sell training —which you couldn't sell at all until the last few years, maybe that's loosened up a bit — unless it came with a job. So we've now shifted dramatically politically. Both parties are in favor of industrial policy, making America the arsenal of democracy again, which is up now in the news. And we're going to build a lot of factories to make bullets and bombs. Well, if you want--

**BLUMENSTYK:** --And chips.

**CARNEVALE:** [Inaudible], you'll take the training. Otherwise, you'd rather not.

**BLUMENSTYK:** Well, bullets, bombs, and chips, right? And green, green energy, and all the other things as well. Anyone else have such an optimistic view about American politics as Tony? I mean, do the rest of you think he's right, that it's really [inaudible]. Well, Ben, I was sort of wondering if that was one of the reasons you wrote the book. Is it you were concerned that it was more political posturing out there?

**WILDAVSKY:** Well, I am concerned about political posturing. I mean, that's the part-- I guess I would like to be a little more optimistic than Tony about the possibilities of making the case for education just because we have such a great story to tell in our country, it seems to me. Not that we're perfect, and I have been quite critical of higher education in all kinds of respects in the past. But when I, when I see the level of sort of criticism that I think is just-- it doesn't, it doesn't make sense because it's not gonna be good for people to get, to get ahead. I would like to think that, you know, we talk about, in 1970, you know, half of high school students went on to some form of post-secondary education, whether four-year or high school, college or community colleges. It-- by a few years ago, had gotten to almost 70%. And that happened, did not, did not undermine degree value in terms of the economic returns, degree value grew. So, even though

people thought the market might be flooded with degrees, that's really an amazing social phenomenon. You know, in 60-70 years, to see way more people going to college, and not as many graduating as we'd like, but more graduating, more going, and the economic benefits staying very, very high and and stable in the last 15 or so years — that's an incredible success story. So when people talk about the sort of terrible failures of to college, I just don't see it.

**BLUMENSTYK:** Yeah. Aimée, you obviously work at Braven, you believe in the four year-- the value of the bachelor's degree. Your programs are focused on-- these programs about building social capital our focused at four-year institutions. Do you think-- what do you make of this notion? Is it political posturing? Is there something else? What do you think? What are the currents out there that you see?

**DAVIS:** Yeah. I mean, I always take this through the lens of students because it's mainly the people I end up engaged in, and my team ends up engaging with a lot. And the students who we work with are mainly Pell-eligible students, often first in their families to go to college, identifying as black or brown —so underrepresented minorities in terms of the professional workforce. And what I continue to hear from them is that making sure that they can come out of college and truly earn a strong living that's not just a job, but honestly, a career over time, is not only important to them, but it's important to their families. It's why so many of their families-- and they have done everything right for usually a couple decades to get them there. And so, it's so interesting because whether we're working in Georgia at Spelman College, or in a place like Rutgers Newark in Newark, or out in the Bay Area, I will say, from a politics standpoint, we see all kinds of students if I had to guess in terms of where they might land in terms of their viewpoints. But what is very common about all of them is how important it is to believe that through the doors of education will come the American dream for them. And so, I don't know--they're also voters, of course, over time. And I think what people want to know is that America works and that it works like it's supposed to work, which is supposed to be a place where no matter where you come from, your ending point can be different.

But what I will also say is that, you know, I am concerned that a certain group of students are, at moments in the K-12 sector, which is where I'm coming from, encouraged not to be thinking about higher education. And I'm not going to say that every single person should go to college, etc., etc. But I will say, the moment you see only certain young people who happen to identify as black, brown, and low-income being encouraged only through certain pathways that are not necessarily those through higher education, I am deeply concerned. Because what we know in this country is that you are five times more likely to end up breaking into the American middle class over time and staying there if you actually have a bachelor's degree.

**BLUMENSTYK:** You know, Katharine, I don't know if you wanted to add, but maybe you might want to jump in on this next one. One of the interesting phenomenon I think we've seen over the last three to five

years is this movement for more skills-based hiring. We have organizations that are promoting this notion of this ever-fresh crush the paper ceiling idea. And it's a very, I think, a very, very-- the movement is very oriented towards increasing opportunity for people who didn't necessarily go to a four-year college in particular, but people who still might have the right skills to get a job, and that people are trying to promote this as an alternative pathway or a different way to economic opportunity in the country. But I guess I'm wondering what is-- is that a good arg-- does the argument make sense? Is that, is that really an economic opportunity argument or is that something else going on there?

**MEYER:** I would love to hear from Ben on this about some of the work you've done on what-- who people actually hire. But I'll, I'll just step into say that, you know, colleges impart real skills, and we know that college graduates have overwhelmingly better outcomes on a suite of measures. They earn higher wages; they have greater employment stability. We had a report that came out through Brookings recently on life expectancy for people who have a bachelor's degree versus those who don't on a whole suite of metrics, again, we know that going to school and earning a degree really pays off, and that comes through some of the concrete skills that people are developing. That being said, completing the credential and getting that certificate is a way to signal to employers and increases the efficiency of the job match rate. It is more efficient to look and see that somebody has a certificate of completion from a post-secondary institution that stamps their attainment of those skills, then trying to do, you know, more in-depth analyses of what skills they actually have on the different metrics you're hiring for.

**BLUMENSTYK:** Ben, did you wanna talk about [inaudible]? I mean, the skill-- some of the myths about skills-based hiring, I think it's a-- I noticed it's a big theme in your book.

**WILDAVSKY:** It is a theme, and I would love to hear from Aimée and Tony about this too. But look, I have I have mixed feelings in the sense that, you know, there are some really thoughtful, very well-meaning people and organizations who are involved in this campaign to open up alternatives. And I absolutely think if you do the alternatives and you look for ways to identify the higher quality alternatives, and if you look for ways to combine them into credentials with a longer value, I'm all for it. I think the danger, and what I've observed is that people get a little bit, I think, I don't, I don't want to say they get carried away, but they go beyond what the evidence shows to be excessively negative about degrees, and to not really look too much about what I consider a very weak evidence base for many of the alternative short-term career-oriented credentials. And there is what economists call revealed preferences, which basically sort of translates into "Look at what I do, not what I say."

So there was a recent study from LinkedIn about five or six weeks ago that found a massive increase in job listings. It's sort of flavor of the month, you know, and recently it's very fashionable to say we're listing

a job, we're dropping degree requirements. Many state governments have done this — just Minnesota just the other day — a lot of large employers are doing it. It's viewed as if just by saying you're dropping the degree requirements, you're making a stand for equity and justice. But this LinkedIn study of, you know, a huge number of LinkedIn job listings found in several major sectors, maybe a 250% increase in the last three years, a very short time period, in job listings with no degree requirements. So then you might say, "Okay, well, that means this movement is on a roll," and maybe it is. But they also showed how many actual hires were made of people without degrees. And in several major fields, it was about 3%. So it's that 250% versus 3%. It's a total disconnect. And that's an illustration of this phenomenon reveal preferences.

Now, I think the best-- you can certainly say "Maybe this will change in 20 years. Maybe there'll be some really robust analysis and data showing that these short-term pathways were not dead ends, that they really turned out to have great long-term outcomes," but right now, that evidence, I haven't seen it. So I just really am concerned. I mean-- and Tony has been very-- expressed this very thoughtfully, that this whole danger that we're taking groups that already suffer a lot of disadvantages, including in our education system, and essentially say, "Oh, you're okay the way you are. You have lots of skills. Degrees are just a signal. They don't really mean you learned anything, it's just a piece of paper. Let's tear the paper ceiling and let's just give those people great opportunities." But what if the-- what if the real deficit is the deficit of human capital, it's the deficit of education? And you need better education and better opportunities to really address the problem, as opposed to suggesting that somehow it's kind of like those bureaucrats are just putting up those degree requirements for no good reason, and let's get those out of the way. I think that it's a fundamental misunderstanding of the core problem and what we need to do to fix it.

**BLUMENSTYK:** Tony, what do you think?

**CARNEVALE:** This is one of the things that I wish were true. It would be nice if, in fact, we had some systemic way to find people who really deserved the job but don't have what are post-secondary credentials, which is what drives labor markets now. But unless American labor markets become very, very tight and employers are forced to do that, there's not going to be much of it. One of the two trends in American economic history, or two of the most important ones since the mid-1980s, is the increasing value of educational attainment through the VA, and graduate school, and so on. That-- incidentally, access to that now accounts for more than 70% of the growth in earnings inequality now, that is whether you have it or or whether you don't. And it means we're doing something that's very un-American, and that is, we're allowing credentialism to run American society. That's an un-American idea; that is you gotta have a piece of paper to sell a cake. Whereas in Germany, you do have to have a piece of paper sell a cake. You got to have been a

baking apprentice, In America, if you can make the cake and people like it, you can sell it. Well, that's less and less true. Now, you've got to have a piece of paper.

The other thing that's very important in this is it's not just the credentials level, the far more powerful trend than the increase in the value of post-secondary degrees, certificates, industry-based certifications attached to those is — the far more important and powerful trend — is the variation in earnings returns by program of study. We're increasingly living in an economy where what you take determines what you make. It's not just about going to college; it's what you choose when you do. And that's disturbing to people in higher education. It's not flattering to the humanities. On the other hand, 70% of college degrees are either in STEM fields, business, education. and then lower-wage degrees in counseling. and so on. So, the specific education that goes with your general course requirements is more and more what colleges and choices for students going to colleges--.

**BLUMENSTYK:** Doesn't that also sort of depend on when you measure? Because I think if you're measuring within 3 to 5 years, it might be more true than if you're measuring over 25 years. And I mean, obviously, not everybody can afford to take that measurement at 25 years, but some of that variation in degrees is really--.

**CARNEVALE:** In the College Scorecard data, in the initial years, the VAs don't outperform a lot of the AAs. The VAs catch up, yes. But in the end, it comes down to field of study. Now, there are a lot of people with very general degrees in literature and so on and so forth who make their way. American employers have no issue with hiring people based on their potential simply because they have a college degree. But what's happened not just in America, but in the world, it is the specific piece of the education that mostly drives the earnings.

**BLUMENSTYK:** By the way, I should have said this at the outcome here. We really want folks on the webinar to be sure to submit their questions as well to this. If you have questions for the panelists and-- or me, you can do that by Twitter at BrookingsGov with the hashtag 'TheCareerArts,' or email [event@brookings.edu](mailto:event@brookings.edu), just to keep the, keep the questions coming in. But I want to kind of go back to this idea of what the curriculum is because, Aimée, as you know and other people know, there's the curriculum, and then there's the hidden curriculum. They're the other part of what happens in higher education. And how, how real is the hidden curriculum, and how important is that? And what do people need to understand about that?

**DAVIS:** Yeah, there are three parts. I'm actually also gonna address the question that I think that's one of the questions that's come in about H.R. people, given, I guess, that's how I would've been termed in my, my role before the one that I have now, in terms of hiring. But when I think about the curriculum and the

content that's taught in higher ed — you know, first, as a former teacher for many, many years — the hidden curriculum that I think people don't talk about is that if you're from a higher income family, in your family, every day, you are learning certain skills that are, in my opinion, pretty hard skills around: How do you network with people? How do you build your own resumé to be a person who people are going to want to hire? And it might not seem like that's happening, but it happens every day in this country, in living rooms and at kitchen tables, where there is a coaching — I'm doing it with my own three children — coaching that's going on to make sure that when it's time for them to fly, that they're able to fly.

And I think people just really take for granted how much networks actually drive where you land. And so, basically, if you submit a network-- I mean, a resumé or LinkedIn profile cold to a job, you have a one-in-250 shot of anybody really looking at it. Whereas if you know someone in the place and there's a warm lead that goes in, that shrinks to like one to 15. For the group of students we work within the world of Braven, they don't know anyone in the professional workforce, so they're a massive disadvantage. And so I think there's this hidden curriculum that people never talk about, called a curriculum that's based on income in terms of what your families earn. And then, therefore, as the-- one of the rappers says, you know, "Your net worth is your network. Your network is your net worth," and it is really, really true. And I think that people don't think about that. That's the first thing in terms of the hidden curriculum.

The second is, as a mom of three children, the oldest who is 15, and as an educator, I think people don't think about how college, in and of itself, is a maturation point for young people. Literally, where you get to learn how to go and live, if you can, with other people, or even if that's commuting in and to work in project teams, etc., etc. I think people don't often think about at what age — not all because I know it's changing in terms of the demographic and who's going back to college — but you still have a lot of young people who are going to college at 18. And I have to say I think most employers are not necessarily looking to have a bunch of 18-year-olds, to be honest, working for them every day. where they're just going to have to reconstruct that environment, literally, from a developmental standpoint. And I say every day, like, I'm looking forward to my three young people going off to college. I want to see them also mature in a really concrete way.

And the final thing I'll say, and this is actually not connected to the curriculum, but to a really good question about hiring and HR people, what people do not know — and this is as someone who ran a huge people operation, so the HR shop — is that HR people actually don't make the decision on who get hired. It's actually hiring managers. And this goes back to my network piece. Often people hire people who look somewhat similar to them. And so, basically, it is very natural for someone to look at the name of a school where someone might have gone, etc., etc., and say, "Oh, this person is kind of like me. They might be good on my team." And I think people don't give enough thought to-- HR only takes you part of the way. Ultimately,

who makes that hire is an actual hiring manager. And again, I think people like to think that they're going to build a team of people that are somewhat similar, like-minded to them for all different kinds of reasons.

**BLUMENSTYK:** And I'm just thinking back on what Tony was talking about before as well in this hiring context. It's like, you'd like to think people could be hiring for skills, but we really don't have a way to do that now. It's not like AI-- we don't have a magic AI machine that's going to help, help employers. You know, there are there are hiring systems that look for keywords in resumes, but they don't necessarily tell you that a person has has the exact skills.

So I want to think a little bit about practices and policies, and we'll start with practices first here. You know, Ben talked a little bit about in his career or the ways that students can kind of — and students of all ages I think very importantly, not just 18 year olds — students can kind of maximize this experience. But what about, what about the institutions themselves, the colleges? What should colleges be doing more of right now to ensure that students are, you know, getting the kind of experiences that they'll need to have opportunity? Katharine, thoughts? Yeah.

**MEYER:** Yeah, I'll jump in to say that whatever the age of the student that the college is serving, we need institutions to be incredibly agile and to offer programs that work for where students are. And so oftentimes that's gonna take the form of being creative with offering classes, you know, more in the evenings. We see that a lot when-- you know, here in D.C., we have a lot of students who are enrolled in programs while they're working full-time. And so, a lot of the colleges will offer classes in the evening, on the weekends to find ways to do longer stretches of shorter-- you know, longer stretches of time over a shorter number of days. Find a way to craft programs that are going to be flexible that enable students to have these out of classroom experiences as well, whether that's continuing on in their career or getting a chance to do internships. And then I'd make the push for, again, as I mentioned earlier, really paid internships. Making these opportunities-- offering the chance that students who don't come from a background where they can just not get paid for six months, have a chance to go and do that internship. It's incredibly important. It's going to pay off for those students. And it's a huge barrier to students getting really rich opportunities to develop skills, to build that social capital network.

**BLUMENSTYK:** Aimée, I had the opportunity to moderate a couple of panels at the Braven Summit last week in Chicago. Internships came up a lot and, you know, obviously a great opportunity and a great way for students to learn about careers and a way for employers to learn about students. But we also talked a lot about the challenges of these, you know, internships. It's not so easy, right?

**DAVIS:** No, it really is not that easy at all. And in our case [inaudible], the young people who we have the privilege of working with, many of them actually don't really understand what an internship is even



and what they should be looking for in that experience. And then making sure, as Katharine said, paid, but then also high quality as well. The other thing is, is that a lot of internships in this country they're-- sometimes people will say to me, "Oh. Well, there just must not be enough internships. I'm like, "No, I think there are enough internships to go around." However, internships don't get posted quite in the same way like other jobs often get posted. And so, again, it really comes down to who you know or, honestly, who knows you. That matters if you get to find out about some internship that's happening at some company and/or if you, again, have family members, who can either themselves or have friends who can create an internship. A number of people who reach out to me to create internships for their young people who are not necessarily in the Braven Fellow demographic is very interesting to me all of the time. People are always trying to figure out how to give their young people more professional experience.

So, that said, one thing that I would say practically colleges can do, and one thing that we see in the world of Braven, and because it is a course inside of higher education institutions, we actually make students apply for internships while they're in the course. And we actually do try to stock the pond for them where those are like real-life internships. Now, they're going to have to get hired, hiring managers are going to have to want them, etc. But let's say there's, you know, 100 students in a course. Thirty-five percent of them will actually have the internship locked before the end of the course. And usually, it's an internship that they had never thought about and a place that they had never thought about or even sometimes even heard about. And so one thing that I'm realizing is that how much colleges could actually do, and universities can do, to make sure that students truly have the time and the space as a part of their journey through college to be whatever major they want to be, because they're adults, they should make their own decisions. Not that Tony is not absolutely right— there are certain majors that are absolutely stronger currency-wise in the market. And that said that there are ways to help students really think about how do you kickstart yourself into an internship and honestly get it while you're still in undergrad and still, you know, in some form of a course.

The second thing I will say on the internship front that I've absolutely said to companies is that there are moments where internships are out there for students from lower-income backgrounds. But those internships, when you get under the hood, even if it's a college-going student, are more on the charity line than they are the real access to a job. And there are other internships that, if you have an internship as a junior in college and you do well in that internship, you get an early offer. And so, the other thing I'd say is on the employer side, is really making sure employers are-- I always say this: can we have an 'and' strategy where you recruited your top 12 favorite schools, and you also take a strong look at the commuter state schools that are not gonna have career services department that are gonna be able to automatically deliver

a bunch of students to you and also to the HBCUs. So the internship is critical in terms of building out that network and honestly giving young people a real career experience.

**CARNEVALE:** But this is a systemic problem in American education. That is a good reason. Beginning in 1983 with the Nation at Risk report, which triggered 40 years of education reform, which finally arrived in higher ed and is still going. The Nation at Risk report, the thing that it did with that was essential was it kicked voc ed out of the curriculum, vocational education. The reason it did so, because I worked on the Hill in those days, was, first of all, it didn't work. I mean, it-- kids who got voc ed weren't doing — and didn't go to college — weren't doing any better than kids who didn't get voc ed and didn't go to college. [Inaudible] do work. The second thing, though, was the real reason it took-- it got eliminated, run out of town on a rail, really, was pretty nasty. The real reason was it was tracking by race, class, and gender.

And so, we've built the K-12 system that is purely academic and ends with algebra two, or whatever you can substitute for that. And then, so that shifts all the vocational, professional, whatever you want to call it, preparation into the post-secondary system. And that's really the last wave of it, at least the recent one, is about including-- trying to find a way to get labor markets into the education system. In the case of K-12, it's career and technical education, which is this little hostage inside a very academic K-12 system, although it's a billion for-- in federal money, eight billion billion in state money. It's not inconsequential, but it's relatively small. And then the whole issue shifts into the post-secondary system, which is why the Congress is going to pass a post-secondary training bill sometime in the next two years. So there is a long-haul movement, and it's a sens-- it's a very sensitive subject about how we're gonna get labor markets into the K-16 education system.

**WILDAVSKY:** I would just jump in quickly to say there are some very interesting combinations because I love the both end right? A place like University of Texas is trying to get micro-credentials built into their system. It's still early days with some foundation support, but essentially they're not trying to say, "Go and get this targeted job credential instead of college." They're trying to say, "Maybe you're in a major that doesn't typically lead to strong earnings right out of college, but you can also get this very targeted skill." And as a micro credential, and by definition, those things can be replenished and changed over time to meet the job market demand. So, that may not be exactly where Tony is going, but it seems to me there are ways in which higher ed — and higher ed it's hurting, right, hurting for enrollment. There's a lot of, there's a lot of opportunities for serving everybody more effectively, and particularly older students, all kinds of disadvantaged students more effectively. And I think some of these blends the targeted along the credentials or the micro-credentials, along with degrees, could help the job market, and it could also help the student's prospects.

**CARNEVALE:** The big, the big mover in this, which is a big change in higher education, is training Pell, or short-term Pell, or whatever you want to call it — it has different names — and that's gonna pass. The only thing that's stopping it is people can't figure-- people can't agree on the Senate on what to do with for-profit colleges.

**BLUMENSTYK:** Well, and also, and also, all other [inaudible] also how to handle the quality, the quality question for all these other training providers that might enter the mix when short, when short-- if short-term Pell becomes approved.

**CARNEVALE:** The administration has stolen a march on the Congress and figured that out. The administration, as of a month ago, there are regulatory standards on the books that says any program funded by federal money, any training program, has to lead to a job that pays at least 25K, Now, I think that's a low number. I'd go for 35. But the-- in the end, the regulatory structure is already there. That is, we are going to have a universal training grant in America in post-secondary education, something that is my-- Bob Rice fought like hell for that and could never get the-- the education department has always hated it because it means they have to share pile money with the, the labor department, although, and in the end, that the worry they have is it will constrain their ability to raise the maximum Pell grant, which is increasingly irrelevant, I think.

**BLUMENSTYK:** So that's a great segway to the questions. I was gonna ask all of you about the policy thing. Obviously, short-term Pell is a very highly debated issue right here in Washington right now. I'm, I'm not convinced too many things, or anything is going to get through this Congress or the next one. So I'm not as optimistic as Tony that we're going to actually have a short-term Pell regimen out there any time soon. But, you know, obviously, having federal funds available for students to be able to go to get training that's not just through a traditional two-year college or a four-year college isn't-- could be a really interesting wrinkle on the environment. Katharine, I'm thinking you study these issues more broadly as well. I'm wondering about some of the other policy barriers and some of the policy challenges here that really kind of throw up obstacles in the workforce. Tony kind of alluded to the fact that we've had a workforce system and an education department system we have. That happens at the state level, even more so at the federal level. Where do you see some of the concerns, some of the challenges at the policy front where you think we might need to get some-- address some of these issues that could sort of help us make opportunity more available to more people?

**MEYER:** That's right. I will, I will say, if anything gets through the current Congress, short-term Pell, I think, has the greatest chance. I'll put my optimism level somewhere between Tony and Goldie. I do agree, it's one of those things that we do see bipartisan support for. And it is this question of how do we balance

access and accountability. You know, this point that Tony made around how the gainful employment regulations are going into effect for any sort of federally financed program, or any program that's receiving federal financial aid, is really important. You know, what is the metric by which we are measuring a program? And as those programs get shorter and more flexible, which I think we all agree students need and employers want, we have to temper our expectations about what the sort of short-term returns on those credentials are going to be. It was not clear that somebody going through a short-term program is going to automatically make a measurable amount more than the average high school graduate over terms of what you're gonna measure it. Hopefully, what that is doing is setting them up on a pathway that, again, they could stack that credential, that they could go back to school on, that they're prepared to go and engage with the higher education sector when it makes sense. What we don't want dinosaur of accountability tempering down the availability of those programs because they're not showing us immediate response. So, I think that's one thing, is thinking through how do we hold programs accountable that are going to access federal funds, but also making sure that we have reasonable expectations for what one specific program can do on its own, as opposed to within the broader ecosystem of higher education.

**BLUMENSTYK:** One of the challenges I keep wondering about, as I think about all these opportunities that are out there — you may have some thoughts on this, or Ben, from your research as well — it's like there's no way to navigate this system, really. I mean, a young person or a mid-career adult, I mean, there's so many options out there, but there's really nothing at the policy level that supports any kind of real advising for this. I've written some stories about this over the years. I know other people have sort of lamented this. But it's like there's no-- you can't go get a federal grant to hire an adviser that's gonna really help you decide if you wanna — should you take a move, should you take a short-term training program, should you join a union program, should you go to community college? Any-- is it even feasible to kind of have something like that? And what, what happens, what happens to students when we leave them with so little ability to kind of navigate this incredibly more sophisticated system than there was a few years ago?

**MEYER:** Just to say-- just to jump in, that I think so important in this is finding the trusted source for a particular prospective student. You know, when we're thinking about high school students, they have access to adults in their lives who has maybe varying experience with higher education, but they have trusted adults who can hopefully provide them information. We can talk about increasing high school counselors and the importance of doing that. But you're right, when someone is an adult, they don't have an obvious person to go to, because I think the best things are going to be partnering with trusted voices, whether that is working with military to communicate to the service members who are departing their service and thinking about the next step, you know, whatever that trusted voice is.

**BLUMENSTYK:** And [inaudible] number I've seen on this is \$40 billion. That is an estimate of what it would cost us. We have no career counseling system in America; we're bereft. So, we started from scratch. And the number I've seen is — which tells me it's not going to happen anytime soon — is \$40 billion.

**CARNEVALE:** Yeah, but 40 bi-- I don't know. You know, we-- there are proposals out there, we spent a lot of \$40 billion things

**BLUMENSTYK:** A lot of \$40 billion.

**WILDAVSKY:** It seems to me-- and look the natural role, I mean, it partly depends on what you think is realistic and desirable for the federal government to do, something like, you know, it's still evolving, it's still imperfect, but the College Scorecard information, reliable data seems like a logical and reasonable role for the feds or perhaps also for state governments. Something like navigation assistance, which I think is absolutely increasingly recognized, is a core challenge, you know, for traditional age students, for adult students. That, to me, seems like something where institutions could really do a lot more. And there's much more recognition, and I'd love to know what Aimée thinks, but I think particularly first-gen college students, a lot of the things that're some of the very basic things that we-- often get used as examples, professors don't have to reinvent themselves as job trainers, but using even a term like 'office hours' is not always widely understood. That might mean getting people to change terms, or it may just mean having some more robust, hands-on, meaningful coaching and training sessions, which may mean having a budget and staff that can do that so that you have more students than the 62% current, full ti-- first-time, full-time students who graduate from the same school six years later. That's terribly low, and the numbers are much worse for black and Latino students, for low-income students. I would not say that coaching and navigation is going to solve that completely, but you'd be doing a huge service if you move that by five percentage points, 10 percentage points up. That would really be a really-- it would be good for the individuals, and it would be really good for the sort of human capital of the country.

**BLUMENSTYK:** If that's already for the students already in the system, though, Ben, you've got-- that's talking about the students who've already found a way to college or maybe to something else. I'm even wondering about the people who don't — you know, young students and mid-career students — who don't really know where to start. And, I mean, I guess I want to ask you, do you think, I mean, is information enough, or do students need something a little bit more? I mean, and not because, not because some bulk of the students just because the opportunities are just so vast.

**DAVIS:** Yeah, no, I mean, I think, again, like, without it being baked in somehow into various different educational systems — whether that's high school, whether some form of a course that allows you to explore college and career — it is just really hard to get done. And this is someone who has taught in

public schools, in real constrained public school systems. There's just, there's just not the dollars. So, you do have to figure out how can you use existing systems in high schools, and probably teachers or a teacher to then teach something that allows young people to really think about college and career within the confines of a high school day. And I've seen that through an organization called One Goal.

I'll also say on the higher ed side, what I see-- and Ben is right, like I do think we have to be more creative and I think colleges can be far more creative than maybe some of them are being at the moment, in terms of professors really thinking about having cohorts of students that they are really helping to think through what might come next, which is also graduate school in some cases, and professors love when their students decide to become a professor after them. And so graduate school is a real option too. And for black and brown students, more advanced degrees actually can really help as well.

And that said, there is a massive difference in this country between what well-resourced schools can do in terms of counseling and what under-resourced schools can do. So, for example, at University of Chicago, 7,000 amazing students, mainly from the top quartile earning families, a \$10 billion endowment. Meredith Daw's incredible, who runs their career advanced team. Her budget must be \$14 million or so. She has 40 full time people on her team, another hundred professors, to Ben's point, that advise students one-to-one in terms of what they might do next. We're on our way into a partnership — and I know you got to meet him briefly, Goldie — with Dr. Tony Allen from Delaware State University. Six thousand students at the public HBCU, you know, mainly from the bottom quartile families and-- income-wise. And there are two and a half people who are supposed to work in career services every day. I mean, you just can't compete with that. And so, I do hope that the federal government really thinks about how do you allow school to use resources, and hopefully more resources over time, to apply not towards access only or success only, but also what comes after in terms of economic mobility through jobs and graduate school, and really being able to have some additional dollars to spend in those areas.

**CARNEVALE:** But why do we[inaudible]? Why would any college, any college, including Georgetown, where I am, why would Georgetown have counselors that tell Georgetown students that accounting is the most lucrative major at Georgetown and it's not classics? What ha-- how would the faculty senate deal with that?

**BLUMENSTYK:** Right. That's where we get to the trusted advisor, right? You need somebody who's not a self-interested adviser. And I'm also worried that the person who's deciding college or not, and someone's going to tell them that this is the best way to go through it here. I wonder-- we're getting kind of-- we're winding towards the end here, and I want to make sure folks who have questions make sure that they can send them in. Be sure to send it to-- you can still do it at Twitter @BrookingsGov-- BrookingsGov, with

hashtag TheCareerArts, or send it right to events@brookings.edu. You know, Katharine and Ben sort of got into this a little bit in their fireside chat without a fire, but I also want to-- I'd like to bring Aimée and Tony in on this question as well, because society, society's expecting a lot out of colleges these days to be sort of the vehicles for social mobility, but I think there are other players in the social contract who really have a responsibility here too. And I guess I want to circle back a little bit to what, what's reasonable to expect from employers, maybe from unions, other kinds of institutions in our society to kind of help make sure that-- you know, because really colleges can't do everything right? Aimée, thoughts on that?

**DAVIS:** They absolutely cannot do everything. And on the employer side, it's super important. And I know there continues to be a question in the world of HR. So, again, I ran a big people team. I know how people teams work. Without a doubt, there is more that we always can do to train people who are recruiting and doing some of the selection of candidates. And ultimately, though, as a person who's done recruitment myself for hiring managers at one point, you are taking what that person also views as what they believe are the requirements for the job. So then, you can actually throw in some different candidates, etc., and push more in different ways. But ultimately, that person makes the decision, and that's where I see the real opportunity actually in the world of employers. It's one, I think, people better understanding that different employers actually operate differently as well. And what we've seen in the world of Braven is, when you get employers to actually have their talent coaching teams of five to eight students when they're in their Braven experienced, what that does is, if that person is going to be a hiring manager all of a sudden in the next three to five years, or sometimes much less than that, you actually have a real shot at helping to shape how hiring managers think about who their candidate pool maybe should be.

And so, that said, I think if you don't create solutions for employers to do that easily, and we hear that in the world of Braven all the time, it's really easy for people at different for-profits, nonprofits, and the government to coach at Braven. And it's because we created a turnkey solution in terms of how do you get that person prepared to actually have this cohort of students that they're actually leading and managing through the lens of diversity, but also doing professional mentorship in my interviewing. And I do think companies, because they're under pressure, in many cases around their bottom line, will make this one of the first things to flip and/or because recruitment budgets get, you know, they basically get-- they get taken away very fast if things get tight. And so people then revert back to what they've always done, which is their own networks. And the network effect is real. So there's a huge role that I know that employers can play, but I also think we have to figure out where to-- how to meet them where they are as well.

**BLUMENSTYK:** Yeah, actually, that's very similar to a question that did just come in: "How can we get HR to look beyond the credentials?" What [inaudible], you know-- because we don't really have good--

we have these applicant tracking systems that do some of this work, but I still don't know that they have a way to, like, look through the screen. But Tony, is there a way that employers could do, could do more either in the hiring or maybe even in the sort of developing their ecosystem?

**CARNEVALE:** I mean, one thing that I remember is due power. That is, if you start hiring people because you like them, and if you make an advertisement that shows what the skills are supposed to be and the skills [inaudible]. Lawyers are involved in this, that is hiring is a legal act. So that's always been a problem for employers. They have to be careful. And then, I think employer involvement, you get-- employers get involved either because they want to do community service, which a lot of them do. If your banks and insurance companies always have — Chase Bank, a big one now — so they have an interest in the community. And then there's the hope — and I think there is a hope here — that the labor market may get so tight because we're both, both parties are anti-immigrant now. So we're not bringing people in, and birthrates are way down in America. The labor force is not, it's not-- it's growing very slowly, if at all. It may be that there'll be so much scarcity. Now, one thing is you turn to technology, or you try to use H-1B visas and go overseas.

But in any event, it may be that the demography in the United States may get employers more interested in working with education institutions — I doubt high schools, unless it's community services — it's going to be community colleges mostly, and four-year schools, I would think. And then one of the things-- and Nancy Johnson, who was a congresswoman for a very long time, she always pushed a tax credit for employer involvement. And I think, at some point, that's worth considering. I mean, it has all kinds of problems. But I think she had a point. I mean, her whole thing was employer involvement. She's not-- she's retired, but I think that's something to be considered, given the demand for internships, work-based learning, connections to employers. But employers are hard to get and hard to keep. They're just scarce.

**BLUMENSTYK:** And as I've heard someone discuss in the context of apprenticeships, they need incentives, right?

**WILDAVSKY:** If I can just quickly add, Goldie, I mean, one specific thing that I talk about in the book — not far from Connecticut, where Nancy Johnson, you know, represented — in Rhode Island, a place like the Community College of Rhode Island, I interviewed, you know, some people who had done programs — non-degree, short-term programs — sponsored by employers, major employers, where there was, for example, a lot of need for advanced manufacturing skills in the labor force in that region. So it is in the interest of the employers to, to work closely with CCRI, the Community College of Rhode Island. They actually make these programs free to the students. They are short-term. But talking to the then president of CCRI, she absolutely wanted to be certain that these were credit-bearing programs, where they are short-



term, but people can come back to school. And I talked to one guy who had-- you know, high school never really worked out for him. He kind of sort of tentatively dipped his toes in the community college, you know, after he got laid off from a job at a bar during the pandemic. He goes to CCRI, he does this financial services job. He's now working as a customer service rep for a major firm. And he kind of is getting back on-- he's getting more stable financially. He's going back to school and would like to get his-- finish getting his associate degree, and then go and transfer to the University of Rhode Island for a bachelor's.

So there is an ideal world, and it may not happen immediately, but if you believe in sort of incremental progress that without having to snap your fingers and blow up the whole system, if you can create more — I hate to use a word like interoperability, but, you know, if you can create an ecosystem where the short-term credentials-- we recognize as a lot of people need that, they want that, that they're not going to do the four-year thing right away. But if we can offer these kinds of bite si-- that's why I think stackable credentials, they're, they're perhaps a little bit more a theory than reality now. They exist on a very small scale. But if we can make that the norm, I do think that will give employers a lot more places to get in, and it will give higher ed a place to go where they can be addressing where there's a clear public demand without giving up on some of their core academic mission.

**BLUMENSTYK:** You know, it's interesting that you said [inaudible]. This summer, I actually did some reporting in New England, as well, in Maine, and the community college system there. And they, they've developed a lot of also short-term credentials. And I just noticed Maine's just been reporting. as they were hoping, a lot of their increases in enrollment at the community colleges has come from the short-term credentials students who started taking that first short-term credential, which was employer-paid for in many cases. They're now enrolling in the community college to pursue additional credentials, perhaps, and perhaps even eventually a degree. So that was their, their secret hope, and it's sort of paying off. So there is some payoff for that.

I think we should just close out this conversation just thinking a little bit about what you just hinted at, though, Ben. It's not an either-- the landscape has really changed in the last five, 10 years. We have MOOCs now. We have stackable credentials — maybe not as many as we want. We have industry-embedded credentials. We have community colleges that give four-year degrees. We have four-year colleges that give associate degrees. So, I guess, like, as we're thinking about this picture more broadly, is-- are we sort of set up for sort of a next generation of higher ed or post-secondary — let's call it that — where the models will be more flexible, and we have these opportunities. Or, I mean... I don't know. I write about it a lot. I think it's kind of happening. But I guess how incremental is this really going to be versus how re-- how realistic is it going to be for students in the next five, 10 years? Katharine, Aimée, any of you have some thoughts on that?

**MEYER:** Yeah. I mean, I will say I am also encouraged that I've seen the increase. Again, not as many as we'd like, but we've seen more stackable credentials being offered, and we know that those pay off. You know, I've done research on that in Virginia, and we see really strong labor market returns, and particularly strong returns and employment stability when people go through stackable credential programs, compared to people who just have sort of the first credential along the way. They're just more likely to hold a job consistently. And that's so important. It's true— higher education institutions are not known for being particularly agile and flexible, but I think there is the demand and there is the, the hope and the interest in wanting to build a system that works for students. And so I think the more of these conversations we have, the closer you are to getting there.

**BLUMENSTYK:** Great. Unless anybody else has something very quick to add, I think I'm going to toss this back to Katharine at this point, and I think she might have some final words.

**MEYER:** Well, thank you so much, Goldie, Ben, Aimée, and Tony for sharing your insights with us today. And thank you to everyone who joined online for the discussion. Just a reminder that Ben's book, "The Career Arts," is available from Princeton University Press. I know we all have copies in our offices. Goldie's got hers with her, and you can get your copy too. Again, so Princeton University Press, and using the discount code from them, which is WILD000!, it'll give you 30% off the book. I love how it's very pocket-sized. I'll be [inaudible] my copy often. For those of you interested in future events, you can follow BrookingsGov on Twitter, or scroll to the bottom of the page you're viewing this on and sign up for our newsletter to receive the latest in-depth, nonpartisan research on policy and governance at the local, national, and global levels. Thank you very much for joining us today.