

The Future of Work podcast is a weekly show where Jacob has in-depth conversations with senior level executives, business leaders, and bestselling authors around the world on the future of work and the future in general. Topics cover everything from AI and automation to the gig economy to big data to the future of learning and everything in between. Each episode explores a new topic and features a special guest.

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Jacob Morgan: Hello everyone. Welcome to another episode of the Future of Work Podcast. My guest today is Cindy Parnell. She's the executive director at Arizona State University, Career and Professional Development Services. Cindy, thanks for joining me.

Cindy Parnell: Thank you for having me, Jacob.

Jacob Morgan: Yeah, and so for those people that don't know, obviously, they wouldn't know. We had the chance to grab lunch in the Bay Area at the Slanted Door at the Ferry Building, where talked a little bit about the future of education and we talked about doing this podcast. [00:00:30] So I'm glad you agreed to do it.

Cindy Parnell: Yeah. No, I appreciate it. I'm looking forward to our conversation.

Jacob Morgan: Yeah. It'll be fun and this is something that a lot of people always wanna know about because I speak with quite a few business leaders, but I don't speak with people on the academic side that often. So it's gonna be pretty interesting to hear your perspectives, and today we'll be talking about how universities like ASU are and should be preparing students for the future of work. But let's get started with some [00:01:00] background information about you. How did you get involved with what you're doing today?

Cindy Parnell: Yeah. I did my undergrad studies at Arizona State University and I'm also a native Venetian, and public education and higher education has always been a great passion of mine. And so, after leaving ASU and working myself in industry, after a few years, realized I really enjoy teaching and educating [00:01:30] and doing so with young adults, and so it brought me back to ASU. I started entry level in career services about 11 years ago at ASU and I've worked my way up and I've had a chance to be in multiple roles within this department. I have really seen ASU and career and professional development services grow to really be a driving force working alongside industry and best prepare students for their next [00:02:00] steps after college, whether that's world of work or national service or going on to graduate school.

Jacob Morgan: And you're now leading this division, this department at ASU and you said you started off entry level. So curious, what do you think contributed to your

success of being able to start off as entry level and now being kind of the top dog at this part of the university? Anything specific that helped you get to that point in your career?

Cindy Parnell: Yeah. I think it's a lot of what we [00:02:30] tell students and work with students even today. It's kind of that fire in your belly, it's the grit. Right? It's some of the things that you can't necessarily teach people, but you certainly need to be able to practice, and have some pitfalls and road bumps and missteps along the way and pick yourself up and learn from it and keep driving forward. I've had great mentors along the way I've really positioned myself to be around strong leaders and great leaders, [00:03:00] and truly believe in the mission of Arizona State University. So I see myself staying here and growing here and contributing, not just to the university, but to the work that's being done on a national and global scale.

Jacob Morgan: So basically it sounds like having that genuine interest and curiosity and kind of grinding it out when you need to.

Cindy Parnell: Yeah, and it's passion for education too.

Jacob Morgan: Help get you to that point.

Cindy Parnell: Right? Teaching and being in that environment that fosters learning and messing up a little bit along the way too. [00:03:30] I think I found my place to be able to coach others as well.

Jacob Morgan: What's a typical day like for you?

Cindy Parnell: Oh, that's one of the amazing things at ASU. No day is ever the same. A typical day ... So ... Well as we've discussed-

Jacob Morgan: Starting from when you wake up by the way.

Cindy Parnell: Yeah. When I wake up, I drink a lot of coffee. I almost need coffee to make coffee. Coffee drives me and fuels me. So-

Jacob Morgan: You need coffee to make coffee.

Cindy Parnell: To make coffee.

Jacob Morgan: Oh, man,

Cindy Parnell: [00:04:00] I've had moments right, and maybe there's others that are listening too, where I hit the start button and there's no water in the coffee pot. Right? And I'm wondering why my coffee isn't being made. So yes, I do say I'm the one that needs coffee to make coffee.

Jacob Morgan: You could just walk around with a coffee drip.

Cindy Parnell: Yes, I know. That's a good idea Jacob. I might take you up on that.

Jacob Morgan: Yeah.

Cindy Parnell: So no, I ... Mornings are a swirl in our family to get everybody out the door and to get into work, get everybody off to school. [00:04:30] But when I'm here at ASU, I mean it's everything from collaborative work and meetings to ... This morning alone, team, my senior leadership team, we meet every Monday morning 10:00 AM to start off the week, with what is it that's coming up, what is it that we all need to be in on. We talk a lot about having one foot in the current work that we're doing, but also one foot in what need to be advancing for the future and how we're leading and visioning [00:05:00] for great connections to be made.

I do a walk around at the office too and try to check in with those that are. A lot of work is done out in the community and out in the university, so I call it my walk about. I go around and check in with those that are here for the day. We work hard and we work fast, so it's a quick pace. I'm lucky if I get to sit and have lunch, otherwise food is on the run and [00:05:30] I drive. I drive quite a bit to and from, from home to work. So I get a lot of phone calls done first thing in the morning and a lot of phone calls in the evening on the way home. It's also a time for me to check in with people too with my phone calls, and so I make sure that I do that across our organization, just to pulse check how the team's doing.

Jacob Morgan: Are there any other sort of like daily rituals or practices that you do, either work related or personal related? I know you do like the walk abouts, that's a great example of one where you check in [00:06:00] people. Are there any other daily practices that you do, either personal like meditation or work related that you think other people wanna practice?

Cindy Parnell: Yeah. You know Jacob, I'd like to say I'm one of those power yoga people, that's up very, very early in the morning, and I get through all emails by like five AM. That's just not the reality of my world. But I think at work, I do look ahead for example, and see [00:06:30] whose birthdays and whose work anniversaries are coming up and take a time to write simple birthday cards or work anniversary cards to make sure that they get to people for the month. That's I think something special that I need to pay attention to and one I certainly appreciate and recognize our team that exists here.

Jacob Morgan: That's actually pretty neat. It's a kinda simple handwritten note, but I'm sure for the employees, it means quite a bit.

Cindy Parnell: It does. I think so. I hope so.

Jacob Morgan: Now for ASU, [00:07:00] I certainly wasn't aware of a lot of the things that you shared with me when we went out for lunch-

Cindy Parnell: Yeah.

Jacob Morgan: But maybe you can give people some context around ASU.

Cindy Parnell: Sure. Happy to. So I think one of the great things about ASU is our size. We have just reached the hundred thousand mark in terms of students taking classes and earning degrees at Arizona State University, and I think sometimes people maybe look at that size as [00:07:30] a challenge. We look at that as a strength. Right? We talk about all that that affords our students. So for example, we have over 12,000 international students included in that number, representing a 136 different countries, and so what that allows for is all of our students to be working with and alongside people who necessarily are not like themselves. It allows for a great sense of culture [00:08:00] and diversity in classes and on campus. It's a beautiful place, it's an impressive place making a huge impact. We're the number one public research university in terms of size in the U.S., but I think what makes us unique and different is our charter. Our charter states that we're measured not by whom we exclude, but rather who we include and how they succeed. We have for the [00:08:30] first time in the state of Arizona, a true representation of our demographics reflected in our freshmen class. That's socioeconomic status, ethnicity, in state student population and that's something that as a public institution, we're proud of and we have a responsibility, a fundamental responsibility, really for the economic, the social and the cultural health of our community and of our state.

Jacob Morgan: Wow. Yeah. So you're technically [00:09:00] the largest educational institution in the United States, which is quite an accomplishment in enough itself. And how many employees work at ASU and how big is your team?

Cindy Parnell: Oh, good question. So my ... Let me start with my team is 35 total across four campus locations and our team serves all of the students, and we do that both what we call on ground and online, [00:09:30] or immersion and digital immersion. So that 103,000 number includes both our on ground from the four campus location student body, as well as our online student population, and our team has to be very cognizant that we're serving all of our students. So the same services and resources and connections to employers, for example that we offer to our on ground students, we make sure that we have that same level of service and responsiveness to our online students.

Jacob Morgan: Got it.

Cindy Parnell: [00:10:00] In terms of Arizona State University and the employment size, I'm ... we're well over 10,000 faculty and staff, but I think even a greater number to shout out is the number of student employees that we actually hire. We have about the same amount in student employees who work on campus as

researchers, as teaching assistants and those for example, that even work in my office. We have about 55 students that [00:10:30] we employ to help run all of our events and customer service and even give peer to peer career advising student to student.

Jacob Morgan: So this is in addition to the 35 people that are part of your team directly. These are student ... like student employees.

Cindy Parnell: Yeah.

Jacob Morgan: Got it.

Cindy Parnell: So I have like 35 full time and then about 55 student workers.

Jacob Morgan: Wow. So it's a massive organization in terms of size and scale, and as far as the career and professional development services, maybe you can also [00:11:00] give listeners a little bit of context around what that team is responsible for, because I think pretty much every university has one. Right? I know for example, when I went to UC Santa Cruz, I went to the career and professional development services area maybe once or twice and I found it ... I don't wanna say completely useless, but they did not do a good job at that time, over a decade ago, guiding me and preparing me for anything [00:11:30] and we talked a little bit about this as far as how things are changing. But maybe give us some context, what should this team or department actually do inside of universities? Like what are they responsible for?

Cindy Parnell: Yeah. And I can certainly share our lay of the land and our perspectives. So I think for career services or career centers, often times they sit on the students' services side of the house in university. So there's two sides, there's the academic side [00:12:00] and the student services side. We sit on the student services side and so not only are students one of our obvious main constituents, but employers who hire those students and who help to professionally develop those students and provide meaningful engagement for those students, is critically important. So we have a team that's focused all around employer relations and corporate engagement within our department. We certainly have the career advising team, but like you were mentioning, 10 years ago right, the focus was more on that one [00:12:30] to one career advising experience, and we really disrupted what it means to be a career advisor.

We can talk a little bit more about that 'cause we're seeing some great wins and strides at scale at ASU. But we also focus on alumni and how do we engage our alumni and bring them back to the university, both either on ground or virtually to connect with our students and prepare them. But also leveraging our alumni relationships where they work, so that Sun Devils are coming back [00:13:00] to hire Sun Devils, and we also have parents in the community. So we're one of those unique student services organizations that have multiple constituents, certainly students are top of mind and then it's a matter of bringing together

and bridging those communities of additional constituents to our students to best support them. I think one of the big things that we've done in even just the last two to three years is really disrupted the career advising model and we talked a little bit [00:13:30] about this over lunch a couple of weeks ago and that is ... And maybe you can speak a little bit to this from your own experience.

Career advisors used to be generalists. Right? We used to know a little bit about a lot of things and we've really had to ... really since 2008, when the economy took a dive and the challenge to really the ROI of a college education was disrupted. It was turned upside down and so we needed [00:14:00] to do the same thing and so we have taken the model and now our career advisors are actually specialists. They adopt an industry or a sector and they become specialized in that area through professional associations, understanding and knowing employers within that sector, and what are their hiring trends, what are they looking for in candidates. And then that helps us drive programming and services and resources to best prepare students [00:14:30] in college for the next steps of world of work. It's been a phenomenal model. It's been a professional development opportunity for our staff, but more importantly, it's helping our students become ... They're getting targeted and customized information that's meaningful to them where they're at, to help direct them into being most successful leaving ASU.

Jacob Morgan: And I certainly didn't feel like I got that. When I went to career services, [00:15:00] I kinda felt like I got a template that everybody got and I can't remember what it was. But they take out like this piece of paper, this laminated piece of paper and they kind of walk you through the same steps that they walk everybody else through, and it literally ... You just felt like I'm getting the same thing that Bob is getting behind me, that Eric is getting behind me, like it was just identical.

Cindy Parnell: Right.

Jacob Morgan: And so I felt like there was nothing and I don't know. I'm hoping UC Santa Cruz changed this, but [00:15:30] at least when I was there, I didn't find too much value in that. But it's great to hear that universities like ASU are thinking differently about it and we'll dive into some details about that in just a minute. But I wanted to get your perspectives, just in general. What was or what is traditional education like? Because we hear a lot of conversations around traditional education and kind of the new world of education of what it should be like. So what is the traditional kind of state [00:16:00] of education? Traditional education, what does that look like?

Cindy Parnell: Yeah. So you can look to universities that have long, rich standings of tradition right, where it's very exclusive in terms of who they're admitting into universities. Right? So you're top A, A+ students and actually they receive rankings right, based on more of who they exclude rather than who they are including. Traditional education [00:16:30] is ... I would say and I think others would agree, that it's very much focused around theory. Right? The knowledge

acquisition that you're going to college for, that true liberal arts education, that really embeds itself into the theory of ... and embedded with research. Right? Now you can still have that and at ASU, we certainly do. The thing that we do differently is we have students go to class [00:17:00] and work on teams in an interdisciplinary approach. And so what that means is, you could have a business student, an engineering student, a liberal arts student and an education student all working together in a class, where industry now is partnering and bringing a case study or a real problem that their organization is facing, that this team of interdisciplinary students actually gets to work through and produce solutions and present to [00:17:30] this company.

So it's allowing students in an innovative, fast paced environment to work again with people who are not like themselves necessarily, to be able to practice and produce results around real world problems. That's where education is trending and if you look at this Gen Z group that's now in college, they're coming to college not as necessarily a traditional career path, but more of a ... what we call a make it now opportunity. [00:18:00] They have ideas, they have solutions. They see concerns and problems all around them and they're coming to college and they're seeking ASU specifically because we allow them those opportunities to come and to solve their problems, alongside faculty and produce results in a short period of time.

Jacob Morgan:

Which is obviously quite important and even recently, I was at a conference in Half Moon Bay and there was a lot of talk of education. As you know the future of work is a big theme [00:18:30] and it seems like a lot of people ... of course, we turn to universities and companies and what should everybody be doing. And a lot of the conversation always seems to stem from okay, universities need to do more because by the time you graduate from a four year institution, everything you learn is outdated. Universities don't teach you to learn how to learn, they're not preparing people for the future of work. It's kind of just like the same old, same old that we've all been kinda going through and [00:19:00] whatever we're all used to. I'm curious what your thoughts are on that. Do you think that that is true for most universities and educational institutions? They're just not doing a good job of preparing people for the future of work.

Cindy Parnell:

Well I don't know if I can speak to other universities, but I can speak to ASU and what our President ... President Crow speaks to often, is that we are creating a new group of master learners that are adaptable and capable of learning anything, and we've talked [00:19:30] about this too. Jobs that our children right, or even students who are freshmen this year in college, jobs don't even exist for them yet by the time they're graduating out of here in four years. So it's about creating environments and teaching students how to think critically, how to problem solve, how to work on teams. All of those competencies that organizations and companies are hungry for, those are the skillsets and [00:20:00] the competencies that we focus on in developing our students outside of the classroom and complimenting what they're learning in the classroom. But I think the new wave of education in universities really is around creating those master learners, teaching people how to learn. As we know, non

routine jobs aren't going to ... Non routine jobs are going to be what's going to exist and so it's gonna be more thinking than [00:20:30] it is doing, and we've gotta help our students understand that but also practice it and become efficient in how they learn.

Jacob Morgan: How do you teach a learning how to learn, because that's obviously a phrase that's been used a lot. I've certainly used it a lot too, this idea of learn how learn.

Cindy Parnell: Right.

Jacob Morgan: What does that actually mean and how do you teach somebody to learn how to learn?

Cindy Parnell: Right. And so that's one of the great questions out there, but I think you create environments for students to come together [00:21:00] and ... You do. You have to break it down and you have to allow them to practice, and then you also have to debrief. Right? So often times it's having that conversation. It's having the follow up that comes with a student, so that they understand either the missteps that they took, how to do things differently, how to adjust and mold. So creating teams, creating projects, having problems set for students to practice in an environment with key faculty that are [00:21:30] well known in their specific area of study, that's how we wanna drive learning, where students can misstep, but where students can practice, delve in, figure it out for themselves and have that formal guidance along the way.

Jacob Morgan: As opposed to just kinda reading something in a book and then taking a test.

Cindy Parnell: Taking a test. Right.

Jacob Morgan: Which is like 99% of the stuff that I had to do. I mean I double majored in economics and psychology. I can't really think about ... or [00:22:00] I can't really recall how much of that I actually used during the course of my professional life. But pretty much everything that I did was read this book-

Cindy Parnell: Take a test.

Jacob Morgan: Exactly. We're gonna take a test on it and then we're read the next chapter. You're gonna get a pop quiz, but there was no ... There was maybe one class that I had, where we actually did sort of a game where you were a retail manufacturer. You produced [00:22:30] shoes and that was like the one thing that we did that was kind of a game. But that was one class out of like the dozens that I took and there was no real world, hands on, all very hypothetical stuff and maybe that's why nothing kind of sunk in. I don't know.

Cindy Parnell: For you.

Jacob Morgan:

Yeah.

Cindy Parnell:

Yeah. Kind of simulated exercises right, where you have that business model or that business plan. I think that's one of the great things in where ASU is integrating industry, is [00:23:00] we welcome and we invite industry to the table. In fact, when we're having conversations with businesses that maybe are looking to expand into Arizona or move their headquarters to the area, we talk to them about how ASU can become name the company university. Right? We are in a position where we are adaptable and flexible to be able to design curriculum and experiences for students to pipeline them and to prepare them [00:23:30] for particular organizations, sector and industry. Something that not a lot of universities are as nimble and adaptable to be able to do very quickly.

Jacob Morgan:

Yeah. I completely agree. I mean it's something that they do struggle with quite a bit. The other thing that keeps coming up is the ROI of college.

Cindy Parnell:

Yeah.

Jacob Morgan:

ROI of universities. Costs keep going up, do we need to go there, we can learn a lot of things online, we can go drive for Uber or Lyft and make more [00:24:00] than what we would for a starting salary for most companies. So do you ever get this question yourself, like what's the ROI of college? Like why should students go to ASU as opposed to taking some classes online for free, driving for Uber? How do you respond to stuff like that?

Cindy Parnell:

Yeah. Well I think that's where ASU is extremely innovative, is we've figured out how to create multiple pathways to meet people where they're at. [00:24:30] We know that there are tens of thousands of people who have started college and haven't finished. So ASU has created pathways like the Starbucks College Achievement Program, that has allowed for people working in a particular company to have tuition assistance, so that they can go ahead and finish their degree program, while having a job with phenomenal benefits. And there's other models that are out there as well, but it's about solving problems, it's [00:25:00] about meeting in teams, it's about practicing and [up skilling 00:25:03] on those critical thinking and problem solving skills, that does take time to practice and to learn.

Those are the skillsets that we know industry is demanding. Things like written communication skills. Right? How often have you heard from all of your travels in work Jacob, where employers are saying, "I wish they could just write in a complete sentence instead of [00:25:30] writing as in texting form." There's things that we can call out to students and that we can practice with students in a higher ed environment, that gives them connection to real world situations, that helps to develop those skillsets that are in such demand from today's employers. Something that universities need to pay attention to because the gig economy, that freelancing economy that you're speaking to, Uber, Lyft, others. [00:26:00] We need to figure out a way that allow for students to work, while they're going to school and again, that's creating multiple pathways, because

the day and age of going to college and using that as your I'm growing up time frame. That gets to be a pretty expensive proposition if there isn't other ROI and value associated to it.

Jacob Morgan: Yeah, it's very true. It does get to be pretty expensive. So obviously from your perspective, there's still significant [00:26:30] value to going to a four year university. But it sounds like it needs to be the right one. Right? If you're gonna go to a university or to a school, where it's all based on kind of like read a book, take a test. Maybe those types of universities are the ones that are going to disappear and the ones that are going to grow and flourish are the ones like ASU where it's focused on case studies, practical examples, working with employers, agility, nimbleness, teaching people [00:27:00] to learn. That's something that we need more of, but reading a book and taking a test, I don't think we need that anymore.

Cindy Parnell: I think the industry collaboration piece is what's going to be the future of universities and truly the future of work. Because it's only when we understand what's happening in industry and what are the trends that really are shaping the future of work, that universities can best respond, and it's gonna be unique for every student and for every family. Making a decision [00:27:30] on what university to attend, I actually talk to students and parents. It's more about what is it that you're looking to do and how is the university going to help you in building those networks and connections for you and give you that practice to become whatever it is that you hope and aspire for in your time after ASU.

Jacob Morgan: And it's tough because sometimes a lot of employers, they look for the certain tier of university, the certain name [00:28:00] of the university. Even ... Jeez, a hypothetical example. Let's say Harvard was purely based on read a book, take a test, and I don't know, maybe they are. If that was the type of education you get a Harvard or Princeton, employers still love Harvard and Princeton. They're still viewed as like the top universities. So I'm wondering do you think there's gonna be a change in dynamic as far as the brand of the university versus how they teach or is the brand [00:28:30] still kind of the number one thing that people care about?

Cindy Parnell: It's interesting, right, 'cause we work with employers on this all of the time and the things that we hear is they're gonna go back and recruit and hire from their alma mater. Right? And so that gives me and our team a chance to educate them on ASU, because not only are they getting a high caliber academic education, but they're also getting the true life skills and experiential education alongside industry at places like [00:29:00] ASU. I think it's actually ... We're gonna need to have more and more conversations with employers and organizations about what is it about a 3.8 in the job description that is hard and fast, that really tells you how a potential candidate is going to do on the job. Right? So I feel like we constantly have conversations with employers around things like, "Well why is GPA your only recruiting tool?" Or, "Why [00:29:30] is a particular major the only major you're willing to consider?" And so a lot of our time and effort is put on educating the HR teams, educating the employer on all

of the other skillsets and ways that they can take a look at students and candidates as being high caliber, high quality candidates to go into their pipeline.

Jacob Morgan: That's actually quite interesting because I don't think a lot of employers even know why that's a criteria. Like why does [00:30:00] it need to be a 3.8? Why does this person need to have a business degree versus a degree in ... I don't know, literature?

Cindy Parnell: Right.

Jacob Morgan: And I actually ... I don't even know who comes up with those things. Like who decides-

Cindy Parnell: And it's so hard to change. I don't know who decides them and then they're so hard to change too, and part of it is we'll hear that's how when they have high volume of applicants coming in, it's an easy way to go ahead and kind of narrow down the list. But who's to say a student who's not working 30 hours a week [00:30:30] to pay for their education, has an A- GPA, not the 3.8, but then was also in a student organization and was vice president and leading that. Why aren't those qualities of multitasking, teamwork, leadership as valuable as a 3.8 on a resume?

Jacob Morgan: So why aren't they as valuable? I mean do you have any insight into like how that works and why that's the case? [00:31:00] Is it just sort of just institutional legacy ways of doing things? You mentioned that you're working with some employers to kind of help them understand why that stuff doesn't make sense anymore. So what are you seeing? I mean why do they have that mentality do you think?

Cindy Parnell: Yeah. A lot of it I see is it's been that way. Right? So it's been part of their hiring protocol, it's written into job descriptions and sometimes, we're even at fault at that. When we're hiring [00:31:30] and we have job descriptions that are posted at ASU, our minimum and our preferred qualifications and we go by these kind of check boxes that we need to kind of get through. Instead, how do we create behavior based interviews and scenarios that really do test the grit, the fire in the belly, the teamwork abilities, the leadership abilities that can be stronger predictors for success and long term engagement [00:32:00] within a company as well. So-We're both gonna have to kind of meet in the middle. Because we've for a long time have had job descriptions and HR protocol that has had certain standards and yet we ... I don't know if we've fully come up with the wholistic [00:32:30] way of being able to truly interview and test for more of those resilient skillsets that can be greater predictors of long term success for a candidate and long term engagement in staying with a company as well.

Jacob Morgan: So I have a hypothetical question for you-

Cindy Parnell: Okay.

Jacob Morgan: And that is what do you think would happen if one day ... And we kinda started to see this a little bit. But let's say the Fortune 100 or even the Fortune 500, tomorrow they all agreed that you no [00:33:00] longer need a college to work here. So you can apply here straight out of high school or whatever you want, but you don't need a college degree here anymore. Do you think that that would cause a lot of universities to just kind of tank and plummet and people wouldn't go there anymore? And the reason I'm asking that is because part of me wonders if a lot of people go to universities simply to get that piece of paper, that diploma, saying that they graduated there because they know that without [00:33:30] that, they have no chance of getting a job. And so what if that criteria went away for a lot employers? I'm wondering what would happen to schools. I don't know if you've thought about that at all, but would be curious to hear what you think.

Cindy Parnell: Yeah. Interesting question and scenario. Right? Because there is great value to the collegiate experience and the college education. We talk about it, that it's not so much the major you choose to study, [00:34:00] but all of the experience that you take in while you're going to college. Right? It's about how are you engaged in campus life, because we know that those students are engaged in university life, have a higher predictor to be engaged at their company, and stay longer term because of their engagement with their company once they leave college. Yeah. That's an interesting conversation to think about and talk through.

Jacob Morgan: Yeah. I mean [00:34:30] it's something that I'm constantly thinking about because I know that ... I can't remember which companies. I'm gonna say it was like a KPMG or some professional services firm. They didn't say that you don't need a college degree anymore, I don't believe. I think it was something like it doesn't need to be from a top two university or we're not gonna look at where you went to school anymore, which it was ... it used to be a big criteria. But I think even some companies over the past year or so, have even been saying that it's not a ... a college [00:35:00] degree is not a prerequisite as long as you can demonstrate the necessary skills required for the job.

Cindy Parnell: Yeah. And I wonder-

Jacob Morgan: And so I'm just kind of wondering if that will ... if we'll see more of that.

Cindy Parnell: Yeah. And I wonder too if maybe the degree isn't needed for the foot in the door, the entry level position, but for advancement within the company-

Jacob Morgan: Yeah.

Cindy Parnell: To go to management or to work across different business units. So I'm curious to see how organizations and companies [00:35:30] think about that as well.

Jacob Morgan: Now you guys are doing quite a lot of things there at ASU. You touched on some of them earlier, but maybe we can spend the few minutes kind of going through a rundown of what ASU's doing differently to prepare students for the future of work, either ways that you structure programs. I know you mentioned cross disciplinary courses, where you might be marketing and be sitting in a class with somebody from ... [00:36:00] I don't know, computer science.

Cindy Parnell: Right.

Jacob Morgan: And so that's I think a great example of one and maybe we can touch on that a little bit. But what are some other things that ASU is doing to prepare students for the future of work?

Cindy Parnell: Yeah. So let me highlight a few things. I think one of our very proud programs is our Public Service Academy. So this is about four years old and the concept being is students across all different majors can be a part of this program, [00:36:30] where they actually learn about cross sector leadership. So for example, the students in this program again, studying all different types of degree programs actually have to do an internship in three different sectors, the government, the corporate and the non-profit sector. With a goal in mind that when they do graduate from ASU, they have an understanding of how each rely on each other to advocate, to advance policy, to make decisions [00:37:00] and to make change globally.

Jacob Morgan: Oh, so this is required for who?

Cindy Parnell: So this is a program called Public Service Academy.

Jacob Morgan: Okay. So it's an optional program.

Cindy Parnell: They actually opt into it.

Jacob Morgan: Okay. Got it.

Cindy Parnell: And so students that are studying any degree program can actually be a part of this program. So I mean we have students that are studying the business, the computer science, but we also have the history student and the lit study and the religious study and the psychology student, and they're all working together. But I think the key piece [00:37:30] there is that they're being exposed to different sectors through internships that are required of them, so they have a greater understanding of how each interplay with each other, and making decisions and advancing policy forward. That's one example. Another example is our Fulton Schools of Engineering do a phenomenal job of hosting throughout the year eventathons and hackathons, that allow industry to actually [00:38:00] sponsor teams of students to come together. Again, all different disciplines working together to work on short term problem solving and actually showcase results to industry leadership at the end of these particular days. It really allows

student to ... I guess demonstrate and showcase their capabilities in these real world situations, and it allows companies to kinda test drive and [00:38:30] take a peek into some potential candidates that might be hiring potential for them as well.

Jacob Morgan: Can you talk a little bit more about how that works with the hackathons? Maybe how long they are, how they get organized. Is it an employer that comes forward and offers to host the hackathon or is it kind of an ASU thing?

Cindy Parnell: Yeah. So faculty actually help to drive it and for example, we just had a phenomenal meeting with an employer partner last week. They're very interested [00:39:00] in it, specifically around cyber security and so there will be different themes throughout the year, and so we'll get that employer plugged into the team that will be planning that eventathon for the fall and get them connected and organized. There's a lot of work that goes into it ahead of time, but there are days. There are days where students basically take over and work these problems and it's kinda cool to see industry leadership and real employees [00:39:30] from that company working alongside the student and guiding them and coaching them. And for the student, they get to kind of understand the workplace culture, they get to build relationships with people from that organization. It's a brilliant way for recruiting to take place, that really is of value to this generation that believes in building relationships and connections well before the recruiting takes place.

Jacob Morgan: I think that's a great example. [00:40:00] You also touched on the interdisciplinary classes. So maybe you can mention that briefly again and how that works. So let's say I'm a psychology student and I show up to class, there might be people from computer science or from ... I don't know, literature in that same psychology class with me?

Cindy Parnell: Yeah. So let me share with you what we're launching actually for the fall to this point, because we wanna engage students with companies earlier on so that it's more of an exploratory process for [00:40:30] them. So we're building out a 200 level course. So it's for let's say second year students, sophomores traditionally and it's open to any student studying anything. And they will come together in teams of four to six students for a short eight week course, and we invite employer partners to come in and have a simple case study that these students get to work on, alongside leadership from those different organizations. And at the end [00:41:00] of that class, they get to present their resolution or their solution to the case study that was offered to them, in this very short term teamwork oriented, focused class. What it allows for a student is to see how working together with people who are ... from studying different things, can create solutions. It allows them to connect with employers that maybe they've never considered before.

I'll give you a perfect example. A lot of our [00:41:30] students, we have many degree programs around health and wellness, and they don't think necessarily of going into corporate wellness. Think of how many Fortune 100s, Fortune 500s

have corporate wellness departments, right, keeping their employees well through different initiatives, programs, and our students may have never thought of that before. So by having let's say ... Verizon is a great partner to ASU, their corporate wellness team [00:42:00] presents a case study for a marketing, english, a psychology and a sociology student to all work together to produce a solution in a short time frame. That's what we're hoping for to allow win, win, win situations to happen between the student, between the employer and those of us in career service who wanna provide opportunities for students to do just that. Produce solutions and explore options in companies that they maybe never have thought of or considered before.

Jacob Morgan: And so this is launching in [00:42:30] the fall?

Cindy Parnell: This is launching in the fall. Yes. So we're-

Jacob Morgan: This is a ... Oh, go ahead.

Cindy Parnell: Yeah. This is something that we are actually doing with our College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. It's the largest liberal arts college in the United States and this is a perfect example of how I came to our Associate Dean in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and said, "I have 25 to 30 companies that don't necessarily have the funding to do large research projects, but want to engage with students early. [00:43:00] How can we make something happen?" And in a short four month time frame, we've been able to create curriculum and bring in industry to launch for students in the fall.

Jacob Morgan: That's pretty cool. It's even something that I think employers can learn from, if they wanna bring together different team members from different functions to solve problems as well because as you know, inside of companies usually there's a lot of silos. Teams don't talk to each other-

Cindy Parnell: Right.

Jacob Morgan: So that could even be something that employers can learn from-

Cindy Parnell: Right.

Jacob Morgan: Which would be unique to see.

Cindy Parnell: That point and [00:43:30] also if there are up and coming employees within that particular organization, what a great kind of leadership or professional development opportunity for them to become engaged with their potential future workforce.

Jacob Morgan: Yeah. Totally. You also mentioned when we had lunch, that you guys have something called takeover days and that employers were starting to build relationships with students even earlier in the process. I think you even

mentioned that some of them even help students move into their dorms.  
[00:44:00] So maybe let's start off with the takeover days and what those are, and then you can talk a little bit about the-

Cindy Parnell: Sure.

Jacob Morgan: University and employer relationship.

Cindy Parnell: Yeah. So one of the things and maybe you've heard this too from the employers you're working with ... the companies you're working with Jacob ... especially with a hot market right now. It's a candidate's market. More and more companies and employers are trying to better brand and get connected to students and candidates earlier. [00:44:30] So one of the things that we've started at ASU are called takeover days. So an example would be Ford Motor Company, they have a phenomenal summer internship program. They hire a lot of Sun Devils for their internship program, which pipeline those students into full time career offers at the end of their internship. But Ford will actually come onto campus for a full day and it's a huge branding and awareness campaign. They'll bring in actual [00:45:00] vehicles and we'll have them on campus but not to share and to sell the vehicles, but to show how technology and design and sustainability efforts are very much a value set for that company, which are all very important points for our students.

So we coach these companies and we work with these companies on how to best message to students to drive attention, to attract. But then to also teach more than [00:45:30] maybe how the student has envisioned that company. We know students wanna know about the impact that the company is making and that if they were to go work let's say with Ford Motor Company, that they would have meaningful, impactful work that they'd get to do at that company. So these takeover days are designed for branding purposes, to better tell the story and kind of de-mystify maybe how students think of a particular [00:46:00] company, and then certainly to showcase the internship and job opportunities that are available within that company.

Jacob Morgan: And as far as the relationship that employers are building with universities, hopefully that's strengthening quite a bit and I know at ASU, they're even coming in to help the students move into the dorms.

Cindy Parnell: Right. So we know that companies are smart, they're savvy and they wanna get to students earlier, which we love because the traditional recruiting and waiting until they're a junior and coming [00:46:30] to an internship or a career fair, often times it's too late. Right? So students want exposure, they wanna understand that they have a lot of options, but more importantly, they wanna build connections to different organizations and people within those organizations, and a lot of times, that's what's driving their decision to accept one offer over another. So we will have organizations and companies actually volunteer for our freshmen move in days and they [00:47:00] will come in their ... let's say their polos right, with the brand of their company and they be there

as the families are unloading their cars and bringing things up to their residence hall rooms. And they're there meeting with the parents, they're there meeting with the student, but they're also showcasing to the family that they're a company that gives back to their community and that they believe in developing the students from early on. It's a win-win situation and something that we're looking to grow and also-

Jacob Morgan: Yeah. That's pretty neat. [00:47:30] I definitely didn't have that at UC Santa Cruz. I had my mom and my dad schlepping big boxes into my dorm. That's about all the help I got.

Cindy Parnell: You're lucky if you got a dolly to help carry things up the elevator.

Jacob Morgan: Yeah, there was definitely no dolly. But it seems like the ... you're getting extra hands from the companies, which is great.

Cindy Parnell: Yeah and our companies are they're smart and they're realizing they've gotta give back to the students and that's part of them developing their [00:48:00] own future workforce by partnering with ASU. So another example Jacob, is we have some really strong companies that have ties to our student groups. At ASU, we have over 1,000 different student clubs and organizations, and for companies that are really looking to drive their ... let's say diversity hiring initiatives, maybe it's women in science, maybe it's veteran hiring [00:48:30] initiatives. We're able to put in contact employers to some of our strong leadership student groups and the student groups can invite one of these employers in to host one of their membership meetings. What we ask is that these employers bring real world advice on how to write the resume for their company, how to go through the interview process with their company or even what are some of those soft skills that they're seeing are lacking in candidates coming into the [00:49:00] workplace and practicing and training and having those conversations with the student groups. So we really are working with companies, with employers that are looking to truly partner at ASU to develop our students, so we're doing this side by side.

Jacob Morgan: Yeah. It seems like a lot of exciting things are happening and hopefully other universities are catching up as well. What about as far as any kind of online programs. I know that a lot of universities have started rolling things out online. They've also explored ... [00:49:30] Well some of them and I know you guys have done this, shortening classes so maybe they're not semester long or quarter long. Are you guys doing anything around those areas?

Cindy Parnell: Yeah, we are. We wanna graduate students and get them onward and upward. And so yes, we actually break our courses into either seven and a half week sessions, which is a half a semester or a full semester. So a lot of times what students will do [00:50:00] is, they'll take several full semester courses but then they'll take the first seven and a half weeks, they'll load up, finish that out and then they'll take additional classes the later seven and a half weeks. And so what that allows is for students to accumulate more credit hours that fit their

schedule and to graduate sooner and move on to workforce sooner without acquiring more debt.

Jacob Morgan: Which is of course a very nice thing. Nobody needs [00:50:30] more debt. So where do you see all this going? I mean when you look at the future of work, when you look at the future of educational institutions, I don't know, five, ten years out.

Cindy Parnell: Yeah.

Jacob Morgan: Do you have like a picture in mind of what you would like to see happen or what you think will happen or what are you working towards?

Cindy Parnell: Right. That's a big question, Jacob. I think there's a lot of room right now for industry to become even more embedded into the university [00:51:00] curriculum, where we can constantly [up skill 00:51:03] our students. Let me give you an example, coding has been a big thing the last four or five years and so how do we create coding boot camps, so that every student coming out of college automatically has that skillset moving forward. I see industry becoming partners and not just for one slice of the pie, not just for recruiting, not just for research, not just for case studies. But truly [00:51:30] becoming industry collaborators with universities so that we are best preparing candidates for specific sectors and jobs underlining master learners as a part of all of our work. I also see that the freelancing or kind of that gig economy, we've gotta figure out how to work within that. People are gonna start working more remotely, where [00:52:00] travel is very much a part of their work, and so creating ... ways for students and people to connect. We have somebody right now on our team, who's working on the concept of virtual internships, to really allow for innovation to happen with technology and companies that students don't necessarily need to come into a physical place to gather and to gain their experiential education through an [00:52:30] internship. So-

Jacob Morgan: Wow, virtual internships. That sounds pretty neat.

Cindy Parnell: Yeah and so we'll see where this takes us. We have one company right now that's going to pilot with us. They're actually gonna do a couple of in person internships and then a handful of virtual internships, and we're gonna kinda compare and contrast and see where this goes as a potential model for working with our other employers.

Jacob Morgan: What are your thoughts on customized and personalized learning? I know that's been another big critique of a lot-

Cindy Parnell: Yep.

Jacob Morgan: Of educational universities, [00:53:00] is that we all have different styles and different ways that we like to learn, and we're all kind of forced into the same bucket.

Cindy Parnell: No. We have to be able-

Jacob Morgan: Have you seen that?

Cindy Parnell: Yeah. Well no, not at ASU. We have to be able allow for people to learn in different ways and at different speeds and through different mediums, and so we have to be able to also do that at scale. Right? So ASU I think is well positioned and has been doing this successfully for [00:53:30] quite a bit, and that goes back to the conversation we were having around different pathways to education and pathways to learning. We have to be able to adapt to that and to grow within that, so that more and more people have access to higher education.

Jacob Morgan: So how do you do that customized and personalized learning? You mentioned that you guys do a pretty good job, different pathways, different mediums, different speeds. Is that something that students can customize at ASU?

Cindy Parnell: They can. So they actually get to customize [00:54:00] their degree program. Let me give you an example. We have a degree program called Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies and in that bachelor's degree program, students get to concentrate in two areas of their choice and they have over 90 different options of which to put together their design, their curriculum design. So that's a phenomenal example of kind of that targeted or customized degree program, that they get to create based on their interests, based on skillsets that they wanna develop and connections that they wanna make [00:54:30] with industry.

Jacob Morgan: Curious, what are some of those like 90 options? Obviously, you don't need to give me all 90. But do you have any examples of what some of those options are that they get to customize-

Cindy Parnell: I mean there's everything from travel and tourism, to business, to technology, to statistics and everything in between. So they can build based on what they're interested in, what they're looking to do.

Jacob Morgan: Got it. So they're the courses that they're interested in. Very neat and what do you think the employers [00:55:00] should be thinking about or learning from all this? Obviously, building better relationships with universities. I mean that's been in conversation for a while. I don't know the kind of general state of well employers are doing there, I would hope that they're doing well. But what advice would you give to employers that are thinking the future of work for their employees?

Cindy Parnell: Right, and some are doing it really, really well. So some advice. Advice that we give [00:55:30] to employers is ... and we've talked a little bit about this already, is connecting students ... connecting with them earlier and connecting to students in a meaningful, authentic way. We have an employer who just moved their regional headquarters here into Tempe and so we're actually working with them, so that one of their internal resource groups ... employee resource groups at this company is actually connected to a similar ASU student group, and they are doing volunteer [00:56:00] days together. So when this company goes out and does volunteering in the community, they're inviting students from this student group to volunteer alongside them. It's a very authentic, meaningful way to build a connection to that company and it's savvy, it's smart because students are paying attention, and they're understanding this is the workplace environment. This is what this work values, is being involved civically and so it's a phenomenal and [00:56:30] very wise recruiting tool. At the very beginning of it, it's about relationship building and it's about helping those students connect with somebody is like them. The students can see themselves becoming an employee at this particular organization because of something that's starting very early, that's meaningful and connected in a value way.

Jacob Morgan: What advice do you have for parents? I have a 18 month old daughter-

Cindy Parnell: Little.

Jacob Morgan: Yeah, still very small. [00:57:00] But other people listening to this, I'm sure have either kids who are in college or are about to go to college, or maybe even about to graduate college. Any advice for them as far as kind of navigating this landscape, picking the right college, working with universities. What advice would you have for the parents or even the students?

Cindy Parnell: Yeah. We work with parents often. It's almost ... We call it parent season because new orientations are starting to happen for the freshmen class that are gonna start [00:57:30] this fall. And so the freshmen and their parents start coming to campus in March, so we start having our parent season right about now. Conversations that we have with parents is let the student dabble, let them try different classes to find out what they're going to be interested in, what they can excel at and that high school curriculum is very different than college curriculum. It's demanding, it's tough, it's rigorous and there's high expectations. [00:58:00] So being about to not ... A lot of times parents are like, "Well I want them to study and only to study and not do anything else."

But the reality is all of us in our lives ... Jacob, you have to multitask your job, your family, your friends and so ... and everything else. Right? And so we want to have that conversation with parents to allow for their student to try different courses, try different classes and if they switch their major, it's okay. Majors don't always [00:58:30] equal job title. I want students to study, go to class, do well GPA wise because of what we've already talked about. But I want them to also get relevant experience and if that means they're volunteering, they have a part-time job, they're involved in a student club or organization, they do need to

do something in addition to their studies, so that they can practice multitasking. They can practice balancing and they can practice making decisions of where to invest more and where to step, [00:59:00] because those are all meaningful and relevant skillsets that are needed, by the time they leave ASU.

Jacob Morgan: I love that. I think that's great advice and this different approach to learning, moving away from purely being academic to kinda case studies and some of the cool stuff you're doing at ASU, I think is wonderful. We definitely need more universities that are helping prepare students for the future of work. Are you guys working on anything else that's gonna be coming out maybe in the coming years that you haven't shared with me yet, [00:59:30] that you're allowed to talk about?

Cindy Parnell: Yeah. We're gonna be at ASU GSV, Global Silicon valley, where a lot of new projects and innovative are often times shared. So I would say take a look at what's gonna be happening in April at GSV. And honestly Jacob, this place is so dynamic, so fast paced moving that there are things that are happening [01:00:00] beyond my pay grade that I know are exciting and extremely impactful, not just here in the state of Arizona, but on a national and global level.

Jacob Morgan: Perfect. All right. Well to wrap up, I just have a couple fun rapid fire questions about you, if that's okay.

Cindy Parnell: Okay. Good.

Jacob Morgan: All right. First one, what's the most embarrassing moment you've had at work?

Cindy Parnell: Oh, I know this is boring, but it's probably like totally messing up on a speech in front of a large audience.

Jacob Morgan: That's okay. Hey, that works. If you were a super [01:00:30] hero, who would you be?

Cindy Parnell: Ooh. I'm gonna have to go with Wonder Woman.

Jacob Morgan: What's a book that you recommend? It could be a business or non business book.

Cindy Parnell: I just finished reading The Nightingale, not a business book. Very emotional, meaningful, beautiful story.

Jacob Morgan: If you could have dinner with anybody, alive or dead, who would it be?

Cindy Parnell: [01:01:00] Oprah Winfrey.

Jacob Morgan: Oh, wow. Okay, Oprah if you're listening-

Cindy Parnell: Give me a call.

Jacob Morgan: Yeah. You guys can have dinner plans. If you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be?

Cindy Parnell: Tuscany, Italy.

Jacob Morgan: Oh, wow. Very nice. Cheese, wine, bread. I like it.

Cindy Parnell: Yeah.

Jacob Morgan: And if you could ... This is a question that I typically ask for executives that are in companies, but I thought I would ask you as well because you probably have some thoughts on this. But if there was [01:01:30] a workplace practice that you could get rid of, even at ASU, what workplace practice would you get rid of?

Cindy Parnell: I've already gotten rid of it, clock in, clock out. Working-

Jacob Morgan: Oh, you already got rid of it, huh?

Cindy Parnell: Yeah. Get rid of it. Clock it in, clock out. It's not so much physically being present but always being an advocate of the place and always being on and producing best work whenever that suits you best.

Jacob Morgan: And last question for you. If you could implement one workplace practice, what would [01:02:00] you implement?

Cindy Parnell: Bring your dog to work day.

Jacob Morgan: I like it. And I forgot to ask, so two quick questions that somebody online told me to ask you. One from Doug Freeman, he said, "Maybe ask her about the benefits of value, of age, of diverse teams and building an inclusive culture."

Cindy Parnell: Yes.

Jacob Morgan: So if you have any thoughts on that and then I have one more and then we're all done.

Cindy Parnell: Yeah. No, I do have thoughts on that. Students are savvy and they want to work [01:02:30] for places that value diversity in all forms. And so having workplace boards, leaders, supervisors of managers that are reflective of that diversity are going to help in not only recruiting, but keeping strong talent that values that as well.

Jacob Morgan: And last question for you, I promise from Robert Thornton. He said, "Big trends like mobility, flexibility, adaptivity, [01:03:00] accessibility, et cetera that are driving how we think about life and work, and how we use technology to enable

new cultural norms." So I guess he basically wanted to ask, do you have thoughts on how those trends are impacting life and work?

Cindy Parnell: Yeah. I think it's important for places of work to be very open to how this up and coming generation values technology and utilizes it in everyday life. I remember when I [01:03:30] was first starting in my management career and everybody came to a meeting with laptops on and I'm like, "Why are they all on the internet and not paying attention to what I'm talking about in this meeting?" When in actuality, they were taking at the websites or the theories or the conversation points that we were talking about to then contribute to the conversation. We have to look at technology and mobility and the savviness that this group is coming to work with around technology, and embrace it and [01:04:00] not think it's a negative thing.

Jacob Morgan: I like it. Well Cindy, thank you so much for taking time out of your day. Where can people go to learn more about you, some of the programs that you're working on? I know you're on LinkedIn, but anything that you wanna mention for people, please do so.

Cindy Parnell: Yeah. So our website at ASU is, [asu.edu](http://asu.edu). I think our rankings page is phenomenal. Get to know ASU. It's a brilliant place that's making major change on a global scale and I am on LinkedIn. So I welcome [01:04:30] connections.

Jacob Morgan: Very good. Cindy, thanks for taking time out of your day to speak with me.

Cindy Parnell: Great. Thank you, Jacob.

Jacob Morgan: And thanks everyone for tuning into this week's episode of the future of work podcast. My guest again, has been Cindy Parnell. She is the executive director at Arizona State University, Career and Professional Development Services and I will see all of you next week.