

The LAUNCH Podcast – Inside the Hidden College Curriculum

[00:00:00] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:00:00] Welcome back to The LAUNCH Podcast. I'm Emma Bjorngard-Basayne Academic Advisor in the School of Business at the Stamford campus,

[00:00:14] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:00:14] and this is Kayla Hogrefe, Academic Advisor, UConn School of Business on the Hartford campus today. Emma and I are talking about a concept called the hidden curriculum. And we're not interviewing anybody special for this podcast episode.

[00:00:27] We're just gonna talk about it between the two of us. But we think it's a really important topic that really contributes to students' academic and personal and professional success in college. And so what is the hidden curriculum exactly? Buffy Smith is an associate professor of sociology and criminal justice at the University of St Thomas, and she wrote a book about the hidden curriculum.

[00:00:49] If you're interested in checking that out, I'll link to our, I'll put the information in the episode notes, but basically she defines a hidden curriculum as. The set of norms, values, and [00:01:00] expectations that govern interactions among students, faculty, staff, and administrators. And so to Excel in college, students must navigate a world of social norms.

[00:01:10] So Emma, what does that mean in English?

[00:01:14] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:01:14] So I think one important thing just to point out before we like give examples of this is that students are actually either. Rewarded or penalized based on their knowledge of the hidden curriculum. So just some examples would be like knowing that you should go and meet with your professor during office hours.

[00:01:34] Knowing how to navigate different offices on campus, right. Like how to pay my fee bill where my academic advisors office is. Yeah. Those types of things.

[00:01:44] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:01:44] Yeah. So when we say, when we use the word curriculum the way I think about it as like the obvious curriculum in college is when you're taking an accounting class and you need to learn the principles of accounting, or when you're taking

[00:01:58] Give me another [00:02:00] example, like a bio class and you're learning about, or an anatomy and you're learning about the human body. And those are, that's the curriculum of the class. But the hidden curriculum are the things that people don't necessarily talk about, but that are the overarching, unspoken rules of the institution.

[00:02:16] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:02:16] It's almost like, if you think about the bio class. It's like syllabus. It has all the different chapters you're reading, like the content of the course. Then if there's almost like a syllabus for your time in college that contains like the hidden, the hidden curriculum.

[00:02:29] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:02:29] Yeah, and so the reason, the whole way that this came up was Emma sent me an it really interesting article from the NPR website, and it was about

office hours and how students think that a professor's office hours, it can be scary and they don't want to go. But how important it is that students use professors' office hours. And I know that you have real examples.

[00:02:52] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:02:52] Yeah. Like I remember this one experience that I had this is actually in graduate school and my [00:03:00] advisor told me to take an undergraduate psycholinguistics course cause they, you know, kind of pertained to my dissertation.

[00:03:06] And I was like, Oh. This is not going to be hard. Right? I walk to the class, you know, and, and I enjoyed, you know, the lessons, but then we had the midterm and I like, did not do well. So I felt what's wrong with me? Like, I'm not competent. Like, why am I in grad school? I shouldn't be at Yukon, you know, all those, you know, kind of impostor syndrome feelings and experiences. And then I was like, okay, I need to go and talk to the professors. So I was kind of scared. Right. Cause you know, you feel almost like a little shame that you didn't do well. but he was very welcoming and very helpful. So I just ended up going there every week for his office hours.

[00:03:43] And because of the, I know I was here a lot, but because of that, I ended up like doing well in the class. Right. And we build good rapport. So I feel comfortable. Asking questions like in the class too. which I didn't do before cause I'm very shy [00:04:00] and introverted. So like having that relationship with him helped me not only to do better in the class, but also to just feel more comfortable.

[00:04:06] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:04:06] So how, how do office hours are utilizing a professor's office hours relate to what we're talking about in terms of the hidden curriculum?

[00:04:15] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:04:15] I mean, in the sense that it helps you find help and like advocate for yourself in a way or like within, within the classroom. Because I think doing that in a safe environment, which, you know, approaching an authority figure, right.

[00:04:30] And, and, and getting help and finding success in that will probably help you feel more confident to do it. In other areas of your college experience too, like figuring out how to maybe. Drop a class if you have to do. or as we were saying, like paying your fee bill. Or if you have questions around that, like maybe now you're more likely to just go in and do that and feel like you can do it instead of avoiding it.

[00:04:56] Cause I think that's kind of a natural reaction to just be like, okay, I have to [00:05:00] figure something out, but I don't want to do it cause it's a little nerve wracking or, you know, intimidating in some way. I like it can help you that way.

[00:05:08] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:05:08] in that NPR article that you sent me, and I'll link to this in the episode notes, but one of the professors that's quoted in the article explains that office hours obviously are a way for your professor to get to know you, but they.

[00:05:22] He offers that students also gain access to institutional resources and you gain access to a professor's network. you gain access to a professor's support for adventures and experiences that you might not even know about. So that is a way of uncovering the hidden

curriculum is having a relationship with your professors and they can help you understand and know about opportunities that you might not even even like, you don't know what you don't know.

[00:05:49] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:05:49] Right, right. Like if, for example, if, you know, I mean, jumping until up until graduation, but like if you're planning on or maybe just you've had the thought about going to graduate school, [00:06:00] they can help you approaching how to research different, different schools you want to go to. They can provide letters of recommendation or maybe, you know, for an internship or a job shadow, like opportunity, something like that.

[00:06:12] Yeah. They could be a first resource to get to those opportunities.

[00:06:17] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:06:17] Who do you think is most impacted by this idea of the hidden college curriculum? Like what types of students?

[00:06:25] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:06:25] What types of students? I mean, I do think everyone can benefit from it potentially. You know, I was an international student, so I had no idea how to navigate.

[00:06:34] Like I didn't even really know what university was in the U.S. other than what I've seen movies. And I kind of realized pretty quickly that it wasn't really like that, you know. so definitely just students that might not have that support maybe from home. Cause I was saying like

[00:06:51] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:06:51] first generation students,

[00:06:52] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:06:52] first generation students, international students.

[00:06:55] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:06:55] I think about when I was like filling out my FAFSA when I was 17 years old to [00:07:00] get financial aid and. I would have no idea what I was doing if it, my mother had not gone to college and ha and guided me through how to fill out a FAFSA and accept financial aid and what does it mean when you're accepting loans and those sorts of things.

[00:07:13] So I think, I think first generation students especially are impacted by this and

[00:07:19] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:07:19] international students

[00:07:20] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:07:20] and international students. Yeah.

[00:07:22] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:07:22] But even like all students to a certain extent where it's like, yes, maybe you have more experience with like, or you can get help at home with, you know, FAFSA or maybe your mom or dad or you know, a guardian will say like, Oh, you should go and talk to your academic advisor.

[00:07:37] Maybe like someone like me that didn't have, that, wouldn't have thought of that if it wasn't for it. Maybe actually my professor during office hours saying like, Oh, have you

met with your advice? Or like things like that. So I think. Yes, maybe in particular first gen students, but in different areas of your college experience, like we can all benefit from it.

[00:07:56] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:07:56] So let's talk about some [00:08:00] specific

[00:08:00] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:08:00] things that you'd, yeah.

[00:08:01] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:08:01] Like some specific steps.

[00:08:02] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:08:02] Yeah. So like building social capital

[00:08:05] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:08:05] Oh what does that mean?

[00:08:05] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:08:05] On campus. I mean, the way. I think about that, it's just kind of like a network that you build on campus of like supporters and that can come from like faculty, staff, but also your fellow students.

[00:08:19] Right? Cause that's really something you are establishing in college. Like you are. Network of peers cause you know, you need that and when you graduate. But yeah, so some examples of how you can kind of build that. one thing would be to have, I mean, it might sound silly, but have coffee with any person like every month try to, you kind of push yourself outside of your comfort zone in that way.

[00:08:43] Right. And everybody that you meet has something, like you have something to share with other people and. Everyone you encounter has something that they can share with you. So that is an awesome, like a super accessible, easy first step to take to build your social capital on campus. [00:09:00] another thing that students can do is a, once a semester, send at least three quote unquote.

[00:09:06] Checking emails to professors whose classes you've really enjoyed or the group project teammates that you've worked well with. So let, it kind of goes along with like the office hours idea of checking in with your professors and building that relationship with them.

[00:09:21] And this might sound silly, but I remember doing things like, even if I didn't have a specific question, like maybe there is a class where it felt like, you know, I have this under control, I really enjoy it, but I might even.

[00:09:33] Kind of just come up with a question, even if I knew the answer, but it was like a way for me to send an email and have an interaction. I know this. That's silly.

[00:09:41] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:09:41] No, like, no, it's not silly at all. Yeah. And you've, and you've told me, cause you teach philosophy at, got it. And you've mentioned to me how excited you get when students in your class are like send you a video or an article that you had not seen before that has to go with what you're teaching in class.

[00:09:56] So as an instructor, what does that, what does that say to you when a student [00:10:00] sends you something like that?

[00:10:02] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:10:02] I mean, I feel like, wow, I have like an impact in how they view things like online or what they watch on TV so that they actually think about the class. And then usually they will say like, Oh, maybe this is something we could share with the other students.

[00:10:17] So they're also thinking about how others can benefit from it and they want to talk about it in class. And then sometimes I can use that as like a. I'm kind of a jumping off point in class, like show that video

[00:10:29] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:10:29] So they're like contributing to the learning environment and like having a real say in what they're learning in their classes, which is really cool.

[00:10:36] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:10:36] Exactly. It's like building the content of the course. Yeah. Yeah. Okay. So what else? one thing that, you know, we talked about too was that you should try and attend a club meeting. Um. You know, that's related a club that's related to maybe something you're interested in. Right. it could be like the marketing club, but he could also be like the debate club, right?

[00:10:58] Cause I can be a way of like [00:11:00] building connections with other people.

[00:11:02] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:11:02] And we could go on a whole tangent. we can do a whole episode about the importance of experiential learning and joining clubs and things like that. But just in relation to building your social capital, joining a club is a great way to build yourself, like your unofficial team.

[00:11:17] You know, make friends, make, make allies, other students that can help you, give, you know, give you a hand when you need help with something.

[00:11:25] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:11:25] I also like the idea that. we discussed about trying to befriend someone maybe in your major who's a couple of years ahead of you.

[00:11:35] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:11:35] That's important,

[00:11:35] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:11:35] right?

[00:11:36] Cause I could be like a, a mentor, mentor figure. someone that can give you some tips and tricks about like, you know. But of course this, that they like the, you know, you can get what to

[00:11:48] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:11:48] expect in your upper level courses. What is it? How do you look for an internship or like mistakes that they may have made that you can avoid?

[00:11:56] Yes. The older students are so important, and just the power of [00:12:00] having a mentor, whether that's. Another student who's older than you or a staff member. mentors. That mentorship relationship is so helpful.

[00:12:09] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:12:09] Yeah. And even like, it doesn't have to be someone technically at your institution. Like it could be like an old, older sibling's friend who is in college currently somewhere else.

[00:12:21] Like they could also be a mentor for you in terms of kind of accessing what the experience is like for an older student on campus. Definitely.

[00:12:31] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:12:31] so what else?

[00:12:33] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:12:33] Else? you know, in general I think just asking questions and seeking help, you know, we talked about

[00:12:40] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:12:40] That's kind of what it all boils down to.

[00:12:42] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:12:42] Yeah, exactly. Cause I think sometimes it's just hard to admit, like, I'm so confused and overwhelmed. Oh, like what you're asking me to do, like if we're meeting with students in advising meetings and we tell them maybe to go to another office. Right.

[00:12:55] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:12:55] I also think there's this misconception that students have where they think that they're the [00:13:00] only people who don't know what's going on, or they don't know where to start.

[00:13:04] What's it like when you're, if you're undecided on a major? Sometimes students feel so overwhelmed, like, where do I even start? I'm the only student who doesn't know what I'm majoring in. But you know, reaching out to people and just asking. Asking a question, what's my first step? I'm asking another student that sorta sorta thing is so important just to get the ball rolling on those, on those first steps.

[00:13:25] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:13:25] Definitely, definitely. And yeah, I just think that sometimes we have to be vulnerable to like move forward and saying like, I don't know what to do, or I'm confused. Like it's a vulnerable situation to be in, but. I don't also think we like grow from that.

[00:13:40] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:13:40] Definitely. The reason Emma and I wanted to, as we are wrapping up, the reason that Emma and I wanted to talk about this so much is that we wanted students to know that they're, they're not alone.

[00:13:49] And when you come into college, yes, you're learning a lot of new material and content in your classes, but there's a lot going on that's a part of this hidden curriculum and it can [00:14:00] be confusing and overwhelming, but you're not alone. You have your network of peers, you have staff and faculty that are here that really want to help you, so please make sure that you're asking questions and seeking help.

[00:14:10] What, what are your closing thoughts, Emma?

[00:14:13] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:14:13] My closing thoughts? I mean, just to acknowledge, I think that, you know, we've kind of talked about the academic side of things, but there's also

a social aspect to this, right? Making friends, negotiating what it's like to be at UConn Storrs, Stamford, Hartford.

[00:14:30] Which is definitely something that we will try and touch on in, in a, in a future topic. But again, I think that older siblings. classmates of yours can be, you know, a good resource when it comes to like social aspects of the college experience as well.

[00:14:50] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:14:50] And there are a ton of articles and books that I will throw links to in these episode notes because there's a lot of other aspects of the hidden curriculum that [00:15:00] maybe we didn't talk about, like how schools recognize and integrate different cultural perspectives and

[00:15:07] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:15:07] Cultural values.

[00:15:08] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:15:08] Cultural values. Exactly. So if you're really interested in this topic, I'll, I'll stick those episode notes there.

[00:15:13] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:15:13] Oh, and also, if you have any particular questions, you know, regarding this topic, feel free to you know, comment in the comment section and we will try and answer.

[00:15:25] Those questions in a future episodes.

[00:15:28] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:15:28] So thank you so much for tuning in and we'll talk soon.