

Tanya Domey: Hi, this is Tanya Domey. Welcome to the Thought Project, recorded at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Fostering ground breaking research, and scholarship in the arts, social sciences, and sciences. In this space we talk with faculty, and doctoral students about the big thinking, and big ideas generating cutting edge research. Informing New Yorkers, and the world.

Doctor Jennifer Furlong is the director of career planning, and professional development at the Graduate Center. She arrived at the GC in 2013. Before becoming a career development specialist, Doctor Furlong earned her PhD in Romance Languages at the University of Pennsylvania, and a Bachelors Degree in Comparative Literary Studies at Northwestern University. She is an expert in 18th century French literature, history, and culture. She previously worked at New York University, where she served as associate director of graduate student career development, and earlier at Columbia University Center for career education. She initially pursued her interest in career development at University of Pennsylvania, where she was associate director for graduate students, and post doctoral fellows.

Welcome to the Thought Project Jenny.

Jennifer Furlon: Thank you for having me.

Tanya Domey: When you arrived to the Graduate Center you were given the task to establish a new office of career planning and development of fulfillment, of goals that were laid out in the strategic plan 2012 to 2016. As a matter of fact you got here just a couple of months after me, but you had a pretty big job. Also, part of your mandate was to increase, and diversify the graduate professional prospects for careers, both inside, and outside the academy. What did you do? How did you get interested in this field, because you have achieved a PhD in romance languages. You have an excellent educational record from your Bachelors degree at Northwestern. A really, really fine academic career, but you went into career planning. It's very interesting. We want to hear about that.

Jennifer Furlon: Well that's actually a little bit of a paradox, because I sort of fell ... The Seinfeld phrase is ass backward into career planning, which is at odds in so many respects with having a career plan, because I had no plan. When I finished my PhD at the University of Pennsylvania, a position had come open in the Penn Service's office, and I needed a job. I applied, and I figured so many people who work in career services that, if this wasn't exactly the right fit for me, at least working in a career services office would expose me to many career choices, and then I could decide what would be a fit for me.

Tanya Domey: That's very practical.

Jennifer Furlon: It did have a very practical bent to it in some respects. The University of Pennsylvania's career office had worked with Penn's doctoral students, and master students for years, and years prior to my joining the office. I had

wonderful mentorship, and there was wonderful leadership in the office. I got into the career, field of career planning. Enjoyed many aspects of it. Enjoyed working with what at the time very much felt like my peers, the doctoral students, because I had recently graduated, and now I feel much older than the doctoral students that I see.

That's how I got started in the field of career planing. It wasn't a plan, as many people I know who are in career services say no one at six says I want to be a career advisor when I grow up.

Tanya Domey: Right, sure.

Jennifer Furlon: But it ended up being a fit for me for lots of different reasons. I like working at universities I believe in their mission in spite of the somewhat contested, political landscape around higher education that we sometimes find ourselves in. That's kind of an answer to your second question. Your first question was I got to the graduate center in 2013, and there was no career office, and there had not been for some time. What did I do? Well I started my work actually just by letting students know that I was there, and I was available to meet with them, and then meeting with students, because I feel very much that the office that I work in, that I run, is at its heart a student service, and it should be focused on students, and their needs.

In order to find out what the Graduate Center students were about, I wanted to hear first hand from them what their problems were, what their issues were, what their aspirations were. At first I just saw a lot of students, and then the other half of my time was scheduling the appointments, because I was only the person in the office, and scheduling appointments is a pain. Then eventually a graduate student joined my team, and then she became our scheduler, and she built our website, and I saw the students, and then we grew from there. That's what I did to start the office.

Yeah I had worked in two very large career offices, so I was kind of familiar with what a career office did, and needed to do, and was familiar with things, and questions that people are going to have, or bring to me.

Tanya Domey: Yeah you were at Columbia, and you came from NYU to the GC. Did you seek out this position? I mean did you [crosstalk 00:06:31] ...

Jennifer Furlon: Well I had [crosstalk 00:06:34] ...

Tanya Domey: You made a decision to leave a very well resourced, privately endowed university.

Jennifer Furlon: I had always ... I occupy this weird niche, and that most of the work I do has been with doctoral students, and master degree students. In higher ed most of

the jobs are focused on, or most of the staff positions, or many positions in our world are focused on undergraduate education.

Tanya Domey: Right.

Jennifer Furlon: Undergraduates, God love them, they're great, but they're not ... Working with undergraduates was never my passion. When I left the faculty track, and realized I was never going to teach an undergraduate class. I felt no particular emotion around that. I had always had from the time I moved up to New York, the Graduate Center on my radar as a place where I might want to work in some capacity. I would periodically look at jobs at the graduate center, and think well none of those are really a fit for me. Too bad, I'll look four months from now, and see if anything else comes up.

But as it turns out, when Matt [Showengood 00:07:54] the Vice President for Student Affairs was conceiving of the career office, in partnership with the president and the Provost office. He had kind of gone around and talked with folks at Princeton, and at Penn, and all these places. Of course I know all these people, and all these people knew me.

Tanya Domey: I see.

Jennifer Furlon: Once the job came out, it's the old classic networking [crosstalk 00:08:12] ...

Tanya Domey: It's network, yeah.

Jennifer Furlon: Jenny, you should apply for this position.

Tanya Domey: Right.

Jennifer Furlon: You're not wild about the work you're doing at NYU, it sounds like a good opportunity, and it sounds like you would be uniquely qualified for it.

Tanya Domey: You literally launched this office, and you put it together. I was looking at your website. You have a little [inaudible 00:08:35] of social media. You even have a podcast, alumni allowed podcast. I was listening to the most recent one, the last one of the semester. But you've been on this career track of working in career development, and professional opportunities. What have you learned about the changing careers, and trajectory of PhD holders? I mean that is an incredible degree to have. For many years, and decades, and decades people went into the academy.

It seems here just from my own experience working here at the graduate center, and doing some work with the Provost Joy Connolly, who authored this grant, Melon Grant now, and they're going to really try to innovate, and revolutionize, and reform doctoral education, and it includes tracks on professionalization of development of skills. These people are not necessarily

going to enter into the academy, and we're very open about that here, which is unlike maybe what you see at Columbia, because at Columbia sort of traditional. They want you to go into the academy. What's changed? Talk about how it's changed, and maybe in your view given your experience here in the last five and a half years. What's different, or maybe at the graduate center, then at other places that you have been?

Jennifer Furlon: I do want to say PhD is doing other things, has been a question, or an issue for a really long time. I have a copy of the MLA's job guide from 1985, that somebody found here at the Graduate Center, and gave to me. In that there's a whole section on careers outside of academia. What do you do if you can't find a job in your field, as tenure track faculty member. This is something that people knew about, or knew could happen to people for a long time. But there was not a very sustained, or national conversation about it. People just kind of ... People couldn't find a tenure track job, just kind of scooted off into other things, and maybe didn't really tell their institution about it, or didn't tell their department, or their advisor [crosstalk 00:11:04] ... They just sort of disappeared.

Tanya Domey: Disappeared.

Jennifer Furlon: They faded away. What changed, or what has changed. I think first of all ... I mean this is the dumb thing to say, it's so obvious. The internet changed a lot of this picture, because people began to tell their stories, and their struggles, both with searching for a position as a faculty member, and searching for work doing something else, however people want to define that. That conversation became much more public, in a way that it could never have been without this forum through which people can more easily share information, and individual voices. That was a big thing that changed. The faculty job market has always been tight. People point to 2008 as kind of a [crosstalk 00:12:05] ...

Tanya Domey: Turning point.

Jennifer Furlon: A turning point when it became tight, and would show [crosstalk 00:12:10] ...

Tanya Domey: The economy fell apart, yeah.

Jennifer Furlon: The economy fell apart, and the faculty market tanked, and never really rebounded. This is the kind of conventional wisdom around that. That, sort of once again pushed some of these conversations, particularly for people in humanities, and humanistic social sciences [crosstalk 00:12:29] to the forefront.

Tanya Domey: Yeah that's a very good point to address. I mean you see all these articles in the Chronicle about higher ed. How do you defend humanities? How do you support humanities. It's a steady drum beat in educational publications.

Jennifer Furlon: Right, and actually it's [crosstalk 00:12:46] from Penn State has written some articles in the MLA's profession, and then the Chronicle for this. Just analyzing

data, and talking about why the crisis is worse than it's been before. I think he's really smart, and I would really suggest to people that they look up his articles. I think those are the things that have changed, in sort of a national conversation. Now the professional associations that didn't really talk a lot about this. The American Historical Association. The Modern Language Association. The American Psychological Association. Some of the big science organizations are now talking about this.

Where do our folks go? What do they do? How can we help them get to where they want to go better. I think that's really useful, and productive, although they're a lot of critique back, and forth about, should this conversation be about creating more opportunities on the tenure track? Where do we locate this ... What's most productive? That has changed. What do I see in my office for our doctoral students. I would say ... Someone asked me this question yesterday. I would say that the majority of our doctoral students want to give the academic job search a try. They maybe emotionally, or professionally, or both wedded to this at varying levels.

For some people it's one thing of many that they're going to try. For others it's really in their heart that they have trouble seeing other possibilities, and that this is what they want to do. I don't think that is going to change. I think for many of our students, given the faculty job market at least a try is something that's always going to happen. Then if they're successful they can make choices from there. Did I answer your question?

Tanya Domey: Yeah [crosstalk 00:14:44] ...

Jennifer Furlon: I'm just babbling.

Tanya Domey: No, no, no, I mean that makes sense. Also, as somebody who has occupied different fields, like I've worked in government. I've worked in Washington, and also in the State Department, where having a PhD was highly respected, and very useful. As a matter of fact in the policy world, in think tanks you want to have a PhD. Since I've been here at the Graduate Center I've met many students. I've worked with a lot of them in my job in communications. I've met many people who have gotten jobs in the academy, but I've also met some people that one for example works at the Pew, Polling Institute in DC. She used to do this work at the center for Latin American, Caribbean, and Latino studies, where she was doing the data. She was in charge of the research for the data project.

That's a great job. The Pew Polls are ... They have their finger on the pulse of the American people, and there isn't anything probably more important right now then knowing what the attitudes, and values of Americans are given what we're all going through at this moment in the political context. I see this at the Graduate Center. A student I worked with is now at the University of Alabama in

a tenure track position. Another person who's done all this data visualization, she has a tenure track position. It's very impressive.

Of course I hear that the job market is tight. I also see a lot of really talented people doing exceptionally well, and they're not in the traditional academy position here at the Graduate Center. I've seen this. I've seen the process that people go through, because you get to know people, because they're in school for a long time here.

Jennifer Furlon: Right, oh yeah.

Tanya Domey: Those kind of relationships, knowing about their stories, and what they're doing is really interesting. At a bigger place like Columbia, or NYU, you don't necessarily see the career people that much. You've been around. I've seen you around, and I see you talking to students. I just wanted to get a sense for our audience to understand kind of what you're doing, and what you're seeing. The other thing that you do that I particularly have appreciation for as a professional communicator, is that you co author a column at the Chronicle, and you've published a book. The Academic Job Search Handbook with your co author. Tell me how you decided to start writing in the public square literally, when you talk about the Chronicle of higher ed, which is equivalent to the New York Times of education writing for our audience members.

Jennifer Furlon: Right. I talked about having good mentorship at the University of Pennsylvania in that career office. My co author is more senior than I am, and she brought me into the opportunity basically. She had been writing for the Chronicle on, and off for some time. She [crosstalk 00:18:25] ...

Tanya Domey: Her name is Julia Miller Vick, so everybody knows.

Jennifer Furlon: Julia Vick invited me to write with her as an experiment. When you co author something, your repore with your co author is very important.

Tanya Domey: It's everything.

Jennifer Furlon: We had a good repore, and I think when you co author, which I really recommend that people try. It's actually a lot of fun to find someone that you can write with. It's sort of being able to fill in each other's gaps. When you run out of steam the other person brings fresh ideas, and [inaudible 00:19:02] ... We've written our Chronicle column back, and forth for a long time now, and it's been a lot of fun. The Academic Job Search Handbook, the same sort of thing. The fifth edition we added a third author to have another voice, and also, because it's a lot of work to update an edition of that volume.

That's how I got into those. I mean basically good mentorship, being given the opportunity by someone. Being open to the opportunity. Yeah, it's fun.

Tanya Domey: Has it extended your network? I imagine a lot of people read it, and do people reach out to you?

Jennifer Furlon: People do occasionally reach out to us, and say that the column was helpful, or say that the book was helpful. Joe Strauss from our music department new that the Academic Job Search Handbook, because I even started at the graduate center. That gave me [crosstalk 00:20:08] relationship with Joe. I speak to his music students who are going on the academic job market every fall, and see a lot of students from music. Learned a lot about music. Slightly ironic, because I am completely tone deaf, and those students are not.

Tanya Domey: There's a great music program here at the Graduate Center.

Jennifer Furlon: There is a great music program here.

Tanya Domey: I think it's sort of a gem in the rough. People don't really ... It doesn't have a lot of visibility. I mean it should, because the students are incredibly talented, but I have a fondness for them. We talked about PhD students, and I don't want to overlook the Master students, before we go to another discussion. I want to talk about the podcast with you, and your social media. What's different maybe, or how do you approach graduate students who are MA programs. Imagine that some of them might be considering pursuing a PhD here at the Graduate Center, or not. What's different about talking to Master students?

Jennifer Furlon: Well I think probably the biggest difference is Master degree students are here for a shorter time. They have no time to lolly gag, if they are hoping that in a year and a half, two years this graduate degree launches them into a new opportunity. They really have to do a lot of work, a lot of networking, a lot of strategy around their career to get there. Whereas our PhD students are here for five, six, seven years right?

Tanya Domey: Right.

Jennifer Furlon: Even if they kind of just chill, and focus on their course work for three years. They've got another three years to sort of get their act together, and make a career plan. I don't encourage that, but it's not uncommon shall we say that. The Master degree students have to be focused from day one. That's sort of the burden that's on them. Our Master degree students, I think have a kind of broader, maybe social life kind of scope than our PhD students. We have Master degree students who are coming to a MA, or a MS program straight from undergrad. We have people who have spent 10 years in one profession, and are hoping to use a Masters degree to angle into something else.

Of course we have people from both of those kinds of, both of those camps in our PhD programs. There's a little bit less. I sort of know what I'm going to get usually when I see a PhD student on my calender, and with a Masters degree student if I met with them before [crosstalk 00:23:13] they could really be

coming from almost any direction. That sounds bad to say. I know [crosstalk 00:23:19] ...

Tanya Domey: No. No.

Jennifer Furlon: There's a kind of typical PhD student, who may have worked for a year, or two after finishing under grad, or may have done a Masters degree student, or a Masters degree somewhere else. But the MA students tend to skew a little bit more broadly.

Tanya Domey: Tell us about the resources you have available. I mean what kind of services do you provide at the Career Planning, and Professional Development Office?

Jennifer Furlon: Most career offices, one of the things that people most want is to come, and meet with someone one, on one, and get their job documents reviewed. Ask people questions about networking. Ask people questions about where to look for jobs. Ask people questions about what should I ... Here's my situation, what should I do? We provide that, so we do a lot of one on one career advising in our office. We also do a lot of events, workshops on kind of the career basics, like writing a resume, interviewing. How to find your fit. We host alumni events, where we bring in alumni to talk about their careers, and give perspective about how to get into that field. How to build a career in that field, whatever the field may be.

We do a lot of that. That I think is what students expect from us. I think that is just some of the most useful basics that we can offer.

Tanya Domey: That's all really important, because it didn't exist before you came in the door, which is so incredible. The other thing that you're doing is you have this podcast. Tell us about the podcast, how it came about, and is there a continuous host, or different students host? How does it work?

Jennifer Furlon: I have several doctoral students who work for me. For a long time we talked about how to create compelling alumni profiles for the site. Do we do a picture, then a transcribed interview? How do we feature our alumni? What do we do? What's the best way to do it? One of our students hit on the idea of doing a podcast, and at that time there was a music student working in our office, who knew a lot about recording, and editing sound. This student, a very interesting guy taught the other students how to record, and how to edit the podcast content using an open source software.

That kind of put the kind of own ess on my students, who were really enthusiastic about this podcast idea, because they apparently ... I only started listening to podcasts recently. I guess that should be embarrassing. I guess it just shows my age, but my students said that podcasts were one way that they really got content, and they would go jogging, and put podcasts on their I-device. I sound really old, when I say stuff like that. They went with a podcast, and I let

the students kind of drive the production. Whenever I meet an interesting alum, or either in person, or over email, just cross them in the world. I say to them, "Would you want to be willing to be on our podcast?" If they say yes.

People just say yes. Some people say tell me more. Then I toss the name to the students. We try to get a really ... We try to get students from all different programs, so that we have broad representation of the Graduate Center. We record ... We just finished our first season. We'll start the second season in a few weeks. I had two students who were very busy over the summer doing interviews, editing podcasts, and getting them ready to go. Our podcast always starts with the phrase, "For Graduate Center students by Graduate Center students."

Tanya Domey: Yes.

Jennifer Furlon: That's very much what it is. It is a student driven initiative, and they have a lot of fun with it.

Tanya Domey: It's very well done. It's a great way to also keep your network in with alumni, that many times are really grateful for their experience, and they want to come back, and give, and share, and people like to do that. It makes them feel good about their connection to the Graduate Center I would imagine.

Jennifer Furlon: Yeah, people have been very receptive.

Tanya Domey: Well I just want to say that this is a wonderful thing that you have done. It's really important to the lives of students, and their futures. You're to be congratulated. We will look forward to hearing more about your activities at the Career Center. I want to thank you for being here today.

Jennifer Furlon: Thanks for having me.

Tanya Domey: Thanks for tuning into the Thought Project, and thanks to our guest, Doctor Jennifer Furlon, the Director of Career Planning, and Professional Development at the Graduate Center. The Thought Project is brought to you with production engineering, and technical assistance by Sara Fishman. I'm Tanya Domey tune in next week.