

## **The Politics Classroom**

Host: Professor Floros

Ep. 2022.15: It's Broke and Needs to be Fixed

In the Classroom: Professor Laura Hamilton (University of California, Merced Sociology)

### **Professor Kate Floros:**

Hi, everyone. It's Professor Floros from The Politics Classroom, a podcast of UIC Radio. Today, I'm going to share with you a talk given to members of the UIC United Faculty union at the University of Illinois, Chicago by Professor Laura Hamilton, a sociologist from the University of California, Merced about the racial consequences of underfunding public universities, followed by an abbreviated Q&A.

So, let's get started in The Politics Classroom, recorded on April 20, 2022.

**Intro Music:** Three Goddesses by Third Age

### **Professor Jeff Kessler:**

My name is Jeff Kessler. I'm the Chair of the Committee on Political Education for UICUF. The COPE is the political action committee for UICUF, and our goals include supporting pro-education and pro-labor legislation, endorsing pro-education and pro-labor candidates in the Illinois House and Senate, and educating members on political issues, uh, which is our purpose today, with Dr. Laura Hamilton.

Before we begin, the COPE wants to acknowledge and express solidarity with GEO who continue to strike for a fair contract. We believe that the poor treatment of GEO is a direct consequence of underfunding public higher education. We encourage everyone to join their picket, um, when they can and to support their strike fund.

### **Floros:**

My name is Kate Floros. I am a clinical assistant professor in the political science department, and I am currently the Coordinator for Political Education for the COPE.

It is now my pleasure to introduce Dr. Laura T. Hamilton. Dr. Hamilton is a full professor and the chair of the Sociology department at the University of California, Merced. She earned a bachelor's degree in Sociology from DePaw University and her master's and PhD in Sociology from Indiana University. Her research and teaching interests include higher education organizations, social class, gender, intersectionality, family, and mixed research methods.

She is the solo author of the 2016 book "Parenting to a Degree: How Family Matters for College and Beyond," which explores the role of parenting strategies in student success in higher education. In addition to many other publications, she also has two co-authored books on her CV. In 2015, Dr. Hamilton and her co-author Elizabeth A. Armstrong released "Paying for the Party: How College Maintains Inequality," which follows a group of young women over five years and illustrates how university structures advantaged students from privileged backgrounds while failing to remove obstacles to the upward mobility of many students from more modest backgrounds.

Dr. Hamilton's most recent book, co-authored with Kelly Nielsen, is the subject of today's talk. "Broke: The Racial Consequences of Underfunding Public Universities,"

published in 2021, tells an organizational story about two New Universities with high research ambitions serving low-income students of color in California. UIC is name-checked in Dr. Hamilton's book, so we are especially excited to welcome her to a fellow New University and look forward to her insights about a setting that will look strikingly familiar to our daily work environment. So, Dr. Laura Hamilton, welcome to UIC.

**Professor Laura Hamilton:**

Thank you so much, Kate. I'm really excited to be here with this audience.

So, the title of today's talk is "Austerity Administration and How to Push Back." The talk draws directly on my research from my book with Kelly Nielsen, and that book focuses on the ways that the defunding of higher education has really shaped the organizational practices of research universities serving the most marginalized student populations.

So, we refer to the universities at the center of our book as New Universities. New Universities are public research universities that enroll a segment of the new majority of US post-secondary seekers. The new majority is not affluent, not white, or from households with college educated parents. These students primarily attend community colleges, open access schools, and for-profit universities.

When they do gain access to research universities, small numbers are admitted to predominantly white schools, but many more are concentrated in reinvented organizations that just 20 or 30 years ago served very different populations or, in the unique case of the University of California, Merced, did not exist. New Universities organize around inclusion rather than exclusion and focus on offering social mobility to historically marginalized students. Typically, at least a quarter of the New University student population identifies as racially underrepresented students. New Universities, enroll economically disadvantaged students of color, as well as other low-income students. Indeed, students receiving federally funded Pell grants frequently constitute a third of the student body or far more.

Research is central to the mission of the New University and not by accident. These are aspirational organizations that compete on the basis of research in order to secure status and financial resources. New Universities are typically ranked among the top 200 national universities, according to US News and World Report, and are either designated as Research I or Research II. So, there are New Universities all over the country, including UIC. We argue in the book that New Universities will increase in numbers as the racial demography of the US continues to change, the wealth gap between the richest and poorest Americans grows, and declining fertility rates really shrink the size of the college-going population in many states. Many predominantly white universities will look to the new majority for organizational survival and many regional universities already serving racially marginalized students will intensify research in order to maintain or hopefully gain ground.

New Universities offer a particularly useful lens into what we refer to as post-secondary racial neoliberalism. Neoliberalism supports the deflation of public spending on social welfare and the intensification of private market competition, which we're gonna see more as the talk proceeds. In "Broke" we also build on the

work of Michael Omi and Howard Winant in arguing that post-secondary neoliberalism in the US is at its core, a racial project.

So, where did New Universities come from? Low-cost public higher education existed in the US during much of the Cold War period from the late 1940s and up until about 1980. As students of color, often from low-income households, really began to enter higher education in significant numbers, we see that sentiment around government financing soured. Over the next 30 years the dismantling of affirmative action and the end of the state university partnership of the Cold War really occurred in lockstep.

The New University is a product of demands for access to research universities in a racially segregated post-secondary system. Most racially marginalized students are effectively blocked from top 200 research universities. Without affirmative action these students typically lack the accumulated privilege that would dramatically increase the odds of entry to the very tippy top of the system. As many predominantly white public universities scramble for tuition dollars from wealthy white and East Asian students, often outside state or country lines, New Universities have instead expanded their reach within their own states. By capturing an underserved student population, they really ensure their own existence.

In states around the country, a reduction in government support has dramatically harmed public higher education as a whole, but I wanna emphasize that the impact has been different for different organizations. Among public four-year universities, New Universities are hit the worst. For instance, a recent report by the Institute for College Access and Success indicates that predominantly Latinx institutions, those over 40% Latinx, received nearly \$4,300 less in per student revenue than similar peer institutions. With around 35% of incoming students identifying as Latinx, UIC is very similar to these schools.

How are race and the allocation of post-secondary resources linked today? So, I have a cycle here. If we start at the top box in the cycle, you can see that racialized resource allocation is centered on merit, a socially constructed and colorblind sorting mechanism that emerged in elite US higher education as defense against demands for greater access by marginalized groups. White families have on average, greater income and wealth to devote to producing academic and extracurricular merit, thus their students typically appear more meritorious regardless of actual abilities, and potential. Merit then leads to the racial segregation of students into different schools. Merit is also mapped onto organizations so that there are supposedly more quote, unquote selective and better quality schools, distinctions that are directly tied to student racial composition. Schools that serve racially and economically disadvantaged students are thus, less competitive for private funds from tuition, donations, philanthropic investment, and corporations. With limited access to private funds, and in many cases, state funds, these organizations cannot provide the same level of support as organizations serving affluent white students. Limited organizational supports for the educational or research missions of the university can then become normalized, as inevitable and unavoidable, even by administrators, which is part of what we're discussing today.

There's really a feedback loop here. If universities with disadvantaged students are always under-resourced and their students under-supported, then it contributes to the perception that merit is somehow accurate, rather than a social construction that produces racial inequities.

The rest of the talk today is gonna focus on these questions. How and why, and to what end did New University leaders administer austerity? How might their practices entrench austerity? As a reminder, by austerity we mean the voluntary reduction of public spending on higher education.

So, the material consequences of austerity are very real. What I'm showing you here are decreases in the share of state funding for California's four-year university systems, but we could be looking at almost any state. Note the very clear and opposing relationship to corrections funding in the state. So, as you see in CSU, funding goes down, corrections funding goes up in such a way that it makes an X.

This is in part why we emphasize the voluntary aspect of austerity. Governments choose where and how to invest. In Illinois, there has been a similar decline in funding for public higher education. General funds provided about 33% of public university revenue in 2019, compared with 72% in 2002; the remainder comes primarily from tuition and fees. As a result Illinois's average tuition and fees for in-state students were the fourth highest in the US in the 2020-2021 school year. So, in the UC, like most state systems, New Universities are the most impacted. Let's take a quick look at how resources end up being dispersed along racial lines in the UC, and there are likely many parallels in the state of Illinois.

Around 10% of UC revenue is from general funds. This small amount is distributed in equal per-head allotments to students across the system. Now, this is somewhat atypical. In many states state appropriations are unequally divided with the state flagship receiving a disproportionate share of state money, but even this best-case scenario results in resource inequities because of uneven access to private funds. UCM and UCR have the largest racially and economically marginalized student bodies in the UC system by far and they're almost entirely dependent on state funds. For example, while UC Merced is less than 1% nonresident and UCR is around 3% nonresident, several of the UCs are around a quarter nonresident. This matters because non-resident tuition in the UC system is effectively three times in-state tuition and largely stays on the specific campus.

Other UCs also benefit from high profile donors and scaled up philanthropic activity. In contrast Merced and Riverside have what has been described as a "limited or non-existent pipeline" for multimillion dollar gifts. For example, in 2013, UCLA and UC San Diego both started financial campaigns. By June 30, 2018 UCLA had raised well over \$4 billion and UC San Diego over \$1.5 billion. In contrast, Riverside's Living the Promise campaign, which began two years earlier, had only raised around \$200 million by the same date. The endowment assets of UC Merced and Riverside are among the lowest in the System because these schools serve more students from economically disadvantaged families. Legions of millionaire alumni are not lining up to make tax-subsidized gifts. At the end of the 2019-2020 fiscal year, the per undergraduate student endowment at Merced was roughly 1/25, the amount at UCLA and 1/22 the amount at UC Berkeley. And there are also differences in grant

activity and auxiliary sales. At UC Merced, for example, auxiliary services, which are often a profitable unit of the university were in the red.

Austerity administrators were in part thus really responding to real financial pressures. However, we argue that administrators at resource-starved universities are also deeply immersed in austerity logics. When administrators are coping with austerity, they often buy into a culture of austerity that suggests a publicly funded higher education system is unaffordable and the new funding regime irreversible. For example, as a university administrator in our sample passionately explained, "The model that got us here is not going to be what gets us into the future. That idea that we have to dig in our heels and tell the state, the public, the legislature, the governor, and so on that we can't do anymore until they give us more money is misguided because we're not as rich of a country as we thought we were." He then launched into a description of market-based strategies UC Riverside would be pursuing to increase revenue. The statement is really bizarre in a state that encompasses the wealth of both Hollywood and Silicon Valley. There's in fact, a great deal of money concentrated in California, especially on the coasts. Public policies shape how that wealth is to be distributed. If New University leaders believe that publicly funded higher education is impossibly costly, then they act in ways that may entrench austerity.

The rest of the talk emphasizes several of the practices used by New University administrators facing austerity. We talk about Getting Big, Cutting Costs, and Being Market Smart in the book. These practices tend to undercut the experiences of historically marginalized students. At times they're even counterproductive to organizational survival and prestige production. Leadership may set into motion a self-fulfilling prophecy, inadvertently undermining claims to public resources by suggesting that public universities are just fine without substantial state support.

All right, **Get Big**. As this headline from the Chronicle of Higher Education suggests, mega-universities are on the rise. And who becomes a mega-university? If you map undergraduate enrollment growth at public universities by research category since 2000, you will see that while the top tier remains largely flat, every other category has increased considerably in a short span of time. In particular striving post-secondary organizations have just exploded in their growth. In Michael Crow's book about ASU, sort of the quintessential New University, he argues that the academy might even learn from the Cheesecake Factory, which has reengineered the gourmet culinary experience for affordable delivery to millions.

ASU is a behemoth. Since Crow's arrival in 2002, enrollment at ASU has nearly doubled to over 100,000 students due in large part to heavy use of online curriculum. So, what is going on here? Why are New Universities in particular amping up the growth at a time when other schools can't fill their incoming classes? Getting Big is important for New Universities. Tuition, student loans, and need-based financial aid are the most reliable sources of revenue that these schools can secure. When the state places limits on tuition increases, Getting Big is an obvious way to increase tuition revenue. Riverside's 2021 long range development plan indicates that the campus will grow to 35,000 students by 2035. This is an increase of around 12,500 students or 54% growth. When I looked at UIC, I also noted considerable growth over the past eight years. Undergraduate enrollment in 2020 was up around

25% from 2015. And in 2021, there was an 18% increase in the number of first-year undergraduates choosing to attend UIC from the previous year.

Getting Big is also a strategy pursued by public universities seeking to compete on the basis of research. R-I status heavily weighs research and development expenditures, especially in science and engineering. This leads to incredible pressures to enroll more students who bring more tuition dollars to help fund the research enterprise, particularly outside of the most elite and well-established universities as there may be no other way to compete and few other sources of revenue. Austerity administrators are, however, as UC Merced leadership frequently put it, "flying the plane while building it." That is, without sufficient capital funding, they are in a constant process of catching up using the funds from one cohort of students to build what they need, but this always comes too late for those students.

What is the problem with Getting Big? So, let's be clear. Getting Big is not a desirable strategy, more of a last resort, particularly when schools assume they cannot get more from their state legislatures. Harvard, Stanford, and other private elites, for instance, have not significantly increased available slots for many decades. They have instead dramatically grown in endowment dollars, not students, allowing for astronomical increases in per student expenditures. New Universities may struggle to include access in what it means to be a high-quality public university. Perhaps most crucially, however, large cohorts of students within states are associated with lower public subsidies per student and relatively lower undergraduate degree attainment. Resources often become diluted.

As a UC Riverside faculty member made a powerful statement at a faculty town hall that really stuck with us and echoed our observations. As she noted,

"Unchecked growth undermines the pursuit of being a world-class university. A world-class university is not one in which new students arrive without housing accommodations, face panic with course registrations and financial aid, or attempt to get appointments with overburdened advisors and staff. It is not one in which students come to class stressed out because they've spent an hour or more trying to find parking. And it is not one in which students avoid the restrooms, if at all possible, because they are in my student's words, "disgusting" only then to go into classrooms with broken furniture, missing ceiling tiles, dust encrusted air vents, wires coming out of walls, floors covered with dirty footprints and leaves, and filthy desks and chairs. They have to contend with unstable Wi-Fi access because the system is overburdened and several student centers are overwhelmed. The message that students get once they've scored target numbers and have contributed to UCR being named a Hispanic-Serving Institution and recognizes one of the most diverse campuses in the nation is that it is then unimportant that they at a minimum receive instruction, adequately appointed labs, classrooms, and lecture halls. This is not world-class. It is third-class."

There were similar problems that UC Merced, except instead of decaying infrastructure, there was no infrastructure. Classes were meeting late into the evenings, student rooms that were once doubles became triples. Triples became quadruples, and students can be found studying in odd spaces, including a little used elevator in my building. Growth at both campuses, thus proceeded to development

or maintenance of basic infrastructure, such as classrooms and dormitory spaces. This meant that the most racially and economically marginalized students ended up dealing with the acute consequences of underfunding the UC system.

**Cut costs.** This probably sounds very familiar to folks here at UIC. Pressures to cut costs, embracing of cost-cutting measures exist across higher education, but are stronger in New Universities. Austerity administrators and New Universities operate under the assumption that they must shave organizational costs and stretch available resources in order to continue competing on the basis of research. At UC Riverside leadership quickly embraced the idea that the campus could do more with less like many other universities and employ corporate strategies to cut costs. It is in this context that the chancellor and CFO piloted a program for activity-based costing or ABC. Ironically, the only UC to do so as a result of a deal with the governor, ABC involves developing measures of per unit costs for any given activity to produce more accurate data. ABC is supposed to reduce both seemingly unnecessary instructional costs and thus reliance on state funds.

UCR administrators seem to embrace the challenge. As a UCR white paper about the project asks, how can a cutting-edge university continue to deliver a superior education to a growing student population in an era of reduced state funding? ABC is their answer. So where is the pressure to cut costs coming from? Austerity logics, which are widely accepted in state legislatures and among policy makers, as well as sometimes within universities, reflect the widespread belief that higher education suffers from a cost disease. That is, universities will wastefully spend whatever money is available to them, regardless of need.

This is a myth. Research indicates that tuition increases in the public sector have been overwhelmingly driven by state funding cuts, not rising educational costs. Nonetheless, this perspective suggests that universities must learn to utilize limited public resources more efficiently and generate their own resources. And that such a goal is, in fact, well within reach without dramatically compromising the quality of research and education. Administrators may also perceive there is no other way forward.

In the live webcast that went out to all UC Merced staff in 2016, the AVC of Human Resources at UC Merced indicated that the university's official policy was to be "tolerable sub-optimization." He defined the term as follows: Absent an allocation of X resources, then we must accept Y level of sub-optimization. The goal was to figure out how to staff and run the university in the four years leading up to 2020 with a far smaller budget than what was needed. Student enrollment and campus space would be rapidly growing, creating the need for more staff and faculty than in the past. But the resources to fund current and future positions were very scarce. One way to cut costs was to accept suboptimal performance from overburdened workers.

This was a move of absolute desperation. Cutting costs is problematic, particularly when the cuts come from money devoted to educating marginalized students. The dirty secret, according to an academic official at UCR, was that if a university wants to pour more money into the research mission, the only way it's going to come about is shaving it off from tuition. You figure out how to do the teaching in a way that leaves you something to scrape off, to subsidize research. What are the three

most common ways to scrape off the instructional budget? Raise class sizes, use technology to reach mass audiences, and reduce labor costs. Research indicates that all three are typically detrimental for students like those at New Universities.

Reducing labor costs really outsource important supports for students. University employees, and even students themselves, often take on labor to ensure that marginalized student populations can succeed at the university when the university fails to offer sufficient infrastructure. These employees and students are often people of color and are not compensated for the labor. We refer to this as racialized equity labor.

Finally, our third austerity practice: **Be Market Smart**. What do Market Smart schools do? They sell what they can, AKA monetized assets, develop new assets, direct resources to profitable units, identify corporate partners, and generate new markets for the sale of university goods and services. Being Market Smart is all about private revenue streams. As a UCM administrator explained, "I would love to see more named buildings on this campus. And certainly the 2020 Project is only going to expand our portfolio, our menu of options. In this area, the right donor could get a bargain because you could name a building on this campus for a hell of a lot less than naming a building at Stanford or Berkeley." I like this quote as an example of Market Smart thinking, because it illustrates the changing framework for interpreting and utilizing a longer standing practice. While patrons of universities have long been thanked for their contributions with titled buildings, spaces, or schools, you see Merced leadership explicitly discussed naming rights to new buildings as financial products to be hawked. Here are the language of portfolio and menu of options, as well as the bargain available to donors, that is, the ability to get a building named on the cheap, suggests a more aggressive and strategic approach to the donor relationship. It's a very clear example of monetizing existing assets.

What is going on here? Higher education is not immune to the neoliberal notion that the market is the solution or the fix for austerity. Leaders who have adopted a market stance are particularly appealing to trustees, state legislatures, and other involved parties. For example, this quote comes from the now former chancellor of UC Merced before her time at Merced. This market-oriented approach is one reason she was hired in the first place. As she notes, "Today's higher education environment has become increasingly competitive, and many public colleges and universities have begun to adopt market-oriented strategies as a result."

Market Smart practices are not always smart or even executed in ways likely to yield profit. At New Universities practices that divert resources from marginalized students or extract profit from them also have great potential to do harm. The self-funded degree, dubbed a cash cow for struggling colleges, is a perfect example of an exploitative market practice. In contrast to a model in which post-secondary schools heavily subsidize graduate study, it shifts the cost of graduate education to students and families. At the time of the study, UC Merced was heavily pushing departments to create self-funded master's degrees.

I want to note that a Market Smart approach also tends to lead administrators to shift money away from the majors and schools within universities serving disadvantaged students, which we observed in both of our focal schools. For



example, the School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts at both universities served more low-income and Latinx students than any other school but got less resources. As a university employee noted, "The School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts gets shunted to the side. And resources! I mean, it's like the School is seen as a distance, second or third to other schools. The things that have become important in universities are who brings in the funds and the splashy science stuff in engineering that brings in the funding."

Now, this statement isn't entirely true for a variety of reasons that we could go into after the Q&A, but these differences, translated into meaningful on-the-ground disparities for students. In UC Merced's School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts, the typical caseload for an academic advisor was 750 students per one advisor. In engineering, it was 350 students per advisor. These are racial inequities given that the School of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts served far more racially disadvantaged students. They're also class inequities given that there were more Pell students in the School of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts; thus, we can see how some racial and class disparities in funding that play out between universities also occur internal to universities.

Finally, a Market Smart approach may encourage commodification of marginalized students. An obvious resource that New Universities have to offer in exchange for private support is students themselves. For instance, administrators at both UCR and UCM intentionally cultivated financial relationships with companies that desired workers of color to diversify their predominantly white organizations. This is not unlike elite private schools partnering with elite firms for job recruitment, except that the jobs that corporations offer to New University students are field-based managerial positions, working in low-income communities of color, not high-paying positions in leadership. They actually recruit at different schools for those. A whole chapter of "Broke" is devoted to the complex and ethically complicated relationship between UC Riverside and Pepsi Co. UCR gets money from Pepsi and job market training; in return, Pepsi gets a Pepsi-exclusive campus and Black and Latinx students to corner racial markets. These students end up serving as employees in racialized ERGs, or employee resource groups, that often conceptualize in market products like Tapatio-flavored chips. This example highlights the way the austerity logics can lead universities serving marginalized students to engage in potentially questionable practices typically leveraging student diversity in order to extract private funding.

So, we've reviewed three austerity practices and the hows and why and problems associated with each of them. One problem with all of these austerity admin practices is that they can inadvertently entrench austerity. Austerity practices reinforce austerity logics that lead the public to believe that public higher education does not need public support and that universities can simply do more with less. Universities that are looking outward to private funders may direct less attention to requesting funds from and demonstrating needs to the state. And this may mean that universities fail to highlight their massive contributions to public wellbeing.

Getting Big and diluting educational experiences of in-state students for research aims also does not play well with state legislatures who see it as a misappropriation of state resources. When student experiences suffer, legislatures tend to respond,

not by offering more funding, but by suggesting that universities are doing a poor job of managing what they already have. Finally, austerity practices take university operations out of public purview and move it up into the C-suite as a financial matter. This reduces transparency in what universities offer to the state and also limits faculty governance in crucial ways.

So, what are we gonna do about this? In this talk I spend the last couple of minutes with some takeaway points for breaking the racial neoliberal cycle, starting with what folks here at UIC can do and moving to some broader policy recommendations.

First, I would encourage folks here to push for visibility in the allocation of university resources. This is a public institution. As such, the school has a duty to share information, even when it doesn't want to. One thing I learned by pushing this point at UC Merced for instance, was that there was a different formula for determining the resources needed by students in different schools. In the School of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts that formula gave students something like 75 cents on the dollar to the money available to other students in other parts of the university, which as noted earlier, is a real issue given racial and class disparities and who is in what school at UC Merced. We were able to successfully lobby to change that formula to be more equitable. Without asking questions about how the university was allocating money, we could not have seen this disparity. Often university leadership has no interest in sharing these kinds of details and tries to suggest that they are financial matters removed from faculty or student purview, but in a public institution, they are not. And these kinds of details are fundamentally central to the educational mission of the university.

It is also useful, whenever possible, to remind administrators about the long-term costs associated with short term cuts. For instance, cutting the number of support staff at the university can lead to a vicious cycle of losing staff, and I would note, faculty who rely on staff, leading to expenses and rehiring and training staff and faculty. Whenever you hear it, you should reject the notion that defunding is inevitable. This kind of thinking leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy where universities cut more and more and push for doing more with less, rather than thinking strategically about how to interface with the state and the public.

Pushing back against austerity is also gonna require working together. Often when there are scarce resources, departmental units and faculty on different tracks and at different ranks are pitted against each other. Like, "here's one hire and there are 10 units. Fight!" Um, I've seen it happen. This leads to a great deal of infighting that distracts from the larger problems at hand. Faculty also need to interact with staff. Staff are incredibly important, and faculty do very little to interact with staff and students in order to create change. Each of these groups has different types of leverage and different types of constraints. And the structure of academia does a really great job of ensuring these people do not work as allies. But we need to be allies if we are to create change. This means for instance, supporting graduate student strikes for equitable pay and working conditions, marching with Black students, demanding more Black faculty, supporting non-tenure track lecturers and efforts to improve pay and stability, pushing administrators to build in regular pay increases for staff, and creating more equitable voting structures within departments, among many other things.

Speaking of allies, change internal to a state means working across campuses and with other public schools in the state. The voices of UIC actors alone are muted. The power of many University of Illinois schools speaking together would greatly amplify. This means identifying allies at other schools who can recognize the ways that campuses serving marginalized students in the state are systematically under-supported.

Because funding disparities are so deeply connected to racial hierarchies, it is also necessary to debunk the current construction of merit, which advantages affluent white students. We can do this, in part, by identifying unique strengths of marginalized students, relative to others, rather than focusing on their deficits. For instance, the first gen Latinx students at UC Merced are just light years ahead of the continuing generation white students that I taught at Indiana University at understanding structural racism and intersectionality. This means that we can have much more complex sociological discussions around these topics. Faculty and instructors need to teach to these student strengths, which may mean that you have to do some work because most faculty were trained to educate multiply advantaged students. The issue is often with how we approach the classroom and not our students.

So, when I hear things like, "half my class failed," or, "students like ours struggle to do X, Y, and Z," I remind faculty that they could try changing what they are doing. In general, this means also refusing narratives that paint students attending New Universities as somehow less than other students. I often spend a great deal of time in the classroom and with other academics outside of UC Merced, explaining that when you account for the advantages of quote unquote traditional students, students like those at UIC and UC Merced are in fact stronger, more determined, and more meritorious. The same logic extends to universities. I absolutely reject the notion that Harvard is a better university than UC Merced. Better resourced? Sure. Doing better research, better teaching, better work in the community? Doubt it.

Finally, reinvestment. Our country made a choice in the last decades of the 20th century to withdraw public funding for higher education, just as waves of racially marginalized youth gained greater access. This was not coincidental. It has starved universities serving disadvantaged student populations and fueled the administration of austerity with harmful consequences for marginalized students. Reinvestment requires convincing the public that higher education is a public good from which all of society benefits and not solely a private commodity that promotes individual gain. We once saw higher education as a public good in the Cold War era. But, the Cold War university was a war machine driven by military spending and fears of falling behind Soviet scientific development. I propose instead, the diversion of the Green New Deal legislation could really serve this purpose. Universities are a major source of the science behind renewable energy and research on policies to deal with upcoming natural disasters, public health crises, environmental pollution, and population migration. These problems require collective action. Research universities can be both models for and sources of collective efforts to deal with these issues.

So, thank you very much. I look forward to the Q&A, or a nice conversation with the folks here.

**Floros:**

Great. Thank you so much. That was really amazing.

**Short music interlude:** Underneath the Surface by Tiger Gang

**Floros:**

What should a university like UIC do to combat the structural advantages of the flagship university?

**Hamilton:**

Yeah, that's a great question. And we have, you know, this, you know, same situation in the UC system, although there's one difference in that the system is just more cohesively governed by one group. Like, it is very much a single system with a single set of governing structures at the University of California Office of the President, which can make things both easier and harder in one sense. At one point, not that wildly long ago, some folks at UC San Diego, which is one of the wealthiest campuses, in part, unlike your situation, being in a wealthy city, not getting those benefits; they get enormous amounts of money from San Diego, which is also conservative stronghold in the state of California. They suggested that the UC System should just drop UC Merced, Riverside, and Santa Cruz. Um, just like a corporation would drop their, their least profitable units. And they circulated this in the letter, and to the credit of the UC System administrators, they shot that down. But there are these dynamics, particularly when things are tight where schools often sort of retreat into their own, and they think about like, um, a lot of flagships have thought about fully privatizing, for example, in order to like, not be at all attached to campuses that are serving some of the state residents that they're like not serving. So, one thing you could do is try to identify some folks at other campuses in the state that also are aware of this dynamic.

The other thing that I would point out too is that state legislatures actually are really concerned with serving students in the state. And so, it has worked to some extent in California to remind the legislature that some schools are doing a much better job of serving the state than others. Um, and so this has led to various, various things like putting a cap on out-of-state students for Berkeley, um, UCLA, et cetera, a cap that they really hate, but does sort of limit them from going higher. And also some... there's various conversations about indexing, like the amount you get per student, to Pell grant status. Um, and so that's another conversation that has come partly from the reminder to the state legislature, from actors on UC Merced and UC Riverside's campus that they need to, um, really pay attention to this.

You have to be, like, really loud I think sometimes to do this. One of the more effective tools I've seen...Riverside at one point, their faculty, um, got together and put out a statement about redlining. Um, and they, they argued this as like in effect, like, um, academic redlining that you're like, you're sending students of color to schools with no resources, just like you would, you know, be keeping people of color like out of wealthy neighborhoods. And that got a lot of attention in the state and lawmakers read this stuff. It is a difficult path to hoe, and it, it takes a lot of mobilizing. It takes a lot of stuff that as faculty, we actually get no credit for.

**Short music interlude:** Underneath the Surface by Tiger Gang

**Floros:**

Can you comment on the trend of university Boards of Trustees looking more and more like corporate boards?

**Hamilton:**

When you see universities adopting corporate logics, they start to look like corporations in terms of the structure and who is making decisions. One of the things I've seen over the 12 years that I've been here at UC Merced is, for example, the chancellor of the university used to meet with the deans of each of the schools on campus as their Executive Council. What happened was they shifted. The Executive Council now includes a lot of administrators who are not educators who have these kinds of degrees. And so, the deans actually, in many cases, actually have no idea what's going on. And it's this idea that these decisions are financial decisions, not educational decisions that allows the university often to sort of shift this out of the hands of, you know, faculty and faculty governance.

My colleague, Charlie Eaton, has a great book called "Bankers in the Ivory Tower," which shows this shift over time, that I highly recommend that you check out. And one of the things that he points out is that on the Boards of Trustees are not just sort of these MBAs, but they're actually hedge fund managers. These are private equity folks coming out of a particular sector of the economy in which the entire logic is profit, and that logic gets infused from Boards of Trustees, from folks who are in these positions in the university, into what the university's doing, such that the primary objective becomes, does this thing make money, which in a lot of cases, almost all cases, making money and social equity are often in completely at odds with each other. So that shift that you're talking about has been really crucial to marketization. It's financialization, like making these financial issues and sort of relying on private revenue streams, right? Looking for profit through that avenue, instead of looking to the state for support, which doesn't have the same kind of potential for infinite, infinite profit, right?

**Short music interlude:** Underneath the Surface by Tiger Gang

**Floros:**

The work of the university is more and more frequently assigned to low-cost laborers like grad students and argued to look like a benefit.

**Hamilton:**

Of course, there's value in graduate students teaching some of their own courses, but this logic can be real extractive, right, um, I think as you're suggesting. Like, so you take a, you know, second-year graduate student, third-year graduate student and say, "here you go, like, teach a class" without any kind of sustained training and have it be like on the job, you know, like in the fire, cuz you know, graduate instructors are cheaper than others and not compensate them adequately. A lot of this has been referred to before as, like, the universities, both, like, the, the church

and the car dealership. It's like, the sleazy sort of, like, sale of goods. And then also the sort of, you know, we promote equity. And there is a way in which things that in fact are not okay, and are incredibly damaging to folks who are more vulnerable positions end up getting framed as better or for equity or for access.

The example that comes directly to mind for me, because I'm in the middle of a massive research project about this, is online education. A lot of nonprofit universities have outsourced online education to for-profit companies that run these programs and they do not provide a very high-quality education at all. Students really struggle to graduate. They also struggle to repay despite taking out less loans because they're not living on campus. They can't repay them. And those programs with state legislature, with accreditors, whatever, they make the argument that they are a social good and they're providing access to vulnerable communities. And so, it's exactly that kind of thing where it gets, like, equity logic gets attached to it and it's just flat out, not true. And so like access, equity, even DEI, are often used in ways that are actually really disadvantageous to the, to the people who, um, really need those supports, right? You're right that it often falls to folks who, um, are sort of, not at the tippy top of the structure to do that labor, which kind of relates to the racialized equity labor question that you, you brought up.

And so, your students read the piece that was about the ways in which students of color end picking up a lot of this work on campuses that don't have adequate supports for them. I have a companion piece that's currently halfway through the review process. It's about staff and faculty and all of the ways that staff and faculty do this work. It's not only people of color, but it's mostly people of color who are doing this labor. And when the university doesn't support students of color, these folks are doing like emotional labor. They're doing physical labor, they're meeting the material needs of their students to providing academic counseling. They're doing it after hours. They're doing, you know, like if they're doing it when it's like, not even really each to their job, like their job has like literally nothing to do with students. They're meeting with these students and all of that outsourced labor is enormous burden for folks and they are taking it on because the university is not adequately supporting the students.

And those students, when you talk about the profit logic, the universities like these aren't where our profit is at, because these are not the students that are paying out of state tuition, for example. And, it's just devastating. People burn out. People leave. I, you know, there's a one really memorable quote that stuck with me was that somebody who worked in mental health services at the university, um, said that their, their colleague quit because, and went to work in, um, corrections because the job conditions were less stressful and it paid better, which just tells you, like, how awful the working conditions must be.

**Short music interlude:** Underneath the Surface by Tiger Gang

**Floros:**

Sometimes universities provide technology resources when we really just need smaller classes.

**Hamilton:**

Yeah. I find that kind of stuff to be so gaslighting. It keeps people quiet, right? If the, the administration can say things like, "well, we did offer you resources. We have this great center for, you know, teaching excellence." And a lot of these solutions, um, end up putting it back on individual. They're very not structural. Right? So, you mentioned the, like, "I need fewer students instead." They're like "here, we'll give you a center where you can improve your teaching skills and you need to invest in this and you need to," and it's like, "okay, well, meet me halfway." Right?

I've been trained to think about everything structurally. Like, that's just what I do, but a lot of people don't. And so when they struggle in a class of 24 students to teach writing sometimes, like, there is an individual attribution and it doesn't help that the university is increasingly, like, suggesting it's your fault if you don't use this. So, I write a lot of memos. I am often in leadership positions where, like, I was the Faculty Senate Chair for Faculty Welfare. And like, literally all I did was write constant sort of memos about this. And as the department chair, I point this stuff out to my faculty.

In the UC system, the faculty governance structure is very strong, although being constantly eroded and I often will refuse to do things or refuse things that administrators want us to do that fall under this category and remind the Dean or whoever that, "what you're asking is beyond the scope of our jobs. And you're asking us to do more, and this is why this is damaging. And you know, my faculty are predominantly scholars of color. And when you ask X, Y, Z to my faculty..." Like I am just constantly doing that in a very, like, friendly but, like, direct manner. And I think you just have to keep doing that. I don't know that it will ultimately change the tide of history, but I do think it is important to put that discourse out there. And when you can, when you're in positions, to try to push back.

**Short music interlude:** Underneath the Surface by Tiger Gang

**Floros:**

Can you speak to the tension between pedagogy and the pressure for more butts in seats?

**Hamilton:**

One of the things that has been somewhat helpful is for us to get our hands on the formulas that are used to determine TA allocation and, like, exactly how they're calculated. There are formulas at every university that their people are relying on and those formulas tend to bake in assumptions. And if you can change the formulas, then you can change some of the problematic assumptions. So, for example, there were formulas that were allotting, what was it, one TA to 160 students, which is, like, bizarre and makes no sense. And, um, our department had been just filing exceptions, like right and left to allow us to have graduate students for much, much, much, much smaller classes, but lots of negotiation and conversations about those formulas.

To articulate if you have a writing intensive course, how do we define that? We were able to define it as like 18 pages of writing over the course of the semester. We've been working on getting them to recognize that writing intensive courses need graduate support, for example, and they need to be smaller. A lot of times, the answer for me is to try to figure out what formulas are they using to determine how butts in seats are, are helpful. And like, how can I tweak that to get what it is we need for our classes? Our department has, um, very few classes over 60 people, which is extremely unusual in the UC. And we've managed to protect that for a very long time through these kinds of strategies, but there is enormous pressure to increase butts in seats.

And so, some strategies that that groups can use...so, for example, if you find out the formula is an aggregate measure of your department, the number of students, your department teaches, or how many seats you offer, then you get like two people who are willing to offer, like, one ginormo class for, like, a semester and keep every other class small, you know? And then when it gets averaged, looks like we're offering like the right average number of butts in seats that people want us to offer. But in fact, we've really protected a lot of our courses and only Gone Big on like one or two courses. So that's what I mean, like you can kind of play with this stuff a little bit.

It does help too if your, like, national association has, like, statements that you can, like, marshal about class size or things like that, that are needed for your particular field. Field-based arguments can sometimes be effective if you have somebody other than you saying it, like if your national association is saying you need, this particular field needs X, Y, Z for, um, effectiveness. So, we tend to use those things too, when we can find them.

**Short music interlude:** Underneath the Surface by Tiger Gang

**Floros:**

Should the union help train department heads and deans in leadership?

**Hamilton:**

This is entirely outside of the scope of anything that any of us were, were trained to do. And the academy has also changed for people who've been in the academy for a long time. The changes that have occurred, you know, between like 1980 and now are extraordinarily large. And so basically most faculty have literally no idea how the thing that they're in is working because that was not at all part of what they paid any attention to. And the only reason I know is cuz it's like actually what I study, right? So, like, otherwise I would have no idea. So, trainings, I think would be very helpful and I think you would have to like advertise them as ways for units to actually get things that would be very, in that they are interested in getting.

I, I am on a, um, email listserv with all of the Sociology chairs in the UC system. And let me tell you how effective, just even that is. So, it's like, "what is your FTE per



student?" Like, "how much do you pay people for an honorarium?" Like, "how have you pushed back against your administration to do X, Y, Z?"

Like, as you know, in a union, like there's so much power and information sharing, um, when people can connect over these kinds of things. So, I actually really love that idea of trainings.

**Kate Floros:**

Unfortunately, we've run out of time, but this has just been amazing, and we will definitely share this conversation far and wide with our membership. And I just wanna thank you so much for taking your time to share this information with us. It's really valuable. And, hopefully in your follow up book, you can have a chapter on UIC solving all the problems.

**Laura Hamilton:**

Yes. I look forward to that chapter. Thank you so much.

**Kate Floros:**

Thank you.

Professor Laura Hamilton is a Sociology professor at the University of California, Merced. The title of her book co-authored with Kelly Nielsen is "Broke: The Racial Consequences of Underfunding Public Universities."

Please join me next week for the final podcast of the Spring 2022 semester. You've been listening to Professor Floros in The Politics Classroom, a podcast of UIC Radio. That's all I've got for this week; class dismissed.

**Outro Music:** Three Goddesses by Third Age