

Partnership between Career Services, start-up company provides students paid projects

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OPINION EDITOR

On the last day of 2015, IIT’s Career Services sent out an announcement for “an exciting initiative at Illinois Institute of Technology.” The initiative is for special, short-term paid projects with companies to become available for students. While initially I was interested in the work being done by Career Services, I’ve learned more about the exact arrangement and I think there is cause for concern.

Career Services is working with start-up Parker Dewey so students “will have the opportunity to work on projects with some of Chicago’s leading companies, emerging visionaries, and exciting non-profit organizations.” At the information meeting, I

had a chance to talk with Jeffery Moss and his vision for “career launchers.” Moss has worked with and supported several educational institutions. Parker Dewey is his self-funded project for unemployed and underemployed recent graduates. In his own words, the big picture is “it’s an opportunity to get experience, make money.” Jeffery’s passion is clearly genuine.

When asking students they didn’t seem entirely convinced.

“It’s a good opportunity for work which is why I’m interested. The point is to get a job, but at least this will let me use my skills to get money,” said Cory Winiecki. “Network building for contacts is what this is good for. Jobs4Hawks doesn’t work. This could be better than finding part-time jobs,” said Agrim Sethi. “It really seems like higher level spam.

It sounded like whatever letter you get in the mail that say we have so many jobs available in your area,” said Reno Waswil.

The grand vision of Parker Dewey hasn’t seemed to inspire its audience. I think it’s a really easy change from something that many are highly skeptical of to one that would provide an excellent opportunity for students looking for employment.

The pitch from Parker Dewey is that through these projects you get the chance to interface with companies and make contacts. Through this hard work, they may love you so much that they will call you back when they have an opening.

My problem with this is that the pitch does not adequately reflect the reality of the situation. Students will be selling themselves as independent contractors to

corporation looking to temporarily boost resources during crunch time. Satisfying the short-term needs of a company does not lead to long-term employment.

If instead Parker Dewey arranged with the companies such that each adequately executed project was guaranteed an interview on site, I would see an amazing connection between industry and new labor. Top companies apply tests to new applicants to gauge their abilities; if these projects are used as such then I think we have a match made in heaven.

Until then, from where I stand there is a disconnect between the stated vision of Parker Dewey, which I believe is genuine, and the process that is supposed to make it a reality.

An Exoticist Theory on the LGBT Movement

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The emergence of the LGBT movement has been a pretty big deal domestically, and to a lesser extent abroad. Now that the legal and political battles about its morality, implications, and ultimately legality have been mostly concluded, save for a few republican state governors who seem to have missed the Supreme Court memo, I’d like to float a theory on why the movement emerged in our time: the emergence happened because we as a culture got bored.

To understand the basis of the argument requires a short detour to social Darwinism, a subject with many negative connotations but at least a few logically sound working assumptions. Let us, in a little thought experiment, assign to each unique human civilization a value which measures the security, activity, and energy to enact and embrace change in order to better themselves, let’s name this value societal impetus.

Certain cultures seem to have inherently low impetus, and are relatively stable but stagnant. Examples include the indigenous North and South American cultures, especially the Maya and Incas who despite receiving stimulus and competition from neighboring cultures remained relatively stagnant in their own identity and did little more than to paint the region in their own image through military triumph. Examples of surviving low impetus cultures include China and India. Though ancient China was technologically advanced and militarily powerful, and though it was aware of the existence of neighboring cultures

and even the existence of Europe and maybe the Americas, it never sought to project its power and assimilate these neighbors for political or economic gain. Even when it was conquered in the 1800s by now technologically superior western forces, the Chinese tried their best to cling to traditional values as opposed to embracing the new and seemingly more powerful western ones.

High impetus cultures accordingly lead much more vibrant histories. Rome would be the first prime example. As a nation which fueled its entire political and economic structure upon the conquest, subjugation, and integration of new peoples, the Roman empire promised its soldiers and politicians wealth and land, acquired both from military conquest, and in the process of assimilating conquered people, generated more soldiers and politicians, feeding into itself to create one of the largest empires in history. More recently, and of greater note are European powers, who are geographically close packed and fiercely competitive. In the crucible of western Europe, every country seemed willing to do anything, even to forsake and redefine their own identity, in order to get an edge on their neighbors, and through military and economic success reaffirm themselves as the superior culture. Naturally, this was the birthplace of colonialism, nationalism, and imperialism, three factors integral to cultural impetus as we have defined it.

Western society is, as mentioned, decidedly high impetus. The desire to expand our influence and alter the ideals of others in our image is as undoubtably ingrained in the

modern American as the need for military triumph was ingrained in the ancient Roman. Of course this impulse manifests itself in a less extreme way today, but it is still undeniable.

A powerful example of America’s fascination with the exotic is the “turban trick”. During the Jim Crow era of racial oppression, a few clever African Americans discovered that by learning an accent and putting on a turban, they could immediately escape the brunt of racist oppression even in the heart of the deep south. By simply appearing foreign, their identity to the white male went from a stagnant, thoroughly oppressed and inferior class to an exotic, mysterious, and thoroughly exciting foreign dignity, and this garnered them seemingly unthinkable respect, given their attitude towards the prior class.

It is also prudent to note that as a consumer in this nation travel has always been a fixation. Exotic goods and imports have been the driving force behind the era of colonial expansion, and that applies for all Western countries. Though no longer imperialist in the strict sense, America retains a vague but undeniable fascination with the foreign, projected in our interest in tourism, our high consumption of foreign goods and services, our fascination with the exploration of nature on earth and space beyond, and of course our incessant meddling in foreign politics.

There is just one problem: we’ve run out of new cultures to meet.

Every time this nation encountered something new it was at the forefront of the American existence. From the initial contact with the Indians, children were scared with

tales of Indian raiders, while men traded furs for guns and wine to make their livelihoods. Cue the transition to frontierism, and soon after the Monroe Doctrine was established both to keep Europe out, but also to keep the frontier of Central and South America within American grasp.

When we got bored of the Caribbean and traveling back to tour Europe, intercontinental air travel made accessible the ports of Asia. When our economic machine thirsted for the lubricant of new markets, Africa, South America, and the Middle East became resource economies to feed our consumerism.

Our economic machine is pretty much sated now, having expanded to every corner of the globe, but the cultural fascination and desire for the exotic is not. Maybe, just maybe, when America looked inwards towards its domestic issues, it saw in the LGBT movement not only a group of oppressed people, but also a people never before publicly recognized and discussed.

America more than any other country owes its success to frontierism, and members of the LGBT community are the new cultural frontier. Unfortunately, America has historically sought out new frontiers for only one purpose, to amuse, enrich, and advance its own interests, often at the frontier’s expense, and to eventually incorporate a small degree of that frontier we find agreeable into our own culture. It is simply yet to be determined how this latest exotic new wave will break against the shoals of American progress.

Illinois Tech Robotics Hosts FIRST Robotics Competition Kickoff

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For over a decade, Illinois Tech Robotics (ITR) has been supporting the endeavors of youth Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) education through many partnerships with FIRST Robotics. FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology). On January 9, 2016, ITR’s students returned to campus early to put on the Chicagoland FIRST Robotics Competition kickoff event.

The FIRST Robotics Competition was founded in 1992 and is an international high school robotics competition where teams of students and mentors work during

a six-week build season period to build robots weighing up to 150 pounds that play in a competitive challenge that changes every year. These competitions culminate in a world championship held in St. Louis, but they begin with local kickoff events held simultaneously around the world in early January each year.

At kickoff events, teams from the local area come together and watch a live broadcast that reveals the challenge for which teams will have to build their robots. As the live broadcast concludes, teams of students receive the set of rules for their challenge as well as a kit of parts that contains components that they will find useful when building their robot. Many kickoff events also hold workshops that allow teams to meet, exchange ideas, or learn

new skills that will help their team succeed.

The Chicagoland kickoff hosted by Illinois Tech Robotics in Hermann Hall welcomed more than 300 students as well as their mentors, parents, and supporters. Illinois Tech Provost and Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs Frances Bronet opened the event with a speech to the students in attendance. After the broadcast concluded, students from Illinois Tech Robotics helped teams receive and inventory their kit of parts, review rules for the competition, lean programming techniques, and discover effective fundraising ideas.

The event was possible thanks to months of preparation on behalf of Illinois Tech Robotics members as well as the help

of dozens of volunteers on the day of the event. The Chicagoland kickoff is just the first of many volunteer events that Illinois Tech Robotics will be involved with this semester, including working as key volunteers at the Midwest Regional FIRST Robotics Competition at University of Illinois at Chicago, and volunteering at the FIRST World Championship event.

Those interested in volunteering their time with FIRST or otherwise getting involved with Illinois Tech Robotics can contact the organization at robotics.iit@gmail.com, join the organization on HawkLink, or join weekly meetings held Friday evenings at 7pm in their robotics lab in 3424 S. State Street.

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