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AIARU: Panel 2 - Organization and Structure of the Modern Research University

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Author

Van Dyke, Nella

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Symposium**

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**Panel #2: Organization and Structure of the Modern Research
University**

[Nella Van Dyke, Ph.D](#)

Associate Professor, School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts, UC Merced

**UC MERCED
ASSISTANT
PROFESSOR OF
SOCIOLOGY,
NELLA VAN DYKE,
PH.D.**

[inaudible] ..a sociology professor so I thought that I would share some insights from the organizational behavior in sociology and that I think are relevant to what we're talking about here and what we're doing on this campus. And so the research on organization formation and structure tends to emphasize two sets of forces that shape organization structure. So there's the external environment and actors within the internal environment.

And the organiza--the external environment presents both opportunities and constraints for how an organization structures itself. But then actors within a new organization, they also have independent power and they can be effective at trying new things if they recognize opportunities in their environment.

So first focusing a little on constraints. Research from an organizational ecology perspective tells us that new organizations that take an unusual form are more likely to fail because they don't have legitimacy. And other research tells us that organizations often adopt the forms that are dominant in their organizational field not because they're more effective but because they have

legitimacy. So what this tells us is, is that we need to think about the various constituencies that are relevant to us, And that would include our students, the state and federal government, foundations and other funding sources, and then business and other academic institutions that may hire our undergraduates and our graduate students, and make sure that we're doing something that makes sense to them and strikes them as valuable and legitimate.

So as [UC Irvine Chancellor] Michael Drake provided the example with the medical center, you know, the health science center, if people don't understand what it is that people are doing, it's just not going to succeed. Another example in terms of graduate student training, if we're training graduate students for positions in academic departments elsewhere, we need to make sure that we're giving them degrees that resonate with these existing departments and structures so that our students can actually get jobs as we train them.

So, so these are some forces that push us toward a more standard organization and that we need to keep in mind. At the same time, though, institutional research tells that, that powerful elites and interests and actors within the organization shape institutional forms and that there is room for innovation. And this is especially true if an organization brings distinctive assets to its environment and if there's a demand for those assets.

So if business and the new economy demand students trained with a more interdisciplinary focus then innovative, interdisciplinary training can succeed. If there's a labor market out there, and other colleges are not training students well to fill, then we can take advantage of it. And this is something that enabled the community college system to succeed, was that community colleges discovered a niche in a way that they could train

students that other educational institutions weren't fulfilling and that's, that's why we have so many, you know, great community colleges. And not incidentally, California was a leader in the community college movement.

So this echoes points made by Shawn [Kantor] and Alex [Whalley] about thinking about the new economy and how what we do needs to be geared and oriented toward the external environment and what's going on in the new economy and how what we do can fit in with that and support it and help it succeed.

I mean, it also echoes what Jeff said about the needs of the Central Valley and our placement here, that we can trade students and that we are providing, you know, students and educated people that there's a niche out there, that Central Valley needs well-educated people for business.

Now resources are a big part of this. The availability of resources is going to shape which different options take hold. And research finds that resources from outside tend to follow the establishment of the structure and resources from inside. So the resources have to start from within our system. We have to put resources behind what we want to do, and external resources will follow. And that's, that's what the resources suggest. Now that's not to say that external resources can't be very important in helping programs expand their scope, and do more and really take off, but typically the resources follow organization formation and the formation of structures rather than coming in in the beginning to kind of spur them.

So finally, as others have noted, as a new organization, we really do have the opportunity to innovate here. So new organizations are more likely to innovate. We have more freedom because we don't have the existing structures that have

been around for a long time. But with the organizational research literature, which says we just have to make sure we do this in a way that fits the needs and interests of our external environment, that makes sense to the various constituencies that are a part of what we do, just so that what we do really can succeed. So I'll end it with that. [*applause*] Thank you.