Harrington Forum lecture series hosts discussion on hiring in a neoliberal age

Ilana Gershon, associate professor of Anthropology at Indiana University, presented “Me™ Hiring in a NeoLiberal Age” to students and faculty at the University of Rhode Island on April 12. This lecture was a part of a series of lectures that make up the Harrington Forum, in which URI faculty and guest lecturers are invited to present their research and ideas to students, faculty and friends of the Harrington School.

Gershon’s lecture focused on the hiring process and how it has evolved over the past hundred years. Her research encompassed navigating the digital world we now live in to find jobs and get hired. Nowadays, there is much more to be done than simply filling out a job application and hoping for the best. Gershon discussed the different types of professional documents, such as resumes, cover letters and LinkedIn profiles, that every job seeker must have, and how to tailor them to each company and position in order to get the best results.

However, even perfectly articulated professional documents are not enough to land a job in this day and age. “Networking is the magic bullet that will get someone a job when skills and experience are not enough,” said Gershon. One hundred years ago, networking was not viewed as the best way to get a job but nowadays, it is a necessary skill for all job seekers to have. Students in the Harrington School learn the importance of networking through their classes and special events, such as this lecture.

Gershon related her research findings on navigating today’s hiring process to a business. “The self should be seen as a business. You are a bundle of skills, experiences, alliances and relationships. Anytime you apply for a job you are entering a business to business arrangement, which is always a risky investment,” she said. Gershon advised handling the job seeking process like a business arrangement, in which applicants should present their best entrepreneurial self by doing extensive research on the company, meticulously filling out the job application and arriving early to the interviews.

Additionally, Gershon described the importance of standing out amongst the large pool of job applicants. “Be the CEO of ‘Me Incorporated,’” she said. “Be authentic, but with calculation.” Balancing authenticism with preparation is the key to standing out from the crowd and letting personality shine through in an interview.

While all of the job seeking advice Gershon gave was beneficial, she reiterated that, “Job seeking is a skill that is constantly being learned because the hiring process is always changing and genres (different professional documents such as resumes, cover letters and LinkedIn profiles) can always be improved.”