

**Dr. Green:** Hi, I'm Dr. Jon Green, I'm the director of the Cottey Writing Center and I am joined today with Dr. Oindrila Roy, Assistant Professor of International Relations and we are excited to do the premiere episode of Writing Across Cottey. A little bit about this project: the goal of this project is to interview faculty from across the disciplines here at Cottey, and get their opinions on why writing matters to their discipline, how writing is done in their discipline; and this is all in an effort to demonstrate that writing truly is done across the curriculum. We say that a lot, but a lot of people don't really know what that means. A lot of people don't really know what form writing takes in the various academic disciplines. So that's the goal of this project, is to demonstrate for the Cottey community how exactly and why exactly writing is done across the curriculum. So thank you for being here for our pilot episode of Writing Across Cottey, and thank you Dr. Roy, for joining us.

**Dr. Roy:** Thank you very much, I'm excited to be a part of this project.

**Dr. Green:** Great, so let's start with a pretty open-ended question: What kind of writing is done in your discipline?

**Dr. Roy:** Well in political science, writing is everywhere and in the academic sphere, if we pursue political sciences in academic discipline, writing is done in terms of research studies. Publishing your research in peer-reviewed journals, or writing a book, that is the academic format of how writing is done. However, political science does have an applied side to it. So political science graduates also go into journalism, they go into campaign, they go into non-profit; and regardless of where they go what they have to do is to persuade, be it an oral communication or

written communication through audios, visuals, they have to be able to communicate their ideas persuasively. So writing--If we perceive of writing in the very broad sense, where it's not just written text but it is different modes of communication regardless of what you do with your political science degree, if you become a lawyer, if you become a journalist, if you are working in the grassroots, you have to communicate yourself. And in that sense, writing is all-pervasive in the discipline and not just confined to academic writing in terms of journal articles and academic books.

**Dr. Green:** I see. And why do you think it's important to be able to write well in your discipline?

**Dr. Roy:** Well political science as a discipline I think is concerned with how power is distributed, who gets what, when, and how. So when we are talking about American politics, public administration, public policy, international relations, the centrality of power and how it is distributed matters a lot. And in discussing that, one needs to effectively communicate the argument as to who gets what, when, and how. And since arguments lie at the core of the discipline, I feel it is important to develop strong arguments to be able to persuade the audience with those arguments and have that argument be backed up by evidence. So when we are talking about power relations, when we are talking about who are disadvantaged, who are advantaged in society or in the international system, there is a lot of arguments that we have to place to make sense of what's going on around us and writing is the mode to communicate that.

**Dr. Green:** It's very interesting that you keep using these words like "argument", and "persuasion", and

"persuasiveness", because these are ideas that come up a lot when we talk about rhetoric.

**Dr. Roy:** Yes!

**Dr. Green:** The art of rhetoric, the art of persuasion, we talk about that a lot in the first year writing seminar class, we talk about it in writing 102, and what I'm hearing from you is that that never stops being relevant.

**Dr. Roy:** Yes! That never stops being relevant and I know as rhetoricians, you start with Plato and Aristotle, their rhetoric and when our political science majors at Cottey--we have international relations bachelor's degree, not political science--but international relations is a part of political science and one of the courses that they take is political philosophy. And political philosophy, starting from Plato to Marx, main political philosophers and we are looking at feminist scholars which forms the basis of political philosophy, it's about discussing persuasive ideas, right? Ideas about human nature, ideas about how the world works, ideas about how we can bring about change to make the world a more secure place or to address oppressions, to address structural violence, this is all about creating persuasive ideas that are backed up by evidence. So that way, persuasiveness in communication is very important and lots of political science, especially when we are looking at social movements, be it environmental justice, be it feminism, be it movements for civil liberties. So [5:45] we talk a lot about Black Lives Matter, but that has a huge historical lineage starting from the very first movements for racial minorities to protect their rights, and all of those are grounded in some form of activism. And activism, the success of any form of activism depends on how persuasive your arguments are.

So that way I consider political science to be very much reliant on effective communication and writing is a tool to achieve that goal.

**Dr. Green:** Yeah, a lot of overlap there. So getting a little more specific, what specific writing skills would you say are important for writing in international relations?

**Dr. Roy:** Well in international relations, the first skill that I would emphasize on is critical thinking and being able to demonstrate that critical thinking in writing as well as in oral communication. So critically engaging with a text, with a documentary, with a speech, and then being able to effectively communicate your critique of that material. So critical thinking is foundational to the discipline, and once you have engaged critically with the material, what we have coming is the problem-solving. Looking at what is not a desirable situation where we need to address some issues and then solving the problem based on the critical thinking part that precedes it.

**Dr. Green:** Hm, critical thinking, problem solving--a lot of things that probably apply to multiple disciplines.

**Dr. Roy:** Yes! Yes, definitely. In the humanities, in the social sciences, in the natural sciences, we are all trying to solve a problem. In public policy, which I also teach, is goal-oriented and problem-oriented so it's all about solving a problem, but you cannot solve a problem unless you start thinking critically about what is in place about the status quo. So all of that requires effective communication-

**Dr. Green:** Yep.

**Dr. Roy:** To be persuasive so that's what I think is fundamental for how we approach international relations at Cottey.

**Dr. Green:** What has been the most important thing you've learned about writing in your discipline?

**Dr. Roy:** Well what I have learned, most important thing about writing in my discipline is to be able to develop arguments. I keep coming back to the point with evidence; evidence-based arguments where--well I went to a graduate program which was very much positivist in approach, it was very empirical this particular program where we relied on the quantitative or qualitative evidence-based political analysis. So definitely creating arguments that are backed up by evidence, to me that is a skill of even when you are critically engaging with something, or solving problems, regardless of what you do that has to be backed up by credible evidence.

**Dr. Green:** And what kind of evidence would you be looking to use in international relations? What would be good evidence to back yourself up?

**Dr. Roy:** So it depends on the kind of study that you are doing. So for instance, if I am engaging in a case-study project, right? Where I'm looking at a case and we are trying to analyze that case, we would rely a lot on primary sources for getting the basic description of the case, right? What the case is all about. So primary sources would be a valuable resource. However when we are doing a literature review, before we get into the analysis of the case, we would look at also secondary sources. We would look at highly vetted sources, such as journal articles, university press books. So that would be--the literature review for any study should be based on peer-reviewed journal articles and university press books and other books that will through that peer review process. But if you are doing case studies, speeches, communications from government departments, then definitely all kinds of--if there's a treaty

involved, direct text of treaties, texts of legislations, lots of interview data, those are all important. So it actually depends on the kind of study you are doing.

**Dr. Green:** So you would say it's important to go into international relations knowing how to do primary research as well as secondary research?

**Dr. Roy:** Yes! Yes, both primary research and secondary research is critical; it ultimately depends on the kind of project or the question that you are wanting to answer in your research, but both are extremely valuable skills that students of international relations should know.

**Dr. Green:** Good. I'm glad we teach it in writing 102, then.

**Dr. Roy:** Writing 102, yes!

**Dr. Green:** What advice would you have for a student looking to improve her writing in your discipline?

**Dr. Roy:** Well, the first thing is to pay attention to your audience, to pay attention to the context, and your purpose. So before you are writing any piece of writing, be it if you are posting a Tweet about any political development, or if you are writing on Facebook, or you are writing a paper for your class, pay attention to who your audience is, pay attention to what your purpose is, and pay attention to what your context is. That is key. Second is when you are making a statement, make sure you have evidence to back it up, right? And be sure to show what you're telling. So without that, it is problematic. To be persuasive, to be compelling. And the hard thing is, regardless of what information you're consuming, think critically about it. And from basic questions like, "Is this piece of news credible?", distinguishing fact from opinion, distinguishes credible news from news that is fake, we

are living in the age of information overload and not every piece of information is equally...

**Dr. Green:** Reliable.

**Dr. Roy:** Reliable, yes! So to be able to make that distinction between what is valuable information and what is not, to critically think about the information; why was this information written? Was it written for informational purposes, was it written with some kind of hidden agenda? And all those skills help you come up with information that is--you yourself can evaluate before you utilize it in your own work.

**Dr. Green:** I want to ask you more about that. How would you suggest somebody determine whether a source is credible or not?

**Dr. Roy:** Well, in order to-- there are multiple things you can do when you are consuming a piece of information. First, look at where it was published, what is the reputation of that source? When was it published? All the claims made in the article, are they backed up with evidence? Who wrote it? What are their credentials? So looking at those things can give you some basic idea about whether it's a credible piece of information or not, before you utilize it in your work.

**Dr. Green:** The who, what, when, where, and why questions, right?

**Dr. Roy:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Dr. Green:** That's what I always suggest my students do. Especially who, right?

**Dr. Roy:** Yes, who?

**Dr. Green:** Who's writing this?

**Dr. Roy:** Who's writing it and where are they writing it? So I often talk about how news is covered in cable TV in the United States: so for the same incident- the coverage that you receive from MSNBC will be completely different from what you receive at Fox News. So it's

important to know who is covering it and why are they giving that spin, and to know about the agenda of the one who is presenting the news and then make your own decision about how much of it is opinion and how much of it is fact. So I think media literacy is key to developing good communication skills and to develop writing skills that are going to make an impression, a positive impression on the audience. And I think this brings in civil responsibilities, too, you should be responsible for the kind of information that you are putting out be it on your Facebook page or in your paper. In this age of misinformation, it is absolutely important for us to check, fact check what we are sharing.

**Dr. Green:** I agree.

**Dr. Roy:** Yeah.

**Dr. Green:** Well this has been very enlightening for me, and hopefully for you too. Dr. Roy, thank you very much for being here today--

**Dr. Roy:** Thank you very much.

**Dr. Green:** and I hope you all have enjoyed the first episode of Writing Across Cottey, there'll be many more to come. We'll be talking to faculty across the disciplines, and the interviews will very much look like this. You know, we're just trying to get an idea of what the faculty think about writing in their disciplines, how writing's used, what specific writing skills are used, all in an effort to demonstrate that writing really is done across the curriculum. So until next time, I'm Dr. Green, take care.