

JG: All right. Hello. Welcome to Season Two, Episode Two of our Writing Across Cottey video project. We are joined today by Ms. Denise Hedges with the Serenbetz Institute here at Cottey, and again, with Season Two here, we are talking to professionals from across the Cottey campus, just to get an idea of how writing factors into their work, what sorts of writing they do, what sorts of genres they write in, and what advice they might have for someone looking to enter that profession. So we are very happy to be joined by Ms. Hedges today, and I will just jump right into the first question, if you don't mind. And that is a rather broad question: what kind of writing is done in your position?

DH: Well, so much writing is done in my position, and I would say 90% of my work is done right here at this computer. But everything I do at the Serenbetz Institute begins with writing a proposal. I write proposals for every program I offer through the Serenbetz Institute. For instance, the recent immersion to Washington, DC over spring break with students started with writing a proposal. Then, I also annually write proposals for conference presentations. But then once the proposal is accepted, writing is not done. I have to secure funding to fund my work. So this is done through writing grant applications. For instance, I write an annual grant application to fund our immersion that is tied to the common reader. So this year's immersion is based on the book *A Bigger Picture* that all first-year students read in the First-Year Writing Seminar last fall, and this immersion will take students to Maine to learn about climate activism. So I received funding for that immersion, so that trip will be able to take place, but then once funds have been spent, I write a report to the donor. So I'm in that stage now. With the DC immersion having completed over spring break, I'm now writing the final report to the donors who funded that. I also coordinate several panel discussions in the work of the Serenbetz Institute, and writing involved with that is helping to draft the scripts for the panel moderators. I also work with student panelists on a few different student panels throughout the year, and I help students draft their remarks for those student panels. Other writing that I do is your typical business correspondence. I write award letters and contracts for student grant applicants. I email community partners and agencies. I create website updates for the Serenbetz Institute, draft text for program and marketing materials. Just lots of writing is done for the Serenbetz Institute.

JG: Well, that is a very wide genre of—or very wide range of genres that you write in. And I think a lot of people probably don't realize that your job entails not only that much writing, but that many types of writing. And it just goes to show you how important it is to be able to write in any profession, and sometimes it's a surprising amount that you end up having to write. So it pays to be good at it, right?

DH: I agree.

JG: On that note, why do you think it's important to be able to write well in your position?

DH: Well, everything I do is tied to convincing other people to support my work. So in grant applications, I must communicate compelling needs to donors in order to receive funding for the programming I have planned. In donor reports, I must demonstrate the effectiveness of the program on student learning outcomes in order to receive future support. In proposals, I must communicate a well thought-out program that will impact student learning. Everything that I do is about convincing people to support my work.

JG: So there's a lot of persuasive writing in your position.

DH: Absolutely.

JG: A lot of showing people how they stand to benefit from things, why this would be a good thing for them to approve of or endorse. And I imagine that requires a lot of attentiveness to your audience and their needs, right?

DH: Yes, yes. That leads us right into your next question, because you ask your—I'll let you ask it.

JG: Sure. What specific writing skills would you say are important for writing in your position?

DH: I think the very first thing that comes to my mind is about audience awareness, so understanding what the reader needs to know about the work that I'm going to be doing, what student learning is expected from the program, just what do they already know and what do I need to help them know more about. So audience awareness, persuasion is really important. I have to think about, "What can I say? What can I write that can convince my reader to approve my proposal and award me grant money?" I feel like persuasion is a very critical piece of the writing process for me. And then the last writing skill I think is important is attention to detail. I try to have a finished product with no errors, so that anyone who's reading the report or the proposal or the application knows that I have given my full attention to this important work and will continue to do important work to make sure that the program is a success.

JG: Yeah, I think that attention to detail is a very underrated element of persuasiveness. And in my classes, you know, we call this ethos. We use that Greek word ethos for, you know, drawing attention to your own credibility and making the audience see you as a credible, trustworthy person, both in the sense that you are on their side, you have their interests in mind, but also that you simply know what you're talking about. And having sloppiness in there, errors, misspellings, typos, can very quickly harm that credibility that you're trying to build and reduce your overall persuasiveness. So it's interesting to hear you say, you know, just how critical that is, that idea of making a good impression on the audience and persuading them to see this idea or this program the way you see it and the way you hope that they see it.

DH: Yes, yeah, I think that is really important and something that I hope that all of my work shows: an attention to detail so that my credibility isn't impacted by sloppiness or inaccuracies in my work.

JG: So what has been the most important thing you've learned about writing in your position?

DH: Just how important it is, how it is a critical skill set in the work that I do. Because everything I do is through a writing process. And I don't know that when I took this position, I understood the impact of writing. Though my undergraduate degree is in communication studies, and I think I learned a lot about persuasion and communicating effectively in my undergraduate, but just the amount of work that I do that is tied to the writing process. I don't think I understood that before taking this role, but I hope that I am a convincing writer.

JG: Yeah, so you mentioned you have a background in communications, so I want to touch on that a little bit. Because one thing that I really try to stress in the in the writing classes, especially the first-year writing classes, is that oral communication is also kind of a form of writing. It's also a way of generating text. And I think that a lot of the same things that apply to written communication also apply to oral communication. So can you just briefly talk a little bit about what kind of oral communication you do in your position and what you've learned about it?

DH: Sure, sure. And I agree with you that oral communication and written communication both have the same strategies involved. At least in my case, whenever I'm doing any sort of public speaking, I'm also educating my listener, often persuading them to see value in the work that I'm doing. I had a tour just last

week with some potential donors, and being able to emphasize the work that we do at the Serenbetz Institute, share a little bit of the history and the programming, of how we do our programming, and what we hope to accomplish with the programming. It's really a lot of the same skills that you're using, that persuasion and attention to detail, making sure that you're communicating with them what you think is important that they know about the programming to potentially fund the program. So that oral communication. But then I also think about that as I prepare students to present a new student panel. I do that usually about twice a year, but I use the same mindset: "What do we want our audience to know, and how do we structure our remarks in a way that our audience can listen and hear what we're trying to communicate with them?" So I think a lot of the same strategies apply to your written and your oral communication.

JG: Yeah, that emphasis on audience is a commonality, for sure, and that's rhetoric in general. You know, when I teach rhetoric, that's kind of how I explain it. You are trying to have an impression on an audience, right? And the way you do that in written and oral communication is very much—very similar. You know, obviously some things change, but your end goal there is more or less the same. So it's no surprise that a lot of the same strategies apply to both modalities of communication. All right, so my final question is, what writing related advice would you have for someone seeking to enter your position or a similar one? Advice.

DH: Well, I my advice is about the grant writing process. I think that whole idea of grant writing sometimes is very scary for students, and in the Serenbetz Institute, I hope to help students prepare for that future if they are entering into a field that may require them to write grant proposals and grant applications. So don't be afraid of the grant writing process and get some experience with that process. So in the Changemaker class that I teach each fall, students write an internal grant application to fund a service project of their choice, and that activity that we do in class gives students an opportunity to practice the skills to convince a donor to fund their idea. But students can also receive funding through the Serenbetz Institute to fund a Leadership Immersion undergraduate research or summer internships, and I am always available to meet with students to help them brainstorm through that process. But recently, students have received Serenbetz awards to travel to leadership conferences in the Missouri State Capitol, conference in Washington, DC later this month. Last summer, a student traveled and received funding for a human osteology workshop. And those are just some of the examples of opportunities that are funded through the Serenbetz Institute grant application process. So lots of opportunities at Cottey to get some exposure to that grant writing process.

JG: Yeah, on that note, I think I'd like to give a brief plug for the IMPACT internship that we've started doing over the summer, and that is all about getting students set up with local nonprofit organizations to help them write grant proposals. And you know, sometimes they're very successful. So you would be a good resource for anyone maybe thinking about going into that program or anything involving looking for grants, writing grant proposals, etc. ?

DH: Yeah.

JG: Good. Good. Anything else that you would add? Any other final words of wisdom or advice?

DH: Well, this is something I am probably one of the biggest cheerleaders for: the writing program. Something in the leadership literature we I have learned, and it sticks out in my memory, is that in leadership, we consider writing or communicating effectively a threshold skill, so everyone in the leadership process needs to be able to communicate effectively. I really encourage students to consider a writing minor. I think it's really an important skill. And I really am a fan of, I think it's a business writing class, Dr. Green, I think that you teach?

JG: Professional Writing, yeah.

DH: Professional Writing, yes. I think that's a great class that a student should take if they have space in their schedule. I think that's really an important writing class for students. And then all of these opportunities that Cottey provides, like the IMPACT position over the summer, where students can get practice in these skills.

JG: Yeah, thank you for those endorsements. Yes, the Professional Writing class is one that I'll be teaching this fall, actually, Fall 2025, and I always—I really enjoy teaching that class, because, again, we kind of focus on all aspects of professional communication. Obviously, there's a lot of writing, but there's also a lot of oral presentation, there's a lot of collaborative work, and so it is, you know, very much teaching you the genres of professional writing. But I would encourage even someone who prefers academic writing to venture into that class because I think you can learn a lot from seeing how writing and communication in general is done in a different context like that. So I definitely also encourage people to sign up for that class. I also encourage you all to come by the Cottey Writing Center. Our hours are Monday through Thursday, 6 to 9pm, and remember, you don't necessarily even have to have a draft with you to come meet with a tutor. You don't need to make an appointment in advance. We're simply on a walk-in basis. So just simply walk in and ask to meet with a writing tutor, and one of them will be happy to meet with you all. We also have a website that you can go to to find not only these episodes, these Writing Across Cottey episodes and transcriptions but also an online writing lab database of resources. It's not quite as robust as Purdue OWL's, but then again, you know, they've had years and years to rack up a lot of resources. But it's kind of the same idea. You can go there to get access to various resources on some common writing challenges, some grammar challenges, some citation challenges, and then just various other things that you're probably going to be expected to do throughout your time at Cottey. So I'd like to wrap up this episode by once again thanking Ms. Denise Hedges for being our guest speaker today. We will have this episode, this recording, as well as a transcription of it up on the Writing Center website as soon as possible. And once again, I look forward to seeing people at the Writing Center at some point. And stay tuned for our third episode of season two, which will be coming in the fall semester. So Ms. Hedges, thank you again for being here, and we will end the episode there. Everyone, have a lovely day.