WriteCast Episode 10: Faculty Writing Advice: Residency Interview with Dr. JaMuir Robinson

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[Introduction music]

[Teaser] DR. ROBINSON: Work at it, work at it, work at it, and the more you do it, the better you'll get at it.

NIK: Welcome to WriteCast, a casual conversation for serious writers. I'm Nikolas Nadeau.

BRITTANY: In last month's episode, Nik interviewed three students at a PhD and DBA residency in Atlanta. If you haven't listened yet, I highly recommend that episode. In this episode, we're going to feature an interview Nik did at that same residency but with a faculty member.

In addition to co-hosting WriteCast with Nik and working with students on their writing, I serve as the coordinator of Writing Center residency instruction and design here at Walden. This means that I help schedule and prepare Writing Center staff to attend residencies. Representatives from the Walden Writing Center are present at each DBA, PhD, and EdD residency throughout the academic year, and we present sessions on scholarly writing and hold one-on-one advising sessions with students.

Because writing is so integral to your success here at Walden, and of course, is also an important life skill, we feel it is really important for us to connect with you face-to-face at residencies.

Residencies are also a key time for Walden students to meet the core faculty in their program.
Residencies are also a key time for Walden students to meet the core faculty in their program and to get faculty feedback on their writing. Because your course instructors are the ones actually evaluating and grading your writing, we thought it would be helpful to get one faculty member's perspective on what she looks for in student writing. Notice that she focuses particularly on writing in a specific academic style and engaging with the scholarly conversation that's already taken place in your field. Let's take a listen.

NIK: I'm here with Dr. JaMuir Robinson. She's public health core faculty. And I'm really interested in your perspective on what makes strong student writing and also what habits you wish that students could really focus on when they're at home in the drafting process.

DR. ROBINSON: I think students should really focus on being concise and not worry about trying to be very descriptive in their language. I think a lot of times students think the more words they use, the bigger words they use, the more professional it looks. And scientific writing is very different, and so we really are looking for you to be very concise and to the point and supporting your arguments with relevant resources, but you don't need a lot of the flowery language, and I find that students do that quite often. And I also think that students should keep in mind that it's a different style of writing, so when it's recommended that you go to the Writing Center for assistance, it doesn't necessarily mean that you're a bad writer, it just means that there are areas where you can improve your writing, and sometimes it's adjusting to this new style of writing, this scholarly writing style and scientific writing, which is a little bit different than other types of writing.

NIK: I often get asked about, you know, how can I understand scholarly writing intuitively? You know, it seems like you get it and I don't, so how do I bridge that gap? So what advice would you have for students that are really looking to have that mindset of understanding what scholarly writing is, but coming at it from the outside and trying to gain that perspective through their time here at Walden?

DR. ROBINSON: I think it's kind of looking at it like professional writing. Everyone has different ways of communicating--how you communicate with your friends and family may be different than how you might communicate with colleagues at work or your supervisor at work. So, there's a certain level of professionalism, but also scholarly writing, in a sense, is saying, I'm acknowledging that the points that I'm making are not necessarily points and ideas that I've come up with on by own but that they're based on things that I've read and learned from other researchers. So, it's also acknowledging and referencing other researchers who've done work in the area and kind of using their work to support your own opinions, and so it's a level of professionalism but also an acknowledgement of the work that's already been done in the field and your opportunity to show how that's impacted your current thinking on a particular topic.

NIK: Well that's interesting. One thing that we at the Writing Center talk about a lot is the
NIK: Well, that’s interesting. One thing that we at the Writing Center talk about a lot is the relationship between critical reading, critical thinking, and good writing. How do you see critical reading and thinking as relating to writing that impresses you as faculty?

DR. ROBINSON: Well I think if I'm reading someone's writing and they are kind of repeating what someone else said, that doesn't show me that they have done critical reading. It shows me that they're summarizing what someone else said. But if they are making reference to other people's ideas in a way that shows maybe their own understanding and possibly their disagreement with other people or their ability to reference several different people and pointing out things that they agree with and disagree with in different areas, I think that's a reflection of the fact that they have done some critical reading and not just that they have summarized some information and are just kind of regurgitating that on the paper.

NIK: And my last question: What do you find is the most helpful advice or the most frequent advice you give to students who are really enthusiastic about improving their writing but also really frustrated and lacking that confidence that it's actually possible.

DR. ROBINSON: I think pretty much I just tell people to accept the feedback and critique and not take it as personal criticism, and that you will get better the more you do it. And so, go to the Writing Center, look at the feedback you get, and then try to apply it in all of your assignments throughout and just in everything you're writing, and just work at it, work at it, work at it, and the more you do it, the better you'll get at it. And it will become very--it will become like second nature. And even after time, I mean, there are still people who've been working and writing in the field for a long time who still would benefit from getting editing and another set of eyes. So don't view that recommendation or referral to the Writing Center as a critique or criticism but as an opportunity to improve upon your skills.

NIK: Dr. Robinson, it's been a pleasure, thank you.

DR. ROBINSON: Thank you.

BRITTANY: Thanks so much for joining us, everyone. And don't forget to check back in for next month's episode!

[Music transition]

NIK: This podcast is a production of the Walden University Writing Center.
BRITTANY: This episode was produced by me, Brittany Kallman Arneson, my co-host, Nikolas Nadeau, and Anne Shiell.

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