

Professional Writing Program Alumni Panel

By Melissa Rush



L-R: Kellie McDermott, Abby Ponder, Seth Dukes, Sarah Slatton, and Skylar Wooden. NP: Jacky Killian

Alumni of the WKU Professional Writing Program returned to Cherry Hall to offer advice and answer questions to current PW students. Dr. Angela Jones facilitated the panel and asked questions her current Professional Writing Capstone class considered the most essential information needed as they prepare to leave WKU and enter the work force.

The returning graduates included Kellie McDermott, Consultant and Lead Trainer at Health Tech Solutions, LLC, in Frankfort, Kentucky; Abby Ponder, Communications Specialist for Murray State University; Seth Dukes, reporter for the *Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer*, and editor of the *McLean County News*; Sarah Slatton, Lead Professional Writer at KirkpatrickPrice; Skylar Wooden, Events and Facility Rental Coordinator for the Historic Rail Park and Train Museum; and Jacky Killian, Graduate Assistant at WKU.

The panel addressed the most valuable skills each graduate had taken from the PW major, as well as what they felt were missing elements.

Without exception, each panelist listed their experience in the internship program as one of the major components to their current success. It was also a unanimous belief that the core area of deficiency in the PW program was a lack of integrated technology classes, such as Adobe programs and basic software program training. McDermott suggested student take advantage of free tutorials and familiarize themselves with software programs that are essential in many PW careers. Ponder said working in the

WKU Writing Center helped her find the confidence to move into her career at MSU. She encouraged students to take advantage of opportunities to gain writing experience. Dukes, Slatton, and Wooden all encouraged students to take risks and be unafraid of accepting a position in an unfamiliar field. Skylar Wooden shared how valuable the communication skills she learned at WKU have been since graduation. She pointed out, "There is a reason every job posting usually has the words 'excellent communication skills' in the listing." Killian explained he felt he benefited from soft skills learned during college, including the ability to take criticism, being open to feedback, and time management.

When asked about the job search and interview process, each panelist had a different story to share. Ponder offered excellent advice when she suggested researching companies before interviewing with them. She also suggested downloading sample interview questions to prepare for interviews and to market yourself. Slatton had a unique idea that few students consider, but would be an incredibly valuable approach; she believes time spent at WKU should be treated as a dress rehearsal for the interviews that will come after being handed a diploma. By connecting with professors and advisors, a student can prepare for interviews that may not come until a year or two down the road. Wooden suggested students diversify their interests as much as possible, not for a resume highlight, but to become a well-rounded individual. McDermott noted the value of understanding how the professional networking site LinkedIn works suggested students build a well-developed profile before graduation.

Kelly McDermott closed her remarks with advice to be confident and unafraid when showing people what you can do. By continuing to put in the work and challenge yourself, remarkable things can happen. Skylar Wooden explained the idea of finding your "must haves in a job." Knowing the "must haves" in a job will help the rest fall into place. Wooden also believes in taking risks in life, and her suggestion was "if you cannot find what you are looking for, create it."