

A Look at Scholar's Voice Retreats [Episode 157]

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SPEAKERS

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Cathy Mazak 00:02

Welcome to the academic writing amplified podcast. On this podcast, we believe that the culture of academia needs to change radically. Women and non binary people are revolutionising academia within institutions that were not built for us. If you're ready to reject the culture of overwork, kick, guilt and overwhelm to the curb, and amplify your voice, to make a real impact on your field, without breaking down, or burning out, you're in the right place, with our team of experienced writing coaches, as CO hosts will share insights and talk to inspiring guests to bring you the practical strategies, systems and mindset shifts. You need to find time to write, publish work you love, and design your career on your terms. And it all starts with writing. Let's go. Hello, hello. It's Kathy me Zack, your host for this episode of the academic writing amplified Podcast. I'm so excited to talk to you today. I've had a week, maybe now it's like 10 days that are really been kind of that. And you might hear in my voice or like the nasally sound like that I actually have the cold that everybody in my family is passing around. And you know, you all know how that goes. So excuse my raspy voice and my stuffy nose, I'll be pausing definitely to blow it. Recording this podcast, this week's podcast is about something that I'm really excited about that I would I just want you all to know about. So, gosh, maybe I'll do a little bit of history of retreats. All right. So history of retreats, academics, love retreats. Or I should say my audience loves the idea of a retreat. And in fact, we use the word retreat in the way we talk about things, because it encapsulates the feeling that I want our work with clients to have, which is like a stepping back, a stepping away. I think there's something reflective about a retreat, like retreats invite reflection, they invite thoughtfulness. Nobody is rushed during a retreat, right? It's stepping out of busyness, it's stepping out of rush. And it has such a different energy to it than many programs that you might hear about out there like a boot camp or even sometimes we use the word like an intensive, or something like that. Like I think that's just like a different energy that you bring to something than the word retreat. And so that's why we really like to use the word retreat in the way we talk about our offers. And I'll tell you about our very first product that that I can say we but it was just me. So that I ever offered was a tiny little product called the Virtual writer's retreat. And it was like I think, I don't know if it was a week long or two weeks long. It's now become what we have marketed in the past as a writing sprint blueprint, like a little program called Writing sprint blueprint that we used to sell. But really what virtual writer's retreat became is our writing sprint method. So it really laid the foundation for the writing sprint, but anyway, the virtual writer's retreat, I used to run through a

Facebook group, I would run it occasionally. And it would cost like \$97 or something. And basically, I would go live every day for two weeks, I think, at the same time, and teach a little lesson, and encourage people to keep like moving a writing project along and it was, you know, very again, it was very intentional to use the word retreat, because it was about, you know, planning your writing and taking a step back and observing and breaking projects into tasks in a thoughtful way. So it did have that sort of retreat aspect to it, although it wasn't really retreat, you know, because we didn't go anywhere. Then after that. I started doing actual in person writing retreats. So I found a house here in the west coast of Puerto Rico in ring calm. And I think my first retreat we had three or four women academics come and stay in this house. I did the cooking myself. I did like all the catering all the driving around to places that we ate all the activities. I personally did them I was again, one woman show and I did all of it. I think it was four days long, maybe five days. And from that group of four, who did the retreat, we did another retreat, we found a little yoga retreat center again, and drinkin on the west coast of Puerto Rico. And it had a few more rooms. So I think we did two more retreats there. And like, two of those four people who came to the first retreat came to the next two retreats, who like people started to come back to the retreat and kind of look forward to it. We hired a local chef to come in and make us all this beautiful food. There were like hammocks and views and a lot of just really a lot of just time and space to write. There was really no programming in those writing retreats, they were just like, okay, escape get away, we're going to do a little goal setting, I did some one on ones during the retreat with people, but it really was a let's just hole up together and write in a beautiful place. Again, at that point, I did those retreats by myself, I didn't have team to help. Until I think the very last one that we did, we did as part of our amplify program, our very first version of amplify had an in person retreat in it, I can't remember it was optional, or I can't remember. But then Rocio and Gina came to that retreat, they had just been hired. And then they came to Puerto Rico, and did that retreat with us. So I guess maybe I did five or so. And then the other retreat we did, which was in January of 2020, was mostly for amplify, but then some people from elevate came, I think it was a bonus. It was a retreat that like it was a different vibe, it was at this beautiful old boutique hotel, in Old San Juan, people came there, and we provided the meals, they paid for their own hotel rooms. And it was really there was more, there's a lot more content in it, it was more like a mini conference than a retreat. Truth be told, there was probably too much teaching in it. And not enough, just sit around and write together. But we still had a great time. And we certainly did retreat, right, like we got out of our normal place and came to San Juan together. And it was so nice that we did because that was the last time I've seen clients in person. So that is the history of our company, which is now called scholars voice and retreats. I totally believe in the power of writing retreats. I'm sure I have a blog post and I'm pretty sure there's a podcast episode that talks about retreats and creating a retreat for yourself, how to make it feel different than the normal things that we do every day, right. And after 2020, when the pandemic started, we did start to do virtual retreats, I think we got quite quite good at them, making them have that same sort of feeling like we send people a gift box and and we will have two to two and a half days of like online work together. Some of it would be co writing. So the peer review. And then some of it would be workshops. And even during the height of the pandemic, we also would bring in like we would do like Zumba together online, we brought into DJ and you know, did kind of fun things just to make it feel like a little bit fun and different. So as we're making so many changes this year, and becoming scholars voice like the next iteration of our company, we want it to keep the retreats in there somehow. But I've been like just quite frankly, a little shy about trying to actually schedule an in person event. Partially because of course COVID has scared everybody from well, I should say has scared me from making the investment. Like we had a retreat that was scheduled for July 2020. We booked out a small hotel we sold 18 spots are something in the retreat. And then we had to cancel and refund everybody's money, which was really difficult to handle as a small business for sure. Like we didn't have the cash flow to

really do that. And we had to anyway, so that kind of burned me a little bit to the inperson retreat, although I'm starting to dream a little bit about doing them again, possibly. But what we've come up with kind of as a little bit of an alternative is what we're calling the scholars voice faculty development retreats. And the reason I wanted to talk about it today on the podcast was to give you an image of what it might be like to have one of these these retreats on your campus. And to tell you how easy it is So to get one of these retreats onto your campus, so at the time of this recording, we just filled our navigate 12 week pilot, I'm just you know, I've been talking about on the podcast for weeks now. And we have 12, amazing, amazing people signed up, and we are starting, what the first call is, in real time is this coming Friday, but when you're listening to this podcast, it will have been last Friday, the 24th of February. And as I was talking to people about the Navigate 12 week pilot, the cost of the program is \$4,500. So it's an investment. And some people, understandably so especially during this particular historical moment, when the job numbers are really great. But there's still this inflation, are we going to have a recession feeling that people are like, it's very weird economic time right now, like such a small unemployment rate is so small right now, like historically low? And then we also have high inflation and people are like, is it going to stick around? Is it not going to stick around what's going to happen? So people are wary, like, interest rates are going up? Yo, you know, like, I understand, like, I got it, believe me, we are all living in the same universe. And like, I understand that it's people are wary to spend spend money. And especially because of that, in this past week, as I've been enrolling, you know, we're closing close the doors on the pilot, I heard a lot of like, Ah, I just can't do it right now. I can't afford it right now, that kind of thing. So our scholars voice faculty development retreat is really meant, for those of you who are like, you know, I love the podcast, I maybe read, making time to write write my book, maybe read the book, and you're like, Wow, this is great. And you would like to participate in some kind of program with us, the scholars voice faculty development retreats, is that program for you, because it will be free to you. It is paid for by your university. So this is our university facing offer. And it comes in two flavors, it comes in two formats. Either it is in person, we can fly to your university, and, you know, at a venue which your university provides, right, like whether it's on your campus, for example, when we did this at St. Lawrence University, in upstate New York, we had a lovely room next to the library, and the university catered it. So there was breakfast and lunch every day. And I went, I brought all the materials everybody got, you know, we're so excited, because they got a lot of sticky notes, I got a copy of the book, they got our beautiful printed workbook. And then I ran this two day retreat on their campus for their women faculty. And it can be for women and non binary faculty, it can be for any faculty like, we know that we most like our message when we describe this retreat to people that mostly the people who are going to want to do it are going to be women and non binary professors. So if you have ever been like, oh, I don't want to recommend Cathy's stuff, because it's really just for women, the retreats we do for whoever wants to come. So your university can decide whether they want to do it for women faculty, we usually say women and non binary faculty, right, or whether they want to kind of put out an open invitation to everyone. If your university does decide to do the bring us for a retreat, like we do ask people to register that to fill out a little form so that we know something about them. And we can kind of make sure that we're understanding really well, our audience when we go in to do the retreat on your campus. So I'm going to get into content in a second. But there's that in person version. And then there's a virtual version, which is a one day online virtual retreat between five and six hours of content together. And we come to your campus via zoom. And the nice thing about the virtual right, besides the fact that like nobody needs to cater anything, oh, that would be great if your university did cater it for you or send you, Uber Eats so participating in the in the online virtual retreat, but you know, it's kind of scalable, right, so you could do it for a small group on your campus. You could do it for a big group on your campus. You could do it as a dei initiative. You could do it as a, you know, your department or your

school. You could do it through your Center for Teaching and Learning. There's like so many options for how a university might want to use a tool, like the scholars voice faculty development retreats to attract and retain faculty, which is our main messaging, I'm going to give you the link to the brochure in the show notes. But our messaging around this retreat is to administrators, right, like the people who are going to pay the bills for this retreat. And so it's really a message of retention. And I'm going to tell you some of those statistics in a minute, so that you understand them so that you can make the ask at your university, I'm going to tell you kind of like a, how people have been doing it. So that we've got, we have three of these scheduled in April, like, it's kind of funny, because I was like, I would really love to do one per month, and then it's like, you don't get to do one per month, you're gonna do three and April, you know, so, April's booked. But we do we are booking out, we'd love to book out in advance. So if you're interested, I'm going to tell you in a second, how you can get us in front of your administration so that we can come virtually or in person to your campus, and train you in one of our scholars, voice faculty development retreats. So I'm gonna pause and blow my nose. And then I will be back to talk to you about the content of the retreat, like what we talked about at the retreat, what we do on the retreat, and then how you can get your university involved. Okay, so let's start with a few statistics about faculty retention and faculty support. So one of the things that I, the hill I will die on is that universities, even though they are they might be they might not be well intentioned, right. But institutions might be very well intentioned. And they might really, they want to see you succeed, they want to retain you, right. But they don't know how that's the hill, I'll die on that universities don't really know how to support faculty, especially women, and non binary faculty, and any kind of minoritized faculty members are traditionally excluded groups, universities, because their institutions built the way they're built. Most of them don't really know how to support like, they don't know what support looks like, they tend to think or like an institution tends to kind of want to check boxes around support, like we did a faculty workshop on how to keep up your CV check. You know, we did this, we offered a one time travel grant thing, and it was competitive, and we got 50 applications, and we funded two people check like, you know, like, that's not really the level of support that scholars who are operating at a really high level or want to operate at a really effective, world changing field altering level, what they need, they don't need one off workshops. They don't need to beg for small amounts of cash, in order to go to a professional conference. It's like, No, that is not what academics who are really, you know, trying to move their field forward need. And especially traditionally excluded people like people who are traditionally excluded from the profession of being a professor, especially those people need a kind of sustained support. That is not usually available. That is one of the reasons that we don't do just like one off workshops for universities, we want to do something longer, that we can go deep and get in depth, even if we're only there for one day, but at least people will know who we are will be in your system as a vendor, right? Once your university pays us to deliver the scholars voice faculty development retreat. And then we can continue to develop a relationship with your university where they fund you into navigate like that is the secret sauce behind this. This offering is like, Okay, we get to show up, we get to be our best selves, we get to help people for one day, and then they know where to go for more help, which is navigate. So if I was an institution, I would be worried about retaining faculty and institutions are worried about retaining faculty. It's very expensive to hire faculty as faculty members, we often are like, because we compete, there's so much competition for jobs. Sometimes we think oh, like, I'm a diamond doesn't 300 people applied for my position so they could get rid of me at any moment and hire one of those other people. That is not the attitude to take. The attitude to take is they chose you out of a pool of people for a reason and they do not want to go through the process. Your university does not want to go through the process of doing that. Again, they want to retain you. Okay, they want to retain you. I think the key to faculty retention is support or write like, if you really support your faculty, they will stay with you and they will continue to develop themselves and their students

and their labs and their research lines and everything, under the name of your university. That's the energy you want from your faculty. Just some statistics from 2021 Chronicle of Higher Ed survey, 75% of female faculty feel stressed. You know, more stressed compared to 34%. In 2019 82% of female faculty indicated the pandemic increased their workload compared to 70% of male faculty. So let me just say also, like that was in 2021, I wonder how things are in 2023, like the university figured out how to like, don't even more things on us. So I wonder if people have had their loads equally lightened now that we're like back to in person classes like probably not. And then 74% of female faculty indicated their work life balance deteriorated in 2020, right, nobody's surprised by this, compared to 63% of male faculty. So what this data is showing is the difference between how women faculty, in this survey, female faculty, right, had to take on increased burden and increased stress, increased workload, during the pandemic. And we already knew that before the pandemic, many times women faculty were doing more service work, we know that's true, more advising more of the busy work of the department, right? And that's that invisible, unpaid labor that often women professors take on or get, they get dumped with it in their department. And also, of course, we want many times, right, we want to be those supportive faculty members, like we want to mentor students, we are excited when students want to work with us. And also at the same time, it is a lot, it is a lot, right. So the key to faculty retention is support, and targeted support. So when you're thinking about, you know, if you would like to ask your university to bring a scholars voice, Faculty Development retreat to your campus, I think the place that we get the best traction is in with people who deeply understand diversity, equity and inclusion work, you might have an actual office, you know, on your campus that does that kind of work, you might have an officer like a dei officer, or somebody that you could talk to, to help to explain that the kind of professional development training that we offer at scholars voice is focused on women and non binary professors. Exactly, because those people need more support and a different kind of support than male faculty. And that that support is equity. Right, like equality is when everybody's getting the same thing. Equity is when there's a deficit, and you're you are providing something to make up for that deficit, even if it's in a small way, right. And that's what we see, as scholars voice, that's what we see our work is doing is equity work, because we are explicitly anti patriarchal. And so we are explicitly teaching methods that center our clients and help them to stand in their agency, and help them to really create proactively the careers that they want. So that's an equity move, because you don't have to do that if you're a white man, most of the time, right? Like you get structural favoritism that you don't have, if you are traditionally excluded. So we're concerned about making sure that professors go all the way through the pipeline, right? So they come in as assistant, move through associate and make it all the way to full part of our work is like creating the situation or help coaching our clients to go all the way through the promotion process and not get stuck, not peter out, right. Like that's why we have specific programming around kind of different career stages. So the idea here is that our retreats are going to be attractive to your administrators because they do these things, right, because they help with retention, because the administrators can, you know, get more training that is going to help support this group of faculty have this kind of traditionally marginalized. So what do we talk about? What do we do these retreats? Why would you want to bring us to your campus for one? Well, you've heard me talk a bazillion times about the academic mission statement. We do our whole academic mission statement workshop during that year. treat. So I've probably shared the template statement before. But that is just a taste of what the whole academic mission statement Workshop is all about. There's a lot of coaching in it, there's a lot of writing in it. And so we do the full fledged hour and a half version of the academic mission statement workshops so that you will leave with the academic mission statement and the coaching around it that's required to really commit to it right. We also then will talk about how to use that academic mission statement, to find time to write right like to align the activities, align your calendar, behind the academic mission statement, and make

choices about your career that is in line with your articulated academic mission. During that we coach you because it is a really different way of thinking. It is like a totally different approach to your career. Right? Your career, probably maybe if you're listening to this podcast, or maybe if this sounds interesting or different to you. It's because your career has been like just publish anything, just shove everything into the pipeline, right? Like scared, scared, scared, like, we need more more more publications, we need to not say no to things because because we say no to things, people are going to not give us tenure, or not promote us or exclude us from some kind of benefits, right? And this is really saying like, No, you have your academic mission statement, and you're making decisions based on that. We talk about a pipeline that's aligned with your academic mission statement we do in person, if we're in person, we do really fun activity with post it notes about pipeline. So you leave with your pipeline mapped out. And again, all of that happens with coaching around it like with coaching in the room spot coaching, as we go through, because as you're doing it together, like you're like, hey, what about this, or, but I have two academic mission statements, what do I do you know, and so that's what the virtual retreat works on. The in person retreat, also layers on more career design. So it really talks about like, what you want for your career, how you want your career to look over the years. So it really is about this, like agentive proactive career design that we talked about, actually part of our AMPLIFI program, I think a big thread through amplify has been career design. So in the in person retreats, since we have two days together. Day one is the role of writing in your career. And day two is designing your career. So we really get to dig in even deeper if we do the in person version. Okay, so finally, how do you get one of these wonderful retreats onto your campus like, again, if you are the one who brings this to your campus, like, you get all of this training and all of this coaching as part of the campus retreat. And so if you've been like, well, I can't afford navigate, or I really want to participate in one of scholars, voices programs, but it's just not in my budget, or I, you know, individually, I've already spent my startup funds or my my professional development funding or something like that, this is a way to get to work with us, that does take some labor on your part, but hopefully just one or two emails I'm going to describe to you right now. And then we take it from there. So here is what you can do. In order to get us booked for your campus. All you need to do is to write an email, and copy us on the email. So here's the steps, right, you need to identify who you think is the best person who is going to be behind the idea of a scholars voice retreat on your campus. Okay. So again, we've had a lot of success with di initiatives like being brought in through dei initiatives. But that's not the only way. Like when we went to St. Lawrence, like it was the dean of the assistant dean of faculty, who was like, We need something to recenter ourselves after this pandemic. And that's why I came in, they scheduled it between the end of the semester and the end of the school year so that it was particularly for their women professors. So we were able to get in there and do this work before, like a lot of the people who were moms had, you know, to deal with kids at home for the summer, right. So it was strategically planned. And that was what St. Lawrence really wanted, was like, Oh, we've been struggling. So let's do this nice thing for our faculty to help them kind of recenter and refocus on the way out of the pandemic. Ironically, I got COVID for that. We had to reschedule it. We didn't move it by like a week because I got COVID Oh my gosh, that was the worst. Anyway, so you just need To find the person on your campus who you think is going to be a decision maker, and who would advocate for funding for a retreat, right? And you're going to write them a letter, an email, rather, the best is if you copy us, because then that goes into our spreadsheet, and we can do follow up, right? The email can be something like, Hey, I've been listening to this podcast called Academic Writing amplified. And I've really enjoyed the advice, I think it would be a great way to help support our faculty to write and publish more. And here's the brochure, I would love for you to bring this retreat to our campus. And it's even better if you can ask, like with a little team of people, you know what I mean? Like, if it's just you, that's great. And that's how we've booked these retreats so far, like just one person saying, Hey, look

at this. But also, if you had more than one person, it's a little harder to ignore, then just one person. So just an email to a person that you select, saying, Hey, I've been listening to this, it's really helped me, I think it would help a lot of professors on our campus. So let's see if we can book these people in and copy us. And then we can continue to follow up from there. Basically, what happens is, we share like a 15 minute call link, that the person on your campus can book a call with me, we talk on the phone and talk about like, what's the right thing for your campus, we talked about some dates, and then we schedule it. So again, we are working, we've worked with St. Lawrence in person, we've working with University of Kentucky, their communication school, UC Davis School of Nursing. And when he received other desulfovibrio, in Chile, in Santiago de Chile. So that's another thing too, like we are going to do the one in Chile in Spanish, or at least partially in Spanish. So we can also do it in Spanish. So so that is what I wanted to tell you about how retreats are working right now in scholars voice, again, is called the scholars voice faculty development retreat. If you go to our website, [scholars voice.org](http://scholarsvoice.org). Okay, remember, it's dot org. So [scholars voice.org](http://scholarsvoice.org), you can go to our website, and you can find the form to fill out there as well. So you can send an email, copy us, or send the person the link to that page on our website. And they can get more information there as well. The key, as with everything is really follow up, right. So if we know that you've reached out to someone on your campus, that's really helpful to us. So even if you don't feel comfortable copying us on that email, like if you just send Paulette an email, you can get her at support at scholar voice.org, then we'll be able to follow up for you. Because I know that you're busy. And I know I'm on one hand, like I know, I'm asking a lot because nobody wants to write more emails. But at the same time, the payoff for this email is pretty high, right? Like if you get to participate in one of these retreats, you get some of our best material direct to you at your university for free to you. So I think it's like a really great way for those of you who are like, Yeah, I'm not ready for navigate, or I don't have the funding for it now, to do this is such a great alternative. And you will, it will really, I think inspire you to do that and like and see how your advocacy can really pay off not just for you, but for your colleagues as well. So that's the end of this podcast. I hope you enjoy this little trip down memory lane about retreats in our company. We've done them all the ways definitely. And this latest version is specifically for you all who want to work with us, but just haven't found a way yet. To make it happen. We could be in person at your university. Wouldn't that be fun? All right. So I hope you have a wonderful day. Check out all the links in the show notes. Also make sure you're on our email list because we do email about this occasionally as well. And I'm just so happy that you listened to all the way to the end. Have a great day. Bye. Thank you so much for spending your valuable time supporting yourself and your writing by listening to this episode. If you like what you heard today, the best way to say thank you is to hop on over to Apple iTunes and write an honest review. The more reviews the more amazing academic women and non binary people will find this podcast so go write one now.