Justice Curry: Hello everybody. My name is Justice Curry, and welcome back to a Chat With WRAC, a podcast that highlights the WRAC Department, its students and its faculty. I just want to give you guys a disclaimer, there's construction going on around me and I have a cat and our guest has animals around too. So if you hear random things, that is what it is. But joining me today, we have Jessi Wright, who is a graduate student in the WRAC department. You tell me about your master's program in the WRAC Department.

Jessi Wright: Hi. So I'm a first year about to be second year master's student in the Digital Rhetoric and Professional Writing Program in WRAC.

Justice Curry: Cool beans. What drew you towards this program in WRAC?

Jessi Wright: So funny story, actually, when I was applying to grad school, MSU, the WRAC Department offers two different programs, the Digital Rhetoric and Professional Writing program, but also the Critical Studies in Literacy and Pedagogy program. And me as a fresh-out-of-undergrad person, didn't totally know which one I wanted to do/what the differences were going to be. But I thought I was like, okay, I'll do the Critical Studies in Literacy and Pedagogy. That sounds right up my alley. So I fill out the application and then I look at it after I've submitted it and I'm like, oh, I did not sign up for the CSLP program. I signed up for the DRPW one and I was like, oh man, okay, well I'll just call, I'll figure it out. I'll do whatever I need to do.

So I call the office and they're like, "Oh, well you just submitted it. It's too really to do anything, call us back later." And then four months passed and I was accepted and then I'm in it. I'm in DRPW now. But honestly, I feel like this is a better fit for me than the CSLP program would be. And I have an amazing cohort that makes it all worth it.

Justice Curry: Yeah. I was just going to say, did you feel any regret with that? Because I know if I made a mistake like that, I would be like, oh my gosh, my life is over.

Jessi Wright: There are several moments in the applying to graduate school process where you know you just made a really dumb mistake and you have that sinking feeling in your belly where everything drops and you're like, oh no, I just ruined it. I'm not going to get into grad school now. It's all downhill from here. What am I going to do? How am I going to get a job? And then it all works out somehow, some way.

Justice Curry: That's awesome. I believe in that everything happens for a reason and that it's going to work out in your favor. That's my mindset about a lot of things. I also know from just having conversations with you, that you have some copy editing experience. And I was just curious to know why you shifted your focus from copy editing to digital rhetoric and professional writing.

Jessi Wright: I was an undergraduate at Miami University of Ohio, and they're really big on study abroad experiences. So it was my sophomore going into junior year where I decided to go into their Literary London study abroad program. And I had worked all year to try to pay for it and everything else. I was so excited to go. And you take about, I think you take three classes while you're over there and you apply for an internship and they place you wherever they feel fits your specialty. They place you wherever they feel you will fit in best. So I show up, they didn't even tell us where we were working until we showed up at orientation. We were in London, sitting in that room, scared, scared out of our minds.

Justice Curry: Sounds like a horror movie.

Jessi Wright: Yeah, it was a little scary. And they said, "Okay, Jessi, you're going to be working with This is London, this publishing magazine, this tourist magazine." And I was like, "Okay, that sounds decent enough." It was a great experience because I learned very quickly that I did not want to do that for the rest of my life. And I remember I had an hour and a half commute out of London, Monday through Thursday. I was constantly running all of these errands to places that I had never been to. And it was expected to meet deadlines that were impossible and the editing and publishing experiences that I had, they were full of Americanisms. So they weren't even seen as valid in their eyes. And so it felt really discouraging in the moment. And I've had several editing experiences since, more so in academia than in public media, and those have made it better, but the pace of that job proved to me that I did not want to do that for the rest of my life. It just was not a good fit.

Justice Curry: Even though that was a very unfortunate experience, I'm glad that you were able to see that this isn't going to work and you were able to kind of change the direction of what you were doing with your schooling experience.

Jessi Wright: And that's why it's really important for folks that are in their undergraduate to have these internships and what you think will be your dream field, because sometimes it just doesn't work out-

Justice Curry: Is that what you think?

Jessi Wright: ... and you have to go to plan B or plan C or whatever it is.

Justice Curry: Yeah, because me, my anxiety is through the roof. When I think of internships, I'm like, oh my gosh, I don't want to think about that type of stuff until I graduate. But then after having experienced with an internship, it's like, whoa, it's really important for me to know exactly what I want to do before it's too late. So that is very beneficial advice to people who are like me or were like me and were very afraid of internships. Definitely take advantage of them because they are very beneficial to helping you figure out what you want to do, what you don't want to do, what you like, what you don't like, things like that. That's really cool. So what pushed you towards pursuing a master's degree? Or how did you know it was something you wanted to do or something that would benefit you?

Jessi Wright: So after I went through that whole identity crisis where I wasn't going to be an editor and I wasn't going to go into publishing, I was like, well, what am I going to do now? So I went to some of my favorite professors and I was like, "I need to figure this out. What am I going to do?" And they're like, "Okay, well, what do you like to do?" And I was like, "Well, I really like being in school." And they're like, "Jessi, you can't make a whole career out of that." I'm like, "I think I can though." And they were like, "Well, we don't advise you going into that type of thing, unless you're really dedicated to seeing it through.” Because you go through undergraduate, then you go through graduate school and that can be just your master's program to where you become an instructor or that can be master's plus your PhD, which is 5+ years more schooling.

And so I kind of just went into my master's degree, thinking like this will help me figure it out what I want to do. But also I think I know what I want to do. And I would always advise to go into whatever program you're going into with an open mind, because you don't know where you'll end up out of it. But with that said, I made up my mind that I wanted to do this. Just for my year here, getting more into the background stuff that goes on behind teaching, that goes on behind publishing and research, I've learned that this is something that I'm really interested in, that I'm having a lot of fun doing, that I look forward to doing every day. And one of the main parts that's so great to me is working with undergraduate students too, which is something that I think I'll always like, because we always need the undergrads to keep his hip. I've learned so much. I'm only a year out of school and I feel like I'm 10 years older than everyone.

Justice Curry: So far behind. Look, that's awesome that you were like, yep, I'm just going to go for it. I want to help people. I want to teach people. From my experience, having you as my boss—Jessi's my boss. I can definitely, it's very apparent that you do care about me and my co-worker. And I'm an undergraduate by the way. And that you really want to look out for us and help us in whatever ways you can. Jessi gave me books for one of my classes, which I will return. I still have them. They're not ruined. Jessi provides a lot of resources for undergraduates, just people in need who need some stuff. So I really appreciate you always helping us out and looking out for us. And I'm very shy. I don't really be like, “Oh, you're a grad student. I'm going to go talk to you and network with you.” So it's nice to have you around to ask questions and to just help me out.

Jessi Wright: And I also think that's one of the most important parts of your undergraduate degree is making connections with people that you normally wouldn't. So whether that would be going to your office hours and talking with faculty and learning more about them and how they think their class is going, or even what they're doing in their actual lives because they are actual humans. And then getting in touch with graduate students, because there's always this weird divide between graduate and undergraduate students, but we're really only a few years apart. We're not that different. And even if we're more than a few years apart, we're still going through the same stuff. We're still struggling through classes. We're still trying to find our place in the world. And I think it's important that everyone always offers kindness and resources and whatever they can and just make it a welcoming community because that's what WRAC is all about is welcoming people in and helping them achieve their goals.

Justice Curry: Exactly. I definitely, and I do get that energy from WRAC, which is why, even though when I switched into P2W I was very unsure. I felt very comfortable because of how welcoming and how helpful the faculty and staff are and other students as well, especially graduate students. You guys make us feel very comfortable and welcome. So if anyone has any questions about whether or not P2W is a very welcoming space for them, or if they'll fit in, you'll find your place. And everyone cares about you succeeding, which is really important to surround yourself with people that care about you succeeding because I've had some experiences in other departments that are just not, they don't compare to what I've gained and experienced in WRAC. So yeah. So switching gears a little bit, let's talk about numbers, let's talk money. On average, how expensive is grad school? What can we expect to lose from our pockets if we decide to go down this rabbit hole of grad school?

Jessi Wright: Well, it depends on the program that you apply for/go to because every program is different and there are different resources with every program. So there are some whether it's Ivy League or just smaller private schools where you might end up paying more than you would like to, but there are many programs out there where you don't have to pay anything at all. They cover your tuition and then you can get an additional assistantship and you just have to do your research to find out what will work best for and what would work best for your wallet as well.

Justice Curry: Yes, very important. I know a lot of people that are like, I need to go to grad school to really compete on the job market and they put themselves in even more debt trying to achieve that. So if it is a possibility, you should definitely check in the scholarships and any ways that you can get the cost of grad school down. I forgot who I was talking to, but they were telling me like, if you have to pay to go to grad school, don't, you just don't go.

Jessi Wright: All of my professors in undergrad, they said that if you have to pay to go to grad school, then don't go. Work a couple of years, apply again if you still want to go to grad school and then see what you can get out of it, because paying for grad school is not good, especially if you already paid for undergrad and you just don't have a lot left, you know?

Justice Curry: Yeah. Because before meeting you, I did not know that it was possible to not have to pay for grad school. I look at grad school was a very like, almost godly thing where it's super expensive and it's not the same as undergrad where you can get a bunch of scholarships from all these other areas. I've always thought of it as something that has to come out of your pockets. And so to meet you and find out that it can be accessible to someone who cannot afford it, who is going through it financially. It was very comforting even though I'm not really considering grad school. If I did change my mind, I would know that it was possible for me. It's not impossible for everyone. So if you feel like grad school is impossible, but you really want to go definitely look into some options for you because it is very possible for everybody. So for those that are unfamiliar, can you briefly explain the process for applying to grad school?

Jessi Wright: And this process is different for everybody, of course, but I'll explain my experiences with it. And there's no one right way to do it, but I'll share with you how I did it. So I think it was the end of my junior year when I decided, yes, I want to go to grad school. And it's very important to make that decision like, yes, I want to do this right now. This is what I want to do. This will lead me better, or this will lead me towards my goals. That's a huge part of it. So after that, you start doing your research and your research should include applications. With your applications, you need to look into what materials you need to have. So that can be your resume, some samples of writing, which are usually about 10 to 15 pages long and have a cover letter for what you want to work on, and then you have to do a statement of purpose. So what you want to accomplish when you are at that school, and then also a personal statement, so about you, about why you want to do this, what led you to go into grad school and what you want to accomplish. So make sure you have all of that set and that you're working on that in the summer before your senior year, because once school starts up, you're going to be overwhelmed again. And then you also need to contact your favorite professors or professors that you've worked with and ask them for recommendation letters. So that's just with the application process.

Then you need to start studying for the GRE, which is the Graduate Record Examinations and specific programs may require you to take a specialized GRE program or the specialized GRE tests. So I think there's an English one, there's a math one. There's an engineering one. If you go to each program's site, they will have requirements and then preferences for those that are getting accepted into the program. So they'll say usually students that are accepted have gotten over a 160 on the GRE. And then also a huge part of your research should be calculating how much it'll cost to apply to all of these places. Around every application costs like 50 to 100 dollars, even the GRE test itself costs, I think around $150. That's just something to keep in mind when you're applying. But also just remember that graduate school is an investment financially and mentally, and sometimes physically from sitting up all night, stressed out over this.

Justice Curry: It definitely sounds like a lot. Just like going to college is definitely like undergraduate, it's an investment. When is the best time during your undergraduate to make sure that you are prepared to go to grad school before you graduate?

Jessi Wright: In the spring of your junior year, in the summer before your senior year, you need to be researching what programs you want to go to, compiling lists of all their requirements and all of their preferences, and then studying and then taking the GRE test. And then the fall of your senior year, you're going to be applying to the grad schools. And so that's when you have to submit all of your statements and everything and all of your faculty recommendations. And then spring the next year, you're just waiting and waiting and waiting and then one day you'll get that call and you will be on top of the moon.

Justice Curry: But how was your grad school experience so far?

Jessi Wright: So I will say it was very overwhelming at first. I think I started two weeks before school started up and I was introduced to my assistantship. I went through orientation training and I remember they gave me this giant handbook of everything that had to do with my program. And they pointed out this page of acronyms. And I will say that one of the hardest things to adjust to with MSU is the number of how many acronyms people use on the daily. But that was part of what made everything so overwhelming, but then also I was in a completely new state, new town. I didn't have any friends, I didn't have a roommate. It was just me and my cat. So it felt very lonely for the first couple of months before I really started to connect with people, whether that was faculty or my cohort or even undergrads. It was very, very lonely.

Justice Curry: Absolutely. It's really hard. That's a lot.

Jessi Wright: Yeah. And something that I wish I would have realized when I was going through it during fall semester was I could ask for help. I don't know why I didn't think I couldn't ask for help from faculty, from my cohort, from anybody. You can just say like, hey, I'm going through it. And people will be like, me too! I am going through it. And we're going through the same things too. Everyone in my cohort, we were all thinking the same stuff. We were all lonely. We were all feeling like we didn't belong there. And then once we all finally came together, we were like, oh, this is normal. This is just like growing pains and adjusting to a new place.

Justice Curry: Thank you so much, Jessi, for sitting down and talking with me today.

Jessi Wright: You're welcome. It was great to be here.

Justice Curry: I enjoyed having you on the show and just getting your perspective on grad school, answering a lot of questions that maybe freshmen or other standings may have in regards to grad school. Is there anything else you want to add before I close it out?

Jessi Wright: If there are any undergraduates or even graduate students who would like to talk to me further, feel free to reach out. I think I'm listed on the WRAC website. Actually, I know I'm listed on the WRAC website, so feel free to look me up there. My name's Jessi Wright, I'm in the DRPW program. So just look me up and we can talk.

Justice Curry: Thank you all for joining us and listening to a Chat With WRAC. If you have any suggestions for future episodes about what you want to hear, definitely shoot us the email. I will put that information somewhere in the future, but yes. Thank you so much guys.