**Stylish Academic Writing - Introduction**

JUDITH D. SINGER: Good afternoon, everybody. I'm Judy Singer. I'm the Senior Vice Provost for Faculty Development and Diversity and I want to welcome all of you on behalf of the Office of the Provost to this event on stylish academic writing. I was describing to a colleague over the weekend this particular event. And he said, isn't that an oxymoron? And unfortunately, having to read a lot of prose across a lot of disciplines, sometimes it does sound like it is an oxymoron. But I think today what we're going to learn is that it is possible to write well, write clearly, and write for your colleagues.

I approach thinking about this event from several different perspectives. One is, I remember my first year of graduate school, turning in a paper to my advisor. My PhD is in statistics. My advisor was Fred Mosteller. He was known as a very good writer. And I turned in my paper and I got it back and there was so much red ink on it I was just traumatized. From the first sentence, he just circles. My sentence began, there are. I thought that was a perfectly fine way to begin a paper. Never begin a paper with the words there are I have never written a paper or a paragraph with the words there are since. In fact, I basically avoid it.

And then over the years, I see this from in multiple perspectives of thinking about the problem space, one are the arguments, sometimes heated, that I get into with my colleagues, both about our own writing and in collaborative work, but also with our graduate students, arguments about the active voice versus the passive voice. The number of papers I read where it's not clear that any human being was ever involved in the research, because it either comes from God or is done by monkeys. But there is certainly no human in the prose.

Coming up with students who say to me, but my other reader said I had to edit all these words out. And I'm, no, you have to put them back in. So it's obviously an area in which we can hold different views about what is considered stylish academic writing. I also have a particular perspective of being involved in most of the appointments processes across the university, and therefore reading appointments dossiers and tenure dossiers across the universities, as well as papers from a variety of fields. And what goes for stylish writing in one field is very different from what happens in another field. I also make a parenthetical note that my favorite dossiers are written by Steve Pinker. You should be lucky enough to have Steve make your case for tenure. It's really quite a statement.

The idea for this event came when Helen Sword contacted me, said she was going to be in the States and was interested in speaking with a group of faculty about this topic. And we have been running a series on publishing more generally for the faculty from a variety of perspectives. And the notion of thinking about how to write well was something that was quite appealing to us. But we had to figure out how to time this with Helen's schedule since she comes from the other side of the planet.

And then we wanted to have two other perspectives on the panel, one of a faculty member who thinks quite closely about writing and every word and how it's presented, and Steve Pinker was very gracious in accepting our invitation, as well as Elizabeth Knoll from Harvard University Press, who has done a lot of work with us on these book publishing events. And if you're interested in learning about the book publishing business, I can think of no one better than Elizabeth Knoll to be your guide.

So with those opening remarks, I'm going to turn this over to Amy Brand, my colleague in the Provost's office, Assistant Provost for Faculty Appointments and Faculty Appointments, who by the way, was an editor at MIT Press in a former lifetime, so really comes out of the book publishing industry as well. And thank you very much for coming. Bye, bye.

AMY BRAND: Good afternoon and welcome. We're delighted to see faculty from across the university at this event. And we're going to start the panel out with our invited guest, Helen Sword. Helen is the author of the book that you now have in your hands I hope, the namesake for the panel, Stylish Academic Writing. Helen is originally from Southern California. She received her PhD in comparative literature from Princeton and now teaches at the University of Auckland as Professor and Director for the Center of Learning and Research in Higher Education.

Helen is an outspoken advocate for creativity and craftsmanship in scholarship and has offered workshops on popular academic writing all over the world. In fact, we are just the second stop on a 14 university tour that she's in the middle of right now. Helen will be followed by Elizabeth, Executive Editor at Large at Harvard University Press. And as Judy mentioned our offices go to person on all matters related to book publishing. Elizabeth holds a PhD in the history of science and has been doing book acquisitions since 1988. As the range of fields that she acquires and continues to expand, she in her own words, consequently knows less and less about more and more. I take issue with that, actually. Elizabeth knows a lot about a lot and will offer an editor's perspective on Helen's remarks.

And batting clean up we have Steve Pinker. Steve is Harvard College Professor and Johnstone Family Professor in the Department of Psychology and author of many blockbuster titles for the general reader on language evolution, the mind, and most recently on violence, with Better Angels of Our Nature. Steve has received so many awards and recognitions that I won't attempt to list them, but most recently he was named one of Prospect Magazine's top 10 World Thinkers for 2013.

So our plan for the panelists comments to last, hopefully no more than an hour, leaving plenty of time for your questions and discussion. So Helen, start with you.