

WEBVTT

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00:00:01.140 --> 00:00:14.519

Anne Maxham: Hi Bill. Good to see you. And thank you for participating in this inaugural session of writers on writing, we're going to dive right into deconstructing what are called the growth strategies for written communication.

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00:00:16.020 --> 00:00:28.110

Anne Maxham: Let's begin on a general note, some would say letter writing is a lost art and yet you not only do it well you write frequently what compels you to write these letters.

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00:00:29.250 --> 00:00:32.640

Chancellor: Well, first of all, and thank you, and thanks for inviting me.

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00:00:34.200 --> 00:00:37.920

Chancellor: Well, passion, I think more than anything.

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00:00:39.180 --> 00:00:47.220

Chancellor: And I unfortunately, there has been a lot of opportunity to exercise my passion over the last four years.

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00:00:48.720 --> 00:00:50.400

Chancellor: You know, really, up until

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00:00:52.020 --> 00:01:03.900

Chancellor: 2016 when I took over the reins as Chancellor. I'm not sure that there was much this kind of writing by the chancellor of maybe more speaking

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00:01:05.730 --> 00:01:19.980

Chancellor: But not writing. And I think that some would question whether I should be writing in a way that I did, starting with the evening or the day after the election in 2016

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00:01:21.060 --> 00:01:30.690

Chancellor: And continuing with the Charlottesville riot. And I think there have been nine or 10 other

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00:01:32.070 --> 00:01:46.050

Chancellor: Occasions I wish I have written, but in each case. I was really motivated by the passion and our values, as an institution, I basically had taken the position that

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00:01:47.160 --> 00:01:59.040

Chancellor: Institutions have a duty to speak to their values that it should not just be individuals and we teach. And we're an institution of higher education. And certainly we are educating

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00:01:59.970 --> 00:02:15.450

Chancellor: The next generation of writers and activists, but that doesn't mean that I think Antioch as an institution should not also speak to those values. And so that's that's really what has motivated me to get out the

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00:02:15.930 --> 00:02:24.840

Chancellor: Keyboard and start composing something in light of various national world incidents over the last four years.

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00:02:27.930 --> 00:02:36.930

Anne Maxham: Yeah, as one of your readers. I've always appreciated how responsive. You've been to the social events. And I think back to the

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00:02:37.860 --> 00:02:40.410

Anne Maxham: The shootings in Orlando, Florida.

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00:02:40.680 --> 00:02:44.160

Anne Maxham: And how that that spoke very directly to

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00:02:45.240 --> 00:02:52.320

Anne Maxham: To Govt plus rights and and the atrocity of those murders.

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00:02:53.250 --> 00:02:54.600

Anne Maxham: Well, yeah.

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00:02:54.780 --> 00:02:57.750

Chancellor: Right. And there's been plenty of atrocities.

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00:02:58.170 --> 00:03:01.650

Chancellor: Right I shootings. I've spoken about a couple of those

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00:03:02.700 --> 00:03:16.710

Chancellor: And you know, I not only have I guess a passion to write about them. I, I also feel like there's a responsibility to give voice to the victims and the George Floyd letter is just another example of that.

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00:03:18.060 --> 00:03:23.430

Chancellor: No one is speaking for those victims, unless you write about it. And I think that

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00:03:24.570 --> 00:03:25.230

Chancellor: We

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00:03:26.580 --> 00:03:37.620

Chancellor: We honor them by doing that and we are advocating for them by doing that and my letters have been an attempt to advocate for the victims as much as anything

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00:03:40.080 --> 00:03:50.520

Anne Maxham: Yeah, so let's move into the George Floyd letter because I think that that represents on what I call it a year descriptive.

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00:03:51.930 --> 00:03:53.580

Anne Maxham: Skill of

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00:03:54.660 --> 00:04:04.920

Anne Maxham: Writing about something that is really atrocious, and yet doing so in in such a way that you have memorable lines. So I remembered the

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00:04:06.060 --> 00:04:12.780

Anne Maxham: The introduction is news or knee lynching or suffocation. The result is still death.

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00:04:13.980 --> 00:04:21.900

Anne Maxham: So I'm curious. How did you begin formulating a piece of writing that ends up in such a memorable way.

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00:04:24.540 --> 00:04:27.600

Chancellor: You know all interesting, those were not the first words on the page.

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00:04:28.650 --> 00:04:31.980

Chancellor: Or the last words on the page, almost the last words.

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00:04:34.650 --> 00:04:45.270

Chancellor: You know, like any piece of writing. I think you start with a lot of reflection thinking and reading and research and I had never. The first one out of the box.

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00:04:46.050 --> 00:04:54.240

Chancellor: I'm never going to be the first one to issue a proclamation or letter of this nature as I think that fast. And frankly, I need employees reflect

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00:04:55.230 --> 00:05:05.130

Chancellor: My own thoughts together and I i think the one thing I've noticed as I read kind of the early responses as many times they just sound like word salad to me.

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00:05:06.270 --> 00:05:11.940

Chancellor: Obligatory institutional comments that one should say to be good citizens.

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00:05:13.320 --> 00:05:19.740

Chancellor: And I, I don't want to do that, I want to add to the narrative in some way.

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00:05:21.300 --> 00:05:30.870

Chancellor: And I want to connect to my audience. And that's, you can't do that with word salad I can have all the same words I wrote and end up being word salad.

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00:05:32.760 --> 00:05:33.660

Chancellor: So,

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00:05:35.130 --> 00:05:45.660

Chancellor: I think about that. And I, I am one of those people that does not write a draft. Well, I actually almost have to have a whole thing in my head before I start getting it down, but I will make changes after that.

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00:05:46.800 --> 00:05:53.760

Chancellor: I had an English teacher in ninth grade at once, said the best writing is rewriting and she is absolutely right about that.

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00:05:55.440 --> 00:05:56.250

Chancellor: So,

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00:05:57.540 --> 00:06:00.510

Chancellor: As to your my opening sentence.

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00:06:02.070 --> 00:06:13.710

Chancellor: I already knew I wanted to write something that I gave something new to that I had perspective on that I had expertise in I really wanted to start with the framework.

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00:06:14.280 --> 00:06:28.380

Chancellor: Of the 400 years of institutional racism, starting with slavery. I wanted to kind of provide a constitutional context to that, you know, that's my expertise.

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00:06:30.570 --> 00:06:49.110

Chancellor: But after getting that far in the letter and after realizing that I had not really captured my audience. The way I wanted to, I wrote that first paragraph and my first paragraph was an attempt to give George Floyd voice and to make people really

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00:06:50.910 --> 00:06:59.370

Chancellor: Appreciate the horror of the situation. I mean, we'd seen the videos. I didn't want to ignore them in this letter.

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00:07:00.450 --> 00:07:01.050

Chancellor: And

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00:07:03.540 --> 00:07:12.510

Chancellor: The word news came as a really powerful expression of racism in America.

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00:07:14.160 --> 00:07:18.420

Chancellor: This was nothing less than a lynching. And I wanted to say that right up front.

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00:07:19.770 --> 00:07:21.150

Chancellor: Right at the top of the letter.

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00:07:23.010 --> 00:07:40.980

Chancellor: And often you'll see in my writing. I don't waste any time getting to my point. I want the audience to know immediately what my point is not just what I'm writing about. But what my point is they should not have to read to the end to figure that out.

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00:07:43.320 --> 00:08:01.770

Chancellor: Those are kind of my formulaic views of how to write and capturing your audience is very critical. I think I wrote a lot more opening statements in my law cases than I have ever written about anything else and getting your audience to listen to you is the biggest

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00:08:03.510 --> 00:08:12.540

Chancellor: First your requirement of good writing, you need to have their attention so that that was the reason for that in that letter.

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00:08:13.980 --> 00:08:28.200

Anne Maxham: Exactly. So in composition. We talked about writing for reader. And that's what you're doing, and yet many times, that's something that for for writers is difficult to achieve.

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00:08:29.550 --> 00:08:41.190

Anne Maxham: And I'd like to go back to, you know, the descriptive quality and then your voice. I mean, you're an attorney, you're chancellor, you're an activist you combine all of these

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00:08:42.240 --> 00:09:03.060

Anne Maxham: You know identities and which is, you know, just three of several hats. You might wear in your life right i'm i'm curious. I'm going to go to, like, because I think if you're writing as marked as a very sincere and yet the George Floyd piece combines

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00:09:04.740 --> 00:09:08.220
Anne Maxham: cogent commentary and

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00:09:09.570 --> 00:09:22.830
Anne Maxham: And there's a sense of not necessarily frustration, but you're you're you're angry, you're angry about about this, you know,

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00:09:24.210 --> 00:09:32.640
Anne Maxham: You know, racism and you know that there's one killing after the next and when is it going to stop but

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00:09:33.660 --> 00:09:40.860
Anne Maxham: It's it's readable, because it's all couched in this sincerity.

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00:09:41.940 --> 00:09:50.100
Anne Maxham: And so, if not, you know, a poignancy to your writing. So what I'm curious about is how do you balance that

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00:09:51.990 --> 00:09:54.330
Chancellor: Well, again, thank you for your compliments.

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00:09:55.980 --> 00:09:56.220
Chancellor: Um,

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00:09:57.930 --> 00:10:11.190
Chancellor: Well, whenever you're writing for your writing of any kind. You need to know your audience. And this is an audience that is I'm writing, not only for staff, faculty, students, I'm also writing for alumni.

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00:10:11.460 --> 00:10:12.660
And I don't know them for me.

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00:10:13.680 --> 00:10:15.840
Chancellor: And they and they stretch back decades.

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00:10:18.240 --> 00:10:31.110
Chancellor: So, but they went to Antioch. I tend to approach the work then as making sure that whatever I write is anchored on what I

believe are our shared values and if I can just stay there.

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00:10:33.150 --> 00:10:42.930

Chancellor: I will be communicating with all of them. So I do try to not be too political. I don't think it needs to be.

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00:10:43.410 --> 00:10:56.520

Chancellor: I think that it's wrong to be, frankly, in a higher educational institution. I think that you can speak to values and not necessarily be advocating for a certain political party or political position.

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00:10:58.140 --> 00:11:19.590

Chancellor: But I'm not going to be embarrassed about speaking to values and I'm not going to shy away from speaking devalues even though some might interpret it as being politically motivated and there were letters that I've written where I got responses back that were accused me of being political

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00:11:21.480 --> 00:11:27.570

Chancellor: Enough, they were they were letters I would not have expected that the one was the

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00:11:28.740 --> 00:11:37.530

Chancellor: Tree of Life synagogue shooting. Oh, and of course I took on the NRA and the values of life.

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00:11:38.400 --> 00:11:58.110

Chancellor: were central to that. But nonetheless, I'm not going to shy away from the statement of values and I write toward those values and I advocate for those values. And I think that in terms of structuring the letter. I'm always thinking, well, what am I asking my audience.

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00:11:59.400 --> 00:12:12.210

Chancellor: To take away, other than my opinion. I'm always I always want to advocate for something and in most of my letters I am advocating for certain policy or actions but

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00:12:12.660 --> 00:12:20.010

Chancellor: There are many policy debates that could be had around any one of these subjects and I don't pretend to know any all of them, but

I do

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00:12:21.090 --> 00:12:29.370

Chancellor: Try to advocate for change in those areas and sometimes specific changes as I did in the Floyd letter.

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00:12:31.680 --> 00:12:36.840

Chancellor: So those are some of my. And then the last thing I would say, and is

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00:12:39.180 --> 00:12:47.550

Chancellor: I like to be empathic in these letters I am I usually write at a time when I know that

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00:12:49.770 --> 00:13:08.130

Chancellor: nerves are raw for reasons of related to the climate that we live in today. And these are highly charged issues. I want to acknowledge them and I want to affirm those feelings so

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00:13:09.420 --> 00:13:33.210

Chancellor: I think that the that people then listen to you once once they know you under trying to understand them, then they will listen to you. So empathy is a big part of each one of the letters that I've written and I usually conclude with some kind of empathic comment about it as well.

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00:13:34.470 --> 00:13:36.090

Chancellor: So, there

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00:13:37.920 --> 00:13:47.760

Anne Maxham: So you were talking about writing and rewriting when you revise. Are you looking for language that would

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00:13:49.470 --> 00:13:51.960

Anne Maxham: would appeal to readers and

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00:13:52.020 --> 00:13:54.120

Anne Maxham: Writers that empathic

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00:13:54.540 --> 00:14:05.670

Chancellor: I'll give you a really good example because I you know I wrote the George Ford letter really with a time crunch. It's probably the fastest letter of letters. I've written

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00:14:06.030 --> 00:14:13.980

Chancellor: Because we were in the middle of budget and I had board meetings and I wanted to get something out to people in a timely way.

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00:14:14.550 --> 00:14:26.040

Chancellor: But I did not spend a lot of time rewriting I probably went through it twice, but it needed a couple more spice. I'll give you a very good example of this, and that very first question.

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00:14:27.270 --> 00:14:39.030

Chancellor: New sore knee lynching or suffocation. The result is still death at the hands of the very law enforcement institutions meant to serve and protect I should have said sworn

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00:14:41.220 --> 00:14:43.770

Chancellor: Sworn it's much stronger.

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00:14:45.060 --> 00:14:47.520

Chancellor: In oath to serve and protect

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00:14:48.750 --> 00:14:49.230

Chancellor: And

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00:14:50.460 --> 00:15:07.440

Chancellor: You know, that is the kind of thing that I look for when I'm when I'm writing their words matter. The other one was, I was advised of later by a reader who who sent me an email and I got a lot of emails about this letter.

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00:15:09.930 --> 00:15:15.390

Chancellor: One was a moment a teaching moment for me. I use the phrase.

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00:15:16.680 --> 00:15:17.370

Chancellor: That

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00:15:19.110 --> 00:15:37.710

Chancellor: It's an America with a deep and long issue with race and America first experienced by blacks as slaves and she said, in the future, you should use the phrase enslaved people instead of slaves. It gives the word, the word slaves.

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00:15:39.060 --> 00:15:39.270

Chancellor: Is

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00:15:40.350 --> 00:15:45.720

Chancellor: Full of connotations that you don't that suggests that they are lesser than

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00:15:47.640 --> 00:15:57.660

Chancellor: And they are people just like everyone else who were in slave and I believe she's absolutely right about that. But that's the kind of thing that you would pick up in rewriting thinking about your audience.

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00:15:58.140 --> 00:16:05.010

Chancellor: Thinking about meaning of words and the connotations that they've been given over time. So,

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00:16:06.000 --> 00:16:15.390

Anne Maxham: Yeah, excellent. And that's all part of that the running discourse that I think that your time 1619 project has

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00:16:15.420 --> 00:16:22.920

Anne Maxham: Right was promoted, it's not, you know, enslaved people and then the slaver right

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00:16:24.540 --> 00:16:27.300

Anne Maxham: Yeah, that's a, that's an excellent example.

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00:16:28.470 --> 00:16:38.790

Anne Maxham: Um, I'm curious, Bill. If you get if you're writing goes beyond the boundaries of Antioch.

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00:16:40.260 --> 00:16:49.260

Anne Maxham: Do you have you know do send it off to a higher ed commission or journal

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00:16:50.610 --> 00:16:57.240

Chancellor: Well, I had taken the Floyd George Floyd letter and turn it into an editorial

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00:16:59.610 --> 00:17:17.370

Chancellor: So we did send that out. I don't think I got picked up by any of our local newspapers, but I've tried. It's the first time I don't have a communications person here and I am a communications person. So that kind of of

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00:17:18.750 --> 00:17:23.640

Chancellor: External publication is is hard for us to achieve, but we need to do more.

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00:17:25.560 --> 00:17:29.250

Chancellor: And so now the answer to your question is basically no

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00:17:30.660 --> 00:17:37.470

Anne Maxham: Well, we're going to post the George Floyd letter you have with with the riders exchange.

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00:17:37.950 --> 00:18:03.120

Anne Maxham: On and we'd be glad to post any of your missives on our, on our Facebook and other social media, we'd be honored to I on my end shared your letter that day with maybe 10 to 15 friends and every one of them responded with a thank you and with the comment about how

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00:18:05.220 --> 00:18:20.460

Anne Maxham: You know how how effective how your words resonated for them and and they appreciated, knowing that the, the leader of Antioch University took the time to write

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00:18:21.270 --> 00:18:30.060

Anne Maxham: So, you know, Bill. This has been a wonderful conversation. Thank you. Katie for taking time to converse with me today.

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00:18:30.570 --> 00:18:46.170

Anne Maxham: I'm going to have the letter attached to this to this video and so readers can see that your Floyd letter that we were glad

to also post other letters, just that should people be interested

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00:18:46.890 --> 00:18:55.080

Chancellor: Well, I'm happy to participate and let me know there's anything more I can do in the future. And let's both hope I don't need to write more letters.

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00:18:55.920 --> 00:18:59.520

Anne Maxham: Well, yeah, that's it. That's all of our hopes. Yeah, yeah.

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00:18:59.730 --> 00:19:00.660

Anne Maxham: Well, thank you.