OPCD Podcast: Episode 23 - “Composing a Cover Letter” (3/19/2015)
Interview with Ms. Levy Daniel, Career Coach within the Office of Professional and Career Development, Harbert College of Business

Voiceover: Ready to jump in to creating that perfect cover letter? Well we’ve got a few tips that’ll help with everything from starting the process to standing out of the crowd. Stay tuned here on the OPCD podcast.

Your cover letter plays a significant role in representing you to potential employers. After all, it’s the first thing they see when your name comes across their desk. That’s a pretty big deal and well worth spending the extra time required to make it effective and polished. Ms. Levy Daniel is talking us through that process today. As a career coach within the Office of Professional and Career Development she can tell us more about what works and what doesn’t.

L. Daniel: Going in to a cover letter and just writing one is almost nearly impossible to do without a job description. You really have to have something to guide you in writing it. Because that’s your best knowledge of what the company’s looking for. If you think about trying to include your whole life into a letter, it’s not going to fit very well. It’s going to be a lot of information and the things that make you qualified will vary from job to job.

Voiceover: So do custom fit each cover letter to the description of the job you’re applying for. What you don’t want to do is fill up the body of that letter by repetitively using the same sentence structure.

L. Daniel: Whenever you’re writing a cover letter it gets very natural to start off with your sentences “I was responsible for, I did so-and-so, I did this, I did that.” You really want to avoid starting every sentence with “I,” whenever you do that it really stands out. Every sentence looks exactly the same. You can start sentences another way, so you can say “as a career counselor for the OPCD I did so-and-so” and you’re still getting the “I” in there but you’re not starting a sentence with it. You’re starting it with “as the role that you are” or whatever would be a good lead-in to the sentence.

Voiceover: Good to know! A few other suggestions: don’t create a whole new header for your cover letter. Use the same format that’s on your resume.

L. Daniel: You want your documents to all look the same, like they come out of a package basically. It’s easy for things to get separated and if your cover letter and resume are to get separated then they’re having to go through and really make sure the names match, but if they both look the same at the top you’re only having to match the header.

Voiceover: And an important one that’s easy to skip - do address each cover letter to a specific person.
**L. Daniel:** Always make sure that you address the letter to someone in particular. Do not try to say “Dear Hiring Manager,” “To Whom it May Concern” or things like that. Don’t take the short cut. You’re going to have to do a little bit of research to find out maybe who the director of HR is or maybe who the hiring manager is for this position. It could require looking online, it could require looking on LinkedIn, it could require you actually calling the company and asking “who is the hiring manager?” You’re going to have to take that extra step and do that little extra bit of effort. But that little bit of extra effort goes a long way. Also, whenever you’re doing the salutation, so the “Dear So-and-so:” make sure you end that with a colon and not a comma. Business professional communication requires a colon after a salutation, not a comma.

**Voiceover:** Now to take a closer look at what the body of your cover letter will contain. The focus of that introductory paragraph should be to state why you’re writing.

**L. Daniel:** You want it to include the degree that you’re earning, when you’re graduating, so when you’d be able to start working for their company, or when you’re looking for an internship if there’s a particular summer. They’re not mind readers so you’re going to have to tell them that. And telling them how you heard about the job opportunity that’s available, if you found it on Tiger Recruiting Link, including that in your cover letter, in that first paragraph. And then state, of course, what job you’re applying for in the company. You want it to be clear and beyond a shadow of a doubt in their mind that this cover letter was intended for them.

**Voiceover:** And that attention to the words and phrasing in the job description that we talked about earlier come in to play here in the latter part of your document.

**L. Daniel:** In the second and third paragraphs you’re going to want to cover, really, why you are qualified. And this gets down to going through the job description and my recommendation is that you take the job description and you highlight all the reasons that you’re excited to be part of that company. Read through the entire job description, read the “about the company” part if they have that, read your responsibilities that you would be doing, read the qualifications. And if you meet those requirements or you’re excited about the job description and the details of what you’ll be doing, highlight those things. If you’ve done things like that in the past, keep that in mind and you can jot it out beside it. And those are the things that you’re going to now know are important to include in the second body paragraph of your cover letter. The third paragraph is where you’re going to restate your enthusiasm and open the door for them to contact you about an interview. Then make sure that you thank the reader for their time and consideration of you as a candidate.

**Voiceover:** These are all great things to consider as you’re creating this document, but if got concerns or questions that weren’t covered today - no worries, that’s what we’re here for!
L. Daniel: This is a process, creating a cover letter does not happen overnight. It does take a little bit of work so don’t get frustrated and give up on it. But if you want help with this, we do offer career counseling and career coaching in order to help you get through this process. We’ll look over your cover letter, we’ll answer any questions you have. If you’re stuck, come in and we can help. In order to do this, you’re going to log onto TRL. Across the top ribbon you will see “Calendar - OPCD Coaching Appointment.” If you click on that it will direct you to making an OPCD coaching appointment where you’ll select the type, which will be “resume/cover letter,” and you can make it for about 30 minutes. That will be a good amount of time for us to be able to help you.

Voiceover: TRL is located at jobs.auburn.edu or you can make an appointment in person by simply stopping into Lowder 101. Thanks so much to Ms. Daniel for taking the time to talk us through that and she’ll be back with us in a few weeks to discuss some pretty exciting new cover letter resources that will soon be available on TRL. More on that to follow but this is where I leave you for now. Have an awesome week and see you back here soon!