

Season 5, Episode 4: A Journey of Paper and Perseverance

Host: ESF President Joanie Mahoney

Guest: Dr. Ericka Redmond, Assistant Professor, Paper Engineering

Ericka Redmond: 100% job placement. It's amazing for many several years because one of the benefits is you have that foundation located in our building, is that they help bring the companies in the department.

People think that this paper industry, "Oh, they are just cutting all these trees to make all this paper. Nowadays, we have everything online. We don't need all this industry, this industry is going down," but it's not really. We should think they're really sustainable companies.

I wanted to create a better bridge between South America and ESF. I wanted to have our students here in ESF going down to Brazil, learn about the industry in Brazil, visit all ... the opportunities out there, and I want to bring some of the students from that to come here too.

Joanie Mahoney: Welcome to season five of Campus Conversations, the podcast. I am Joanie Mahoney and I have the honor of serving as SUNY ESF president. ESF is a small college with big ideas and this season I'm speaking with faculty, students and staff who make ESF mighty. These are the people working to improve our world and sustain the environment. I'm excited to welcome ESF's Dr. Ericka Redmond as our guest today.

In this episode, Ericka will share the story of her journey from Brazil to the United States, from what inspired her passion for education, to her pursuit of new experiences. Erica reflects on the tight-knit and diverse community she found as a PhD student at ESF, as reasons she eventually made her way back here to teach in the paper engineering program. Thank you for joining me today, Ericka.

Ericka Redmond: Thank you so much for having me join. This is so exciting.

Joanie Mahoney: I know, I've been really interested in talking to you because you have an interesting story. I, as listeners know, grew up here in Syracuse. You can practically see the house I grew up in. My mom still lives there. And for you, it's been a very different kind of life. You're a long ways from home, right?

Ericka Redmond: Yes, but now Syracuse is my home.

Joanie Mahoney: Oh, I love to hear you say that. So why don't we start at the beginning. Where was your childhood? Where did you start?

- Ericka Redmond:** I started, I was born in Vicoso, in Minas Gerais state in Brazil. I was born in this small town, but with so many students because everything's surrounded by students because it's all about the university. So, we have one of the biggest universities in Brazil, which it comes people from all over the country. So it's a fun town, a small town.
- And my parents, they used to work at a school, as staff. My mom is a secretary in one of the departments. My dad used to be a staff, in which he worked in research projects with these other professors.
- Joanie Mahoney:** So, you grew up then with parents in the higher education world and I would imagine, a premium on education for yourself?
- Ericka Redmond:** Yes. So for us, for me growing up, my goal already, I wanted to do a master's. I want to have my undergrad, I want to do a master, I want to do a PhD abroad.
- Joanie Mahoney:** Oh my goodness. So, you were pretty focused, right? Pretty driven.
- Ericka Redmond:** Yes, because growing up, we were surrounded by all the professors that my mom and my dad would work with. Some of them came abroad, they did their PhD, they saw the funding opportunities so they can come and study abroad, that's something that I wanted to do and I always wanted to learn English too.
- Joanie Mahoney:** Your English is remarkable. It's not a first language?
- Ericka Redmond:** No, it's not my first language. Please make sure you tell that to my husband.
- Joanie Mahoney:** Okay.
- Ericka Redmond:** It looks like I reach some level that I can't get over all the propositions, in and on and that. So I have some problems with that.
- Joanie Mahoney:** I do understand. English is a tough second or third language for people. What was spoken in your home?
- Ericka Redmond:** It's Portuguese.
- Joanie Mahoney:** That would be my guess. And then was English number two?
- Ericka Redmond:** Yeah, but not necessarily everybody can learn English because you would have to go to a private school to learn English. But at some point, sometime in high school, I got some scholarship so I could have stood in this private English school. So, that's where I learned.
- Joanie Mahoney:** Did your parents speak any English at all?

- Ericka Redmond:** No, not at all. Nobody speaks English in my family, just myself.
- Joanie Mahoney:** That makes it even more remarkable. I will tell your husband.
- Ericka Redmond:** Please do.
- Joanie Mahoney:** So, you grew up then, knowing that you knew that you wanted a bachelor's and a master's and a PhD, how did you pick the subject matter?
- Ericka Redmond:** By an accident. In Brazil, for you to enter to a college, the very good college, they are public. They're for free. However, to get into college, you need to pass to exam that's called vestibular. This is very hard and you end up here, applying to several schools to try the test. When it was time for me to choose what I wanted to be, I was confused. I didn't know. As a 16, 17 years old, I had no idea.
- Joanie Mahoney:** Right, and as the mother of four sons, I know that that is the common phrase for young people. They get through with high school and then the world starts asking them what they want to do with the rest of their lives. So, you were like everybody and said, "I don't know."
- Ericka Redmond:** I don't know. First I thought I wanted to be a dentist. So, my first year I applied for a dentist school, then realized I don't want to do that. No, thank you. And then I saw there was a vestibular in this forest engineering. So, I look at the descriptions are ... Oh, that sounds interesting. I'm going to try this one out. So, I just passed as in second place. So I was kind of, well, I passed this one then I'm passing this vestibular in my hometown, might as well start college in this other town and in this major that I'm not very familiar with. I've never heard about it.
- Joanie Mahoney:** Isn't that interesting? So, you read about being a forest engineer and then that just launched you into an undergraduate program. Did you find that it was a good fit?
- Ericka Redmond:** Yes. So, so there were so many areas, like here ... the first two years we're trying to ... You lay the foundations of all this engineering and all this math and chemistry and biology and I thought I could fit for everything. I was a good fit for everything, but still, I wasn't sure what I wanted. So, I started doing a bunch of internships.
- Joanie Mahoney:** Which I know you think is important for students to have these experiences. So, I always say it's as important to learn what you don't want to do. And the stakes are so low when you're still in school and you're getting these experiences and you can say, "That's not really a great fit for me," but you actually found some that were a great fit. What were your internships?

Ericka Redmond: So, I did a bunch of internships first like in a zoology department, sorting some of different animals for collection stuff. That wasn't for me. I stopped doing vegetable anatomy, to learning some of the cells of some leaves and some stuff along these lines. And I thought, "Oh, that's okay." And then I found this area about old chemistry. I said, "Oh that's interesting," trying to understand the anatomy of the world. I thought it was interesting. So, in that point, I have decided to return back to my hometown to restart college debt, I transferred my credits back to my hometown.

Joanie Mahoney: The college where your parents were working?

Ericka Redmond: Yes. And then, once I got back, I was in search for new internships and at that point I had really good GPA and I was looking for a professor who had some scholarship opportunity that would give me some financial benefits and I could learn something as well.

Joanie Mahoney: Were you still working on your bachelor's or had you transitioned?

Ericka Redmond: Yes. I was still doing my bachelor's in forest engineering and then I found this professor that he always seek for good students because he had scholarship opportunities for the students doing internship in his lab. It was a pulp bleaching lab.

Joanie Mahoney: Pulp bleaching lab.

Ericka Redmond: Bleaching lab, yes. This is in the pulp and paper laboratory. It was a really building that was a little far from the department. It was a little ways. When it got to that, I was obsessed. It was so interesting because I thought, "Oh, how come, what is pulp bleaching?" And it's basically when you take the wood and when you're going to make your paper, you need to make a lot of chemical reaction in washing in order to become white. So, you can see. So, I was in the laboratory and that's when I started getting exposed to all these different paper industries and that's when I start getting exposure to all these other ... this area that was very fascinating to me.

Joanie Mahoney: It's really interesting for me to hear that, that you go from a 16, 17 year old who's choosing a college and having no idea what you want to do. You read a description about forest engineer, it sounds interesting. You try a couple internships, not perfect, you transfer back to the college in your hometown and make your way to this lab, which I think it's important to point out, you got there because you were looking for funding.

And that is something we need to understand as a college administration, that there are barriers for students and you have to knock those barriers down so that they can experience these same kinds of opportunities that you did. If

there's not funding for a student and they have to disregard that, they might not find their passion, right?

Ericka Redmond:

Yes.

Joanie Mahoney:

So, I think that's really important. Then did you complete your bachelor's degree then in your hometown college?

Ericka Redmond:

I did. I finished, but at that point right before completing, I took a co-op in this pulp company.

Joanie Mahoney:

Is that a break from the academics to do-

Ericka Redmond:

Yes. A co-op is when you do a semester plus a few more months away just doing some work for credit in industry. So, I took a step back and I did this internship and then it was a startup of a new fiber line in this pulp mill.

Joanie Mahoney:

I would imagine that this industry is big in Brazil, given that you're in the Amazon.

Ericka Redmond:

No, it's huge. Pulp and paper industry in Brazil is very, very big and they keep growing. They keep building new mills, they keep expanding, they keep ... it's amazing how big and they have all these new industry with new equipment, brand state-of-the-art equipment.

Joanie Mahoney:

And we need smart, educated people to explain how to do that in a way that protects the forest, which is, I've heard described the lungs for the whole planet. So, how do you carve this industry out of this natural resource in a way that is sustainable?

Ericka Redmond:

It's a good point that you bring it up because overall, people think that this paper industry, oh, they are just cutting all these trees to make all this paper. Nowadays, we have everything online, we don't need all these industries. This industry is going down. But it's not really, we should think they're really sustainable companies because for example, whatever area they're going to cut, they usually ... they plant much more trees that they actually is going to cut. And there is different ways to create the environment surrounding them.

Even in, for example, again, I give you some examples as far as protecting some of the animals that they have in southern areas. In Brazil after the colonization, they destroy a lot of the Atlantic forest. So, some of these company, they helping reforest, some of these areas and create what they call ecological corridors, connecting all these different forest areas. So, they're going to harvest in these areas, but they have a local corridor so the animals, they can go, they have different ways-

- Joanie Mahoney:** I have read about that and it's very interesting how well it works, how smart the animals are and the people that are designing these pathways. So, you bring up a really important point and I think that as far as what we offer here at ESF, the biggest misconception out in the public would be around the paper engineering world. Because when people hear paper, they think copiers and they think newspapers. And as you pointed out, we've moved to a digital world, people aren't printing at work the way they used to. Newspapers have gone online. So, people I think have this misconception about what the paper industry is all about. But it's so much more.
- Ericka Redmond:** It's so much more. For example, Joanie, how many Amazon boxes of things that you bought online in your house?
- Joanie Mahoney:** And that's the one sentence that I say to young people is Amazon boxes and they light up like, "Okay, I understand, there still is ..." but there's the fibers in a lot of different products.
- Ericka Redmond:** In a lot of different products. So we are not talking about only here again, the allergy seasons and the cold seasons, all your tissues and your toilet papers and ... which is very important. Everybody uses something daily. But what about some filters that even you have in your own car? Nowadays, there are some research to use ... try to use fibers in various sustainable manner. What else we can do with all these fibers that comes from the trees? So, insulation materials, that's one of the things that they can look
- Joanie Mahoney:** Right. And I would imagine there's an endless-
- Ericka Redmond:** Endless.
- Joanie Mahoney:** ... opportunity for research about uses for these organic materials?
- Ericka Redmond:** Yes. In our department, you have already talked to a couple of our professors in our department. If we think about, for example, Dr. Deepak Kumar he's doing really amazing research as far as take all these fibers, all these residues not only for the agriculture residues but also for the industry. How can you create this? How can you use this to create some bioplastic?
- Joanie Mahoney:** I have seen some of the materials that he's created in his lab and it's such a sustainable story because he's using what is the end product in other industries and instead of it being waste, it's being turned into this beneficial use that compounds its sustainable benefit because it's usurping the need for petroleum products. It's really a remarkable story, what happens in our chemical engineering department, paper engineering.

And I do think that we have to tell that story. And you being here with me today is really helpful. I want to make sure young people hear this because the opportunities for careers in the world of chemical engineering, paper engineering are limitless.

Ericka Redmond: Limitless. If you're not talking about only paper, this paper industry, any other chemical company, for example, the bioprocess [inaudible 00:16:14], everybody's looking for sustainable ways to produce something that the people need and to produce something with less material, less resource. How can recycle? So, there are all these things that, for example, our engineers, they have been studying, getting their education for the department. They're going back to the world to help improve our world, in the sense. Trying to create sustainable ways to create new products, develop new processes that are more sustainable and that is something that the population needs for the new generations.

Joanie Mahoney: Absolutely. And you know what you speak of because you have had a good chunk of your career spent in private industry. Am I right?

Ericka Redmond: Yes.

Joanie Mahoney: So, tell us about that. So, you ended up in Watertown, New York?

Ericka Redmond: Yes. Very interesting story because when I finished my PhD here in the US I went back to Brazil, but I have left a boyfriend here. So then when I returned to Brazil, I was work for one of the largest paper package industry in South America. I was having really good career, but my heart wasn't fulfilled because part of it was here in Syracuse. So, I decided to quit my job, my career. I came back here, entry start over, start fresh.

I knew I had a PhD from Syracuse from ESF and I know I could get a career, but in the meantime I didn't know what I'm going to do, when I came back, what I'm going to do. So interesting enough, I came to one of my friends, he was defending his PhD, so he was having his presentation, his seminar up here. So, I rushed to come here and to see his presentation. So, then I met another friend who I was already working at this company in Watertown and I would say, "Oh, how is life?" "Everything's good." Say, "Oh by the way, you have any job opportunity right there?" And she says, "Oh actually, we might. Would you mind send your ... Maybe we can talk to my boss." So I said, "Oh, sure." I ended up going there for an interview and they actually had fulfilled the position and apparently he liked me good enough to create a position for me in his product development team.

Joanie Mahoney: Interesting. So, it was a research and development arm of the company?

- Ericka Redmond:** Yeah.
- Joanie Mahoney:** So, I know from reading a little bit about you that advice for young people about making connections is real because it was serendipitous. But you had made all these connections and when you reach out to people or have conversations with them, you learn of opportunities. And that led I think to about a decade up there in Watertown?
- Ericka Redmond:** Yes, this happened, the same thing when went back to Brazil. I also had connection who brought me to that company, the paper company that I worked. It was all about this connections.
- Joanie Mahoney:** I think it's so important for young people to know that about networking. It's as important to be well-educated and prepared to seize that opportunity. But it's weaving your way through people in the industry, that meeting this person in Watertown who had filled the job but met, you saw the potential for what you could add to the team and created this role for you. So, then you spent 10 years up there in Watertown. Were you commuting from here?
- Ericka Redmond:** I was commuting.
- Joanie Mahoney:** Oh my goodness.
- Ericka Redmond:** I was commuting. The very first time I had to drive. My car was really good, thank Lord because I did not have a problem. So, I have to come and go through four snow belts all the way to work-
- Joanie Mahoney:** Oh, my.
- Ericka Redmond:** ... every winter for so many years.
- Joanie Mahoney:** For 10 years.
- Ericka Redmond:** For almost 10 years. It was a lot.
- Joanie Mahoney:** Oh my goodness. So, that's a quick lesson in driving in the snow, but then does that bring us about to the time of COVID?
- Ericka Redmond:** Yes. So, about the time of COVID, I was doing really well. I was our ... manager. We were helping launch a lot of products in the market. I really loved my job and my coworkers. So then during COVID, I was seven months pregnant and we locked down. I was home, I was working remotely, it was fine. And then my daughter was born and then I was on maternity leave. And now with the time to, should I go back? Should not go back. What I'm going to do, I'm not going to do? So, I made a really hard decision at that point for me. I mean, I decide to

quit my job and stay home with my daughter. It was still COVID and it was a lot of uncertainties and I thought I would be safer to be home and care for my daughter, my baby at that point.

Joanie Mahoney: And everybody's circumstances are different. And that's a point I've made on this podcast in conversations like this in the past. And that's why we all need to be supportive of each other and decisions that people make because your family situation, your economic situation, like the moment in time that you're in, I mean, here's this pandemic and you have a new baby and do you want to send that child into a group setting? So, for whatever reason you make the decision you make, I made the decisions, I make. Others, faced with their own personal circumstances, make their decisions and we just need to be kind and supportive of each other. So, you made the decision then during COVID, to stay home with your new baby?

Ericka Redmond: Yes. I stay home with a new baby, but I still try to keep my connection with my work. And then after when the baby was a little big enough, was having really good naps, I would work as a consultant for them in certain projects. So, while she's napping, I was doing some conference calls, I was working some consulting with them, which was good for me to keep myself involved and in a workforce somehow, earning a little bit of money, of my own money, which was always important for me as well.

Joanie Mahoney: In addition to staying home, you were able to do some consulting work and keep your skills fresh and your contacts up. And at some point, we lucked out and you ended up here at ESF. When was that?

Ericka Redmond: When was that? It was a little bit after. My daughter was less than two years old and so, I ended up getting pregnant again, by surprise. But I saw the opportunity here. I saw there was a position open as a faculty member. Because in the back end of my mind when I came back to Syracuse, knowing that Syracuse has always been my home at that point, I always foresee myself going back as a faculty member here at the department.

Joanie Mahoney: So, that was a long-term goal?

Ericka Redmond: It was a long-term goal. So then, when they opened this position, so many people contact, "Oh, look it up, this position." I applied for it and then I had to go through the entire process and actually on the day of my interview, I was nine months pregnant, for the whole day that we spend and from the breakfast, go through the entire process and until the night.

Joanie Mahoney: They are such long days anyhow, but to do that when you're nine months pregnant must have been a stressor.

- Ericka Redmond:** It was a stressful even to choose an outfit. What am I going to wear that is still professional but I still have a bump?
- Joanie Mahoney:** Right, right. Well, I'm so happy that you were willing to do that at that point. And then I understand your second child came along very quickly after the interview.
- Ericka Redmond:** It was so funny, hilarious, because in the next day, my water broke.
- Joanie Mahoney:** Can you imagine, Ericka, if that had happened here during your long day of interviews?
- Ericka Redmond:** Oh my God, I remember my back end of my mind. I just hoping ... I was hoping my daughter, she was like, "Stay there, I need to go through this process. At least let me go through this process." She let me do it. But my water broke the very next day. It was hilarious. She came three weeks early.
- Joanie Mahoney:** Oh, my. I hope we didn't bring her here early by putting you through a full day of interviews.
- Ericka Redmond:** It might be a little bit, but I don't blame you because I have her three weeks longer than I actually I was going to.
- Joanie Mahoney:** Okay, good.
- Ericka Redmond:** So, that's a good thing.
- Joanie Mahoney:** Yes, that's a good perspective. And how wonderful that you made this decision, difficult decision, to leave your career because at that moment in time, that's what your family needed. And then this opportunity opened at ESF, which had been a long-term goal of yours.
- It's so interesting to me how frequently we hear stories like that, about the doors that open and they open at the right time. And again, you had to put yourself in a position to be prepared. So when that opportunity came, you were the best qualified. What an interesting coincidence of timing that you left, COVID happened, you stayed home.
- I'm also somebody who stepped out of my career for a few years to stay home with little ones and then very luckily came back to an opportunity that I wanted and everything's been good. I know it doesn't always work out like that for people.

So, let's back up again though because you said a couple things that are interesting. I don't want to breeze over the fact that you came here as a PhD student on a Fulbright scholarship. Is that right?

Ericka Redmond: Yes, yes.

Joanie Mahoney: So, where did you do your master's?

Ericka Redmond: After I finished my undergrad, I was my top of my class.

Joanie Mahoney: Congratulations.

Ericka Redmond: Thank you.

Joanie Mahoney: No surprise there.

Ericka Redmond: No. And then I got a scholarship to do my full master's there, in the same university back home. So, for that point under my undergrad I was working learning about pulp bleaching and in my master I learned about paper. So, with another professor who actually got his PhD from here from ESF.

Joanie Mahoney: That part of your story I find fascinating. So, you're in Brazil and you're working with faculty that-

Ericka Redmond: Got their PhD from here, was two of my faculty members. The pulp bleaching, he got his PhD different here. He thesis there in our conference room. As well, my advisor from my master's, who also got his PhD from here, that's one of the reasons how I found out about ESF.

Joanie Mahoney: It's so impactful. Our alumni are incredible. They're everywhere. And the fact that they told you about ESF and then here you are, this top of your class student, somebody we would be thrilled to have in our graduate program here, learned about us and then made your way here. Who was your major professor here at ESF?

Ericka Redmond: Dr. Raymond Francis.

Joanie Mahoney: And what year about were you here?

Ericka Redmond: It was 2007.

Joanie Mahoney: And then as a condition of the Fulbright Scholarship, you were required to go back to Brazil for a period of time?

Ericka Redmond: Yeah, for two years.

- Joanie Mahoney:** So you came here, worked on your PhD, met your future husband, felt like Syracuse was home, but had to fulfill this obligation to go back to Brazil and you were working there during the two-year obligation?
- Ericka Redmond:** Yeah, so I worked in this biggest ... one of the largest paper package company in Brazil. It was a really good position that I have, a really great opportunity, but as I was mention before, it was not ... I wasn't truly happy. He did came down to try to leave that, get his own career there. But one of the problems for paper companies is that the location, they are not located in the biggest towns. It's just always little country towns and they're small towns with less resource. So, it's very difficult for certain people to find jobs and careers. So he tried, didn't work out. So, he came back to the US and two years after, I followed my path and came back here.
- Joanie Mahoney:** So, your husband did make an attempt?
- Ericka Redmond:** He did.
- Joanie Mahoney:** So, that's the case then. I guess if I think about it, the paper mills that I know of, true, they're in more remote areas. They're not really in downtown, bustling population centers, right?
- Ericka Redmond:** Yeah, that's one of the reasons that some of the paper company have some difficulties in attracting young talents because of the location.
- Joanie Mahoney:** And then if they're in a relationship with somebody who also needs a career, there has to be an opportunity for them around too. That's good feedback for paper companies to hear.
- Ericka Redmond:** Yeah, so one of the things I know they've been trying to do, some jobs, you can do a little bit of remote work. So, they usually try to highlight all the other things they have around surrounding towns. I know that a lot of nice companies in New York State, they're close to Adirondacks, they're close, so-
- Joanie Mahoney:** Beautiful, right.
- Ericka Redmond:** ... they try to highlight some of the things which it helps some people who like outdoors activities. Here we go, that's a better place for you. And of course, all the benefits that can attract the young professionals.
- Joanie Mahoney:** So, now you are back here and you have your two daughters and your family and you're on the faculty at ESF. Congratulations.
- Ericka Redmond:** Thank you.

- Joanie Mahoney:** What are some of your goals in this new phase of your career?
- Ericka Redmond:** Oh my God, I have so many goals. As far as first event, one of the biggest one for me it's help our department to attract a lot of students because as you may ... it's hard, the paper industry because nobody is 17 years old is going to think, "Oh, I'm going to be a paper engineer, or, "I want to work to this paper company, I want to do this bioprocess company."
- Joanie Mahoney:** Because you have no idea what that means.
- Ericka Redmond:** You don't. So, my goal is to help expand and let people know about us.
- Joanie Mahoney:** I absolutely love that. And as we said earlier, there is a particular misconception around paper engineering and chemical engineering. If you hear environmental resources engineering, or conservation biology, you know what that is and you know what that looks like in the future. But when you hear paper engineering and you're thinking copy paper and newspapers, it is discouraging and we need people to get out in front of young people to say Amazon boxes but also all of the beneficial uses of the materials, the organic materials and some of the incredible work that's being done here at ESF, that is life-changing. What kinds of things do you think you can do to help with recruiting?
- Ericka Redmond:** First of all, even try to get people that come here ... they're here in Gateway, just to go up the top of the hill. It's already hard. People know we do have amazing students that help us with the club officials. They come to Gateway, they talk about the program, try to attract people to come up the hill. So the first thing come up the hill, learn about us. I will give you a presentation, talk about, I'm going to clarify about our majors, all the opportunities we have. Tons of scholarship opportunities, thanks to our Syracuse Pulp and Paper Foundation.
- Joanie Mahoney:** It's amazing the opportunities for students. The scholarships from the Syracuse Pulp and Paper Foundation are so significant and the job placement, the numbers for that program in our outcome surveys are higher than any other.
- Ericka Redmond:** 100% placement. It's amazing, for many several years because one of the benefits is you have that foundation located in our building, is that they help bring the companies in the department, they come to the department, they introduce themselves to the students, they tell them what the job opportunity I have here. I have these internships, I have this co-op, I have this full-time opportunity and they do interview in the building, in our building.
- Joanie Mahoney:** I know, it's such a wonderful opportunity and as parents, this story is among our best. You can come to ESF, which is an affordable school to start with and it's a place that has incredible faculty, students, staff. You can come here and then if you're in this particular program, you get bigger scholarships every year that

you're in the program. You have all of these companies coming to you, interviewing you here on the campus. We can virtually guarantee that you will have a job when you leave and it'll be with a salary higher than most. And you'll be doing real environmental work that improves the world, with this sustainability focus.

And you said Deepak in the work that he's doing, getting us off of fossil fuels but still having the benefit of these materials that we can harvest sustainably, it's a wonderful story. And it's a real challenge I think, for our communications and marketing team because how do you get in front of young students? Do you know whether we have ESF in the high school classes that are teaching in the paper engineering?

Ericka Redmond: Yes, actually we are having some coming, in a couple of weeks, they're coming here. I'm actually helping coordinate their visit here on campus.

Joanie Mahoney: Oh, that's terrific. And there is a paper mill in Solvay?

Ericka Redmond: There is a paper mill in Solvay, so there's some components that we need to work on some of the paper program and disciplines that we need to help them to demonstrate why they are here. But we have all this, we have amazing staff helping us in outreach. We have several events throughout the year, in which high school in ESF, coming to ESF. Or we have family weekends, we have the fair, we go to the fair every year. So, we do have hand-make papers. So, our staff, our students they help us. All these different things, come to attract all these different people, come to all department and do some hand-make paper.

Joanie Mahoney: I heard that you went to your daughter's classroom and taught them how to make paper?

Ericka Redmond: Yes. I mean, I thought it was fun because she was transitioning to a different pre-K. And then I thought, "What fun would that be?" We do this at the fair, where the kids love do the handmade.

Joanie Mahoney: I've seen the kids.

Ericka Redmond: I want to .. so much, activity with them. So, I brought what we do activity here into her school and I have all these pre-K, the school kids, so doing hand-make paper and I talk about, well, recycling and making the paper. So, how we can go back and redo this again and try to ... Of course, it's hard. They're pre-K, they're three years old, we try to show them this.

Joanie Mahoney: Oh, my goodness. But they say we have to get them young. You were a one woman recruiter. That's fantastic.

- Ericka Redmond:** Yeah, so I have all this vision. Unfortunately, I cannot do it all. So, that we are lucky, we have staff, some of the faculty and students, they help coordinate all this outreaching, recruiting events. There are other thing, even some of the visuals in our department. So, we have a paper mill in our basement.
- Joanie Mahoney:** I know and I don't think a lot of people know that. I think we're one of the only schools with a working paper mill on our campus.
- Ericka Redmond:** Yes, we do have some other schools that have small paper machine. But the way that we have, so for example in the paper program in the senior year, they have a capstone project in which they have to do a product development. So, they have a client and a client says, "Oh, I need this paper with this specifications." They need to go to the lab, do some trials in the lab.
- So, we have a small paper machine run. They do this run, they scale up and then we have a really big paper machine they actually get to try. So, you can get more hands-on experience with any other program. This is a product development, they're really stuff that happen real world.
- Joanie Mahoney:** I think it was Ray Appleby maybe and Gary Scott that invited me to come watch a run. And students were explaining to me about the composition of the paper and the testing that they had done. And now this was the culmination of that project, this paper run. It's fascinating.
- We should be in ESF high school, teaching an ESF in the High School class for credit in paper engineering. And we should be doing that in Glens Falls where there's a paper mill. I understand that it gets complicated when you cross state lines to give college credit for high school classes, but there's plenty of opportunity right here in New York State.
- Ericka Redmond:** I think so. I see that there are a lot of room for improvement for us. There are room for growth and I can't wait to help our department in this. I think we are doing step by steps, but we start seeing some of the numbers growing. But I can't wait to talk about the program because I see the benefits for it. I've been there. So, even it's very interesting, I'm teaching introduction to chemical engineering class. So, one of the things that I tried to do, I mean, our career service came to do a presentation. So, to reinforce to these freshmen how important it is to build the resume, teaching them how to do a cover letter, create LinkedIn profile.
- Joanie Mahoney:** Oh, it's so important and it's so generous of you to take that time and to offer that to your students in the class. And then are you telling the students that are in an introduction to chemical engineering about the paper industry as well?

- Ericka Redmond:** Yes, because in this introduction chemical engineer, we have all the majors in the class.
- Joanie Mahoney:** So bioprocess?
- Ericka Redmond:** The bioprocess, they chemical, the paper and the RMS, the renewable material ... they're all in this class. So, we show all the opportunity to other majors because one advantage of coming to the chemical engineering department is that in the very first year, we have a common core for the engineering programs. So, it's important for them to learn about all the majors, opportunity for all the majors, what the difference between, because after the first year, they can switch majors without losing anything.
- Joanie Mahoney:** That's fantastic. I know that's been a priority for people, is being able to make that change. Especially again, because there is so much misconception. So, when students come into your chemical engineering introduction class and learn about it, I would imagine a lot of them will be interested to pursue a paper engineering degree. So, I'm very happy that you're here with us, but very grateful that you're willing to do all of this extra work to help us recruit and build the program.
- Ericka Redmond:** Oh, it's my pleasure. Because I do think I see a lot of potential and I see the plantation, the willingness for everybody. Everybody wants the same goal. But I think here, I'm a little bit the connector. I try to build all this team to help us to create this.
- Joanie Mahoney:** And Ericka, watching what you did in your own life by making all of these connections and getting to these wonderful opportunities that you've had, I just love that you're willing to put that same model in place on behalf of our students.
- Ericka Redmond:** I wanted to give the students some of the opportunities that I have and I saw that was beneficial. All these internships that I said, I think since my freshman year, it was important for me and all these opportunities abroad, it was very important for me, pursue. And the same way, more like one of my goals, we ask one of my goals too, I wanted to create a better bridge between South America and ESF because I wanted to show them. I wanted to have our students here in ESF going down to Brazil, learn about the industry in Brazil, visiting all the industry, see the opportunities they're out there. And I want to bring some of these students from that to come here too. We have other exchange programs in our department. For example, in Germany, we have-
- Joanie Mahoney:** Right, BUCT.
- Ericka Redmond:** ... BUCT but I want to do something similar with Brazil.

Joanie Mahoney: I want to be your partner.

Ericka Redmond: Let's do it.

Joanie Mahoney: Let's talk about this after. Because I think that potential is incredible. And when our students get there and find out there's ESF alum, they'll be very pleasantly surprised.

Ericka Redmond: They will.

Joanie Mahoney: So, I look forward to working with you on that and then talking to you further about your experience here. But thank you for being here and thank you for all you're doing and thanks for taking time to talk with me today.

Ericka Redmond: Thank you. Thank you for having me. I really have a really good time. Thank you so much and thank you for the opportunity. I feel very blessed and humble for this opportunity. Thank you.

Joanie Mahoney: Thank you.