Interviewer: We'll get started. My name is ***. I'm interviewing *** […]. What is it, April 24. The first question is how do you describe yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: Currently or overall?

Interviewer: I guess currently.

Interviewee: Currently, I feel like I'm in a good place. I just finished my Capstone project. I was really pleased with it. A reader was pleased with it. Yeah, overall I'm very pleased with the work that I did in the minor, but I'm at the point right now where I'm trying to write scholarship essays, so I'm back to the part of writing that I just dislike.

Interviewer: What's your major?

Interviewee: I'm a sociology and cellular biology major.

Interviewer: Could you describe the role that writing plays in your life currently?

Interviewee: Currently for me, writing is really important because it's what's helping me get scholarships. It's what's helping me obtain jobs and positions at schools. Instead of just an outlet, which is what writing used to be for me, it's now a tool that I'm having to use in order to secure positions.

Interviewer: How would you describe yourself as a writer when you began here at the U of M [University of Michigan]?

Interviewee: I was really bad. I got placed in the [Sweetland course], which was the intro to writing. I always thought I was a good writer in my high school, but I learned that my high school really did not prepare us for writing whatsoever. I was in really bad shape.

Interviewer: To what extent would you say that you have grown and changed since then as a writer?

Interviewee: I would say a lot. I used to just stick with the five-paragraph format of writing and even if the writing assignment had to be ten pages, I would just make really big paragraphs cuz I was convinced that that was the proper way to do things. Now I just know better. I know that you don't need to follow necessarily a format to get your words out.

Interviewer: Any other ways you think you've grown as a writer?

Interviewee: I think I've grown as a writer, and I write about more interesting things. I'm more willing to share things about myself. This might also just be due to me growing up and being in—I mean, the University of Michigan's a really collaborative, safe environment also to write about these things compared to my high school. I think I've grown stronger in the semantics involved with writing, and then also I think that my pieces are just more interesting.

Interviewer: What would you attribute this growth to?

Interviewee: I would say it's due to the environment that we have within writing classes because they're so small, and you always get to know your professor. You get to know the students. When I have to workshop a paper, I'm not afraid to write about something that's really personal because I know that my professor and my peers aren't going to view me harshly or negatively or judge me.

Interviewer: That's really good. The third question is as you graduate, what are your goals for yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: As a writer, I want to continue being very persuasive with my writing and keep the professional aspect to it because I know that writing for me is going to keep being a tool that I'm using to get my point across and to persuade people.

Interviewer: Thinking across your writing experiences at the U of M [University of Michigan], and if you've been in any other institutions, what do you think it means to write well?

Interviewee: I think that you can write well when your piece has significance to others. I don't necessarily think it has to do with having a good introduction, or conclusion, or proper use of commas everywhere. I think that you can have a piece that's extremely flawed in commas and spelling but as long as it makes an impact on the readers' lives or opinions and views, then I think that's a good piece.

Interviewer: Could you tell me which upper level writing courses you've taken?

Interviewee: I did a senior thesis, so that was one of mine. I took the [Title of course], [English 300 level course], with [Instructor].

Interviewer: Just those two?

Interviewee: Yeah, I think so.

Interviewer: I was just making sure. We're gonna step through each one of these. Can you talk about—maybe we'll talk about that senior thesis first and what your experiences were in that course,

Interviewee: For my senior thesis I'm actually pretty—I'm actually a little bit bitter about it right now just cuz I felt like I didn't get any guidance with what they were looking for. My piece was very detailed and it was very explanatory. I think that some of my readers were pleased, but then I had one reader who failed it so I'm currently in the process of redoing it because it wasn't scientific enough for him. It wasn't cut and dry, and I didn't have all my figures on one page. I kinda felt like with this thesis, I just went into it with no help and I did the best I could. So many people were looking for so many different things, I didn't have a clear guidance. It's definitely something I'm struggling with right now because, like I said, I'm doing an appeal and I'm redoing it.

Interviewer: That's good to know. Could you talk about what effect that experience had on you as a writer?

Interviewee: I don't know if it made me question my writing. It made me almost wanna tell—you have three readers, and I've had probably ten people read my thesis and everyone liked it. When one person fails it, you fail no matter what, even though the director of the bio [biology] department approved it, since this one professor didn't. It's making me bitter in the fact that he didn't like my writing style, which I feel is so subjective, especially when you're doing a thesis. I don't question myself as a writer. I know that my work, I'm proud of. I'm proud of my thesis. I don't need him to be, but it's leaving a very sour taste in my mouth about the U of M [University of Michigan] bio department as I'm leaving. I think that they need to be more structured with what writing style they're looking for. They need to help their students out more.

Interviewer: That's good to know. I'm sure it's terrible that you have to cross this hurdle at this point when you're leaving. We're still talking about the senior thesis course. The question is do you still make use of what you've learned in those courses in your writing now? I guess can we talk more generally about that course?

Interviewee: I think that this course, as far as writing, has taught me to take an inch and make a mile out of it. Other than that, I don't think that it has helped me at all with my writing just because I didn't have much help or feedback. Then the feedback I got was positive, but then clearly there's some discrepancies that have been going on, so I don't know who to really take seriously, I guess.

Interviewer: Good, so let's talk about the [Title of course] course. Can you just talk about, in general, what were your experiences in the course?

Interviewee: I took that during summer school. It was a really accelerated course, so we were constantly reading, and writing responses, and doing workshops. It seemed like every day, we had something to do. Rather than doing three papers, we did two papers. I had just taken this class after coming out of [Title of course], which was my favorite class at this university. I was in that mindset where I wanted to make every paper an argumentative paper like I had before.

[Instructor] helped to show me that you can do an argumentative piece without having to be picking a controversial topic and doing argument after argument after argument and then counter-argument. She showed me how to take personal experiences and then not subtly but make them very universal and create a very well-written piece that has personal touches to it but also is argumentative.

Interviewer: Let's make sure I'm on course. Could you talk about what effect that that course, those experiences had on you as a writer?

Interviewee: That course I feel like prepared me the most for applications which I'm going to med school, so applications are my life when it comes to writing. I feel like that course prepared me more than anything to start writing personal statements because you don't want to just come out arguing why you're the greatest person ever, but you still need to be able to do that. She showed ways to sneak in little points but still make them hard-hitting.

Interviewer: That's good, so it helped translate into those genres that you're doing now.

Interviewee: Yeah cuz I'm not ever prob'ly going to do creative writing and never been interested in it. In the medical field, there's not much writing. She showed me how to, if I want to make a point, I know I can really gracefully express my opinion with words while being very strong with what I'm trying to say but not coming across so harshly. She helped me to weave all of that in.

Interviewer: That sounds great. It sounds like there's a lotta applications for that. Then the last question in this set is do you think—do you still make use of what you've learned in those courses in your writing now? It sounds like you have.

Interviewee: Oh, I do, I have a lot of scholarship essays to do right now, and I'm trying to find a way to brag about myself in 300 characters.

Interviewer: That's hard.

Interviewee: Yeah!

Interviewer: What other writing courses have you taken besides those two?

Interviewee: I took [Title of course]. I took [English course], I believe is the one I took cuz it was more reading-intensive. I took the writing and minor Gateway in Capstone.

Interviewer: Could you talk in general about how have these courses affected your writing, do you think?

Interviewee: When I first took [English course], I hated it. I never wanted to take another English class ever, ever again. I was convinced I was not going to take another one. I ended up getting put in a really awful sociology class, and I found out that I hated it two weeks in. I wanted to pick a different class that wasn't gonna alter my schedule cuz I didn't want to have to re-start everything. I found [Title of course]. It fit perfectly with my schedule so I wouldn't have to mess anything up. I thought I would just go ahead and take it; why not? Then that's the class that I discovered I loved writing and that's the class—after I finished that class, I applied for the minor.

Interviewer: I'll just ask the second part. How do you think these classes affect your writing now? Now as you reflect back, how has your writing changed because of these classes?

Interviewee: If wasn't for [Title of course] I wouldn't be here today because I hated writing up until then. Then I think that the Capstone and the Gateway, especially the Capstone, we all got—or the Gateway, not the Capstone. We all got so close and we were such a tight-knit community, we're still in contact with each other. I took that before I really started opening up with my writing and now my Gateway was an extremely personal piece because I just felt so comfortable with everybody who I was surrounded with at the Sweetland Writing Center, and then the professors, and all of the staff there.

Interviewer: The next question is did you take any writing courses in your concentration?

Interviewee: I did my thesis.

Interviewer: Just the thesis?

Interviewee: Yeah, and that was for Cellular Molecular Biology Department.

Interviewer: That's the only writing course you took in that concentration?

Interviewee: Yeah, I think there's only two courses that have writing in them. It's the thesis and then writing for bio majors.

Interviewer: We'll go to the next question. Now that you're about to graduate, how confident do you feel about writing in your concentration?

Interviewee: It's kinda hard to say just because of that whole thesis thing that's just happened. That's still so fresh. I mean, besides the one hurdle I've come across, I generally feel very confident. I've done poster presentations before. I've wrote summaries about my work. I've kept lab notebooks, and I felt like they were completely fine. I'm trying not to let the one incident that I've come in contact with hold me back, and that's why I'm doing the appeal. It's kind of just I'll see how—I'll see what everybody else thinks before I really start doubting myself as a scientific writer.

Interviewer: You're applying to med school, you said?

Interviewee: Yeah, I'm going to [University] next Fall.

Interviewer: Could you talk about—do you feel pretty confident going into that that you'll do—you'll be successful in terms of the writing you might have to do?

Interviewee: Oh, I feel like that if I have to write in med school ever, I will do amazing just because I know a lot of my peers are not—they don't have writing backgrounds at all. I know that I will just blow it out of the water.

Interviewer: The next question is how often have you used skills or strategies learned in any of those writing classes we just talked about in your other courses, in your concentration or not your concentration?

Interviewee: That's kind of hard for me to answer just because for bio, you never write. I guess if I—it's kind of a far fetch but I'm in a biology class right now where rather than being multiple choice answers, everything is short answer. I've learned to write down every single thought that coming across my head on a corner of my paper just to brainstorm if I don't know the answer right off the bat just so I can see it. Then I can focus in on my options and then focus on one of those. I guess that's kinda the whole shitty first draft, just write it down and then pick something and go with it. That's what I do when I don't know a test question.

Interviewer: How about in other classes? Did you take a lot of electives in terms of humanities classes, or is it all science?

Interviewee: It's been pretty much all science for me.

Interviewer: We're gonna move on to talking about the Capstone a little bit. What impact has the minor Capstone course had overall on your writing, do you think?

Interviewee: I think it's been extremely positive because this was the first time we've really just not had any syllabus, or any rubric, or we've never been told what to do. We were just told we had to make a product and that was it. We were told we had two months to do this, and it better be good. It was really interesting to see the direction that I ended up going because I think I changed my mind prob'ly 15 times. I'm sure [Instructor] got very upset.

Interviewer: Can I just ask what your project was for Capstone?

Interviewee: My project ended up being about the way that sexism has presented itself to me throughout my life. In the very beginning, general academies and then towards the end being women in the science field just always being second best to some of the males that have been in my class and stuff like that.

Interviewer: That sounds really good. Has the course had an impact on your writing process, do you think?

Interviewee: I don't know if it's changed my writing process just because I'm one of those people where you can tell me a better way to do something but if I've always done it like this, I'm not gonna fix my process. It taught me not to procrastinate. I know that towards the end, I started, "Oh, I can do it in a while. Oh, I can wait until next week," but then [Instructor] just kept being like, "You don't wanna do this. You don't wanna procrastinate." I think this may be one of my first writing projects where I actually finished it about a month early.

Interviewer: Has the course had an impact on your sense of yourself as a writer, do you think?

Interviewee: I think it has just because it showed me how powerful my pieces have—can be because all my classmates read it. Then not only my classmates and my professor, but other people within the department have read it and this is the first time that I've ever had that experience.

Interviewer: How do you think that your sense of yourself as a writer has changed as a result of the Capstone would be my question.

Interviewee: I'm more confident just because when I would originally write pieces, I would write them to please myself but then also please my professor. That's all I was keeping in mind. For this, since we had no—we had just free reigns, I just wrote whatever I wanted to write so it was nice to hear that other people really liked my piece and it had an impact upon them because it made me more confident with not only my writing abilities but what I have to say in general, people want to hear.

Interviewer: This question is kind of similar. I feel like I'm asking the same question, just a little differently. What effect has the experience of the Capstone project—not the class itself, but the Capstone project—how's that—what effect has that had on you as a writer?

Interviewee: As a writer, I think it showed me just everything that I have overcome to get to where I am, especially because we had to do the evolution piece that weaved into my project, just writing about how in the very beginning I hated writing and then I learned to use it as a powerful tool to express myself. Then here's my very end project, which is just everything that I've been working on all semester to fully express myself.

Interviewer: The next question is why did you choose the project that you chose?

Interviewee: I chose the project that I chose because I had no clue what I was doing. One day I just sat down in the library and just wrote and then before I knew it, I had 20 pages. I just re-read it and just knew that that was the direction it was gonna go. I feel like I didn't really chose it. I feel like it just happened.

Interviewer: Next we'll talk about the portfolio, which we need to pull up.

[Off-topic conversation 18:45 – 20:09]

Interviewee: That portfolio was not my favorite part of this experience, actually probably my least favorite.

[Pause 20:16 – 20:51]

It's fine if it's on my computer, isn't it?

Interviewer: Yeah, that's fine, just so we have some reference.

Interviewee: You have to actually scroll all the way down for it.

Interviewer: Do you wanna just maybe describe to me what you did so I have some sense before I ask questions?

Interviewee: I absolutely hate that we had to do an online portfolio. I don't like online stuff, so I basically wanted the most minimalist thing as possible because I'm terrible with online platforms.

I picked a template that said that it was an online portfolio and then I went with the picture that it had because I liked it. Then I just changed the page names and uploaded the relevant things. That was about it.

Interviewer: That's one way to do it definitely. I feel like this is going to be pretty generative. Can you tell me about the most memorable aspect of your experience with your portfolio?

Interviewee: The portfolio? Having to make one cuz it was just terrible. Even though this is so minimalist, it probably took me three hours because I cannot figure any of this stuff out. I just wasn't very passion-driven to really devour it.

Interviewer: The most memorable aspect was dealing with the technical issues?

Interviewee: Yes, just sitting there dreading everything about it.

Interviewer: That's good to know. What were your aims for your portfolio? I think you had to write a narrative. What did that narrative—what narrative did you hope to tell? Let me rephrase that question cuz it's wrong. What were your aims with the e-portfolio? What narrative did you hope to tell?

Interviewee: I wanted to be—first of all, I wanted it to work. I had some concerns about that and other than that, the narrative I wanted to tell—I didn't want it to be too cheery. I wanted it to just be very, very, very simple because I am not gifted when it comes to these online platforms.

Interviewer: What about the connection? What about what you put in there? What did you hope to say about yourself or about your writing with what you included in the portfolio?

Interviewee: As far as the additional writing works?

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: For those, I put the pieces I was really proud of. I have my DSP, which we had to include, but it's just the most terrible piece of writing I believe I have. It was just good to see how far I've come. Then I had my [English 200 level course] essay that was the essay that inspired me to start writing. Then I just chose random papers from my other courses, and then my medical school personal statement cuz it shows how I'm using this writing in my academic life.

Interviewer: I think you've already answered this, but I'm gonna ask it anyway. Did you design the e-portfolio in terms of navigation, links, media, visual design, to create a particular experience?

Interviewee: No, not at all. I just wanted it to work and I wanted it to be done.

Interviewer: That's good to know. I guess I already inadvertently asked this question. Did you notice any relationships among your artifacts as you created the e-portfolio?

Interviewee: I don't think so just because I was so disengaged with this e-portfolio that I—my goal was to make it work and spend the least amount of time on it.

Interviewer: Good to know. I think that one's moot. I have to ask the questions even though I already know your opinion. Do you think creating the e-portfolio has had an effect on your writing?

Interviewee: No, not at all.

Interviewer: You did some reflective writing. What did you learn from the reflective writing in the e-portfolio, both the evidence-based essay you wrote and the contextual reflections?

Interviewee: What did I learn about the e-portfolio?

Interviewer: What did you learn about writing?

Interviewee: I learned that I do not like my writing when I have to care about the aesthetics of it. It's much easier for me to just type out that 20 pages, Times New Roman font, print it off and be done with it. I do not like when I have to worry about including images and is this too much for a computer screen? How should I break it up? That's when I really start feeling that hatred again for writing that I used to.

Interviewer: In terms of the actual reflective writing, did you feel like that was useful? Did you feel like you've gained anything from it?

Interviewee: I think that it has shown me that I generally procrastinate a lot but other than that, no, not really.

Interviewer: The next question is what could people interested in writing development, including program administrators like those at Sweetland, learn about writing development from the e-portfolio, from your Capstone and e-portfolio?

Interviewee: I don't know cuz I'm just so not an e-portfolio person. I guess it's just—I mean, it forced me to do something new, and it forced me to care about making things aesthetically pleasing. It's just not the type of writing that I'm interested in. I was just extremely disengaged from it, but it was interesting to see what my peers were capable of doing. I think, even though I hated it, I can understand why it's a component of the course.

Interviewer: Moving away from the e-portfolio a little bit. Now we'd like you to reflect on your Gateway course, as well. How did your experience in the Capstone course compare to your experience in the Gateway?

Interviewee: I purposely took the same professor so that the experiences would be the same cuz I had such a positive experience with my Gateway course. […]. It's just because I loved it so, so much. I didn't always like what we were doing, but I just loved listening to [Instructor] talk and hearing the things that he had to tell us cuz it really helped with my writing.

Interviewer: Your experiences were kind of the same in terms of professor, but were they different in terms of what you were doing?

Interviewee: I don't know if they were different in terms of what I was doing because I feel like with the Gateway, we were also given lots of freedom. I mean, we did have prompts about what we had to write about, but we could pick our brains about anything. I feel like I kind of ended up doing a similar thing to my essays in my Gateway just because that was the type of writing I was interested in. I don't know if I really challenged myself to do anything too differently. I just worked on reinforcing and really fine-tuning types of writing I was interested in.

Interviewer: What have your experiences been of working with other writers throughout the minor?

Interviewee: I would say that during the Gateway, I feel like our class was more close-knit, but I think it was just because we were all so similar at that point in time. We hadn't really veered off in different directions. When we went into the Capstone, you were already grouped off, so there were the people who I knew were in [Instructor]'s group with me and then there were these new people. I feel like it was a different experience than the Capstone just because, since we were given so much freedom, some people wrote about things that I just totally disagreed with, or that were almost a little bit offensive to me, or I had no clue what they were talking about whereas in the Gateway, that never was an issue because we weren't given total freedom to just do whatever.

Interviewer: Could you give me some examples maybe of when that happened?

Interviewee: One person wrote about—what was it called?—Steampunk and I have no clue what that is. His e-portfolio was really cool, but I have no clue what that is at all. I know that one person wrote about—it was s'posed to be a satirical comedy type of thing but had a lot of hints of sexism in it that I know me and my friends picked up on. We weren't totally keen on that one. Then yeah, there were just some instances like that.

Interviewer: Let's probe this once more. How about could you talk about how you maybe worked in collaboration with people, or how you work-shopped your writing, or what were the experiences and why that was important?

Interviewee: I guess in this class, I really learned to, more so than others, the people whose opinions I really respected who I knew knew about my topic and weren't just trying to participate to get points. I focused in on theirs. Obviously the person who I thought had undertones of sexism or the project was about sexism, I just tuned it out. I guess collaborating with different people who have different backgrounds and interests, it just taught me to focus on who I think can actually positively contribute to my writing.

Interviewer: That's interesting. I know you took the same professor, but what are the differences you see between the Gateway and the Capstone e-portfolio?

Interviewee: I feel the Capstone was extremely stressful the entire time because right from our very first day, we knew we had this giant project that none of us really knew how much work it was going to be. We had this evolution essay that we really didn't get started on until later. Then all of a sudden, it seemed like it was a month to go and we still had to get 2,000 points somehow. It was just really—what I feel is the Gateway was really laid back and you just did a little bit here and there. You were constantly writing, but there wasn't a constant pressure on you to get stuff done.

Interviewer: The Gateway and the Capstone courses emphasized reflective writing in various forms. How would you describe your experience with those kind of reflection?

Interviewee: I'd say it's really interesting because you don't—there are some things that I guess I didn't pick up that were occurring to me while they were happening. It was when I sat down later and actually wrote about my experience that I actually got to think about it further and think about how it impacted me and how it got me to where I am today. I know that sometimes it was a little bit hard to do reflective writing just because it's not like one of my necessary favorite types of writing, but when you would sit down and actually get down to it, it was pretty interesting.

Interviewer: What was interesting about it to you?

Interviewee: I know that from my Gateway course, I wrote about being a pre-med student. I would write about what it was like to sit in my oral exam and then just thinking back about all the comments I would hear people say and how I knew people were using drugs to stay up all night

and study. It's kind of interesting to sit back and be where I am today and just think about how people have gone through so many different things.

Interviewer: Are you still using your reflection in your current writing whether they assigned it or you just doing it on your own?

Interviewee: Currently I am, but I think it's because a lot of my prompts are calling for it. If I'm doing a scholarship essay and it's asking me how I'm going to be a leader in the field, that requires me talking about how I've been a leader in the past and how it's going to impact me in the future. I don't really know if I'm self-doing it or if it's more that's kind of the only way for me to answer these prompts.

Interviewer: I'll go meta here. If I say we were reflection writing, what does that mean to you?

Interviewee: To me, that means either reflecting on a work that you've recently done as a process reflection, or a reflection as in you think about an event that has already happened, or an emotion you've had, or something like that. Then you're thinking about it in the future, how you feel now about it.

Interviewer: Has this reflection given you new ways to talk about your writing in terms of new terms or concepts? If so, what are they?

Interviewee: I don't know if it's given me a new way to talk about my writings except for just saying that my writing in the beginning was very dull. Then it transitioned to very argumentative to now where it's personal. I think those are my only new terms that I can use to distinguish different types of writing.

Interviewer: Just a few more questions. The minor program is still relatively new. Are there any suggestions you would have for instructors or administrators for this program?

Interviewee: I think that there's just maybe a little bit too much of a focus on online writing just because—just as someone who's coming from a science background who was interested in writing, none of the online stuff is relevant. Learning different writing styles and being able to go to a professional and ask them to help you with this specific type of writing that you're interested in is more important to me than learning how to blog, or to look at an online portfolio, or something like that.

Interviewer: That's really good to know. Any other suggestions you would have for them in terms of how the courses are structured or anything like that?

Interviewee: Nope.

Interviewer: More generally, what do you think professors should know about teaching writing at the undergraduate level?

Interviewee: I think, for me it really varies because I feel like for freshman, you have to be—not hold their hands, but just because I know that I was coming from a place where I really didn't know what I was doing, it was really important for me to constantly hear that my ideas were good, even if my writing wasn't good. I needed to hear that my ideas were good. I didn't get that at all with my intro to writing course, which is why I hated writing. I think that as you get older, because I was transitioning, I wanted to hear more and more than my ideas weren't fully developed, and I needed to push myself harder. Otherwise, it just gets redundant if I'm constantly being told my ideas are good and not further challenged.

Interviewer: I think that's really good advice. I guess we'll just go really general. Are there any comments you want people at Sweetland to know? Anything else you want to say to them?

Interviewee: I guess no. I think that covers everything.

Interviewer: Just ready to be out of [University of Michigan, I'm sure.

Interviewee: Yeah.

[…]

[End of Audio]