

Interviewer: This is ***, and I'm here with ***. Is that right?

Interviewee: Yep.

Interviewer: We're doing an interview for the Writing Development Study, and the day is May 18, 2015. The first question is this: how would you describe yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: I describe myself as a very passionate writer. I've been writing ever since I was eight years old. I specialize in fantasy novels and novellas, and I just let my imagination just lead me to what I'm gonna write next.

Interviewer: How would you describe the role of writing in your life, in general?

Interviewee: I'd love to become a published author some day. It's something I want to do for the rest of my life. I'm actually looking to—even my career now. At [local automotive manufacturer], I'm gonna be a technical writer.

Interviewer: We'll probably talk a little bit more about that later. How would you describe yourself as a writer when you began your time here at the University of Michigan?

Interviewee: Someone who's definitely very passionate about writing, but I didn't really have the skills to be a effective writer. I think that's something the minor really helped me with.

Interviewer: What kind of skills, if you remember, do you feel like you were still working on at that point?

Interviewee: I think just how to write longer pieces, and just how to keep everything organized, and expand on ideas. I think the minor really helped me with that.

Interviewer: The next question is, to what extent would you say have you grown and changed as a writer since then, and to what would you attribute this growth? You've already mentioned the minor, but is there anything more—anything else that you can think of in terms of what kind of growth there's been, and things that might have aided in that process?

Interviewee: I think I've become a much more mature writer. I find that my stories are much more structured now. I've become much more efficient. My daily work count is probably tripled since entering the university, and I attribute to that—I took a lot of writing courses both outside and inside the minor. I think just the sheer amount of practice really helped bring me up to speed.

Interviewer: You mentioned a little bit your job. That's awesome. The next question is about your future writings. The question is, as you graduate, what are your goals for yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: I'm looking to be a technical writer at [local automotive manufacturer]. That's what's in the air right now. Nothing certain at this point, but that's the most likely position.

I'd like to come back to graduate—I'd like to get my master's degree, maybe in English, or I might do something else in Asian Studies. I think the next couple of years will be just focused on getting writing experience in the workplace, though.

Interviewer: You mentioned—so this is off-script a little bit, but what about the creative writing that you mentioned in the beginning? Do you see yourself—do you have goals in terms of that?

Interviewee: Yes. I'd love to get a book published someday, it's just right now I think I need to focus more on the workplace aspect of writing, though it's something I will definitely keep in the future.

Interviewer: Thinking across your writing experiences here at Michigan, what do you think it means to write well? This is such a big question.

Interviewee: I think to write well, I think my philosophy is when you write with passion, you write with power, I think. It's important to have interest in what you're writing, 'cause when you're interested in something, you're gonna go that extra mile for it. I think it's discovering what is your niche when it comes to writing, what are you impassioned about, and just really to explore that. I think that's what it means to write well.

Interviewer: That motivation—

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: - and personal investment. That's really cool, and I agree. What upper-level writing courses have you taken?

Interviewee: I took English 325, English 323, English 423, Writing 400. I took a couple.

Interviewer: What were your experiences like in those courses?

Interviewee: I think those are definitely the classes where my writing improved the most. I did the most lengthy writing project, especially for the Capstone class. I actually wrote a novella for that one, and I feel like English 325 was particularly helpful in improving my mechanics and the efficiency of my writing, so the upper-level writing courses were definitely the most helpful.

Interviewer: Do you still make use of what you learned in those courses in your writing now?

Interviewee: Yes, especially since I will be becoming a technical writer. It's important to write efficiently, to write well, and to find interested in what you write, so the skills are definitely still relevant.

Interviewer: What other writing courses have you taken?

Interviewee: I took English 223, the first year writing requirement. I think it was English 125. I've taken a bunch of writing courses; I can't remember all of them. Even the courses I took for my major, a lot of them had big writing components, especially the language classes.

Interviewer: In those courses, the other writing classes that you've just mentioned; how have those affected your writing?

Interviewee: It's just they weren't quite as informative, especially since they were more first year courses, but I think just they gave me more practice to write, so I was more prepared when I got to the upper-level classes.

Interviewer: You mentioned this already, but the next question is, did you take these writing courses in your concentration? You mentioned that there was a lot

of writing in your major, so the question then is, how have these, the writing courses—wait.

I guess this question is asking whether or not you took official writing courses in your major, so that would be an upper-level writing requirement course in your major.

Interviewee: There was the junior/senior colloquium for Asian Studies; Asian 381. That was an upper-level writing class.

Interviewer: That's what this question's looking for. How did that writing course affect the writing that you do specifically in your major?

Interviewee: That's where I wrote my first term paper for Asian Studies. It's a really nice term paper, so I just think it helped me introduce me to writing specific to that field.

Interviewer: Can you tell me a little bit more about that, like what you learned about writing in that field in particular?

Interviewee: It's not so much I really learned about writing, it's just more introduced me to different styles of writing, not so much I learned a new skill.

Interviewer: Can you give an example of that?

Interviewee: I think it's the first essay where I really incorporated visuals into it, so that was the first time I had an extensive visuals in it, I think. Apart from that, it was really nothing new.

Interviewer: How interesting. What kind of visuals?

Interviewee: Pictures of artifacts or different—there was some art analysis in my paper, so for pictures of the art.

Interviewer: Do you view that as being specific to your area of study?

Interviewee: I don't think so. I think this is something you could find in Art History or a lot of culture or history-based classes. I don't think it's specifically an Asian Studies mode of writing.

Interviewer: Now that you're about to graduate, how confident do you feel about writing in your major?

Interviewee: I feel very confident. I've gotten a lot of experience for both in and out of the major, and I'm just excited to see where it goes next.

Interviewer: How often have you used the skills or strategies learned in your writing classes in your other courses? The courses that are labeled as writing courses, what you've learned in that, how have you applied that or have you in other classes?

Interviewee: I think so. Just becoming more efficient, and just a faster, more organized writer's definitely helped any time there's been an essay or a blue book exam. It's just being a more efficient writer is something that really helped.

Interviewer: The next question is, what impact has the minor Capstone course, Writing 400, had on your writing?

Interviewee: Just the 400's class? I wrote, actually, my longest piece full. Not all the time, but since entering the university, so that was definitely a big milestone. It was my return to novella/novel-based writing. Up until then, it'll be mostly coursework or short stories, so that was a nice accomplishment.

Interviewer: How did that course, Reading 400, have an impact on your writing process?

Interviewee: Yes, it helped when I developed a new writing method for longer pieces. It showed me how to better organize, how to better structure them, so I think was a very helpful skill.

Interviewer: Has that course had an impact on your sense of yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: Not really. It wasn't that I didn't have a sense of myself as writing. I know who I am as a writer; I just didn't have the tools before I came to the university to express that fully.

Interviewer: That's really interesting. Do you think that Writing 400, in particular, made an impact in terms of equipping you with those tools?

Interviewee: I'd say it was very helpful. It helped me learn how to format longer pieces, but I think English 325, English 323; those are more helpful in terms of just beginning more efficient as a writer and giving me skills to be a better writer.

Interviewer: In terms of expressing your identity as a writer or your sense of self as a writer, which course would you say had the biggest impact, or experience [cross talk 11:29] necessarily?

Interviewee: I'd say being about equal, those three classes; English 325, 323, and Writing 400, although the pieces I made for those really—they were very impersonal in some ways. I feel like they were some of my strongest writing, so I feel like they've all really had that impact.

Interviewer: Was there any writing activity in particular that you can think of from one of those courses?

Interviewee: I think a short story I wrote for English 323 is particularly probably my favorite piece of writing to date, so that was definitely an accomplishment.

Interviewer: The next question's about the Capstone project, which you talked about a bit. That's the novella, is what you did for the Capstone project.

This might be a little redundant, but I'm going to ask anyway since it's on the protocol, but what effect has the experience of the Capstone project had on you as a writer?

Interviewee: I think up until—it was my first longer fantasy piece. Up until then, either it—most of my work had been non-fiction, or if it was fantasy, it was a short story. This is probably the first in a couple years to pass the 40k mark, so that was definitely an accomplishment.

Interviewer: Not just the type of writing, but the length of writing?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: This I'm really curious to find out. The next question is, why did you choose the project that you chose?

Interviewee: Because at heart I'm a fantasy writer. That's what I started out as. That's what I want to do. If I ever get the chance again, I love writing fantasy novels, short stories. It was pretty much a no-brainer when I heard it was free topics.

Interviewer: That relates back to your idea about interest and motivation, right?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: The next two questions are about the Capstone ePortfolio. I am stating for the record, I already had a conversation with *** about the ePortfolio. We decided not to pull up the actual ePortfolio, so we're just discussing it from memory, just for the record. The first question is, can you tell me about the most memorable aspect of your experience with the ePortfolio?

Interviewee: I think the most memorable was creating a running theme for everything. That's decides what pieces what into the portfolio. Quality, too, but I going for a running theme, so it was nice just seeing all the pieces fall into place.

Interviewer: Can you tell me a little bit about your theme, however much you're comfortable with sharing?

Interviewee: It was more fantasy oriented, but at the same time, there were also a lot of non-fantasy pieces. There was a wilderness, natural theme, too. I picked pieces that had elements of those, whether they were fictional or not.

Interviewer: The next question is, what were your aims for the ePortfolio, and what narrative did you hope to tell through it?

Interviewee: My aims was to create a unified, a nice archive of [inaudible 15:12] my most polished pieces of writing. I'd say to keep the narrative and the theme flowing throughout.

Interviewer: The goal is to showcase your best works, but also to have a consistent theme, which was the nature.

Interviewee: The nature. The natural fantasy feel, though, only made it about half the pieces were fantasy.

Interviewer: How do you feel your ePortfolio addresses those specific aims?

Interviewee: My aims as a writer?

Interviewer: Yeah, so the two; showcasing your polished work, and then also developing a consistent theme.

Interviewee: I think it's just how it sounds. I picked the pieces that I thought were the best and had a nice long theme.

Interviewer: The next question is about design of the ePortfolio. Did you design an ePortfolio, for example; navigation, links, media, visual design, etcetera, to create a particular reader experience?

Interviewee: Yes. The background mural, all [inaudible 16:33] images. I went for a mythology feel. I incorporated these mythology figures into a mural to give this other worldly feel when you were on the ePortfolio.

Interviewer: This you've already mentioned a little bit, but maybe this question can get at it a little bit more specifically. Did you notice any relationships among your specific artifacts as you created your ePortfolio?

Interviewee: Probably had some of them—I noticed with me, sometimes ideas tend to go in circles. I would take one piece, and then maybe one I wrote a year or two later was like this piece, but now more mature or polished, so I post them both to show that personal growth. I did know this is this cycle of ideas.

Interviewer: Could you give a specific example of that, an idea that evolved over time?

Interviewee: I wrote for, I think it was for the introduction to the minor writing course. I wrote one personal narrative. It was half personal narrative, half the why I write. As soon as my take on the why I write essay, and I wrote a piece for 325, I think, thematically drew a lot from that, but it was a lot better, it was a lot more mature. I posted them both, 'cause I noticed the running theme, so I thought it was a cool way to show the growth of the piece.

Interviewer: Do you think creating the ePortfolio has had an effect on your writing?

Interviewee: It was the first time I really used a website, other than the Intro class to showcase writing, so it showed me that WordPress could be a nice way to archive and show—preserve my writing, so that was very interesting.

Interviewer: The main gain that you felt you had through the ePortfolio was use of the website [cross talk 18:46]?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Is there anything else that you noticed, or just that?

Interviewee: No, I think just that.

Interviewer: What did you learn from the reflective writing in the ePortfolio, so the evidence-based essay, and then the contextual reflections, as well?

Interviewee: I don't really particularly remember those very well. I guess maybe it was just a nice way to look back on my experiences in the minor. It wasn't really a memorable piece, but I think it was just a nice way to sum everything up.

Interviewer: This is an interesting question. What could people interested in writing development, including program administrators like those at Sweetland learn about writing development of college students from your Capstone ePortfolio?

Interviewee: Maybe just how students let you organize through pieces, or what criteria they set to show what pieces get showcased.

Interviewer: The next set of questions are about the Gateway course. How did your experience in the Capstone course compare to your experience in the Gateway course?

Interviewee: The Gateway course, in some ways, I think was this—my first year writing experience was just passé, but I think once I got to the minor, it's really where my interest in writing was rekindled, and I felt like I was actually really learning something about writing. I don't think it was quite as helpful as 400, but I still think it was a nice experience to get me on track for college writing.

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

Interviewee: I think one aspect that was very helpful was purity sessions. We would go over each other's work, and we would hold—or even classroom discussions about our work. I think those are very helpful when getting feedback for what to improve on my writing, or what—to identify my strengths or weaknesses.

Interviewer: That was overall pretty positive?

Interviewee: Yep.

Interviewer: What are the differences you see between the Gateway and the Capstone ePortfolio, specifically?

Interviewee: I'd say that the Gateway is a lot more polished, more advanced. There's definitely a similar format, but the one for 400's definitely get a lot more mature writing, 'cause you usually write it if you make it a few years later, it's usually larger. It's just more polished and more mature, more inclusive.

Interviewer: The Gateway and the Capstone courses emphasize reflective writing in various forms. How would describe your experiences with this kind of reflection?

Interviewee: I think reflective writing is a nice way to sum up your growth as a writer, or a change you went through in a specific time. I don't think it was helpful as maybe some of the pieces that I wrote for the upper-level writing courses, because it doesn't really ask you to do anything new, just to sum up what you probably have done before.

I think they can be helpful to keep track of one's growth as a writer, but I don't think they're as helpful as just getting down and creating something new.

Interviewer: Are you still using reflection of any kind in your current writing, whether assigned or voluntary, like inside of the class or outside?

Interviewee: I find not so much reflective writing. When I archive pieces online, I'll put a short description, but I find I'm more just summing up what it is then maybe the history behind it. I usually find that unless it's very significant, I find that the history behind the piece is irrelevant to my audience. I'm sure I would write something reflective in the future, but I don't think it would be the norm.

Interviewer: That's an interesting question. Has this emphasis on reflection given you new ways to talk about your writing, such as new terms or concepts for discussing your writing?

Interviewee: I wouldn't say in particular. Again, I feel I learn much more from just creating non-fiction, just creating these new pieces out of left-field, rather than looking back. I just think reflections is a good way to sum up your growth, or I don't think it really teaches any new skills.

Interviewer: The minor program is relatively new still, and we're wondering if there are any suggestions you have for instructors or administrators in the program as it continues to develop?

Interviewee: I think, honestly, I would like to see this expanded into a major. I think writing is just so relevant in our world, and I think it's very, also, underappreciated. A lot of people take writing for granted, and they don't understand the hard work and passion that goes behind good writers. I think a program—this was expanded into a full major, we could—it would really get people more impassioned about writing.

Some people say, "Writing's a disappearing art," and we don't want that to happen. I just think it would be great if this was eventually expanded into a full major program.

Interviewer: Anything beyond that?

Interviewee: Not really. I feel my experiences in minor were very good; I'd just love to see where this program is gonna go next.

Interviewer: This is a question, it's a similar question in terms of suggestions. What do you think that professors across the university, just at the undergraduate level, should know about teaching writing to undergraduate students?

Interviewee: Maybe just to be aware of different writing—I don't know, that's a big question.

Interviewer: It's a huge question.

Interviewee: Maybe to be aware that everyone has a different writing style and a different writing method. I don't like the idea of people teaching that there's only one way or one method to write something, even if it's a certain genre. I think people's methods can just vary so widely, that there's really no one universal way to teach writing, and I think people have to be more versatile and more adaptable in their methods when it comes to writing.

Interviewer: Those are all the questions, but the final question is whether or not you have any other comments or anything that you'd like to add or follow-up on from previous questions.

Interviewee: No, but thank you for your time. It's been a great interview.

Interviewer: Thanks. Well, thank you.

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