

Interviewer: This is *** being interviewed by ***, and it is May 23rd [...]. How would you describe yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: Such a hard question to answer.

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: I don't know. Describe myself as a writer.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Okay, so maybe I'll answer that question by describing the type of writing that I like to do the most.

Interviewer: Great, mm-hmm.

Interviewee: I sort of found my niche of writing to be somewhere in the creative nonfiction realm. I think that I've sort of allowed or really taken writing to have become less of an outlet to express myself and to—of course, it is an outlet to express myself and articulate my ideas. I view it more as an opportunity to learn about myself and learn about things and use the writing process as outlet to do that. I find creative nonfiction as this sort of genre or mode that allows me to do that best. That's sort of how I view writing.

Interviewer: How would you describe yourself as a writer when you started here at University of Michigan?

Interviewee: When I started here, very much the opposite. Whether the way I view writing now is because of my experience with writing or sort of just the progression as a student across the past four years, when I started here it was very much re-reading some of the pieces I wrote freshman year for creating this online portfolio for the minor. It was very much sort of like getting ideas across. I'm a very verbose writer anyway, but the thesaurus was my best friend back then.

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: Just sort of just developing these long, confusing sentences, these sort of grand points of nonsense. Back then when I came in here, I think that I saw writing as a skill that would be learned as opposed to something that is more a continual process sort of.

Interviewer: What do you think helped make that change for you?

Interviewee: It's hard to say. I think that a lot of it had to do with the array of classes I took, both writing and other classes I've taken at the university. Also just the experience with writing and okay, so it's definitely the array of writing classes I've taken, the

mentors and professors that I've had, and my own sort of progression and how my intellectual growth kind of blended with my writing growth.

Interviewer: Okay, so as you graduate, what are your goals for your school? You have graduated, but what are your goals for yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: It's hard to say. To be honest, I think that my goal as a writer is just right to continue writing. This last semester kind of drove me to the ground writing-wise. I haven't written anything since.

Interviewer: Can you talk about that a little bit?

Interviewee: Yeah. This is entirely anonymous?

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: This past semester, the capstone writing class for the minor, I kind of left it feeling not entirely satisfied. I had chose a topic that is deeply personal in creative nonfiction. I definitely went into the project like I am going to write a long piece about everything. All encompassing.

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: Just hammer it all out, which was completely naïve and a terrible idea, this standard that was set from the beginning. Sort of the way the class was set up, I felt that I didn't get sufficient feedback. I didn't leave the class feeling like I became a better writer. Like I learned how to better analyze things or how to better articulate my thoughts and construct. The way the class was set up, I'm not so sure how familiar you are with the way the class was run.

The whole premise of the class was to write a project about anything, however you want, extended piece of research. I chose to do a creative nonfiction piece on food and food in my life, and as told through the store I worked at [a restaurant] on [Street] for about a week in the kitchen. I quit after a week, so that story was the backbone, but I went all over the place of food and history and food in my life.

The way the class was run, every day in class was a writing day. There was no communal sort of talking about things. Once in a while, we'd have opportunities to read each other's writing, but there was no sense of community in the class, and no one really felt invested in each other. My professor only read the piece halfway through the class once, and I got minimal feedback afterwards.

It kind of just felt like the premise of the class, it was a good premise. Here you are. You have this opportunity to shine, write whatever you want, but that premise made it seem as if we knew everything and we knew how to do everything. It was on odd class. It wasn't really a class. It was just an opportunity almost, a structured opportunity. I kind of felt

like it was a missed opportunity. I didn't feel like I left, so this is all then coming back to—

Interviewer: Yep [laughter].

Interviewee: - me sort of just being a little upset with my writing, with the writing process. Then another thing that complicated that was the class was based on points, quantity over quality. X number of words equals X number of points, equals an A, so there were times I would sit down and just train of thought for 10 pages. It was crap.

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: I spent the last three weeks is really when things came together for the end that I was proud of the last [inaudible 06:51] piece, but I cut 12 pages out of my paper total here and there.

Interviewer: Wow.

Interviewee: It was an interesting writing experience. I felt deflated at the end.

Interviewer: You feel like that's influenced your goals for yourself as a writer moving on?

Interviewee: Yes, entering this class, I wanted this piece of writing to—I wanted this to represent my growth as a thinker and writer at the University of Michigan, and I cannot say that it does. I do. I feel defeated, deflated, whatever.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm, so the goal from here is to keep writing.

Interviewee: Just to keep writing. I've wanted to write pieces for magazines and get published and things like that, but writing was never going to be my main career. It was going to be my side hobby, but I worry that it's just gonna fall away.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: That was an extremely long answer to your question.

Interviewer: [Laughter] That's okay. That's great. Thinking across your writing experiences here, what do you think it means to write well?

Interviewee: These are difficult questions.

Interviewer: Yeah, take your time. It's totally fine.

Interviewee: To write well. I think in one sense on one side, it's articulating your thoughts in a coherent manner that you understand and that your readers can understand

too. That's obvious that's what writing well is, but I come to feel that writing well—good writing pokes always at the question of “So what and why does this matter? Why write about this? How does this relate to your reader?”

Any piece of writing that you write, there's an audience, but so what? Why does this audience care? It's framing this writing. It's framing any writing you do, whether it's fiction or nonfiction or whatever with that in the background. Kind of obviously not blatantly answering “So what?” but addressing that in some sense. I think that's what writing well is.

Interviewer: Which upper-level writing courses have you taken?

Interviewee: I took [English 300 level course], which was creative nonfiction. That was the first one I took.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: I took the writing capstone for the minor, and then upper-level counts 09:31 as upper-level writing. Then I took a scientific writing class through my major, which I think counted as an upper-level writing requirement.

Interviewer: Okay. What were you say were your experiences in those courses? We can start with [English 300 level course].

Interviewee: Sure. That was a fantastic class. That was the first time I ever was exposed to creative nonfiction, wrote three essays and three different sort of creative nonfiction modes of portrait, profile of a person, and then an investigation. I think that I chose three topics that were very personal to me, and I wanted to explore. I had a really great professor, and the whole class was great. I really enjoyed it. Should I expand the other two as well?

Interviewer: Let's stick with [English 300 level course] for now.

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: What effect did that experience in that course have on you as a writer?

Interviewee: Oh. I think it showed me a different side of writing that I'd never experienced before. Again, I had never written with the vulnerability, that completely exposing—I wrote those essays as if I was the only one reading them. I think that it showed me—yeah, it showed me a different side of writing. It showed me a different side of articulation and learning and sort of what else I could get out of writing and the writing process more so than the researchy, academic argumentation sort of thing that I had been used to.

Interviewer: Okay, great. Do you still make use of what you learned in [English 300 level course] now?

Interviewee: Yeah, absolutely. Very much so in anything from my thought process to reflection and the writing in that sense to also I think that it played a huge role in how I wrote the creative [inaudible 11:35] for the minor capstone with a lot of the same tactics and structure.

Interviewer: Okay, so you've also taken the capstone course, right?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: We'll talk about that in a minute. Then you said you took a writing course in your major.

Interviewee: Yeah, so that was a scientific writing course, and we wrote tons of abstracts and other little researchy things, and it culminated with a lengthy literature review piece that we had to write on anything we wanted. I chose a topic, read [laughter] thousands of articles, and synthesized my own little literature review.

Interviewer: Okay. That's great. Then what affected that experience in the course for your major? What's your major?

Interviewee: I was movement science in the School of Kinesiology.

Interviewer: What affect did that experience in that course have on you as a writer?

Interviewee: I took that actually two years ago, so it was a while ago. That it was rewarding. I really enjoyed sort of reading all that was out there, kind of taking bits and pieces and developing my own sort of this is what scientific truth is on this topic. That was a rewarding experience to complete. Sort of feel knowledgeable on this topic, to construct and take all of these other thoughts and [inaudible 13:02] evidence and shape it into my own piece, it was cool.

Interviewer: Okay, so as a writer, it helped you to use evidence?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you still make use of that you think in your writing now?

Interviewee: That's hard to say. Yes and no. It was a while ago. I was still a young writer. Had I taken that class now, I think I would have gotten much more out of it. Yeah, okay.

Interviewer: Can you think of any other writing courses that you've taken?

Interviewee: That have had impact on me or just other writing—?

Interviewer: Just in general.

Interviewee: Yeah. I can tell you all the writing courses I've taken cuz I've created the online portfolio, and I have sort of—so starting from the beginning, I took [English course]. That was an experience.

Interviewer: How did that affect your writing?

Interviewee: I can't say that it did to be honest. The teacher that I had, she was from [country] and she'd just gotten to the states two weeks before class started. That was an interesting experience to have that. I was still very young as a writer and a student, so I can't say that I really gained tons of experience from that class. Then I took a creative writing class, actually. I took [Writing 200 level course]. I wrote poetry, and that was sort of just writing in different modes. Again, it's kinda hard to [inaudible 14:38] it's hard to say whether or not I got a lot out of it.

Interviewer: You don't think that course, [Writing 200 level course], affected your writing at all?

Interviewee: Maybe. I don't know.

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: I mean, I wrote 12 poems and a couple short stories, very, very short like six pages. I can't say yeah that it really deeply influenced my writing. Then I took [English 200 level course], which is [Title of course]. I had a phenomenal grad student instructor. That probably influenced me a lot. We chose a discourse to write about the entire semester, wrote three separate papers on that discourse, then synthesized it into an extended single paper at the end.

That really was the first extremely lengthy, research-driven piece that I'd ever written. That was tremendously influential in my writing I think.

Interviewer: How do you think it influenced you?

Interviewee: I think it really forced me to synthesize other information. We took this discourse. Then I decided which direction I wanted to analyze it in, and then I had to go into all of these different research realms, figure out what is useful or interesting or valuable to my original focus, and compose this 20+ page paper.

Interviewer: What was your topic?

Interviewee: I analyzed the [City] mayor [his] first state of the city address as a piece of rhetoric and talked about the state of [City] in that piece as rhetoric and then just the

rhetorical speeches in general. Sort of how they work and sort of how the public and private and sort of how and audience is sort of responding to this and things like that.

Interviewer: That definitely affected your writing in that you were able to synthesize lots of different kinds of sources?

Interviewee: Yeah, absolutely.

Interviewer: Then you said you took that one writing course in your concentration in your major?

Interviewee: Yeah, that was actually the following semester. Yeah.

Interviewer: Have you taken any other writing-type courses in your major?

Interviewee: Because it's movement science, it's not very—that was the only writing course I took. However, we always are writing lab reports. One semester, I took an upper-level class. We had opportunities to write abstracts. It was kinda cool. We were provided the introduction, the methods, and the results. That was it. We had to make the abstract, which was cool.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: Then this past semester actually I was in the computer modeling class, and we developed an experiment and wrote the entire journal article again. I have had a lot of experience in sort of scientific writing.

Interviewer: Have those experiences with writing in your major affected your writing overall? You make any connections there?

Interviewee: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, scientific writing is a very objective form of writing. I find that equally as fulfilling as creative nonfiction, which is probably the other side of the spectrum maybe. I think I have gotten better at sort of—especially in scientific writing, the introduction's always tackling the so what question. Why does this topic matter? Why does this experiment matter? Why did we do this?

I think I have gotten better at sort of the hourglass of one of those reeling it in, sort of here's what is out there, here's what's missing, here's what needs to happen. Fluid. In a fluid, sort of paper writing articulation. I think I have gotten much better at that.

Interviewer: Your writing courses in your major helped you do that?

Interviewee: Yeah, absolutely, and that [Title of course] [English 200 level course], I mean, just sort of research-driven pieces.

Interviewer: Great. Now that you have graduated, how confident do you feel about writing in your concentration?

Interviewee: Fairly confident.

Interviewer: Good. Can you give me an example?

Interviewee: Just like that I feel confident in my ability to write in that mode. I think there's obviously tremendous room to improve, but I feel confident that my experiences both as part of the writing minor and writing in my concentration that I feel confident in my writing abilities going forward.

Interviewer: How often have you used skills or strategies that you learned in any of those classes in other courses? Have you used the creative nonfiction stuff in the courses for your major or have you used this stuff in your major in [English 200 level course] or whatever?

Interviewee: Right. Hard to say. A lot of these science classes at the university are filled with lecture 20:04. They lecture on some topic, and there's an exam. Not much room for personal reflection and things like that. I don't know.

Interviewer: Maybe the other way around then? Anything you—?

Interviewee: Yeah, quite possibly. I think that being forced to sort of learn in these two different outlets—I mean, I have a bachelor's of science and this minor in writing. They're constantly clashing with each other and sort of pushing each other forward too. I think that maybe having the science background has enabled or furthered my ability to analyze things and be sort of objective in sort of thinking about whether my own life or something I am writing about or things like that.

I think that it's much more clear how the science classes are used in my writing as opposed to maybe specifically greater nonfiction influencing how I'm studying for like a biology test.

Interviewer: Yeah, definitely. Good. What impact has the minor capstone course had overall on your writing? [Writing 400 level course] [laughter].

Interviewee: I'm being completely honest here. Little to none. Again, I had mentioned this earlier that I felt that it was a huge missed opportunity, and I can speak for the other students in that class, that we all felt that there was something missing here. It was a very odd class. I mean, you would show up and there'd be a few announcements. Then you would have an hour to go sit by yourself and write.

How much am I really learning? I didn't feel like I learned anything, and I think that the way the class was run, so much was expected of us. Developing an online portfolio. That requires web design, requires writing specifically for the portfolio, doing a 40+ page

[inaudible 22:36]. Pretty much essentially a thesis. I mean, I wrote a 45-page paper in a semester, and the amount of research and writing that was necessary for that.

Those two things didn't allow us to do readings for class and class discussions and writing for class a normal writing class sort of operates. Something had to give if we were gonna do all this, so the class element was just completely shut down after the first two weeks. From that point forward, again, my professor read my piece once halfway through. I was not done with it. I got some good feedback, I guess, but he didn't really read it again.

We had discussions about it, but I didn't get really feedback or direction. There's one other thing I'll say about that that I think inhibited the sort of class learning element is that there was so much freedom. You could write about whatever you wanted, however you wanted, so you're 20 students going in 20 different directions about 20 different topics. Where is the common thread that we all can learn from? That's a difficult question to answer.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. Do you feel like that course had an impact on your writing process at all?

Interviewee: Maybe. Only because I said that I went into it with these huge expectations. It's comical now, but at the time, it was frustrating. I was beaten to the ground halfway through the semester. I hated my piece; I hated the class; I hated my topic. I hated everything about this. There was one morning in the end of March where I woke up and just decided to write first thing in the morning on my paper. Then all of a sudden on Page 35, everything starts coming together. Then I went back and redid the whole paper.

I think it was a sort of maybe a humbling experience to be beaten to the ground and taken back up in some sense. As far as writing process, I think that it's sort of a metaphor for the writing process.

Interviewer: [Laughter] That it's going to beat you back down [laughter]—

Interviewee: Yeah, exactly.

Interviewer: - every time. Has the course had an impact on your sense of yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: I don't know. I think it's too soon to say, to be honest. I'm still pretty bitter about the whole experience.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: I need some time to sort of take a step away from the class, take a step away from the piece, and then maybe I could answer that question better. Right now, I'm just not sure.

Interviewer: What helped specifically your experience with the capstone project?

Interviewee: Oh, the project itself?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Oh.

Interviewer: Yeah. We talked about that a lot in the beginning.

Interviewee: Right. I think, again, I just sort of went into it reading philosophy papers, food and history, anthropology, everything without a clear focus. Then I sort of latched onto this story of working in the kitchen at a restaurant as some sort of backbone to bring it all together.

Interviewer: Can you talk little bit about why you chose the project that you did?

Interviewee: It was around the time last summer and fall was sort of when I got into food and cooking and eating, the foodie culture, and I used it as an opportunity to write about—sort of bring together my science background and my writing background. I felt that food was a great medium to do that because it held some sort of importance in my life and sort of food in contemporary culture is such a—you can view food at this sort of nutrition and calories and very science objective health.

It is the exact opposite as a sort of sense of expression and experience and culture and things like that. How those were one and the same, yet so different, was this sort of great metaphor for sort of my objective science view on my life and things like that versus this other sort of... I don't know how to describe it, liberal arts education-based thing.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's great. Then what effect did you think that that project specifically has had on you? You said you were reading in all those different disciplines. [Cross talk 27:39]

Interviewee: Yeah, I think I came to a handful of really, really great sort of articulate conclusions, satisfying conclusions. This was a realm that really confused me for a long time, and it still does. I mean, but sort of a came to, yeah, a handful of really great paragraphs and sentences in sections that sort of it felt right. It felt sort of satisfying.

Interviewer: Because it was synthesizing all those disciplines or because your experience was there? What?

Interviewee: Both. Absolutely both. It was synthesizing these intellectual topics of confusion for me as pushed forward by my own experience. In that sense, that felt satisfying.

Interviewer: Good. That's great. Now we're going to talk about the portfolio, the e-portfolio.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about the most memorable aspect of your experience with the e-portfolio? We can pull it up on here too.

[...]

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: Your most memorable aspect of your experience with the e-portfolio?

Interviewee: I would say writing the welcome. This evidence-based piece is what they kept saying. Evidence-based piece. Welcoming your reader to your portfolio. What are they gonna get out of this? What are they gonna see? That was the most memorable sort of—I mean, because I framed it—I mean, I framed it as again this contrast of my science background and my writing background. This one piece allowed me to sort of talk about it again and sort of bring it all together through my writing. That was memorable I'd say.

Interviewer: What were your aims for the e-portfolio?

Interviewee: My aim was for it to be a piece of writing in itself, its own sort of composition as opposed to just a showcase of my writing.

Interviewer: Okay. Can you talk about the difference [cross talk 30:24].

Interviewee: Yeah, so an e-portfolio of my writing, I can put all of my writing out here. You as an audience, as a reader go explore as opposed to I'm going to frame it for you in this one sense. You [inaudible 30:34] sort of explore with this. After you've read my welcome, you kind of know what I'm trying to do. Then you explore in that light, and then it's its own composition, its own sort of you know [mumbling 30:49].

Interviewer: What narrative did you hope to tell with the e-portfolio?

Interviewee: I think just that, the narrative of a science student sort of trying to make sense of the science perspective, science culture in light of very subjective, emotionally-driving creative nonfiction say or other sort of the complete—or what feels like the complete opposite side of the spectrum.

Interviewer: How well do you think your e-portfolio did that, addressed those aims, told that narrative?

Interviewee: I think it told the narrative pretty well. Whether or not I made sense of this topic clearly, that's up for discussion, but—

Interviewer: Do you feel like it's a composition on its own like your—?

Interviewee: I do. I think it is.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Interviewee: I think it very much is.

Interviewer: Great. Did you design the e-portfolio to create a particular reader experience, and can you talk a little bit about those design experiences?

Interviewee: Can you say the question one more time?

Interviewer: Sure. Did you design the e-portfolio to give a specific reader experience?

Interviewee: Yeah, so these tabs—I mean, it starts in beginnings and then my clever [inaudible 32:14], [Title of portfolio], which is all of my writing and things like that, short fiction, my academic argumentation, my creative nonfiction. Then you have all of my science writing that I've done here. I wrote a piece on the mind and brain my freshman year. I forgot about that, actually.

Sort of my literature review that I wrote and some other things and the fact that I put them in different sort of sections beginning with these two things and then looking backward, a couple of reflective pieces. I think that that's what makes it the sort of composition. It's a journey in some sense.

Interviewer: Okay, so that's the experience you wanted the reader to have?

Interviewee: Yeah, exactly.

Interviewer: What design choice did you make to kind of...?

Interviewee: To-to-to-to- tooo. That, making these sort of tabs with the separate sections and then my home page being these sort of my welcome because of the two pieces, they really didn't fit anywhere else, but I felt they were sort of necessary for the composition as something.

Interviewer: Can you talk about those other two pieces?

Interviewee: Yeah, so this was the sort of—actually, it's kind of an expansion of a part of my capstone writing project, but since this is a story, a quick little snippet of a time when I was younger and actually made it as—I really shortened it out. For my first four or five sentences, it's my graduate school application essays.

Interviewer: Oh, great.

Interviewee: When I was younger, I was brushing my teeth. I turned around and asked my mom sort of how muscles work, and I had always—

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: - sort of known that the brain is the controller but didn't really ever make the connection that it's the brain that controls my muscles, and sort of her quick explanation that when I'm moving my arm it's already sort of made this decision to do it that happens what seems like instantly was amazing. I could not get over it. That was the first time that I sort of really thought about the mind and the body. I didn't use the words mind and body, but it was the first time that that sort of paradigm amazed me ever since I was a kid.

Interviewer: You felt you wanted to put that on your home page?

Interviewee: Yeah. I think that's sort of the whole idea that there's these sort of seemingly insentient things inside of me that give rise to this sentient being consciousness. That's something that's fascinated me forever.

Interviewer: Okay, and that's the second piece?

Interviewee: This was just sort of—it's actually a snippet. I had applied to some program, and this was—this is just a clear articulation of these two opposing science view objective, this is this, but some things are so completely unbelievable that it's always fun to sort of—nothing can be proven. There's no absolute truth in some sense.

Interviewer: You definitely wanted that on the homepage too?

Interviewee: Yeah, just sort of this imaginative I'm not this—I would say, [inaudible 35:32] I believe in science. I think that I could put my faith in science, but nothing is proven. These patterns of suggestions and observations, this is what we base our life off of, but it's humbling to sort of relish the absence of absolute truth and sort of play with these ideas and things like that.

Interviewer: The welcome page was a big part of your design—

Interviewee: Yeah, definitely.

Interviewer: - choices that you're making?

Interviewer: Great. Did you notice any relationships among your different artifacts as you created your e-portfolio, your different aspects?

Interviewee: I don't know. Relationships in what sense? That they sort of—

Interviewer: Well, what did you want your readers to notice? What relationships did you want your readers to notice?

Interviewee: I see. I mean, again, it was so blatant that—well, it should have been so blatant. I mean, you have this whole section that's scientific writing. I mean, this was—look at this. This was not like—

Interviewer: Is that the human experience tag?

Interviewee: No, this was the empirical and the objective.

Interviewer: Oh, the empirical and the objective tag.

Interviewee: This is very much—I mean, this was—this is my literature review. I mean, this is very—and then you have things that— my minor writing capstone project, very much creative nonfiction sort of—they're so different. The artifacts are so different, but what I really tried to do with the thread was there sort of all still—I am in both worlds. I am the driving force for both of these, and they're sort of still speaking to me as a person and writer. I guess that's the relationship.

Interviewer: Okay, do you think that creating the e-portfolio has had an effect on your writing overall?

Interviewee: I don't think that creating the e-portfolio did, but I think that writing the welcome piece and writing my reflection on the capstone project, those two pieces. Because they were required for the portfolio, you can say it had an effect on my writing.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. How did they affect your writing? The welcome page and then the reflection—

Interviewee: Right, especially with the welcome page, it's sort of just my story, my journey, and then the reflection on the capstone project was just sort of cathartic reflection on this whole terrible journey—

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: - and the experience of the writer. That had an effect, but actually constructing an online portfolio, I don't know if it had an effect on my writing.

Interviewer: Okay, so what did you learn—more specifically, what did you learn from that reflective piece? You said it was cathartic, but what did you [cross talk 38:09]?

Interviewee: Yeah, I think that when I wrote it, it felt good to sort of—it was poking at the question why I write, why write. I told a little story of that morning in the end of March when things came together, and I did not sit down that morning and expect things to come together. All of a sudden, I just started writing and writing and writing and

writing. That's what writing is in some sense is this—it all makes sense at the most unexpected time.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Why write? You write for those times. You right for when it does make sense even though it sucks for three months, that you finally are like—

Interviewer: [Laughter] Yep.

Interviewee: That's why it was cathartic.

Interviewer: You felt like you were able to articulate why right? What writing is for you?

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah. I think so.

Interviewer: Great. What could people interested in writing development, so people here in Sweetland [inaudible 39:06] learn about writing development from your capstone e-portfolio?

Interviewee: [Laughter]

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: Learn about it in what is writing development or how to develop a writer better or—

Interviewer: Either or both. Let's start with what is writing development.

Interviewee: I think that writing development is very much in line with sort of personal intellectual development too.

Interviewer: You think that's evident on your e-portfolio?

Interviewee: I think so. I think that I would not have been the person and the writer that I am had I not sort of developed this specific realm of interest and analysis that I've spoken about so many times. I think that's coming—in fact, when you're in [English course], I could not have imagined writing that piece.

Interviewer: What do you think it is that got you there from [English course] to the e-portfolio?

Interviewee: I think it's writing in different modes, but it's also sort of—it's taking a vast array of classes, sort of what is my education? What am I getting out of this? How are they the same? Yeah, [inaudible 40:18]. What I'll say is I think that a flaw in the education system ever since a young age is that it's framed as just jumping through

hoops, as I said or sort of I came in [English course] thinking that writing was a skill that I could develop and there was a bar to meet. I've met it, and now I'm a writer.

Whereas, I think that education even from a young age needs to be framed as sort of you are learning about the world and life and things, which it is, but's not frame it's not framed like that. That's what I attempted to sort of—my journey and my reflection and sort of synthesizing these two disparate science and writing, they're both speaking to the same thing. That development I think that I came into my own as a writer. I developed into my own sense of being a writer when I really appreciated that and understood that and then attempted to write that way.

Interviewer: You think that's well represented on the [inaudible 41:23]?

Interviewee: I'd like to think so, and then as far as developing a writer, it's hard to say. It's difficult to develop a quantitative means to get there.

Interviewer: You said writing in different modes, taking a vast array of classes—

Interviewee: Right.

Interviewer: Earlier on, you mentioned mentors.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Absolutely.

Interviewer: Can you talk about that a little?

Interviewee: My [English 300 level course] professor was a phenomenal teacher. Times in his office hours were—and even the graduate student that I had that taught the academic argumentation class—only now do I really realize how amazing of a teacher she was. Someone who pushes you further in writing and thinking and analysis, but it's difficult to say sort of—I mean, how did I get here because of that. How do you describe how another student gets there? That's difficult to answer.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. Do you think that that writing in different modes, taking a vast array of classes, and having influential mentors is here somewhere on the e-portfolio?

Interviewee: I think taking different classes absolutely is on here. The mentor thing might be in the background, but yeah, I never really spoke about it.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Now I want you to think a little bit about your gateway course as well.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: How did your experience in the capstone course compare to your experience in the gateway course?

Interviewee: They were the same because both had this huge sense of freedom, which I don't know if it worked or not. I don't know if you can give—I mean, the minor in writing as a program. It's supposed to work because it's a minor.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: We're all different concentrations. We're all coming from different backgrounds, and I think at times these two classes, the gateway and the capstone, they allow too much freedom because of that. They didn't really latch on to the fact that this is a writing program as much as this is a supplement dose sort of opportunity for your concentration, so that exposed to a lot of freedom. Which then sort of inhibited on some sense my growth as a writer and student in these classes. The question was how do they compare?

Interviewer: How do they compare. Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: They compare in that sense that both have that tremendous amount of freedom. Yeah, I mean...

Interviewer: Okay, so what have your experiencing been of working with other writers throughout the minor?

[Pause 44:25 – 44:31]

Interviewee: This past semester in the capstone class, we had a handful of workshop days. There was no real accountability to each other, which was sad [laughter]. In the gateway course, I can't really even remember. There were a lot of open discussions in class and small groups and things like that, but neither class really had a lot of structured workshop, sort of write up a lengthy pages of feedback. Which forces as I was a peer to sort of really deeply think about your writing and try to help you as a writer, and help myself in some sense during that process. I think the experience was much more unstructured workshop, which had its pros and cons.

Interviewer: Can you talk about your handful of workshop experiences in the capstone?

Interviewee: Yeah. I think there were really only three or four. [...].

Interviewer: You said you felt like there was not accountability there between—

Interviewee: There wasn't because there was no sense of community in the class because you should show up every day and sort of do your own thing. That sort of made—because it was all based on points and quantity and the amount of pages I write. A lot of people didn't care. A lot of people, we were second-semester seniors who were about to graduate and go a different direction normally. A lot of people really didn't care.

Interviewer: Did you have workshop experiences in the gateway course?

Interviewee: I think so. I can't remember.

Interviewer: What are the differences you see between the gateway and then the capstone e-portfolio?

Interviewee: Okay, so the capstone e-portfolio really again was this composition of itself, this own journey of the story, whereas my other one was very much here's what I got. Here is an online booklet of my writing. Explore 47:02.

Interviewer: You felt you had less of a cohesive—

Interviewee: Yeah, it was definitely just a collection of my writing. I even had I believe these sort of snippets introducing each piece like, "Here was what this one is about. Here is what struggled with. Take a read."

Interviewer: Yeah, but no like common thread between all of the writings you posted there. Okay. Both courses emphasize reflective writing in various forms. How would you describe your experience with that kind of reflection?

Interviewee: [Clicking tongue] I always took reflective writing as sure reflecting on this piece but reflecting on yourself too, and I don't know how much other students really took it [inaudible 47:55]. That's a little presumptuous to say that other students didn't take advantage of that. However, I don't think that a lot of other people viewed it in that light as more of like here's what I did. Here is how I feel differently now, as a sort of reflection and an opportunity to learn from the reflective piece.

As someone who puts a lot of emphasis on creative nonfiction, which itself is in some sense very reflective, I think I benefitted greatly from the reflective writings.

Interviewer: Why do you think you benefitted? Can you identify a benefit [laughter]?

Interviewee: Again, just the sort of outlet to learn from experience, a structured outlet to do so.

Interviewer: Okay, great. Are you still using reflective writing in any writing that you do now?

Interviewee: I'm a very reflective person, so I don't write as much. I take that back. I have had failed attempts at journaling and sort of things like that every once in a while, and I've bought a number of journals to handwrite like this is gonna be something.

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: This is gonna be a beautiful place to reflect. Just this month, actually, I completely got rid of all the handwritten journals and just started a Word document on my computer. Because I can type so much faster than I can handwrite. It allowed me that sort of just complete freedom there. Every once in a while now I'll sit down and just free write and I reflect. I write anything on my mind. I reflect. I do whatever. What was the question [laughter]? Is that what it—?

Interviewer: Are you still using reflective writing?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Yeah [laughter].

Interviewee: [Laughter] Not as much as I would have liked to have, but I am, and then reflective thought too.

Interviewer: Do you use reflective writing for anything other than just personal journaling or—?

Interviewee: Not right now. The goal was to have done so, but...

Interviewer: Did the reflection that you're doing now and that you've done in the minor given you new ways to talk about your writing? New terms of concepts?

Interviewee: I don't know. Maybe not. I don't know. Nothing comes to mind.

Interviewer: Okay, so are there any suggestions you would have for instructors or administrators of the minor program?

Interviewee: Oh, God [laughter]. That's—oh, God. [Sighs] Yeah, of course.

Interviewer: What are they?

Interviewee: What did you say?

Interviewer: What are they [laughter].

Interviewee: I poked at this all morning, the capstone class needs to be changed drastically. My one suggestion for the minor, there needs to be so much more—I believe, there needs to be so much more focus on the writing program as opposed to here is an

opportunity for you to develop writing for your concentration. Now you've decided to minor in writing. I want to become a better writer. I'm gonna learn about writing, and I don't want this just to be an opportunity to write about whatever I want to write about.

Much more structure in that sense, much more structure. Again, especially in the capstone class. I don't know how to do it. I don't know what the best way to provide an outlet to write a 40+ page paper, but also in different directions, but to have cohesive learning among all students. I don't know [cross talk 51:49].

Interviewer: Yeah, so course readings and course discussion—

Interviewee: Yeah, exactly.

Interviewer: - was lacking.

Interviewee: Yeah, that was lacking in both classes.

Interviewer: You also mentioned more and better workshopping.

Interviewee: Yes. Much more accountability among students. I think that my [English 200 level course] class worked so well is because we were a small community and we respected each other and—

Interviewer: Was this your creative writing class?

Interviewee: No, this was [Title of course].

Interviewer: [Title of course].

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: We were asked to read three ten-page pieces, come in with a single-spaced entire page of feedback, and have an hour-and-a-half discussion about each other's pieces. You were required to do that, and you got points for that. That was beneficial not only to each other, to helping another student with their writing, but editing someone's piece is helpful for you as a writer. That was tremendously beneficial. I think that needs to be there too. Yeah.

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

Interviewee: [Laughter] These are really hard questions.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: I think undergraduate is an experience to sort of learn how to think, how to think differently, and I think that where do you draw the line between writing and thinking. I think it needs to be taught in that sense. Much discussions in talking about writing, yeah, you can talk about sentence structure and grammar and research and things like that, but if you can't talk about the ideas that I'm writing about and push me further in that sense, useless.

I think some of my best teachers and mentors pushed me in that realm of thought, and then they helped me, sort of pushed me in how I think about this stuff and kind of you can help me articulate and form and structure into an argument or a piece. Without this sort of let's have a discussion about my paper and what I'm talking about. I thought of that—it's more difficult to grow as a writer without that too.

Interviewer: Okay, so emphasizing that writing-thinking connection?

Interviewee: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, maybe that's why I liked class discussion so much too.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay. Anything else you wanna add? Any other comments?

Interviewee: I don't think so.

Interviewer: All right, great. Thank you so much.

Interviewee: Yeah. [Inaudible 54:41]

[End of Audio]