

Interviewer: This is ***. I'm interviewing ***for the Minor in Writing interview series. It is Monday, February 13th, 2012. ***, thank you again. We really appreciate your help. What we're going to do here basically—it shouldn't take more than about 30 minutes or so.

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: I'm going to ask you questions about your—sort of—self image as a writer. Questions about your experiences in writing here at the [University of Michigan]. Then your experiences in the Gateway Course. Then sort of a look towards the future. That's kind of the pattern of questions we'll follow.

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: We'll just go and get started.

Interviewee: All right.

Interviewer: The first question is how would you describe yourself as a writer when you started here at University of Michigan?

Interviewee: Wow.

Interviewer: Tough question.

Interviewee: Yes. Well, when I first started I thought I was a better writer than most people. That was more based on my experiences at the high school writing. Now, looking back I would have to say I was a pretty mediocre writer. All told, I was my freshman year. I've gotten better now. My image as a—

Interviewer: What makes you think you were a mediocre writer?

Interviewee: Just because, once I got to college it was much harder for me to write. In high school I could write papers the day before they were due, and in college of course, I couldn't do that anymore. I still can't do it. Which is kind of obvious. Yeah, so, I think that looking back I was mediocre because I could write well, but I didn't really put much thought into it. I didn't really put much effort into it. I guess, maybe a better word would be more simplistic, because, now I feel like I put more effort into my writing for now. Yeah.

Interviewer: That makes sense.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: How would you describe yourself as a writer now as far as—I know you said you put more effort—is there any other differences though?

Interviewee: I think my tone is definitely more polished. We're talking about strict academic papers. I feel like it's not as much of a stretch to use some of the phrases I've been—I feel like I'm more at home—with the sort of academic lingo. Yeah, I guess, basically I put more effort and it's more polished. It's hard to really evaluate where I am right now since it's so immediate.

Interviewer: Yeah. What new ways have you developed to talk about yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: Through the Writing Minor or just in general?

Interviewer: General.

Interviewee: Okay, general, I'm sorry, do you mean like self—like a commenting or—

Interviewer: Yeah, sure, that's definitely, that's definitely a way of talking about yourself as a writer. Talking about skills you've learned or ways you think about writing. Are there things that you've noticed—maybe since high school—that you've developed ways of talking about writing and about being a writer that you didn't have before.

Interviewee: I mean, I think the main difference is that now I recognize that writing is a process. I can talk about my writing process and the way that I write more since coming here at the university. I can—I think I can—distinguish between what I initially put out there, with a rough draft, trying to get all my ideas down and what my finished product is.

It's still hard for me to narrate my writing process because it's—you know—the way I see it's happening as I'm sitting there writing—but, I mean, I guess I, I have more tools to help me in my writing process. Like being aware, like making notes on the drafts and things like that. I find writing is a more interactive process now than it was.

Interviewer: That's a good way of putting it. To what extent would you say you've grown as a writer?

Interviewee: I would say that I've grown quite a lot. Just because I now recognize that writing may come easily to some people but you need to work hard at it no matter what. Otherwise, you'll be turning out papers that may be great in sentence structure, great in grammar, great in pros, but not so sound when you kind of try to dig a little bit deeper into substance and to even organization.

Interviewer: What do you attribute that growth to?

Interviewee: Practice. What I found really helpful—at least immediately—freshman year was that we would have to turn in drafts. That's something that I would never have to do in high school. At first I thought “Oh this is great, this is the easy way out” because now I can just have half baked ideas on a piece of paper. My [English course] prof really kind

of steered me away from that sort of thinking because we would have drafts do, but they would have to be just as long as the final paper. It would have to be four or five pages which to a freshman is cataclysmic.

That's really helped me in my writing process with drafting and really thinking of writing as a multi-step process. It's not something that you do all at once and then you're finished with it and then you come back to it and you think it's great. Another thing that I think helped with drafts is that kind of gives you the distance to really look at your writing. Because—like I said—it's hard to evaluate myself as a writer right now because I have no distance, but it's easier to evaluate things that I've written and what they say about me as a writer. Especially if I take a step back from them for a couple of days, a couple of weeks, things like that.

Interviewer: That makes a lot of sense. What are your goals for yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: My goal is to be able to communicate effectively with a wider group of audiences. Because writing is basically communication and I think that sometimes, even in the academic writing, we get away from that with all the lingo and transnationalization. Like all these big conglomerate words. I see—well hopefully in the future—that I'll be able to connect with a wider audience. Also, I'll be able to do so in a creative way. I think that's something that college writing doesn't always address, how to be creative in what you write.

For an English class that I have right now, she highly recommended us to use a book of templates for creating your argument—which on the surface is not creative—but what you can do with it allows you to be creative. There's that sort of failed creativity in academic writing, but I would hope that I would get the chance to explore more, writing more creatively. As in writing in different forms, writing for different audiences, writing in different ways. Connecting things in different manners.

Interviewer: Have your goals changed at all since you entered the Minor?

Interviewee: When I first entered the Minor, I thought it would be more like “How to Write” like as in how to write creatively. You know, how to write short stories and fiction and stuff like that. I quickly wised up. I think—but I stayed in the Minor because it is helpful for writing creatively, just not in the ways I expected. When I say creatively right now, I mean writing in different mediums for different people.

I think that it's a very important life skill to do and I think that it's important in kind of balancing out the more rigid structures of academic writing. Or how people perceive academic writing to be. I would say that they changed, actually to become broader, my goals and I think more realizable too, I think.

Interviewer: Now I'm going to ask you some questions about transfer, so transfer of knowledge, across sort of time and space. In thinking about your writing experiences here at the University of Michigan, what do you think it means to write well?

Interviewee: Well, I would say to be able to write well—based on my experience with writing here—means to really communicate as openly as possible the ideas that you have and their applications. That really entails quite a lot of things, I think. Which is tone, evidence, the organization of your argument, documentary sentence level, are your sentences connecting within paragraphs. Once I'm going to think that communication is key, but that entails a lot of things. There's no simple way to be a good writer. I think everyone's good at writing in different ways.

Interviewer: What do you think is the most important thing in learning how to write?

Interviewee: Practice with clarity of your ideas. Spelling doesn't even matter as long as you can tell what the words mean, I mean it's good enough. I work with elementary school students—so—writing as communication and the more you practice, the clearer your ideas will get.

Interviewer: Did you take [Writing course]?

Interviewee: No, I did not. That's the one through the Sweetland, right?

Interviewer: Um hmm.

Interviewee: Yeah, no I did not.

Interviewer: What was your first year writing requirement course? [English courses]?

Interviewee: Yeah, [English course].

Interviewer: Okay, and in your [English course] course, what did you learn that you continue to use since then?

Interviewee: I learned that the drafting process is not necessarily the easiest part. I think that for a lot of people who I've talked to [English course] seems to have been the starting point for critical analysis and things like that. I really had that happen, that kind of connect for me in late high school, but it was interesting to me that I was still kind of lacking and understanding really how writing works, how you have to sit your butt down and start typing. You have to revise, and you have to cross things out and scribble things in. I think the drafting process, really understanding how that worked and understanding that that was the start of the whole process was most important to me.

Interviewer: What kind of impact would you say that the Minor Gateway course, [...], you took last semester has had on your writing?

Interviewee: It's taught me to be more flexible when making arguments.

Interviewer: How so?

Interviewee: Well, because we had to write in different modes for different audiences. In particular—I think—what helped me most—was it the repurposing argument, or reformatting—

Interviewer: Remediation.

Interviewee: Yeah, remediation. That argument because it's taught me that the same core ideas can be transferred across to different projects and to different audiences and to different modes and to different contexts too. I think it's taught me to be more flexible because it's taught me that I can connect different audiences together. I can connect different ideas together. Through doing that I think I really have a better idea of what types of writing would be most appealing to certain groups of people.

For example, if you want to write an article about shoes for the general public you're probably not going to overload them with your scholarly tones, stuff like that. It's taught me to be more flexible when writing for different audiences and even when writing for the same audience because I can take different angles, I've realized.

Interviewer: What impact did that course have on your sense of yourself as a writer in general?

Interviewee: It's made me more confident and less confident. More confident because I recognize that flexibility that's afforded to me whenever I write pretty much anything. It's also made me a bit less complacent because mine is not the only—my way is not the only way to write. I think that being in the writing—the Writing Minor course—being around people who were just as passionate about writing as I am, really gave me a sense of community and really gave me a sense of different ways in which people were writing.

Which—once again—I found very helpful because when you're in a regular class and you're writing papers, you're writing in one, you're writing for basically one audience, or GSI [Graduate Student Instructor] or professor. You're writing in one mode, which is a scholarly paper and you're not really getting to see other people's work. You're not really getting to get the feedback—in depth feedback—I guess I would say on that.

Interviewer: You mentioned the remediation project, how would you describe your experiences using maybe your writing in general in [Writing course]?

Interviewee: Really confusing at first and kind of frustrating. I think that frustration was a good frustration because it was a productive frustration because by the end I could do a really crappy website on Google Docs. I could recognize that I had the tools to reach out to a wider group of people should I need to do that. Yeah, it was frustrating, but it was a good kind of frustrating. I think ultimately I had all the tools that I needed to do it, it was just that it pushed me outside of my comfort zone, and that's good.

Interviewer: I want to ask you about the Gateway Portfolio.

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: How would you describe your experiences in creating the Gateway Portfolio in [Writing course]?

Interviewee: It seemed rather rushed to me, simply because there was technical difficulties in getting the portfolio and archive up and running. On the other hand—it was rushed—but it was also immersive. Yeah, I don't know of any other word to describe it than immersive. Because I was kind of thrown into it, sink or swim.

I was—I found myself fine tuning. As a [...], revising some drafts as well as revising how I presented my portfolio. It was a good experience. I don't think the experience I had with it—since it was rushed—was necessarily complete, but I'm looking forward to getting more tips on how to make effective portfolios in the Capstone course.

Interviewer: How do you feel like your experience is incomplete? Do you feel like the product you—

Interviewee: Yes, definitely, because I was only able to put up a fraction of my academic writing and hardly any of my professional writing and certainly none of my creative writing, but maybe that's a good thing. Yeah, so I think the product was incomplete, and I think that the knowledge I needed to get the product—get the portfolio—to the level where I would be pleased with it. I think the information needed to do that was incomplete. I did choose Google Documents which is kind of harder to work with than most people were working with.

Interviewer: Do you mean your technical knowledge? Like your knowledge of the technology was not what you needed to get the portfolio done or was it the writing knowledge you needed or what kind of knowledge do you feel like you would need to be able to complete that.

Interviewee: I think it's more technical but I think it would be—so technical as in me not really knowing a lot about Google Docs, but also technical as in me not really knowing a whole lot about how to make a portfolio in general. As kind of a marketable product that I have that shows who I am as a writer. I think it was technical on both counts, but I think that me not really knowing how to make my portfolio the most effective to show what kind of writer I was, was more of a stumbling block than me not knowing how to do Google Docs.

Interviewer: Okay, fair enough. Since taking the Gateway course, how would you say that your writing has changed?

Interviewee: My writing process is faster than it was and possibly more complete. I think the writing that I'm doing this semester—although it's only half-way through the semester and I'm not taking a heavy semester—I think the writing that I'm doing this

semester, I'm more invested in from more of a technical standpoint. Because it's tempting to say "Okay, I'm going to write this paper and I'm going to get it done with just purely as an assignment."

After [Writing course], I'm finding more and more I'm taking a step back during my writing process when I'm stuck. I'm jotting down notes in the margin. I'm doing more interactive things as I go along, so I think that's sped up my writing process because I tend to create a draft less because I'm more engaged with the drafts that I'm creating. It's made me more invested—I think—in what I'm writing because I think I understand a little better about how I write, and the processes that I need to do to make my drafts good no matter what I writing.

Interviewer: You mentioned writing notes in the margins. I know the Minor course emphasizes reflective writing—

Interviewee: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: - what kinds of—back up. How would you describe your experience with that kind of reflected, reflection, or reflective writing?

Interviewee: As it relates to the Minor course or—

Interviewer: Sure.

Interviewee: Okay, as related to the Minor course, at first my experience, like new media writing, I was like "Oh my gosh, what is this? This is so new. I'm not sure if I like this." It really became second nature. Now I guess I do it without even thinking about it. I would say that the experience that I have with—what is it called, reflective commenting?

Interviewer: Reflective writing.

Interviewee: Reflective writing has been very positive. It's just given me another tool that I can use to create more solid thinking of when I'm writing.

Interviewer: You're still using it?

Interviewee: Yes, I am.

Interviewer: Good. Okay, so last couple of questions—

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: - are about the future. What kind of writing do you think will be most valuable for your career?

Interviewee: I'm planning on going into Museum Education—knock on wood—so I mean, looking at writing as a form of communication for a wide variety of people. For the public, whoever the public may be. I think that that will be the most valuable and I think that that will be the most globally valuable, even if I don't go into Museum Education, even if I decide to do something completely different.

I think that writing as a form of communication is the most helpful way for me to think about writing. I'm not sure. Yeah, I'm not sure that—well, I was going to say that I'm not sure that there are different types of writing, but of course there are—but, if you take a step back, all writing serves the same purpose. Really which is to communicate ideas, communicate information and hopefully do so in a non-threatening and inviting manner. Even if you don't know a whole lot about the subject on which the author is writing.

Interviewer: If you could tell your teachers one thing about writing or about how to teach writing what would you say?

Interviewee: How to teach writing? More engagement with the way that other people write because that can be very eye opening for your own writing. Because reacting even to people's writing, if you're like "Oh that piece writing is really good" or "That piece writing is really terrible" it can show you a lot of the ways because the immediate thing—at least what I do—is compare other peoples writing to my own writing and my writing to other people's writing. Because that's how I get a value system, like am I doing what's right, am I doing what's good?

Interacting with other people who write, not necessarily even writers, I think exposes you to the different ways in which writing as a mechanism can work. It's one thing to make sure you can diagram sentences and make sure that you know your subject verb agreement is all right but it's another way of getting to how people approach writing and how people view writing as being valuable and how other people engage with the writing process as well.

Interviewer: That makes a lot of sense. Do you have any other comments or suggestions for the Writing Minor?

Interviewee: Oh for the Writing Minor. More time on the portfolio, although they're already doing that, so that's—this is not necessarily helpful. No, I mean, at the time, I may have griped and whined about new media writing because I'm not the most technologically savvy person ever, but it's really helpful. It's helpful in ways that continue to be helpful which is great. I guess I don't have any suggestions right now. Yeah, I'm sure I would have at the close of the semester. Christmas break, it's getting back into a new semester.

Interviewer: Time to think about a new subject. It's fine. Well, thank you so much. [...].

Interviewee: Okay.

[End of Audio]