Interviewer: It looks like it's working. I'll just say who we are and then they'll know for future. I'm *** and I'm interviewing *** at […]. It's April 24, 2013. Wow. ***, thanks for coming over. We talked a little bit about the process, that the interview generally sort of follows three steps. We'll talk a little bit about in general how you're seeing yourself as a writer, especially right before graduation.

Interviewee: Yay.

Interviewer: We'll talk a little bit about upper level writing classes, writing you did in them. Then we'll talk specifically about the capstone course and your impressions of the writing minor. Thank you for your help. The first one's very broad, and it may sound similar to a question you were asked before which is how do you describe yourself or think of yourself as a writer now?

Interviewee: Now that I'm graduating and my academic context is kind of ending, I still see myself as a writer in an academic context, just because that's what I've always known and always has been for me. I'm not really entirely sure how writing is going to function in my post-grad place, except maybe—as far as like applications, I'll do some journaling, but nothing religiously. I principally see myself as somebody who likes to learn. I mean, I write—well and because it's assigned, but I also see that as in me getting to know something better, or more deeply. I also write just—I mean, with notes and everything, and the way I learn is taking something off the screen and writing it down physically. That for me is the learning process.

Interviewer: Thinking of reading, like if you have an assigned reading or—

Interviewee: Right, I will recopy my notes down by hand, 'cause I need to write it. That's—something in that physical process of doing that commits it to memory for me. As far as how I see myself as a writer, just really to learn and in an academic context.

Interviewer: That's interesting. This next question I think follows from that and it's how would you describe yourself as a writer when you first came to [University of Michigan]?

Interviewee: As a freshman?

Interviewer: Yeah, can you remember back? [Chuckles]

Interviewee: I think I probably thought I was a lot better writer than I probably am, just because I was coming from a really tiny high school. I was a good writer there. The most extensive writing I'd ever done in high school was one research paper. Coming off that, I thought I was great. I—I don't know, I mean I guess I thought I was a good writer. I've never really been in—like I've never really done fiction or anything like that, or just writing for kicks. I don't know.

I guess I didn't think writing was probably as important as I do now, when I came into college. Just because I thought I was good enough at it and I was like, "I don't really see

the point," as far as even approaching subjects from a writing point of view, and as a point of it like I do now. I think I probably just thought writing was less important and I didn't really define myself as a writer because of that.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm, are there other ways that you think that your conception of yourself as a writer have changed over these—has it been four years?

Interviewee: Yes, yeah. I definitely—I mean, to be honest, I really hate writing, like I hate doing it because it's very much—really a long process.

Interviewer: I understand.

Interviewee: Because of that, I don't really seek to do it if I don't have to do it. The thing is when I'm done with it, I'm really glad—I'm proud of what happened with it. I think before I just kept seeing writing as a thing, like that was it. It was like you get an assignment, I need you to go through this long, horrible process and edit it, and duh, duh, duh. Then you get this one thing when you're done. I think my conception of writing has changed over four years is that I don't see writing as just that singular thing anymore. I see writing with taking notes, like the act of writing at all for me, like I see that as part of a learning process and I was exposed to different genres of writing than in high school.

I never even—like writing the science versus the humanities, I didn't even know that dichotomy existed. Getting to see that, I think, changed how I thought about writing. I guess, too, with the new media issues, I mean I think it's easier to not—to just assume it is considered writing, you know as far as blogging and all that kind of stuff. Just—I think too, the more I've read, the more I have a very, very low tolerance for bad writing. I think also through college you've developed that critical reading standpoint too, then it's a lot easier for me to be like, "Well, the argument kinda breaks down here," kind of thing, or something like that. I guess more than anything, the process has changed my perception of writing, not so much me as a writer. I also think it's a lot more important than I think I originally did coming into college when I was doing my DSP [Directed Self Placement] essay being like, "This is the worst thing ever."

Interviewer: [Laughter] Those are all really interesting ideas. As you're graduating, do you have goals still for yourself as a writer? I know you started by talking a bit about you're not quite sure what the role will be.

Interviewee: Right. I mean I would like to—especially if I'm—I'm gonna be in the healthcare field in some capacity, is my goal. I do think writing is essential for communication. I think it transfers to how you orally communicate as well. I think that's very important. I also—I think as far as like disseminating information in any capacity, I think writing is very, very important and knowing—especially from like a healthcare standpoint, I would like to go to work—I mean, I come from a very rural area.

I'd like to go back and work there, and knowing your audiences as far as that kind of stuff, and I think that's where writing's also very important is that if you wanna

disseminate this information, or you think it's something people should know when they don't know, that you need to find a way to communicate that to them. I think that's how writing, I think, will probably function for me post-grad and in my professional career.

Interviewer: That makes sense. The next set of questions address upper-level writing you did, but not thinking about the capstone course just yet or the writing minor. The first question is essentially just kind of a warm-up. Thinking about your writing experiences here, what do you think it means to write well now that you're on your way out?

Interviewee: [Laughter] I don't know, 'cause it's weird because when I read bad writing I know it's bad, when I read good writing, I know it's good. It just has this like X factor. It's weird too because I feel like people fairly universally agreed on what good writing is, but it's just like it's a—I don't know. I mean, there's like—there's like the mechanics thing that—sentence variation and all of that. Good gravy. I don't know.

Interviewer: What is interesting is I felt like you were talking a bit about this just a moment ago when you were saying you were becoming a more critical reader, noticing when the argument breaks down, when things start to like, "Uh."

Interviewee: Yeah, it is—I guess—I'm trying to think of a couple pieces that I think are very good. I think it's more things that are conversational, not in that they're necessarily informal, but that you feel like it's—for however this sounds, kind of speaking to you, that you can—or that it brings up points like you were thinking about, or addresses issues that you're like, "Oh, well I would've come up with that," or—I think well-rounded, I think, makes good writing. I think writing that is not too reactive and one-sided I think makes good writing. I don't know. It really—I don't know really how to quantify it.

Interviewer: When you began you said, "When I read bad writing I know it's bad."

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Are there things that—I guess it's sort of the flip of that question, right, like what will stop you in your tracks?

Interviewee: Well, I guess I mean one thing is not addressing opposing viewpoints really—that tends to weaken the argument for me, even if the argument is a good argument, just not addressing it. I don't think that is—makes for good writing. I still really don't know. Sorry, like I don't know how to—I could try to think of the things I don't like.

Interviewer: Well, actually—

Interviewee: Yeah, maybe I'll come up with something as we go through.

Interviewer: I was gonna say, as we're talking, if we circle back to this, that's fine.

Interviewee: I think too—like there's different kinds of writing, [inaudible 00:09:36], I love his writing, however I would never produce his writing and I wouldn't—I would've never read his writing either if it hadn't been for class. He's a very different kind of writing. Whereas a lot of science writers, that are like—like Rebecca Skloot who wrote The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks or like Mary Roach with like the Stiff book. Those are very different kinds of writing than I'd like, but I consider—well, I guess well researched writing, too.

I respect writing that's well-researched. Maybe that's what it comes down to it's the different viewpoints and the well-researched that I feel like they're very, very comfortable in what their subject matter is. I think more so than—I don't really respect things like blogs so much where it's like they saw something and then they reacted to it. I don't really give that much weight as far as when I read it. I can come up with that opinion or not that opinion in the same amount of time you did. I guess well researched and competency, that's what I—

Interviewer: That makes sense.

Interviewee: - value more.

Interviewer: Have you taken upper level writing courses outside of the minor?

Interviewee: Yeah, I took—well I took [English courses]. I know [upper level English course] didn't really count. Then I took [Kinesiology course], which in my major is an upper level writing class, which was scientific writing.

Interviewer: Okay. Your concentration is?

Interviewee: I'm in the school of kinesiology.

Interviewer: In kinesiology, okay, great. Can you talk just a bit about your experiences in [upper level English course], in the—and that's the [title of course] class.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Also in the science class.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm. In [upper level English course], that was—so I'd just been coming off of a very, very, very science heavy semester, where I didn't write at all. I did no papers. I've gone like years without writing papers because it's just not—you don't have to. I was getting back into this and I was like, "Oh my gosh, this is going to be like totally—I'm not going to be able to do this." It was a very, very hard switch. It was just like I never had to really analyze anything, just to memorize in science.

I mean, there's some extent of analysis, but my brain was just not ready for that switch. I got into [upper level English course] and my instructor was [instructor], and [instructor]

is like this hobo looking man. I was like, "Oh gosh, he's gonna be like way too esoteric for me. I'm just gonna—this is all gonna be way over my head." Yes, [instructor] definitely was way too esoteric for me, but he's way too esoteric for everybody in the class and he knows that though. He ended up being like one of my favorite teachers I have ever had. He is very—like he definitely challenged everybody in the class to produce good writing.

He took us through—he had a very structured class. He's like, "I've done it the same way for however many years. I'm not doing it any differently." I was like, "All right, the [inaudible 00:12:35]." He took us like—he would read pieces and then we would try to find the bark of the story. He'd make everybody outline it individually and then we'd outline it as a class. I don't really read between the lines too much when I read something. At first, I was just kind of reading these—reading these at face value kind of thing. You're like, "Okay, it's about whatever—a tree," and then it ends up being about life and death or something, which I would never get the first time around. It's like—not that he just told us that, he let us come around to our own point. We kind of figured it out ourselves just through him being like, "Well, what about this? What about this?" kind of thing and talking about it.

Eventually at the end of the class—or the chalkboard in the class—yes, we had a chalkboard, would be like full of the bullet points we made on the timeline for this piece and everything. You're like, "Oh, that's what he was trying to get at." As the semester progressed, I mean I could see myself finally being like, "Okay, this isn't just at face value. This is meant to be this sort of thing." It kind of—he paralleled our writing assignments also to that so that we would have to start writing more metaphorically too by the end. I remember him saying specifically, he's like, "If you got A's on other papers, you're a good college writer." He's like, "If you get an A on this last paper, then you're a real writer." I was like, "Challenge accepted [instructor]."

It was one of my favorite classes because it really challenged my way of thinking that has more been ingrained just from being in science classes so much. It just really forced some of what I've had in my brain to work, which is good for me.

Interviewer: Did you feel like it also had an effect on your writing? I know you're talked a bit about the reading process and seeing the moves.

Interviewee: Yeah, I mean it did for that kind of writing. I got an A on the last paper, so that was—that made me really, really happy. Yeah, it definitely—it challenged—yeah, because I—again, I'll—actually I'll talk about the [Kinesiology] class, where it was just this very dry, pared down writing, where every word is contributing to the act of what you're talking about, and to this more kinda like flowy sort of prose kind of writing. It's so—in that regard, yeah, I definitely developed that. Unfortunately, that kind of writing is not—I'm not really asked to do that.

I'm not going to really write it. I enjoy writing it, like it was fun and it was challenging, and I put a lot of work in that. That's a piece I ended up putting in my portfolio, so the

most—as far as like a drafting, and editing, and thinking, and changing ideas, and the drafts all looking completely different, like that piece was the most like that. Yeah, it definitely did. I just—I mean, I don't wanna sound bad, but just that writing sample isn't really applicable to my major, or concentration, or developing it necessarily. Yeah.

Interviewer: What about the science writing class?

Interviewee: Yeah, so that one—actually I took it as a freshman. This is the first time; there was only five of us in there. We had a really great professors who'd come from Johns Hopkins and was really very legit. She taught us how to read the scientific journal articles, like the IMRAD [Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion] structure, which was vitally important the rest of my college career. It's like I had never been sat down and told, "It's always gonna be like this. This is how—they're always gonna—" and you could see, it's just like unlike the [upper level English course], there's phrases that are used all over, like they're over and over again. Like, "Taken together, these results indicate that—" like just repetitive.

It's always—the structure is very—it's a template and you fill it in kind of thing. Just like if you can say something in three words, say it in one, just a very, very dry version of writing. I never quite—I mean, even those kinds of papers too—like there's something—there's still bad writing in that, and there's still good writing in that. It's much more subtle differences as far as like that's a lot more sentence structure kind of issues because the voice isn't so much an option in those kinds of papers. That definitely taught me how to write for that genre very specifically.

I tend to be—like my writing tends to lean towards that anyways, as far as not being—like I don't really deeply analyze things unless I'm really, really forced to kind of thing. Or my writing's kind of like a little drier and shorter anyways, so it kind of lends itself to that side of it anyways. That, for me, carried through four years because it's more applicable, as far as writing papers, and lab reports, and things like that. That still definitely got developed a lot more than what I learned in [upper level English course].

Interviewer: It's interesting that you still took the [upper level English course] class, that you sort of pushed yourself to—

Interviewee: Yeah, I wanted to. I just like getting—I just feel like I could get kinda like landlocked in this mode of memorizing, and this very, very also micro world. Whereas writing, I think it forces you to be more of a macroscopic perspective on things.

Interviewer: Good. The question is whether you took writing courses in your concentration, and it sounds like the science writing class would apply.

Interviewee: Yeah, that was the only one I took in my concentration. It was the only one offered.

Interviewer: Okay. Were there any other sort of writing classes that we haven't touched upon?

Interviewee: I mean, I only took [English courses]—

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: - and then the minor classes.

Interviewer: Okay, okay. The question is still about—thinking about writing in your concentration, sort of how you used what you learned from some of those writing classes, in terms of what use you found it in your concentration. You were just starting to talk about that—a bit about obviously taking that science writing class so early.

Interviewee: Yeah, how I used that through the rest of my—

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Yeah, so—and that was the only kind of writing I ever had to do. As far as that, reading journal articles, I had to know how to read those.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: I also took a mini course through the library about the digital research or whatever, of how to find stuff. Stuff like that was very applicable. Then I was really just—I mean, as far like if I had to write a paper in the structure of IMRAD, then that was it. That's what I was gonna do. If I had to analyze a journal article or suggest future studies, or something like that from it, I mean what I did get better at was reading it more critically, as far as being like, "Well, did that test—was that really not biased? Did they really consider all the options here? Did they really go back—like this has already been done somewhere else," kind of thing.

Just as far as reading them, I don't know that it necessarily, as far as writing—because it is a fairly uniform process of writing. Like for this, for scientific writing, it was just more of being able to read them at all. A lot of people get bogged down and mired down and a methods section is really dense, kind of thing. Even that, like I'm reading—I'm also only reading science journal articles, too. I'm not reading social sciences, or anything else. I've been very specifically reading that. It was important in that it helped me to know how to write papers, and I knew how to research, and I knew how to read them. It made writing them fairly easy. I know a lot of people who didn't know how to read the articles had a really hard time writing the papers.

Interviewer: That's interesting.

Interviewee: I guess it was just like as far as I knew how to read, so I could do the writing.

Interviewer: Do you anticipate that that sort of science writing will be something that you are using or reproducing in your professional life?

Interviewee: I would—yeah, I would think so, especially because I know there's not really—I do know there is some kind of a clearing house for the medical community, as far as like all these research papers kind of get shuttled through there. They synthesize it for the medical professionals so they can be like, "Here," 'cause you don't have time to read all of these things, like, "This is what you need to know," kind of thing. Yes, I think that's important too.

Also, just as far as a lot of the other stuff that's out there—as far as—I'm doing kinesiology, so like weight loss and obesity is a big thing for us. Just as far as a lot of the information that's out there about that kind of stuff, that being able to sift through that and produce stuff that's more scientifically based, and also accessible for people who are trying to read it, kind of thing. Yeah, I mean I think—I really don't know how else I would use it besides just applying it to journal articles, those will be coming out forever. [Laughter]

Interviewer: Right, they're not going anywhere. The last question in this section is about whether you've used skills from any of the writing classes in any of your other courses. You've been talking about that in terms of your science concentration. Are there any—I don't know how—in what other ways you might have had course work outside of that area? Are there any other examples that we should think of there?

Interviewee: I really just take science courses, and then when I decided to, I take the English courses. I haven't really done any soc [Sociology] or anthro [Anthropology], or anything like that. I took a couple psych [Psychology] classes and those papers were fairly—like in the right structure kind of thing.

Interviewer: It was more following the template from the science writing class?

Interviewee: Yeah. I've just think—I've had a really science heavy like [inaudible 00:23:03].

Interviewer: That's fine. I just want to make sure we weren't leaving out some other angle that we hadn't thought of. The next section is about your work in the writing minor and especially the capstone course. Did you just complete that this semester?

Interviewee: Yep, PowerPoints are due Thursday.

Interviewer: [Laughter] Oh, okay. The question is what impact has the capstone course had on your writing do you think at this point?

Interviewee: Unfortunately, none.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: I feel like the minor's gonna look completely different in like five years from now.

Interviewer: Yeah, some of the questions at the very end are about sort of the minor generally, but it's interesting to hear your thoughts on it, thinking about that course.

Interviewee: I don't feel like what you had to do in the capstone course necessarily made me a better or worse writer, I just don't feel like it really did anything. I don't—I mean—and this is—I mean, I had a talk with this lady, but it's kind of more as a result of just like the general structure of the course and not—I don't know. I just—I don't think we were asked to write enough.

Interviewer: How interesting.

Interviewee: Then I don't think it was enforced if you did or didn't. Then, I don't know, I guess it just wasn't really what I had expected it was going to be kind of thing.

Interviewer: That's interesting. What were your expectations?

Interviewee: I think I was just expecting it to be just more writing in general. I get the—I get the ideas that they had behind this course, and I think in theory it was very—they were good ideas, like it seemed sound, but in practice I just don't think it worked.

Interviewer: That's very interesting.

Interviewee: I think we should—I think—one of the things, this is just like specific, but—

Interviewer: This is really helpful.

Interviewee: - you need hard deadlines, like especially second semester seniors really have to have hard deadline because the only thing—and as we should start earlier. The reality is—and one of the things is just getting this group of kids together that are like—we're all fairly decent writers and so we know we can get away with it kind of thing. We've always gotten away with it. We're like, "Well, what's gonna change now," sort of thing. When the deadlines are floating, it's like we'll just keep letting our work flow until we hit a brick wall and then we'll start doing it.

Yes, ideally, no we should not, but—the thing is too, I think it would also help to hold us to a higher standard, too. Is that—I mean, I think a lot of people went into writing to be challenged a little bit more than I think we necessarily were. It was not intrinsically motivated. If he had set those hard deadlines, then—and forced writing out of us more, at more intervals than just the two or one that we had, and then that writing got produced really fast in a really short time. I think it would have been a little bit more productive.

Interviewer: That's interesting. Was there anything about the course that maybe shifted your thinking about yourself as a writer, if the work itself didn't necessarily live up to what you anticipated?

Interviewee: Nope. I don't know, it was kind of hard because what happened with our class is we—in the beginning we had these reading assignments, there was just a blog about, and then we were supposed to be working on a portfolio, and the stuff for this capstone project. Two weeks in, we basically are like, "We can't do all three of them. Something's gonna go and it's gonna be the reading." I mean, you can keep doing it, but—there's just a lot of metacognition that goes on in this class. It was a lot of talking about what should be, what could be, what can't be. Basically we were saying, "Reading's gonna fall to the wayside and we're gonna have these discussions in class where nobody had done the reading." In dropping the reading assignments out of it, it also dropped out the sense of community in the class. We didn't come together and talk about anything anymore.

Interviewer: That's like a common test [cross talk 00:27:55].

Interviewee: Right, so then everybody was just working on their own things. We had peer editing groups and you know how peer editing groups go. Sometimes they're good, sometimes they're not. [Inaudible 00:28:07] kind of things was hit and miss. Then it was just kind of hard to even break up those because everybody's projects were self-designed. Everybody's projects were very different, and not just in topic, but it was how it was done at all. Like we had a kid do a screen play. We had one girl do several short stories. We had more traditional academic papers. Then there was fiction stories. Even that—

Interviewer: That is kind of hard.

Interviewee: You're like, "I don't know what to do with yours. You don't know what to do with mine."

Interviewer: Right, no I can understand that.

Interviewee: Yeah. Then just as far as people sometimes did or did not reciprocate on editing. It didn't really—I guess the only thing as far as like as a writer is like I guess in the real world you have to have real deadlines, but you also have to be a little self-starting and write it not the night before. It's like, "Well, that's not happening for me, so—" or a lot of us.

Interviewer: I understand.

Interviewee: That's probably something you have to learn the hard way yourselves eventually. I didn't really—no, I just kinda went through it.

Interviewer: This is enormously useful feedback. You brought up the capstone project and I was interested to hear a bit about what you chose for the project and also—the question is about what effect creating that project might have had on you as a writer.

Interviewee: Yeah, so I—my project was about autism and so how autism—so there's all this research about it's on the rise and that it's this urgent public health issue. […].

Which right off the bat, I was like—because I had all of these resources, and I knew about all of these studies, and I knew about all these news bites and sounds bites. I'd heard about it. I had the CDC [Center for Disease Control] report that came out that sparked all of this. I had a ton of information. Then the issue became—like my scope was just too wide. I couldn't—I was like, "What am I supposed to do with all of this?" It was just one of those things where I was like—I had all this information and I just froze. I was like, "I don't know what to do with it." It just kinda sat there. I just kept researching, 'cause I like to research. I didn't wanna synthesize and make it a coherent paper.

I should've been, "Oh my gosh, I know all these things," and talk everybody's ear off about it, but not necessarily do anything to do with it. The issue quickly became that my focus was not narrow enough and I had no idea how to put it into a paper. As far as that and how I saw myself as a writer, I mean this was a very real world experience. I feel like this project was like picking something and getting all this information and then being like, "Okay, well now what are you gonna do with it?"

Interviewer: That's really true.

Interviewee: I found it was very hard to find out something to do with it and it was very hard to find a structure that worked and—work and then I'd write it and then be like, "This isn't it," and scrap that and like, "This isn't it." Just kind of being like, "Okay, well I don't have any more time, so this is gonna be it." [Laughter] I also write very linearly as far as I like intro, dot, dot. When I couldn't get my intro to work, I was like, "Oh no, you still have to write the rest of it and you're just sticking—sitting on the intro here." I guess, I mean it definitely—as far as with being a writer or how it changed like that, I guess it was just how to make the paper happen and I just really, really, really struggled with that. It never really did get—

Interviewer: I was gonna say, how do you feel in the end?

Interviewee: It was a mediocre piece of work. It was—one, I didn't get it edited the way I wanted it to. I didn't get the feedback that I wanted. Just—I think that was just part of the class issue, but also the stuff that I'd brought to have edited before I never—I didn't use any of it, [cross talk 00:33:19] entirely. I was like—but it was past that.

Interviewer: Past that moment.

Interviewee: Yeah, so it was like—no. There's potential there for it to be like—it could have been something else than what I let it become. Yeah, it was—I mean it was finished and I mean it's competent, but it's not very good. It could've been a lot better than it was.

Interviewer: No, I understand. I think that's a real challenge that many, many writers face, students or otherwise, that the topic—like finding your slice of the topic. I think sometimes when you're—it's more difficult the more interested you are, right?

Interviewee: Yeah, right and just like the more information and like—'cause it's so easy to be like—like in my mind to make—to think, "Oh, well this brings up this issue, which brings up this issue," and then it kind of just spirals out of control. I'm like, "Oh my gosh, [cross talk 00:34:17].

Interviewer: [Laughter] Right, where are we headed here?

Interviewee: Bring it back here, 'cause it's just like there's so many avenues to go with it and the thing is to is like—I mean, I've grown up with it, so I—my basis and experiences on it are fairly—like more substantial than the average person that I would talk to about it. That was the issue with the editing that I needed, because it was like I could've just steamrolled through this and been like—the DSN is a common—[…]—so it's like, "Then the DSN five came out and then that changed everything about autism, or how they defined it," just like, I didn't know how much to do with that or like anything with what autism used to be.

[…]. It's like—and I also kinda wanted my paper to be looking forward this way so you know how much to go back here with it. It's like people need a context kind of thing.

Interviewer: Was it difficult to figure out audience? Was that maybe part of it? The things you're talking about, for different audiences, that kind of background information would vary, sure.

Interviewee: Yeah, 'cause I wasn't really—not really sure who I was writing to either. I mean I said in the beginning it'd just be like a science writing piece, like maybe in a knack somewhere of littler higher than Time but not The Atlantic. Yeah, so I—yeah, that was probably a little difficult too. Then just—the reality being, it's like, "[Instructor's] gonna read it," so I—my instructor, so just that issue as far as being really—but in reality, then you have people editing it. Of course the feedback I got from them I would incorporate, so then it kind of morphed the audience no matter what and who was my—like immediately there.

Interviewer: Right, that's interesting. The next set of questions are about the portfolio that was also part the capstone. We wanted to see if you could find it on—

Interviewee: Yeah.

[…]

Interviewer: What are the pictures?

Interviewee: These are actually all my one except this one. […].

Interviewer: Perfect, spring, summer, fall, and winter. I like that.

Interviewee: Yeah, it's my four—my four years.

Interviewer: Oh, I love that. Yeah, I love it. It's not like you're in winter now though.

Interviewee: Right. Winter's my favorite season though. As far as like the composition of the portfolio?

Interviewer: Yeah, so the question is really just as you look at this now, as you might look back on it even a few months from now, what do you think will stand out about the most memorable aspects of creating this?

Interviewee: I think actually probably the—I don't know what they call this part. The intro essay or whatever.

Interviewer: Sure—and I'm just gonna sort of narrate for—in case people are wondering what we're looking at when they listen to this later. We're just looking at your landing page, or your homepage. What was the assignment for?

Interviewee: Yeah, so I can do that a little better. We had been asked to make—to write just an intro essay that would sit on the homepage and just tell what you want the reader—the experience you want the reader to have as far as your writing development. What was your theme that tied all these very separate pieces together? What did you try to make the connecting theme between all of those? I think this is the most significant thing for me because it really kind of encapsulated what I do like about writing, which is discovering something I didn't really know I was thinking just from the process of writing it. I thought I was—writing is important to me blah, blah, blah, because whatever.

I'm writing it along and I'm like, "This is kind of superficial," which is what they told us purposely to avoid. I was like, "I'm really not saying anything constructive right now." I kinda just like kept writing and I was like—it just eventually came around to me as I was writing. I was like, "I write because I learn." Then it—through that, I want to write so other people can learn. I was like that's why—that's what drives and motivates me to write. That kind of—it's kind of cool because that came out of me just writing this essay here, and it kind of forced me to—I say this in the essay, but that it forced me to assess my college career through writing, specifically through that lens specifically, which is something I wouldn't have done.

It was interesting too because it's really my learning style. I think about that even now. I only have science exams left, but I take notes on the computer and then I sit there and

copy it all down. Not even copying it, but reading it and then writing it my way. It's a very integral part of how I learn. I mean, that's—this is the part I love about writing is finding this viewpoint that I didn't set out to find, but then it kinda just happened because I was writing. Then I guess the other part would be trying to find a way to make all of these requirements fit together.

Interviewer: One of the questions here is whether you noticed any relationship between the artifacts that you used to create the portfolio—was artifacts one of the—part of the language you used in structuring it?

Interviewee: Yeah, so I was just—yeah the—any of the pieces you included was an artifact. I forced a relationship out of them because we had to. I don't know that it's a very solid one. What I think happened with mine is that it's just—there's just two layers to it. There's what was required and then there's what I was writing about what was required. The theme I used to try to tie that together was this discover, learn, discern, kind of thing.

I used discover as my freshman year, coming in discovering different genres of writing, different topics, different ways to write, good writing, bad writing. I kind of wrote a very different essay—like we had to—everything we had to include. The DSP [Directed Self Placement] essay we had to include—and we were given that piece by Malcolm Gladwell. I just talked about—as far as discovery that I didn't with that piece, because I just wrote my side of it. I don't even think I followed the prompts, to be honest. I think the prompt was to analyze the argument and I definitely took a stand on it, so I don't think I even did what they told me to do. Just as far as not being very inclusionary as far as my viewpoints here.

My [English course] I wrote about viral—not viral, but online education, online high schools. It was a new topic for me to write about. Then that the concentration writing was my scientific writing. That was a whole new topic. Then I tried to do this learn theme here with sophomore and junior year, as far as this was just more about amassing knowledge, refining, learning how to read critically, think critically. I try to tie that in here with [higher level English course], because that was a very heavy emphasis on rhetoric and reading critically. Then the gateway course for writing, where we had to repurpose—sort of learning about writing specifically for audiences. Then my upper level writing class, learning as far as that being [upper level English course], like totally having to change how my brain was working at the time. Then the lab report, 'cause we had to have multi-modal. This was my—

Interviewer: Okay, the lab report is representing this, great.

Interviewee: Then discerning was—

Interviewer: Was it from an actual lab work?

Interviewee: Yeah, so it was my motor control class. This was a particularly writing intense one, where we had to—I mean all of our lab reports had to be a formal write up, as far as intro, methods, results, discussion. Then this one, there was like three or four modules to each lab report. The last module one, this one, was also to find a scientific journal article that was related to what we were doing and to analyze why that patient was [cross talk 00:43:26] with those things. This was a really writing heavy lab report.

Motor control and kinesiology tends to emphasize writing a lot more than the other fillers. Then discern, I tried to do as kind of a culmination of four years and just being—I have discern on here as defined as perceiving by some other sense or by the intellect, so just kind of using what I've learned and discovered the past couple of year to kind of discern the stories or discern what to write about, just out of my surroundings.

Interviewer: Again, just to sort of reinforce for anybody who's using this later that's not looking at it, so you have—if you can scroll up just again to make sure I'm—so the title of the whole portfolio is [title of portfolio]. As you're describing this, this is essentially tracing the four years, right?

Interviewee: Yeah. Again, everything I said, I feel like there was—I worked hard to make that—I don't even know how well I accomplished this in writing about it, see if I can say it better than I write it. What I felt like when I was doing the portfolio was that like I'd come up with this relationship and think it applies to my writing, but then the pieces I had to include for the requirements for the portfolio weren't necessarily representative of what I was trying to say. Just that I felt like there was this competition between me trying to meet their portfolio requirements and not make it hard for the graders, but also trying to—not just be like, "Here are my requirements for the minor writing portfolio." Try to like put this story—graphed this story onto it, it was just like surgery.

It was not—it was just—they weren't—they were just competing with each other. They weren't—like again, I would—I think just too it was just kind of—the requirements to me were kind of—I guess I'm not really sure what they want the portfolio to do. I know they say your writing development, so I see that as far as having your DSP essay up to this capstone project. I think what a lot of us in the class thought was, "Well, we only wanna put our good writing on there."

We didn't know why we had to put this DSP essay on here. I used contractions every other word. I think there was just that kind of thing too, was like I think we got the writing development thing. I don't know, but I guess just the portfolio was a very formal thing, and the fact that it's online and everything else. It's like, "Well, now I have this really crappy writing out there." It's like—I don't know, I think people were just—kind of wanted good writing on there.

Interviewer: Will that affect how you use this? Will you use this?

Interviewee: Yeah, probably no. Again, this is just—I'm not applying for anything in communications or—

Interviewer: Where it would be a natural thing to draw attention to.

Interviewee: Right, like I know a girl—a girl in my class did. She's in communications and is applying to a PR job and did use this over the summer. Just what I'm doing in healthcare, I don't feel like this is ever gonna—if it does, I'd use it, but I just don't think it's ever gonna come up.

Interviewer: If you had not had the requirement to include that earlier work or—what sort of relationship would you have liked to have drawn if it had been choose the pieces you just think the most of or found the most interesting?

Interviewee: I think—honestly, I think I probably would have drawn the same relationship—

Interviewer: About growth over time.

Interviewee: Yeah, I just think I wouldn't have used these pieces.

Interviewer: Okay, okay.

Interviewee: The thing is—it's like I actually have a lot more writing than I think—than I thought. Just—especially because they say your lab reports, and your drafts, and this, and that, and it's like—and I need stuff I've applied for. I mean, I have stuff from internships and stuff from studying abroad. I have a lot of writing and I just think—because when I'm like—they're like, writing, I think of [upper level English course] and this first, but I actually have a fairly substantial amount. As far as that kind of stuff, I would've liked—I probably would've included that a little bit more. Stuff I've applied to for—cover letters for other things, or essays I had to write for, or whatever else.

Interviewer: Sure, that's interesting. Is there anything about the design aspect that you would wanna draw attention to? They were interested here in whether you had been intending to create any sort of particular reader experience or just kind of the experience of working with the technology.

Interviewee: I mean, I'm not very technology savvy, so this is a template. I used—I didn't WordPress [content management system] this time because I don't like WordPress personally. It just looks more bloggish to me.

Interviewer: What is this?

Interviewee: This is Weebly [website creator].

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewer: Just drag and drop, which is pretty cool. I mean really the only conscious decision that was made here was I really like clean—I like white space. I mean that was it as far as—and I don't actually really like text heavy stuff, but it's really hard to avoid text heavy in this portfolio. It is very text heavy, just 'cause you have to reflect on everything. Yeah, I mean mine's—the white space is probably about—

Interviewer: Then each page has some photograph that—and the idea is that it's sort of reflective of the idea—

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah, [instructor] told me it had to be purposeful pictures. Even if they're not immediately purposeful, they were specifically chosen. I mean and then I just kept the layout consistent, as far as the landing pages for my—each year of school all have a layout with a picture, and this [title of portfolio] text. Then inside, they all have the same layout like this. They're—

Interviewer: Thinking about the project overall and how it did ultimately come together, the question is do you think creating this has had an effect on your writing? There's a follow-up question about the reflective piece of it, but starting first just thinking about the process of this.

Interviewee: I don't think it affected my writing. I think it had an effect on how I value writing, or how I think about writing, or why I write, I guess.

Interviewer: Getting back to the idea you developed in the first essay?

Interviewee: Right, yeah that—not even that I developed in the first essay, because I didn't—you mean the Why I Write in the gateway?

Interviewer: No—

Interviewee: Oh, on this.

Interviewer: On your homepage here, yeah.

Interviewee: Oh, yeah, yeah. It did—yeah. I don't think it changed—not necessarily how I write at all or how I think of myself as a writer. Well, I guess in context of it, it did change why, but no, I don't think it did. I mean 'cause it did force you to draw a connection out of these pieces and analyze it in that way. I guess that was kind of something. No, not necessarily. It was a lot of reflective writing, which I'm not a super big fan of. I know Sweetland is.

Interviewer: The next question is about reflective writing. The question is what did you learn from the reflective writing in the portfolio, both the evidence based essay and contextual reflections?

Interviewee: The same thing, about why I write. I don't know. The reflection—maybe I've never used them right. [Shuffling papers distorts voices 00:51:32] use them, but I don't see the point. I don't know. I just—it just feels very like beating a dead horse to me, kind of thing. Like—and maybe this is—and maybe in other classes it would've been more helpful, but in the minor in writing class, I feel like we reflect so much anyways, like verbally. Verbally, verbally in class, then we have to meet with [instructor], we're reflecting on it. I just don't—by this stage of the game, I have nothing else to say about these anymore. You can kind of see my portfolio wanes too as I get towards senior year. These get shorter and shorter and shorter, because I've run out of things to say about them. I get there's a lot of like thought behind the reflective process or research behind it, but I just—for me personally, I don't know that it really makes a difference.

Interviewer: That's interesting. The last few questions are more general about the writing minor. As you know, it is relatively new still, so this kind of feedback I think is gonna be enormously useful to them to thinking about what it can be, what it should be, what's working, what's not. The first one is connected to the portfolio still. If folks at Sweetland are looking at your portfolio along with other student portfolios, what do you think they can see about writing development from these projects?

Interviewee: Well, I guess I mean because everybody is trying to tell the story of writing development, I guess they can hopefully see some progression there. Whether they see it or not, or whether even I see it or not in my writing—I'm not really sure. I guess too, what has also happened for me as far as writing is that I see a lot more just like the genres of writing and I can't compare them because they're just too different for me. I can't see—when you're comparing writing like the DSP essay to my lit review, like I just—there's no point to me. I think that's kind of the issue that I—the [inaudible 00:54:05] drawn in my mind as far as these—they're not related 'cause they're not in the same field kind of thing.

Interviewer: Right, that the development might have been more clear within one genre, one aspect of your work.

Interviewee: Right, which—and that line might not be as hard for other people, but it is for me. I don't know, I mean I guess—I mean too, it's also—my case, I just haven't—when I would do writing, it was just like these pockets of class. I never consistently wrote over four years kind of thing. I feel like it might be kind of hard, and I don't think my writing stagnated necessarily and goes years when I was like—like sophomore year, I don't know if I wrote anything, a psych paper. I just—it became something else.

Honestly, after I took the scientific writing class, I was just like, "This is—that's just what I'm gonna be writing." Then the [upper level English course], which is kind of like a—almost like a break in there for that. Then it was just like going back to this. I don't know. I mean, I think my writing has changed specifically and that with this hopefully they can see—just in like the topics that I chose to write about and as far as being more critical reading research and including—I guess making better arguments too in my writing, that hopefully that's become a more developed and refined process versus freshman year my DSP essay, when I don't know what I did. I don't know.

I don't know if this is like the best platform—I don't have this alternative platform to suggest, but I don't know. I feel like too with these portfolios and it being on the internet, you can't take away the aesthetic aspect of it. I know you have to like—I don't know, I just also too like—I think it's—there's just so much text. Something like this, like on the internet or portfolio, I don't feel like people get on the internet to read the text heavy things. I don't know. I just feel like there's a lot of competing goals with this thing and that basically I don't have any suggestions for what to do about it.

Interviewer: No, I can understand that. I think you raise really useful points. Just a couple of other questions, they wanna make sure they cover everything before you can—you get out the door here. Thinking back now to the gateway course, which you took when you were a junior or a sophomore?

Interviewee: Junior.

Interviewer: Junior. They were interested in hearing a bit about how you thought the experience in that course compared to the capstone course.

Interviewee: When I was done with the gateway, that was also a class where it was very much like this metacognition again too about the mechanics of the course. I thought we wasted a lot of time talking about stuff that should've been set in stone already.

Interviewer: About how the course was going to be structured?

Interviewee: Yes. I don't think we had a grading scale set until the last week. That kind of stuff I thought was kind of a waste of time. That being said, compared to the [Writing course], we did a lot more in the [lower level Writing] class.

Interviewer: Oh, interesting.

Interviewee: We repurposed a paper. We remediated a paper. We got our first draft in this portfolio done. Somehow out of what seemed like in class every day us not doing anything because we were having these discussions about what should we do? What shouldn't we do? What about this? We still got a lot done. We also went through some reading. We also did that Why I Write piece. Relative to the [Writing course], where we didn't have those discussions as much, but I don't feel like I did anything. I did this—I did the portfolio and I did the capstone project.

I don't know, they just don't—I know those are two substantial things, and this might just be a personal thing, but I feel like I did more in the [lower level Writing course] because I had more things. I don't feel like those were any less substantial than these two bigger things. I don't know, in the [Writing course], I just—somehow I just don't feel like—I don't feel like anything was done. I don't—I just—I know from the other class, and we had this point system where we needed 2900 points to get an A. We had these workdays where—I mean there was an hour and a half to do something.

Interviewer: Is this talking about the gateway course?

Interviewee: This is the [Writing course] level course.

Interviewer: Oh, in [Writing course] you would have workdays, okay.

Interviewee: Yeah. In the [Writing course] course, we would have these workdays to work on all this stuff because everybody was worried about how much work this portfolio was and this capstone project. It just still felt like nothing got done. One, because it's just like everybody's sitting their silently working for an hour and a half and then also—I mean, an hour and a half really isn't that much time, especially for writing. I don't know several people I've spoke to, it takes a lot of—like get your mind set to do that kind of thing.

Interviewer: Some of these are kind of critiques about just how class time was used?

Interviewee: Yeah, but it's just—and too—and see, that's the thing, is like the difference isn't class time. In [lower level Writing course], you never got to do any work because we were always having these discussions. Then in [Writing course], you were given the time to do the work and the work's still not done. I know in other sections of the [Writing course] class, they need like 1,000 less points than us to get an A. I'm like, "What were they doing with their class time?"

It's like—I don't know. It was just like—I still feel like I didn't really do anything to, I don't know; develop my writing, I guess, in the [Writing course] course. Whereas I feel like even after the [lower level Writing course] course, even in the midst of it, if I didn't see it right away, now I see—in retrospect, I'm like, "Oh yeah, you got to repurpose and remediate," those are two things that I've never done before. Those are—I've seen that language used in other places, whereas before I'd never even seen that kind of language. Now I know what that is.

Interviewer: Would you have found value in revisiting a project like that in the capstone class?

Interviewee: Yeah, possibly, yeah. I think the repurposing and the remediating thing—I mean, I know it's important now, but I feel like that's kind of field specific. As far as the repurposing too, I feel like that's just a really, really, really applicable and important skill. I think that's true especially today with—in society and everything else, that skill is very, very important. […].

[…]

It's just you're like too—as far as repurposing and like with the internet and the new media stuff and sound byting everything that you think there has to be this level that's way down here. I don't think it does have to be that. That's a tangent. [Laughter] That's

why I think writing too, with the repurposing and that skill specifically is very important. I mean, you want it be accessible but I don't think you want to be encouraging people to not have a vocabulary.

Interviewer: That's funny.

Interviewee: It just irritated me.

Interviewer: Still thinking about the gateway and capstone course together, and the portfolio projects, did your final portfolio—is it essentially a continuation of what you started or it's all—

Interviewee: Not at all, no. My—so my first one was in WordPress and then it—the tone of it was just entirely different, too. I tried to make this one a little more—

Interviewer: Did some people keep [cross talk 01:03:35]?

Interviewee: Yeah, some people did. Yes, it depended. Some people yeah, just kind of modified the one—the existing one they had and some people entirely redid it. Yeah, so I mean I tried to change the tone of it. This one's turned out to be a little bit more conversational, as far as this is what I tried to do, check out these pieces. I tried to be a little bit more direct too, as far as saying where to go next in the portfolio.

Interviewer: Oh, okay, so more guidance for your reader?

Interviewee: Yeah, [cross talk 01:04:07] that intuitive, like it's fairly well—I mean, there's not a lot going on. My other one is just a lot—I don't know, it was just a lot not darker, but kind of. I don't know. I was—

Interviewer: Darker, more serious or?

Interviewee: Yeah, I don’t know what was wrong with me. I was just, I don't know, in a bad mood or something. The portfolio's in a bad mood. I remember doing this one in a better mood than the other one.

Interviewer: That's great. Does that still exist? Do you still have it active or has this sort of supplanted—

Interviewee: Somewhere, it's WordPress.

Interviewer: That's interesting. While you're calling it up, there's a question about—

Interviewee: Look how slow the internet's going.

Interviewer: Who knows what's happening in this room. Well while you're looking, and if we can't find it it's okay, there's a question about your experiences working with other

writers throughout the minor, so peer collaboration. You touched on it very briefly, but we didn't spend much time on it earlier.

Interviewee: I don't know. Sorry. Yeah, so—I'm probably not gonna find it. I'm not really entirely sure where it is, to be honest.

Interviewer: That's—it's okay.

Interviewee: Yeah, so—

Interviewer: I don't wanna keep you here forever. [Laughter]

Interviewee: Kinda like I said earlier, like these are a fairly good group of writers, or people that are at least interested enough in writing to persist—or pursue it a little bit more. I think probably in the capstone more so than in the gateway I was—I kinda saw how good people were writing and I guess then the issue just became—as far as editing groups, just the level of reciprocation wasn't always even.

Then too, I think it also became an issue of—this actually I ran up against in—and I hate to keep nailing this—like the genre thing, but that people—so in [lower level Writing course] specifically, one of the other students was history and I was edit—in her editing group and she's like, "Well, you're not gonna know what any of this is because you're not in history." I was like, "No, I don't know what it is, but I know how to read. It's not really the issue here. I'm not fact checking here." Which that kind of came up a lot actually—

Interviewer: In both courses?

Interviewee: Not so much the capstone, it did a little bit because there were some papers that were—and I do get it, I guess, one kid's was like really policy heavy and like some foreign policy, something or other. It is hard to edit things you don't know about for—that they're not trying to teach you about it, they're just trying to comment on it. He was not trying to explain what the issue was or whatever that he was writing about. He was just like, "This is what I think is wrong with it," kinda thing. I don't even know what this thing is. That kinda became an issue too a little bit.

Then I didn't—sometimes you did get very good people that were—that offered up some feedback that was a little above and beyond your typical—especially in other classes where it's like if you end up on the higher end of the class, people can read it and be like, "No, it's fine." You're like, "It's not fine." Sometimes you got that level of it back. I don't know, I think especially in the [Writing course] class because everybody—that was the only time we ever came together to do anything. People were still so stuck in their, "My project's gonna [inaudible 01:08:22]" I don't know that it necessarily went on the time to read your ten page draft of whatever and people did have substantial drafts. At that level, since there was no community or sense of who was doing what kind of thing, you didn't really wanna put the time into read like this one kid's 90 page screenplay. I don't know. The feedback I think was kind of lackluster in [Writing course].

Interviewer: Okay, stronger in the gateway course?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, that's useful.

Interviewee: It's also—I mean there's smaller projects too, so I think it's easier for people to do that.

Interviewer: That makes sense. I could see that being a factor. Some of the last questions here are about reflective writing. [Laughter] It sounds like you knew that was coming, right? Obviously both courses emphasize reflective writing in various forms. The question is how would you describe your experience with this kind of reflection? Are you still using reflective writing in any way? In our conversation you've already indicated some discomfort with it or not sure you—

Interviewee: Yeah, I mean, no I don't really use it. I don't know, I guess I don't—maybe if I had been introduced to reflective writing earlier on, like in [English course], or something it'd seem—especially because I still had a writing trajectory to follow where I could see that, "Oh, I'm reflecting on this piece, duh, duh, duh. I took these things away from it," and then that built up and built up and built up. Now when it's the last thing to do here, where it's—the reflection's not gonna be put to use anywhere, kind of thing. I don't really—I don't—I'm not quite on the bandwagon with reflective writing.

Interviewer: Were there any concepts or terms to talk about writing that the process of having to do that for the class maybe surfaced for you in some way?

Interviewee: I don't know. In the [Writing course], I just don't really feel like I learned anything, to be honest. I don't feel like I have any different ways to look at writing. I don't think I learned anything about the process, or my process, or anybody else's process. I don't really have any words to describe writing, especially because I kinda feel like I'm on the outside of—especially like Sweetland's writing. No, I know a couple of the kids in the class are peer tutors for Sweetland, too.

Interviewer: Oh, so okay that makes sense.

Interviewee: They have a different angle at this too. As far as—like one of the guys who was a peer tutor was in my editing group once and just even how he wrote his own paper. There was that—some elements of that retrospective as far as like margin—like saying stuff in the margins about stuff to go back and look at. He kinda used it periodically as he was writing would do that. I just don't really—no, I just don't—I really don't even know the jargon to talk about writing, to be honest.

Interviewer: That's interesting.

Interviewee: The same way with the grammar or anything, like I don't know how to describe anything about grammar 'cause I was never taught it. I just know from reading a lot what looks right and what's wrong. I have no way to describe any of that. It's the same thing with writing. When you said, "What's good writing? What's bad writing?" I know what good writing is when I read it, but I have no way to describe to you what good writing is.

Interviewer: That's funny. I think we've gotten at it in some different ways through this conversation.

Interviewee: Hopefully.

Interviewer: We really are close to the end here, and this is where they turn it over to you, the—their point is that the minor program is still relatively new and I've been trying to reinforce that as we've been talking. The question is whether there are any suggestions you would have for instructors or administrators of the program? You've raised, I think, some really useful concerns about [Writing course].

Interviewee: Yeah, so deadlines is my first [cross talk 01:12:58]. I feel like Sweetland especially needs these kind of—a little bit more nitpicky suggestions because I feel like the pedagogy is there.

Interviewer: You're thinking of these as two different things. There's the one issue of deadlines, that there should be more or harder.

Interviewee: Harder, yeah.

Interviewer: When you're raising this issue of Sweetland and nitpicky issues, are you thinking about in people's writing or around deadlines?

Interviewee: No, just as far as I feel like they're there with the concepts and the ideas, but then the little parts in carrying out those things, that kind of stuff. As far as hard deadlines, grading scales have to be set. The point system, I don't know that it worked for this—for the—we didn't have the point system in [lower level Writing course] like we did in [Writing course]. Again, I get the thinking as far as the point system takes the pressure off of trying to write for an A, or write for a B, or write for a whatever. However, maybe years this will work, even—I'm not saying that they shouldn't challenge us or try to get us out of our boxes, because they should, but we've been trying to get A's since—I've been going to school since I was like three. Even if not then, kind of, like you can kind of write for A or get A's or good writing to us is a writer that gets an A.

Kind of to take away the scaffolding that we've been climbing up forever to get an A, and just be like, "Well, just write something that's good." You're like, "I don't know how to do that." I mean it's good that there were—to challenge us with that, but I think it maybe needs to be phased in, or like a 50-50 kind of thing. This, where it's just like, there's an A if you get points kind of thing, and just to pull that whole thing out is very—

like I don’t wanna say that it makes things less serious, but it kind of does. When you're not trying to—you know you can get an A basically on quantity and not quality.

Interviewer: Oh interesting, right.

Interviewee: I mean, not that we're like cheating the system, because it's not cheating. The system lends itself to do that. That's what people did. That's what I did. That's what everybody in the class did.

Interviewer: Grading tension is a real thing, and that's why I appreciate your candidness around that.

Interviewee: It definitely is. I know they want people to produce good writing and everything, but it's just like in reality, there's second semester seniors, a lot of us still have full course loads. It's just kind of—it's just some balance between idealism of all of it and just an execution of what's actually gonna happen.

Interviewer: No, this is helpful.

Interviewee: I feel like that's probably the biggest thing. I mean, just as far as I think people really just wanna write more. I know it's a good idea that everybody have a self-designed project, kind of thing, but I think doing it twice for both of the capstones—or for the intro and the capstone course, both of them were kind of up to you as far as what you wanted to do. Maybe doing that in one of them and not the other—

Interviewer: Oh, interesting, so more structure around assignments.

Interviewee: Yeah. I just feel like when the grading scale's up in the air, the deadlines are up in the air, the structure of the class is up in the air, and your writing assignment is self-designed, it's just too much to—you just—you have to have something that's set in stone. I really think people want to try different genre writing, writing for different audiences, even if it's an assigned assignment. Even if you're all going to write about whatever, athletic department funding, but you're going to write it for The Atlantic or you're going to write it for The Daily. Even if it was something like that, I feel like that would be—that's kind of what I think I was expecting when I came in.

Then maybe the capstone project still being self-designed, or whatever, but in [lower level Writing course] making it more—I don’t know, just—I guess too with the new media—the [inaudible 01:18:03] is definitely helpful. I think Sweetland probably too is kind of surprised at us being a lot more resistant to technology than they were, like the students. [Instructor] has said several times, "I thought I was the one supposed to be catching up to you guys." We're like, "No."

Interviewer: That's a tension in all writing classes. I mean in all classes there's this weird sort of idea that because you're—

Interviewee: Younger, we're like this—

Interviewer: - young, you were somehow born knowing how to write a blog or something.

Interviewee: Nope. I don't think anybody in our class has a blog, nobody. A lot of people don't even have Facebooks or Twitter anymore. It's just like—I think there's like—actually kind of like—I don't know, I feel like there's this idea of how much technology is used, and everybody thinks everybody's using a lot of technology. Then you're like, "Well, I'm not." It's like, "Well, everybody else must be [cross talk 01:18:52]." Maybe people really aren't as much as everybody thinks they are. I think new media is an important component of it; however it's also one of those things we grew up on technology.

I've never really been formally taught, even how to type or anything. I just picked it up because I had to, kind of thing, or like Excel, or PowerPoint or anything. I learned it because I had to learn it. I think instruction—or where people need or want more instruction is in actually writing and not so much in this technology thing. Honestly, I feel like a lot of this—me personally, I don't have any interest in technology. I will only learn what I need to learn about it, enough to function. Whereas writing or something, it's like it's more basic, and it's more—kind of like you have it or you don't kind of thing. I feel like that's where it would be more valuable to have more specific instruction, or challenges, or assignments, or whatever.

Interviewer: This really is the last question, I promise. It really builds on what you just said. They're asking what you think instructors and professors should know about teaching writing at the undergraduate level. I think it's interesting because you just sort of made this call for more explicit instruction around writing, not just the medium, not just technology.

Interviewee: Yeah, I mean—yeah, it's really—it's just that—it's just because I think you—too with writing, that you have to be called on to challenge yourself to do it, sort of thing. I feel like there's a lot to learn about writing. I don't know, as far as exercises, there's things that—I don't know. I just—yeah. I think the emphasis on technology and on writing for those kind of things is displaced. I think it needs to be—like developing writers and then they can put their writing on whatever kind of medium that they wanna put it on.

Interviewer: Are there aspects of that kind of writing development that you would have liked to have seen in your class or aspects that came up that you were like, "Yeah, that's—more of that."

Interviewee: I guess—I don't know, I think this is probably a personal—like a learning style thing, but for me reading and writing are very inseparable and I can't disintegrate the two. For me, even those dissecting essays, or speeches, or whatever that makes good writing, that's always really helping me forge and craft my own writing. Just because then

I feel like for me it's a more quantifiable—like even if it only applies to that piece, what made it good, "I really like that piece. I really like what they did here. What can I use out of that to make my own writing better?" For me, just reading good writing informs my own writing. I know that doesn't work for everybody, but in [upper level English course] that's always what really, really helped me write better.

Interviewer: Right and you've returned to that theme, I think, several times in our conversation. I was struck too, a few moments ago where you talked about specific assignments, which is also I think a tension in the writing classroom. Do you say everybody is writing on this prompt? Or does everybody choose?

Interviewee: I think—again, this might be a personal preference, but I think the discipline needs to be set up in the beginning of, "You're going to do all of this this way and you're going to try to write for this on this prompt." Then if you like—it kinda lets you get disciplined enough—or try at least these things, then you can go out and pick your own topic. You have this background. You knew how to write for this audience, or you knew how to write in this genre, or you knew how to write about this really narrow, specific topic, or this really, really broad, huge topic. Now—even if those are mini assignments, that you have that scaffolding to try to just, "Pick your own topic and write about it," 'cause that's huge.

Interviewer: That's a nice way to think of it. That scaffolding idea I think is useful. You're not saying, "Never let people choose."

Interviewee: Right, I'm just saying—

Interviewer: One thing leads to the other.

Interviewee: - I think you need a solid background before you try and just give everybody the reigns. It was just overwhelming. I had no idea how to approach it. I didn't even know what to do with it.

Interviewer: Thinking to the autism project especially?

Interviewee: Right. I was excited about this. I was pumped about this topic. Then I was like, "Where do I go from here," kind of thing.

Interviewer: Got overwhelming, yeah.

Interviewee: As far as a creative, non-fiction prompt specifically, or whatever, a dry research one, a fiction, satire, whatever, that kind of stuff I think would be helpful.

Interviewer: […] I was curious, were these things—because you are Sweetland's first minor in writing group, were these things that you talked about with your classmates too or did you have a sense that there were some of these shared concerns?

Interviewee: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, I mean I think that's helpful for them to hear.

Interviewee: Yeah, I mean we talked about it briefly in our—our last day of class was for writing yesterday. We briefly talked about some of these things, especially a lot of what I reiterated on portfolio was from discussion yesterday.

Interviewer: Okay, great. Then you heard from me on e-mail. "Let's talk about that more." [Laughter]

Interviewee: Yeah, they're shared concerns.

Interviewer: Okay, that's great to hear. Thank you for your patience. I know that was a lot of questions, but they wanted to hear all the thoughts before you headed into the world. This has been great. Your thinking about writing is really interesting.

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