

Interviewer: I think we're in the right—this is ***. I'm meeting with *** on April 30, 2015. [...]. ***, thanks for coming again. I really do appreciate it. As I said, the study is interested in your experiences in writing while you've been a student here at [the University of Michigan] in particular, your experiences in the writing liner and capstone course which you're just completing this term is my guess.

Interviewee: Yeah.

[...]

Interviewer: Great. We'll start very, very broadly. The first questions asks, how do you describe yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: I think, for me, writing has been a way to reflect on experiences I've had, especially at the university. I guess maybe that's coming from the classes I've taken have really like honed in on personal essays and things like that. For me as a writer, I feel like I really like to write introspectively and learn something about myself and my experiences through my writing rather than writing necessarily always for an outside audience or something to share with the public. I mean obviously every piece of writing should have an audience of some sort. It's also been largely about me and what I've gotten out of it.

Interviewer: That's really interesting. The next questions asks how you would describe yourself as a writer when you first came to Michigan, so looking back to your first year here at the university. Would that description be the same or would you have said something different at that point?

Interviewee: That was a long time ago at this point. I would think it would have been different. I don't think I had that nuance to the definition or kind of answer about or how I see myself as a writer. I mean just coming from high school and that type of writing, I think it was largely that academic argumentation, that kind of way of writing. That's kind of how I saw—I mean I always felt like I had strength as a writer and I think I saw myself as someone who could just like produce the academic essay for the class.

Interviewer: School-based kind of.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you have a sense or can you talk at all about what you would attribute to that change because what you're describing as you're leaving is quite different from just writing for school?

Interviewee: Yeah. I think that came through different classes that I took. Definitely I think applying to and then being accepted into the minor and taking

the gateway course and then having to take courses that fulfill the minor requirements. I ended up taking [English course] which is all about the personal essay. I think that that kind of started the shift. Then I took [upper level English course]. Then obviously the capstone can be kind of whatever you want it to be. I think that the minor is what pushed me to explore different classes and then I just kind of fell into those types of classes that helped feel about my writing that way.

Interviewer: That makes a lot of sense. Some of the next questions ask specifically about your experience in those upper level writing courses. We'll circle back to those. Before we turn to those, the study is interested in the question of as you're graduating do you have goals for yourself right now as a writer?

Interviewee: Not really. I know that I'm gonna use these skills in the future. I've never envisioned myself going into a writing field specifically. I know that just being able to express myself through writing will be a benefit. I'm just not exactly sure exactly how in the career path that I'm following.

[...]

Interviewer: What's your concentration here? What kind of work are you going into?

Interviewee: I'm in the business school. The minor has definitely provided a balance to business which has been good. My role going—I'm going into a rotational program.

Interviewer: That's perfect. I think the writing work will serve you well. Probably in unexpected moments.

Interviewee: Yeah. Exactly.

Interviewer: Thinking across your writing experiences at U of M [University of Michigan], not just in the writing minor but across your courses, your work in the [Business] school especially. What would you say at this point it means to write well?

Interviewee: I think it means to—to write well I think means to end a piece and know that you put everything you could into it. You made yourself vulnerable, you kind of dug at things that were uncomfortable to you and exposed elements of either an experience you went through or something like a situation around you in a new light. Kind of put a fresh perspective on something whether it be something about yourself or about something you're gonna do.

Interviewer: That's nice. The next question does circle back to the upper level writing classes. The question asks initially, which upper writing courses you've

taken. Then we'll talk a bit about your experience in the courses. You mentioned [English course].

Interviewee: I guess being in the business school there's no upper level writing. All of my classes have been outside. Just because of ease of getting things approved and whatnot I've taken English [200 level course], [300 level course] and [400 level course]. I'm not sure [English course] is upper level writing.

Interviewer: I think it counts.

Interviewee: Those were the three classes I took for the minor requirements.

Interviewer: What were your experiences like in those courses?

Interviewee: I didn't like [English course] because I just felt like it was a lot of—a more enhanced version of what I did in high school, academic argumentations, kinda makes sense. I just didn't feel very challenged. It wasn't—it didn't push me. I think maybe it was—I liked my professor but I think I wasn't pushed enough.

Interviewer: Were there things that you would have expected to happen in that course that weren't—it is the academic argumentation course. Were there things you thought might happen that didn't?

Interviewee: No. I think it kind of met my expectations. I just—I think it was early on so I wasn't like—I was just kinda taking it to fulfill a requirement. I happened to take it in the CSP [Comprehensive Studies program]. That's the only section I could get into. I think that influenced my experience as well.

Interviewer: That makes sense. If you think then about [English 300 level course] and [English 400 level course] would you describe those differently?

Interviewee: Yeah. Definitely. [The 300 level course] I loved because that's kind of what pushed me into really loving personal writing. I felt like I grew a lot just as a person and as a writer through thinking through really obscure personal moments and then writing about them. I really loved that class. [The 400 level course], I guess was the next, just like the next step. That was really cool because not only was I surrounded by people wanted to go into the field of journalism, that kind of pushed my thinking, but it was also a more practical way to write from your experience.

Interviewer: Were there specific assignments that you think of in either [English courses] that you think contributed to that different way of seeing writing, that kinda more personal aspect that you've been describing?

Interviewee: Yeah. In [the 300 level course], the idea of the personal essay and then writing—I think I wrote an essay about my signature and what it said about me. That was a key moment to write about. In [the 400 level course] we did immersion journalism, a travel essay and something memoir, immersion memoir. Those three definitely shaped my view of how you can use personal experiences in your writing. I don't know. Those classes really gave me the opportunity to talk about experiences. For example, I was a student athlete here. I was able to use both classes to write about my student athlete experience over the course of like—I don't remember when I took them both, at least a year apart. I have two different pieces that kind of reflect on that time period which is really cool. Not only has my writing developed from [first English course] to [last English course], but I was able to reflect differently.

Interviewer: I'm sure. What was your sport?

Interviewee: [Name of sports team].

Interviewer: That's great. The question asks if you're still making use of what you learned in those writing courses or if you anticipate that there will be ways to apply those in future writing that you do.

Interviewee: I think that the courses kind of have made me realize the benefit of reflection and reflection through writing. I think that's something that I'll incorporate. Probably not in my professional life but in my personal life which is just as important. I think that—I mean obviously I'm not going to be sitting down and writing an essay randomly but I think just the idea of how you think about your experiences and articulate them is going to be something that I continue to use.

Interviewer: The next question asks if there are other writing courses you've taken that we haven't touched upon. We do circle back to the capstone and the gateway course pretty extensively. We'll set those aside for now.

Interviewee: Aside from that, not really. I mean I took one class in the business school, a writing class.

Interviewer: Was it like biz comp [Business Composition]?

Interviewee: Yeah. It's basically learning how to write a cover letter, how to write a first phase email. I mean, that sounds really silly in comparison to some of the classes in the writing minor but for my major it's extremely applicable. That's the only other major writing that I've done.

Interviewer: Were there other kinds of writing you were asked to do in the business school that were more specific to your concentration?

Interviewee: Yeah. Memo-style was huge. Then cover letter like I said.

Interviewer: Just kind of professional documents, job market materials.

Interviewee: Yep. Exactly. A lot of the writing that we did in my business coursework is all group work. It turns into a group paper. I think there was one assignment, maybe one or two assignments that I wrote personally, by myself. Whereas everything else becomes a collaborative effort.

Interviewer: That's interesting. Of course, they're intending that to be reflective of what you're likely to encounter in the workplace.

Interviewee: Exactly. I mean there's a ton of group work. It just is the nature of kind of the setup of that business [inaudible 11:37].

Interviewer: That makes sense. How confident did you feel doing that kind of work in the B [Business] school, either the collaborative work or the more sort of like memo style, professional document kind of writing?

Interviewee: I think I felt pretty confident. I mean I would say that I had a better grasp on writing and I felt more confident in myself writing parts of it than other people just because unless you go and seek out writing courses you definitely don't have to take them if you don't want to.

Interviewer: Others, your colleagues in the B school hadn't necessarily had that same writing experience. Is that what you're finding out?

Interviewee: Right. There becomes a bit of a variation in how exactly people write.

Interviewer: This next question may relevant to follow up on that too. The question asks how often you've used skills or strategies learned in a writing course in other courses. I guess did you have a sense as you were like working on projects with peers in the business school that you were using some of the skills or strategies from other courses or did it feel different?

Interviewee: I think it feels different just because of the nature of what you're writing and then the structure in which you're writing. Just the practice of writing so much in the courses for the minor inevitable helped when writing in a different setting. Maybe it wasn't necessarily techniques that I applied but just like that practice of—I don't know. It sounds silly. How to structure sentences, how things flow and how you lay them out, those sorts of skills just from all the practice where I could transfer easily.

Interviewer: That's great. Now we'll talk some about the capstone course which of course is fresh in your mind. The first question asks what impact you feel like at this point that that capstone course has had on your writing.

Interviewee: Honestly, I feel like it didn't have a huge impact on my writing.

Interviewer: Talk a little about that.

Interviewee: I think that I learned the most in [upper level English courses]. Really the capstone was just kind of like an add-on that really didn't enhance anything I guess. I don't know. I feel like I was maybe the oddball for not getting as much out of it. I just felt like it was very unstructured and, I don't know. Somehow I just feel like I ended up kinda doing something similar to what I did in those other courses rather than branching out. I don't know if it's cuz I hit my stride in those and then kind of just like was petering out by the time I got to the capstone. I'm not sure.

Interviewer: That's interesting. Was there anything—given that a lot of the capstone is working on this final project, was there anything about the work in the course that made you change, for instance, or rethink your process of writing or how you were kind of approaching the work? Did you feel like that was also building on these earlier courses?

Interviewee: I think that it was building on the earlier courses. I mean I just didn't feel like I had a big change that came about in the capstone. The one thing that I think my final capstone project did was really force me to think about an audience. I think that was one thing I took away was you have to hone in on an audience even if it's something like a personal essay. When you're creating a project just from scratch and it's what you want it to be, I think that's important to keep in mind. That's one thing that I guess I'm taking away.

Interviewer: Tell me what the project was that we're going to look at in a bit then.

Interviewee: I wrote an article geared at or targeted to incoming student athletes and their families to kind of give them a sense of what their experience would be like at Michigan in the athletic community. It's based on my experience and teammates' experiences. I kind of broke my experience down and with the thought or hope that it will transcend me and help give them insight into the things that they might not know right away, things that I didn't know right away.

Interviewer: It sounds like a hugely practical project. Why did you chose that?

Interviewee: I didn't initially wanna write about [University of Michigan sports team] actually at all because I had already written about it in previous courses. I ended up—I wanted to write about my experience at Michigan as kind of a way to reflect on being my final semester, everything that happened before it. My mentor

in a PhD candidate in English. She's also [involved in a University of Michigan sports team]. I was talking with her about it. She was like, "Why wouldn't you write about student athletes? That's what you lived for four years." That kind of pushed me to write about that because I was kinda trying to hide it. I wanted to not focus on it when really I wanna embrace it cuz that's my experience. That's kind of how I ended up picking to do something like that. I don't know. That's what I know best and that's what I love.

Interviewer: Sounds like a terrific idea. You mentioned that the experience of that project forced you to kinda rethink issues of audience. What there anything else about the experience of working on that project or even deciding to choose that project that you sort of think are shifted the way you think of yourself as a writer in any way?

Interviewee: I think I really value how something's put together beyond words. Using images and the aesthetics of it. I think it gave me the chance to work on those skills and practice that. Beyond that, I mean, I really didn't approach it in a different way. I really struggled to find a topic but that's not new for me. I think it was a good—it was basically, for me, like writing in the personal style, but then being able to craft something for an audience in terms of aesthetically and kind of how it fits into an article format and that sort of thing.

Interviewer: That's interesting. I'm sort of hearing some echoes of your answer to the first question about personal writing and personal reflection even though this feels like a practical is geared towards a very specific audience.

Interviewee: It started from me wanting to write about, not myself because that sounds vain, but writing to reflect on where I've been and kind of like where I'm headed.

Interviewer: It makes sense with that experience. It sounds deeply useful. I'm just sort of thinking, do you have—is it something that you'll actually offer to the athletic department or if you thought about that at all?

Interviewee: Yeah. I've had—one of the girls in my class keeps telling me that I need to cuz she works in the athletic department, like in an admin role. I don't know. I'm like embarrassed to, but maybe.

[...]

Interviewer: [...]. I guess the first question just asks if you can talk a bit about what you see as the most memorable aspect of the portfolio and your process of creating it that sort of stands out to you at this point now that you're done and deciding what to do next with it.

Interviewee: I think the most memorable part to me is under—I have my evolution essay which is part of the capstone class. Then we had to include a bunch of different artifacts from our writing fear. I think the most memorable part to me is I created a timeline to kind of like visually show my writing development and best show different pieces of work. I was able to showcase some of my, I guess, my favorites or ones that really meant a lot to me, how I wrote them. [...].

Interviewer: This'll feel a little strange. I'm describing out loud for anyone who's listening in, sort of processing the interview later. Visually too it's quite interesting to look at because it actually reads vertically as a timeline that you might have dates or something, but you've inserted the pieces from those courses. You were just talking about the importance of visual presentation as you're thinking about things. You can really see that here. Can you talk a bit about what you're aims were for the portfolio. I mean a portfolio's obviously a requirement of the capstone, maybe not something you would have just created on your own. Given that it was a requirement, what were your goals?

Interviewee: I didn't wanna use this professionally because I don't need to. That was never an aim of mine. It was really for the minor. It's including drafts and everything like that. It's really the minor in that sense. I want people who read it, anyone who reads it, to get a sense for who I am. I think that the pieces that I've written about, like I said, they're all like personal in nature or somehow tied to that. I want readers to get a sense for who I am, who I am as a person, as an athlete, as someone in business school. I think that I have achieved that through the different pieces I've included and the about me page and everything like that. That was really like my goal.

Interviewer: As you were compiling it and thinking here about visuals, about the different pages that you wanted to include, sort of the more technical aspects I guess, were you aiming for any kind of specific reader experience or viewer experience?

Interviewee: Like technically?

Interviewer: Technically or visually. Thinking kind of a little bit beyond the pieces you chose to include.

Interviewee: Yeah. I wanted—I guess technically in how I set it up?

Interviewer: Right, right. If I just come to this page—

Interviewee: What did I want you to—?

Interviewer: Who was our instructor? [Instructor]?

Interviewee: [Instructor], yeah.

Interviewer: [Instructor] comes to the page. Was there kind of an experience you hoped he might have when you were choosing what pages to include and visually how to structure them?

Interviewee: I wanted it to be really clean, not a lot of—I wanted you to stay in the site, not go outside of it and be able to move through it. Not quickly but have it be succinct enough that you weren't overwhelmed by the amount of text. The About Me is pretty short. The timeline's compact with just quick blurbs about why I include each piece. I guess I just wanted it to be I guess clean and not too much.

Interviewer: That makes a lot of sense. As you're thinking about the writing pieces that you did include, you mentioned that you also included drafts as well as finished work. Do you notice any relationship between the pieces that you chose or patterns?

Interviewee: They all have something to do with my experiences. For example, this piece has to do with signing my name. I think I mentioned that earlier.

Interviewer: This is the [English course] assignment.

Interviewee: Right. What signing my name reveals about me. Then I have a piece from my international marketing course where I talk about cafes in [European country]. I lived in [European country] for three years. I guess while you might not read it and read that I included that in the description so that it was kind of clear where that came from. Same with—[upper level English course]. I wrote about being on [a University of Michigan sorts team], but from an outsider's perspective from the fifth year cuz I'm helping coach now. It kind of like shows what I was like as an athlete and then now what it's like being a coach.

Interviewer: That's interesting.

Interviewee: Then the second [upper level English] piece was about being in business school and the search for a career and kind of what that process is like.

Interviewer: That different exploration.

Interviewee: I feel like all the pieces give a different, I don't know, a different side of me or different insights into different experiences I've had. I guess that's how they link together.

Interviewer: You describe noticing that pattern or relationships. Is that also something you would want the reader to take from it?

Interviewee: Yeah. Definitely. I think that I try to introduce that in the About Me page and on the intro page too saying that, “I hope that you get a sense for who I am by reading this portfolio.” I wanted to make that clear.

Interviewer: The next question asks whether the process of creating the e-portfolio, both the selection process, the design process, what effect that kind of combined effort may have had on you as a writer.

Interviewee: As a writer. I think it was really—it was kind of cool to go back and see my writing from the very beginning. Like I said, I’m a fifth year this year. I’ve had five years of writing artifacts which is kind of crazy to go back to freshman year now [...] and look at what I wrote. I think it made me realize how much I’ve changed as a writer and be able to—I think I kinda forget that you write certain pieces. That was cool to just go back and get a view on what I had actually done while I was here.

Interviewer: There are requirements for your collective pieces to be included in the e-portfolio. As you were preparing those or doing that work did you have a sense that that was influence your thinking about yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: The reflective pieces?

Interviewer: The reflective writing that you’re asked to do as part of—

Interviewee: Do you mean like the evolution essay or just like including a reflective writing?

Interviewer: I’m not quite sure. In different courses it’s structured a little differently. You can walk me through maybe how [instructor] asked you to—what’s the evolution essay, what you understood to be the kind of reflective piece for the course this spring.

Interviewee: Yeah. I would say so. I think the—

Interviewer: Talk to me a little bit about what that essay looked like and then maybe how it helped you kind of think through that process of looking back.

Interviewee: Yeah. I think the evolution essay really forced me to reflect because part of that process was writing an annotated bibliography but basically going back through everything you’ve written. Not everything but picking pieces from different moments. I don’t even remember what the prompt was. Basically [inaudible 28:46] everything you’ve written. That’s kind of what I was talking about where it was kind of cool to go back and see just things that I had forgotten about that I had written. The evolution essay, just forcing you to reflect on each of those and kind of what my thinking was at that point. I’m sorry I forgot the question.

Interviewer: This makes sense. We were trying to figure out if we were talking about the same piece of writing. You think of the evolution essay as the kind of reflective requirement in the portfolio. Does it draw your attention to anything about yourself as a writer that either changed or evolved or stands out to you now as you're wrapping up?

Interviewee: Really I think that's what helped me articulate that I've been writing from a personal perspective and writing about my experiences. I think I had realized that beforehand too but really trying—I mean the evolution essay, [instructor] really encouraged us to have an argument behind it. I think when you're forced to think about it that way I began to realize that I really had been writing about personal experiences and reflecting on them and articulating them through a bunch of coursework, whether I had intended to or not. In that sense reflecting on it kind of solidified how I view myself as a writer maybe and how I've written while at Michigan [University of Michigan].

Interviewer: That makes perfect sense. That ties in, I think, with the themes that you've been talking about.

Interviewee: Exactly, yeah.

Interviewer: As you look now at the e-portfolio, if any sort of administrator like at Sweetland or a writing instructor here at the university opened this up and glanced through it, what do you think they would take away from this about sort of a student's development or growth of student writers here at the university?

Interviewee: I think they would think about how—I mean I think—let me just think about how I wanna answer this.

Interviewer: Sure. I guess we're imagining someone other than [instructor], like someone who was coming to it a little colder.

Interviewee: I think that they would take away that writing, at least for some people can be a reflective experience and college is such a transformative time that writing can become the moat though which you kind of make sense of what you've been through. I think is what my writing experience has been like. I think that they would be able to see that and that writing—for everyone it's not just in the academic sense. Not that that's not valid because it totally is. It can also play a role in personal development and reflecting on your experiences. Especially, like for me, I'm not hoping to go into journalism or a more professional writing career. This is sort of just like a great balance to that.

Interviewer: I think that's a really nice way to look at that. The last couple questions ask you to kind of think between the gateway and capstone. Again, the writing minor is still a pretty new creature at the university. Some of this is

intended to help them think through, “What are we doing? What might we do differently or better?” They’re interested in your feedback in that sense. The first question asks as you’re kind of reflecting back on the gateway course as well as the capstone course, how would you compare your experiences in those two courses? How are they similar or different, built on each other or didn’t build on each other?

Interviewee: I think that my experience in the gateway was more positive than my experience in the capstone. It’s really hard to say why. I don’t know if it was because of just the time period that I took the gateway or because it was a little more structured. There’s the how I write essay and the repurposing and then remediation projects. I think maybe working within a little bit of a framework was beneficial for me. That’s maybe why I had a little more positive experience in that. To me the capstone course felt really rushed, like you’re trying to do too much in too little time. There were just constant—it’s hard because I think you’re trying to balance it being an academic course where students come and you teach them something with it being like, “Do whatever you want. It’s your capstone project. Do whatever.” I think that that was a really hard balance for [instructor] to have between those two. I think that’s what makes the capstone difficult is that you’re trying to have these mini assignments to make it a class. It’s also a time to work on things, something that’s totally different than your peers.

Interviewer: Am I right in understanding that much of the course was structured as workshop essentially for the individual projects?

Interviewee: Yeah. I think it became more like that once my peers and I kind of like lobbied for that. It’s such a huge undertaking to create the portfolio and then the project as well. We were constantly needing time. He always needed to have a bit of a structure behind it because it is a course. I don’t know. I just felt like it was cramming way too much in. That was just my sense. I liked the gateway a lot more than the capstone.

Interviewer: That makes a lot of sense. Both courses emphasize peer review and working with other writers in the course. Can you talk a bit about what your experiences were like with peer review, feedback from other writers?

Interviewee: Yeah. I think I had a great experience with peer review in the gateway especially. I think another part that made my transition hard between the two was that I started with one cohort in the minor and then ended with another because I took a fifth year.

Interviewer: Because of the fifth year.

Interviewee: Because of my business school curriculum. I think that made it hard just because I knew people in my gateway course and then knew no one in the capstone. I guess that could also contribute to the last question. I mean I had great

peer reviewers and really see the benefit in peer review. It made my writing a lot better for sure.

Interviewer: This is great. It's interesting then to have found yourself with a group of writers you didn't know as well. Did that change, in any way, your experiences, either giving feedback or receiving feedback? Was it just a group dynamic?

Interviewee: I think maybe just a group dynamic. Also, by the time I took the capstone this semester I had taken the gateway so long ago compared to everyone else that they're talking about, "Oh my gateway portfolio." I don't even know how to access it anymore. It's out of my mind completely. Just the standpoint I was in made it hard too. They had had different instructors than I had. It just took me a bit to jump back in. Most of them knew each other. It was just kind of harder to—

Interviewer: I think that extra time and then the different community would make a difference. That's interesting to hear about. I laughed a bit because the next question actually asks about the portfolio. You're required to create one for each course. They're interested in hearing your thoughts about the differences that you noticed between those two e-portfolios. As well as you remember your gateway portfolio.

Interviewee: I looked at it briefly this semester.

Interviewer: I'm thinking here, did you have different goals for it? As you look back did you feel like there were things you could take from the first to build on the other?

Interviewee: I didn't use the other at all. I mean I looked back at it, I guess, just for the About Me and kind of how I had written about myself before. Really I started from scratch. In both cases though it was personal, not professional I mean. I guess that part stayed the same. I think my gateway portfolio was a lot more minor-focused whereas this one—I think I write on the first page that this is created for the minor but I think it's a little more subtle. Whereas I think in the gateway, in the portfolio I created for the gateway, it's a little more obvious. I kind of like that it became more subtle. It gives a lot of focus on me rather than the requirements which is something I think [instructor] wanted anyways.

Interviewer: That makes a lot of sense. Both courses also emphasize reflective writing, asking you to look back at writing you've done previously or think through your process on pieces you were working through in that course. The questions asks how would you describe your experiences with that kind of reflective writing. You've talked a little bit about that throughout our conversation. If we might just really specifically think about when you were

asked to do that kind of reflection how did you respond, are you still using that kind of reflective practice in any way?

Interviewee: I think the reflective writing came through that evolution essay I think we were talking about. I don't know if I'm repeating myself. I thought it was really helpful to think through how I had evolved and where I started at university and what my thoughts were when I started taking different writing courses and just that pathway. Am I using any of that? I think just reflecting on where you've been is something that I'm going to continue doing in my personal life through writing, something that I kind of already do. In that way, that thought process and then expressing through writing is something that I'll still think about.

Interviewer: That's great. Do the reflective writing requirements in either course provide you with any kind of new terms or concepts to think about writing or yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: I remember in the gateway we wrote—we had to write on a prompt, How I Write. I hated that essay cuz it was so hard to think about. I think it was actually beneficial to think through how I actually write, how I go about the writing process, what my method is.

Interviewer: Do you remember what your takeaways were on that? It is a very self-conscious assignment I know.

Interviewee: I think that I realized that sometimes the best way for me to write is to just start—I don't know, where you just write words on paper.

Interviewer: Like free writing?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: People call it different things.

Interviewee: Where you just start writing and just kinda see where it takes you.

Interviewer: As I mentioned when we kinda turned to these questions, the writing minor is still relatively new. These last questions are just really open ended to get your feedback. They wanna know if there's any suggestions you would have for instructors or administrators of the writing minor, anything about your experience in either courses or the cross that you found helpful or you'd change or rethink in any way?

Interviewee: I really liked how the gateway class was gamified. I know that's something that they recently changed with the capstone. I think that they should bring it back.

Interviewer: I know when I was doing these interviews like last year, this grade before, that was a real tension for those students. I was definitely hearing a lot about gamification. This is useful to hear.

Interviewee: I kinda see both sides. I can see how gamification could have you kind of slack off. You just—you're doing something for points and it doesn't feel as real. I don't know. I think for motivated people—I would consider myself falling into that group. I want to be able to write in kind of, especially with the capstone project, kind of do what I want to do without this pressure of knowing that there's someone grading me. I think that actually contributed to why I didn't like the capstone as much. I felt like I didn't get as much out of the project because I was forced to somewhat conform myself into what [instructor] wanted me to do. Not that—I mean he was a great instructor. It's nothing about him but more just about—

Interviewer: Like awareness of the evaluation and the grade essentially?

Interviewee: Yeah. I mean I could have looked passed that and whatever but I mean it's just inevitable. I'm not gonna throw away my last semester just to do what I absolutely want to do on the project. I felt a little constrained by the fact that it wasn't gamified and not as comfortable going in whatever direction I want. I think I still would have been pushed had it been gamified. I don't know. That was a big thing for me. I was really disappointed when I found out it wasn't.

Interviewer: I know that that is a theme that they've been wrestling with and going back and forth on. Ongoing feedback on that will be really useful to them. Other aspect of the minor that stand out that were either good, bad, keep, toss?

Interviewee: I think I would have appreciated, I guess, having a more consistent advisor. I was assigned one who'd great but not very good at following up and I guess didn't really make himself available, at least in a coming to me and saying, "I'm available if you need me." I felt like I was following up with him about—for me there was a lot of problems with getting my requirements fulfilled.

Interviewer: That's around which classes will count.

Interviewee: Right. Even beyond that, had I had a good relationship maybe I would have gone in and asked for advice for different pieces I was writing on, especially during this capstone project. If I'd had a mentor who I could have bounced ideas off of I think I would have valued that. I think for the program being so small that's something that they should really focus on. I don't know if it's the nature of who I was paired with. I'm not sure why. The fact that when I started it was like the third cohort or something. I think that would be a big area for improvement would be to have a minor who's substantially part of your writing journey.

Interviewer: That makes a lot of sense. More generally, thinking about writing instruction as you're leaving the university, is there advice, are there things that you might suggest are important, that you see as important about teaching writing to undergraduate students? It's such a big question at the very end.

Interviewee: For me I think the greatest thing I've gotten from instruction has been going to office hours and having the personal conversations like one on one. I think a lot of instructors already do this but making yourself really available to students is hugely beneficial. I also think how professor's structure workshopping is really important to. I had the best experience in [upper level English course] where we were put into different randomly assigned groups. You'd give out your papers and in the next class you'd come together and discuss. We'd write a little summary of your feedback. I think that was like a really great, maybe this is way too specific, a really great way to structure peer review. I don't know. It could have also been the nature of the people I was in the class with if they were really focused on writing. We kind of did the same sort of process in the capstone course. It just wasn't as great. I don't know why.

Interviewer: Did it follow—was it as structured? What you're describing from [upper level English course] is a very, very structured approach.

Interviewee: It was a little less structured because you'd just come to class and then read each other's work right there. I think having to step away and then come back in a workshop. It was the same random groups.

Interviewer: It sounds like what I'm hearing is sort of you're thinking through the structure and the emphasis on structure helps.

Interviewee: I think that that can really impact how you experience. Inevitably in writing courses there's always a draft and then you have to turn in the final. I think if you don't have that peer review every time you're development between the two can be a lot less than if you had it. For example, in [English course] a couple people each paper would get peer reviewed by the entire class which left everyone else out of that process. I think then it becomes harder to improve that piece of writing when you maybe only have your professor giving you some feedback or you go out on your own to find it.

Interviewer: That's a really common tension, let me just make sure that I'm hearing what you're saying right, is that you found more value when every student had the opportunity to get feedback in between revisions versus the whole class. I think what it's often called is like whole class workshop where fewer students per assignment get the feedback.

Interviewee: Yeah. Which I didn't dislike it. I just found that small group workshops a lot more valuable.

Interviewer: You're actually picking up on what is an ongoing tension and discussion in writing instruction. It's very useful to hear that feedback. Anything else? Other comments or other things that stand out to you about writing instruction generally at the university or the minor?

Interviewee: I don't think so. I think I covered.

Interviewer: It sounds like you've had a really lovely experience and produced some really interesting work. Again, the project you described from the capstone, I would find a home for that because it sounds like something that could—and it could really go a long ways to kind of pushing on—I think there's certain notions of student athletes that a lot of us that work with student athletes would really like to push on and change and help people see that it's not one unified single experience. It sounds like the work you did could really push that.

Interviewee: Yeah. I think—I mean it's really geared for student athletes. I would be hesitant to wanna show it to the student body at large because, I mean, I kinda talk about the realities of—

Interviewer: Yeah. I'm just imagining as cohorts come in, just specific teens or to the athletic department generally. I have no idea. What you described I got super interested. I was like, "Oh people would like to see that I bet."

Interviewee: I think having you say that and having other people say that, I should probably do something with it.

Interviewer: Think about it before you head out of town for the Pacific Northwest.

[...]

[End of Audio]