*Interviewer:* This is ***. I am here with ***. It is April 29th, 2015. We are doing the Sweetland Writing Development Study exit interview.

[…]

*Interviewer:* Yeah. Yeah. What did you study while you were here?

*Interviewee:* Social Theory and Practice, in the Residential College on Spanish.

*Interviewer:* Wow! Okay. Social Theory and Practice. What disciplines—is that a sociology discipline? Is it psychology?

*Interviewee:* It's pretty similar to sociology, I would say.

*Interviewer:* Okay.

*Interviewee:* Um, and some of the things that I, like, focused on were more like political science-type of subjects. A little bit of economics.

*Interviewer:* Okay. Interesting.

*Interviewee:* Yeah, some of that, as well as sociology, primarily.

*Interviewer:* Okay. Being in the Residential College, does that let you, sort of, make your own major? Is that the idea there?

*Interviewee:* It's more inter-disciplinary flexible.

*Interviewer:* Okay.

*Interviewee:* It's just, like, a lot better than any departments, I would say, as far as I can tell. I joined the RC my junior year because I wanted to do the RC major. I wasn't in it the whole time.

*Interviewer:* Okay. Oh, interesting.

*Interviewee:* It was, like, after being in Honors for two years that I just realized that it was such a superior program and really creative.

*Interviewer:* Okay. Yeah.

*Interviewee:* I'll have to go check on that.

*Interviewer:* What is it about it that you believe makes it so much better?

*Interviewee:* It's, like, the fact that the professors in the Residential College truly care about you and they care about your active engagement throughout the semester. They expect active engagement. Like active engagement is the norm. If you fall short; you fall short. If you go above, then you go above. Whereas, in the normal LSA classes I've taken, I've never felt like active engagement was something that was really encouraged. I felt like it was just sort of like, you come to class, turn in your work, go to section, raise your hand twice, but it wasn't "engaging."

*Interviewer:* Okay. You liked having that—

*Interviewee:* I took a couple of decent classes in LSA. I won't say that, like, nothing was good. But that was the norm, in a history class, or whatever. I've taken a couple of good comp lit classes, or engaging comp lit classes. But, still, RC classes, definitely struck me as far more engaged. Afterwards, I always feels like the professors said "hi' to me. They knew me by my first name, that I knew them, and that those were the professors who really made the difference in my academic experience. I really don't have enough good things to say about the RC.

*Interviewer:* Yeah. That's so wonderful. That's so wonderful. I'm so glad to hear that.

*Interviewee:* I feel that way too.

*Interviewer:* I went to a small liberal arts college, and I often watched my students come and go through this experience. I wonder how, like, it's such a different experience, but what you're describing is much more the, sort of, engaged, interpersonal, liberal arts environment that really worked for me too.

*Interviewee:* Yeah.

*Interviewer:* I mean, that's really cool that you were able to find that.

*Interviewee:* Yeah. I'm happy that I found it too. I feel like it was better that it was a part of such a big University as well; because if I was just in the RC, I wouldn't be satisfied. But it was having the RC as a resource, in addition to having other departments and other opportunities at my fingertips, I guess.

*Interviewer:* Yeah. How many classes would you take in the RC each semester, as opposed to, sort of, the regular LSA classes?

*Interviewee:* I took—my sophomore year I took RC Spanish for two semesters. Then, my junior year, I took—that was just one class for two semesters. The next year, and maybe, like, one seminar. I'm not totally—I don't totally remember. The next year I took two at a time, because I had to do some pre-reqs for the major. Then I did, maybe, like, two more, like, one or two more since then. Like a

thesis class, and then junior—second semester, I was abroad. I haven't taken, like, *that* many RC classes

*Interviewer:* Okay. Cool. Right.

*Interviewee:* It's just the sense that I have, like, I still talk to the professors of my RC classes. One of them teaches in sociology as well, but, um, and I took a sociology class with him, not in the RC, this past semester. But, yeah.

*Interviewer:* Yeah. Okay. Cool.

*Interviewee:* I took an RC [course] this semester, so it was, like, the defining experience of my life.

*Interviewer:* Okay, yeah. Oh, man, I can't wait to talk about that.

*Interviewee:* Okay, yeah.

*Interviewer:* Before we get there, though, I'm supposed to begin every interview by asking you the question: "How would you describe yourself as a writer?"

*Interviewee:* That's a good question, I guess. Um, direct.

*Interviewer:* Okay.

*Interviewee:* Um, be pretty clear. Sometimes, perhaps, like, I tend to be a little bit verbose in a sense. Like include multiple commas. I think I have a good vocabulary, but I don't excessively use jargon in my papers. I would say that I probably struggle a bit with organization of a paper, but that I have strong ideas, and they tend to carry through my papers, I would say. That's it.

*Interviewer:* Okay. How would describe yourself as a writer when you started at [the University of Michigan]?

*Interviewee:* I mean, there's also, like, personal writing, which is, I guess, kind of a separate category. This is, like, academic writing that I'm thinking of.

*Interviewer:* Okay, yeah.

*Interviewee:* Um, when I started at the University, I think, I came out of a high school that stressed—that was, like, extremely regimented, extremely college preparatory, but they never really looked at my writing. It was like Scranton exams all the time, making sure your grammar is good, make sure this is good. I knew that I was a good enough writer, like, I could get into college and I could succeed here, but I don't feel like my writing was really—um, but I came out of

high school the strongest writer, because they just didn't stress, that they didn't care. I never felt like anybody really sat down with my writing to look at it.

I think when I got to college, I didn't really feel like I had somebody do the "hard work" on my writing that I would have needed. The two classes that you probably look at are your freshman writing seminar—your first year writing seminar and your upper level writing requirement. Both of those classes, I had GSIs [Graduate Student Instructor] that I don't feel like really did the work on my writing. Like one of them, not to be an asshole, one of them was a non-native English speaker. Not to say that his English wasn't good, but, first of all, there was never a time when anybody sat down with me with my writing and gone over it with me.

Occasionally, I would get a paper back. "Like I got an A! I got an A-!" You know, I got good grades. I've always gotten good grades, but I've never felt like anybody has ever really coached my writing. I would say that, like, I came into the University probably with, like, a similar situation, having gone through four years of high school without having anybody really give me solid critiques on my writing, and then spend another four years here in University. Then felt, like, again, like, I've scraped by.

I don't know. Maybe you would look at my writing and be like, "Oh, it's very good. It's top, whatever, percentile." I don't know. That's a personal feeling. I think I could have probably started with a similar level, maybe, like, "inferior" in some analyses, in some, like, "citations." I'm still not that great with citations. I'm still, um, yeah, I don't know. It's kind of a rambling answer. I don't really—

*Interviewer:* Right. No, well, what I'm hearing you say, and talking back to me quite raw, but what I'm hearing you say, is that you have not had the experience of someone giving you the kinds of hands-on attention to your writing that you think would help you grow.

*Interviewee:* Yeah, it would either help me grow or help me really be able to evaluate my writing, because I don't feel like my writing has been evaluated. I feel like, in the context of the stuff that I turn in, sometimes I get feedback. Other classes, I haven't gotten very much feedback. I've gotten a grade, but not much feedback. At the end of the semester, all of these final papers that you turn in that are the largest parts of your grade, these are things that you send off into oblivion and you never see again. This is, like, the culminating work of the semester that you never see, and you never know what you got on that paper.

If you get a terrible grade in the class, maybe you go quibble about it with your professor. But you what I mean. It has never really led to feedback, so I don't know what to say about my writing because I haven't gotten feedback on it, I feel.

*Interviewer:* Right. You haven't had the chance—

*Interviewee:* I've just been told it's good enough. Yeah, it's good enough.

*Interviewer:* Yeah, and you don't. I mean, it's one of those things that you don't develop a vocabulary for talking about it, unless you are sitting with someone and practicing talking about it. Yeah, okay. Well, I will look forward to—I'll look forward to talking with you in a second, um, about what we could do to improve that. Before we get there, do you know where you're headed next?

*Interviewee:* Kind of.

*Interviewer:* Yeah?

*Interviewee:* Sort of.

*Interviewer:* Okay. *[Laughs]* The question is, the way it's actually worded is: "After you graduate, what are your goals for yourself as a writer?"

*Interviewee:* Uh, to be able to, like, effective—so I know that—I've, like, taken these surveys, the Sweetland surveys, which ask me some of the similar questions, that I definitely want to use writing. I plan on going into a profession where writing is very important. Like whether I end up spending a couple of years working in non-profits, and then I figure out grant writing, which I don't how to do, but I'm sure that I can learn. Whether it's something like grant writing, or creating, like publishing, like a newsletter, media, like, whatever it is, about the organization. Talk about what it is your organization is doing. Like using writing effectively for those purposes is probably one of the most important—it's, like, a really important job that I would need to do.

If I'm doing advocacy work, which is another thing that I would see myself doing, and have done for years, uh, it's the kind of thing where if I'm answering letters back and forth with somebody, or if I'm having to communicate an advocate on their behalf, I need to be able to articulate things really clearly. Those are all things that I know writing is a part of any of my goals. Wherever I end up, I need to be able to do that really effectively.

That should be the thing that gets me a job, frankly, because it's not like I've achieved any technical skills at this University. Like I don't know to use "Illustrator," "Adobe," like, I don't know how to use the programs. I don't how to write a grant. I don't have any practical skills. The only skill that I should be able to bring to the table is being able to communicate effectively.

*Interviewer:* Well, they say that, in some ways, the liberal arts education is about "learning how to learn." In that regard, it sounds like you've been prepped to know how to acquire those skills, even if you don't have them at this particular moment. Okay, yeah.

*Interviewee:* I have mixed feeling about that. But, yeah. I mean, I don't doubt that I'll be able to learn it, I just feel like, kind of, looking back at these four years, I'm like, "Wow, I have no technical skills!"

*Interviewer:* Yeah. Do you think you—*[laughs]* I can understand why you have mixed feelings about that, honestly. I mean, yeah. Do you think you could have gotten those, or do you think that that's just sort of the way that the University is set up?

*Interviewee:* I don't know if other people graduated with those skills, or if nobody seems to. But, like, what extra initiative it would have taken for me to have done those things. I think, to take an academic class about that, would have been, like, just a waste of so much money, because I know that there are other ways to learn those things, is what I've really felt like. I want to spend my classes doing, when I choose classes for the semester, I want to take things that are really interesting. I didn't want to take classes, if there was a technical skill; but, then, how else do you learn it? I don't know. It's kind of like a—I don't even know.

*Interviewer:* Yeah, no. I hear the tenet that you're getting at, right? You want to be prepared. You want to have something marketable to be able to show; but, to some degree, you can learn some of those things on your own, so you might as well spend the time with stuff that you can't get on your own. Yeah.

*Interviewee:* Uh, I honestly feel like—this is a complaint that I would make with the Career Center, is the fact that they prep people for three careers. Like Medicine, Law, and Business. If you're not doing any of those, there are not really sufficient resources. Everything the Career Center does is so mind-bogglingly corporate. Like the way that they do everything. Job fairs are mind-bogglingly corporate. There is absolutely nothing for the, like, not—for someone who doesn't want to go into the corporate sector, basically.

*Interviewer:* Right. For someone who wants to do advocacy or non-profit, or—

*Interviewee:* There is nothing for that. Even if they didn't have job interviews, like, a non-profit sector fair, I think they'd pretend they have some social work equivalent to it. But, whatever it is, I've never seen an appropriate career path or option on the surveys of, like, "What do you want to do," with, like, "What I want to do." Ever!

If, like, somebody—and I've gone to the Career Center multiple times, they've talked to me, they've been like, you know, the best they can suggest to me is "Peace Corps." If there was anybody in the Career Center that would be able to appropriately mentor somebody who is going down the path of me and many of friends, who are just "leftist," you know, then maybe they would have said, like, "Hey, go to a grant writing workshop." They would have told me that there are extracurricular ways of acquiring those skills at this University.

We have ISS [Instructional Support Services] workshops. I didn't find that out 'til, like, weeks before I graduated. You know, it's like somebody could have redirected me to those resources and I would have done it in my extracurricular time. I might have done it my extracurricular time, but it's just been wandering down my own maze of a path with very little—there's, like, no job security in front of me. I have just, like, no idea. […].

*Interviewer:* Yeah. In your wildest imagination, what does the future hold for you? What would you like—what would be a meaningful way of using the things you've learned?

*Interviewee:* Um, *[pause 00:19:02 - 00:19:10]* well, I want to work with people, and I want to somehow share and use those skills that I've learned here towards empowering other people. Whether, like, I don't know, like, what exact things would be appropriate for what group of people I'm working with. Right now, I mentor a lot of younger students. I love that and find it incredibly fulfilling, to, like, mentor freshmen who also, you know, like me, there's no clear path when you're in that situation. Then, you know, to give people a few more resources, like a boost, just to be a person who "gets it." I think that that's awesome and it's one of the most rewarding things I've done.

I've also found a lot of, like, activist pursuits to be really rewarding. I would just say, like, to live the life of an activist and to be able to sustain myself, support myself, and perhaps others, and also to be able to—yeah, like, use all of the skills that I've gained here. A lot of those are extracurricular skills, not like things that I learned in the classroom, but, you know, things I've learned from organizing efforts and what-not. Yeah?

*Interviewer:* Sure. Right. Yeah. Can I ask which organizing efforts you've been most involved in?

*Interviewee:* Yeah. The past, about like four months, the past semester, I've started and led [a  activist campaign]. It's been an enormous undertaking.

*Interviewer:* Yeah.

*Interviewee:* I've been working with a whole bunch of students, a coalition of a few organizations, and we're just working to build it up right now. Do, like, the research, the power analysis at the University, the educating, and then to really turn it over to a bunch of people who can this work next year.

*Interviewer:* That's what I was going to ask. Do you feel confident that you have a good group to sustain the efforts?

*Interviewee:* Totally. Yeah.

*Interviewer:* Yeah. Awesome. Very good.

*Interviewee:* So, yeah.

*Interviewer:* Very cool. Very cool. How did you get hooked up with the freshmen that you mentor?

*Interviewee:* I've been, like, leading [student club] for a while—

*Interviewer:* Oh, okay.

*Interviewee:* —and they joined it early in the year. Like in Festifall or something, one of them. Then, you know, I don't know. That's how I have them—and then I've been just, like, working with them for the whole year.

*Interviewer:* Oh, yeah. Right. Okay.

*Interviewee:* It's gone from much more than just people in the club with me. It's like people who tell me all of their personal problems, and people who come hang out with me, and people who come to my house, and people who come to my parties, and people who do this and that. Like, you know, it's just really the role that I've played in their life and that they've played in mind. It has, like, grown a lot.

*Interviewer:* Yeah, okay. That's really cool.

*Interviewee:* It is.

*Interviewer:* Yeah, go ahead.

*Interviewee:* No, it's a lot of time. It's like, a lot, a lot of time of my personal life.

*Interviewer:* Yeah, and it's a lot of time that doesn't get accounted for, as you were saying, by the, sort of, larger structure of the University.

*Interviewee:* Yeah, I mean, everything that I do is not accounted for in the time of the larger University. Like I fill out every survey, pretty much, that comes to my e-mail box. Like, I'm just the person who does them. Like the thirty percent of people who respond to surveys. I'm always in that percent.

*Interviewer:* Yeah. *[Laughs]*

*Interviewee:* They all ask me the same questions, like, "What do you do with your time? How much of your time do you spend on this?" Like, there isn't a word for

what I do with my time. It just can be put under the category of "volunteering," I guess.

*Interviewer:* Yeah, which does not tell us enough.

*Interviewee:* Right. Well, I mean, I—yeah.

*Interviewer:* I love that you're involved in all of this extracurricular stuff. I think it's amazing. I'm gonna ask you a lot of questions that are oriented toward your classes. Given what you've said about your classes, and given what you've said about your extracurricular involvement, let's bring the extracurricular in as well, right? I think this is the one place where, like, let's take advantage of the fact that this is an open communication—

*Interviewee:* Yeah, yeah, yeah. Sure.

*Interviewer:* —like, conversation, to really, sort of, dig into what those extracurricular stuff gotten you. When you think about your writing experiences across U of M, curricular, extracurricular, the whole bit, what do you think it means to write well?

*Interviewee:* Um, *[pause 00:23:58 - 00:24:02]* when the reader of whatever you've written, at the end of what you've written, is not bored, is not confused, understands where you're coming from, and is compelled to do whatever you want them to do, when you read it. Like, that is good writing, to me.

*Interviewer:* Okay, yeah. Where have you gleaned that sense that that is good writing?

*Interviewee:* From reading stuff.

*Interviewer:* What kind of stuff?

*Interviewee:* Many articles in classes. Some journal articles that are so, like, painfully boring, I literally cannot. Some journal articles where I, like, read the abstract seven or eight times and don't understand it, or read the article and don't understand it. I know that, like, that's not my fault; that's their fault. Or, like, the jargon. The jargon is the biggest thing that irritates me in writing. You read multiple articles that use a piece of jargon differently. Like, synonymously, jargon isn't even uniform throughout the social sciences. That's like, "Well, now what," which is even more irritating.

I mean, it's good when people define the concept and then they use it throughout, that's a fine thing to do. But everyone does that. Then, it's like you have nine definitions of whatever it is. So I've done—like made my opinions on writing, based on a lot of freedom.

*Interviewer:* Okay, yeah. Did you have to take upper level writing courses? What did you take?

*Interviewee:* Women's Studies [course] with [instructor] and [instructor], a really cool class.

*Interviewer:* Okay. Yeah. Cool. You said you also took a thesis writing class, as well.

*Interviewee:* Yeah, last semester, I did a one-semester thesis for a senior project for my major. It was a requirement.

*Interviewer:* Okay. Was that a course, or was that independent work with somebody, or—?

*Interviewee:* It was a course. Like I registered in a course guide for it. Then it was primarily, like, there was a lot of independent work that went into that as well.

*Interviewer:* Okay.

*Interviewee:* There was some peer editing.

*Interviewer:* Okay.

*Interviewee:* That was actually, like, a pretty significant thing. Peer editing was one of the, um, it was a really, really good thing. That's, like, a lot of the feedback that I've got on my writing has been the few times I've shared it with peers.

*Interviewer:* Okay, yeah. Was the peer editing required for the thesis?

*Interviewee:* Yeah.

*Interviewer:* Who did you get to do that?

*Interviewee:* Um, just a kid in my class.

*Interviewer:* Okay. Yeah. You guys didn't meet as a class.

*Interviewee:* Yeah, yeah, yeah. We met as a class, and then there was independent work as well.

*Interviewer:* Independent work as well. Okay. Cool. Were you all writing on similar topics?

*Interviewee:* No.

*Interviewer:* No, okay.

*Interviewee:* We were all writing—this was for my major in Social Theory and Practice, so people wrote about, like, a huge range of topics, but they were all similar within the disciplines of the social sciences. It was pretty general.

*Interviewer:* Okay. What did you write about?

*Interviewee:* I wrote about human trafficking across the U.S./Mexico border and how neo-liberal economic policies since the 1980s, such as debt restructuring and NAFTA, have, like, impacted the flow of human trafficking and migration, and, you know, by destabilizing Mexico's economy, which contributed further to human trafficking.

*Interviewer:* Wow. Okay.

*Interviewee:* That was my statement.

*Interviewer:* Wow. That's a big statement, and an important one. Yeah. What sorts of things did you write about in your upper level women's studies courses?

*Interviewee:* Uh, it was, like, a class about women's reproductive justice, and I think I chose "abortion stigma" to talk about. I wrote that paper my sophomore year and it was like—

*Interviewer:* Oh, okay.

*Interviewee:* —I think I took upper level, yeah, I took it my sophomore year. I had wanted to get my classes out of the way. It was probably the first big research paper that I wrote in college. It was like a ten to fifteen page paper, which required citations and everything. That was a substantial part of the class, a substantial part of my—I think it was like—I mean, I may have written a longer paper, but that was definitely requiring citations, and everything, which makes it a research paper.

*Interviewer:* Right. Did you use what you learned there in any other courses?

*Interviewee:* Uh, I thought I—the biggest thing that I needed to work on was how to use cite effectively, how do you make it, you know, a really sold research paper by citing correctly throughout. I felt like I never took that part of it too seriously. Like I would look it up on Purdue OWL, then I would copy/past them in. Let me cite this. Make a bibliography. Put it in. That was always, like, the last step of the research, and not the most compelling part of it.

When I next tried to write a research paper, I would do that again. Every single time, I'd go back to Purdue OWL, or whatever, you know, "etmecitethis.com," or, you know what I mean?

*Interviewer: [Laughs]* Right.

*Interviewee:* I just did that every time, so I don't feel like I really re-applied that; and then the knowledge that I learned from there, I don't know that it really applied to any of my other subjects. Like I didn't continue with Women's Studies. It was a different subject. I mean, it changed the way I thought, and it was a really important class that I took, and I learned a lot of really important stuff, but I don't think I applied it academically, really, much further.

*Interviewer:* Okay. Yeah, yeah. Okay. Okay. Yeah. You feel like the Social Theory and Practice, is writing there very different than the kinds of writing that you did in that Women's Studies class?

*Interviewee:* No, I think it's similar. It's probably pretty similar. It's writing a research paper. Cite your sources effectively throughout. Use multiple academic sources, if it's the same style.

*Interviewer:* Yeah. This notion of "citation." This is one of the first things that you mentioned. This feels like a big theme that keeps coming up. What's your understanding of "citation," in terms of why it matters, and whether it actually matters as much as academics say it does? Do you think you can share that with me?

*Interviewee:* I think it's bureaucratic.

*Interviewer:* Okay. Say more.

*Interviewee:* I think it is—it strikes me as bureaucratic. I feel the same way about it as I feel about other bureaucracies is that, like, "These are the motions that you have to go through. You need to know how to navigate it. When you do history, you use an ALA. When you do social science you do an APA. When you do this, you do Chicago-style. There are all these styles. None of them are different, but you need to do them effectively. You have to pay to use APA on the website."

I always do them in MLA; and then if I need to switch it to APA, I figure it out. It just seems, like, unnecessary steps that I have to go through. I mean, I understand the idea behind it is to show that your research is well-grounded in academic studies. I think it's important to like—I think they thought it was important, but I think that the way you have to do it is just—honestly, I feel like it's stupid.

*Interviewer:* Okay.

*Interviewee:* I don't enjoy meticulousness of saying like, "Hugh, comma, 32 comma, 2012 end parentheses."

*Interviewer:* Yeah, yeah.

*Interviewee:* Sometimes after I write a paper I look at it and I'm like, "That's why it's official. That's why my paper is important, because it's cited." That's the way bureaucracy is. It makes you feel important when you go through the steps if you do it correctly.

*Interviewer:* Yeah, yeah.

*Interviewee:* I don't know. That's my opinion on it.

*Interviewer:* Sure. Okay. Did any of those experiences that you had as a writer, did any of those impact you in any way? Impact your sense of yourself as a writer? Or impact your academic career?

*Interviewee:* It gave me like a huge sense of accomplishment.

*Interviewer:* Okay.

*Interviewee:* Every time I've turned in a research paper, it's a huge sense of accomplishment. Like I've really, really—ah, if I've cited it—Oh, I mean, no, not if I've cited it, um, it's well-researched. There are at least eight to ten things that I've read that have gone into the forming of that paper. Like I have sifted through these academic articles to pull together my argument. By the time I'm done, I love my argument. I'm like, "Yeah! Abortion stigma is bad! Yeah! Neo-liberal globalization sucks! *[Interviewee laughs]* Yeah!" You know what I mean?

*Interviewer:* Yeah, yeah.

*Interviewee:* I feel super-accomplished. I do. It's just that I find going through the motions, sometimes, to be a drag.

*Interviewer:* Okay. Yeah. Is there any crossover between—I mean, I would imagine, like, the [activist campaign] I would imagine your activism, that those things involve writing. Is there any crossover between what's happening in your academic constructs and what's happening in your extracurricular?

*Interviewee:* Yeah. In every, like, activist thing that I've done, you know, also, like, writing "leftist" articles for our leftist publication, whatever, either leftist perspective on current events, or on a global issue, or whatever it is. Writing is always really important. Those kind of articles, you know, I wrote one about my experience in [foreign country].

*Interviewer:* When did you go to [foreign country]?

*Interviewee:* I studied abroad in [foreign country].

*Interviewer:* Oh, that was your study abroad! Oh, wow, that's interesting. Oh, yeah.

*Interviewee:* Yeah, those were all things that I would use, similar, kind of like—well, not similar, like a more concise, concrete, direct style of writing. That's what I've needed to use. At the same time, I felt like the balance between my academics and my activism is really, really hard to maintain. It would make me just, like, tend less towards being the person who does a lot of the writing. Like somebody needs to do a lot of writing for campaigns, for any campaign. Like someone needs to do the writing. Someone needs to articulate it, put it in the Daily's. You know what I mean? Somebody has to do these things; but I've felt, like, more often than not, I've tried to delegate that task to other people, because the time that it would take to sit down and write something really effectively, like, I'm using that time already.

*Interviewer:* Yeah. Okay. Sure, that makes a lot of sense to me.

*Interviewee:* That's, like, my organizational role.

*Interviewer:* Right. Okay. That makes a lot of sense to me. Yeah. You recognize what needs to be done, but you're not the person doing it.

*Interviewee:* I often delegate it, and I would like to edit it, look it over, before I let other people do it.

*Interviewer:* Yeah, yeah. That makes sense. Okay. As you think about your experiences here, what experiences have had the biggest impact on how you write?

*Interviewee:* Hmmm. *[Pause 00:35:55 - 00:36:06]* Biggest impact on what I write. Um, biggest impact on how I write, or what I write?

*Interviewer:* Well, so, again, let me just read you the question, because I think the answer is a little bit of both. The question says: "Thinking back over the last two years, what experiences in and out of the classroom have had an effect on your writing?" Then there's a secondary question which is: "How has your writing process changed as a result of these experiences?" I think there's a little bit of both of the "why" and the "how" going on there.

*Interviewee:* Okay. Um, I would say probably the way my ideology has developed has had a pretty huge impact on my writing. That, like, the only things that I write—like if I write something, and I think it's important, it's because I

think it has social relevance. If it has social relevance to me, it's like challenging capitalism in some way. Most of the extracurricular learning that I've done has been reading these things that inspire me or inform my way of thinking in some way. Those are the things that are most important in determining what I'm writing.

Like I wouldn't have chosen—I wanted a thesis topic that did not—that, like, recognized multiple factors in an issue, in a global problem that we think is really simple, and that we think we can blame on "evil men who are trafficking poor women." When, like, that's really not what it is. It is a situation of economics. I think economics are some of the most important things to understand. It is a situation of, like, capitalist economics. This is why these social factors are the way they are because of capitalist economics. When you look at the world today, I think, when I see the social realities, like, what's going on in Ferguson, what's going on in Baltimore right now, today, this is related to capitalism. That development in my ideology, which has been developing for a long time. Since high school, I knew that I felt a certain way. By now, how it's developed, that's affected what kind of writing I do. This is always the critical lens through which I look at the world, and the way I write.

Then in terms of, like, the "how" I write, um, I would say that it's like, maybe giving my writing a little bit more of a direction on a point, and a constantly critical thing that I always do with my writing, I would say, probably. I don't know. I don't remember what writing things I've turned in on the website. I don't remember, exactly, if any of them—I don't remember what they are. I don't know if all of my writing is strictly anti-capitalist. I don't think it is. I think that I probably also have turned in some "normal" papers that I've written, but—I don't know.

*Interviewer: [Laughs]* I'm sorry. That's hilarious, that the non-anti-capitalist ones are "normal." That's really interesting.

*Interviewee:* Yeah. That's how I do it.

*Interviewer:* You haven't—it doesn't sound like the work of uploading things into that portfolio has made much of an impression.

*Interviewee:* Well, no, it's just that they were a really long time ago. I know last semester I submitted my thesis. Then a year ago I was in [foreign country]. I have no idea. I literally, like, had to pull something together to submit. It was kind of a rough semester. Before that, it was, like, a year and a half ago, was my junior year, first semester. It's hard for me to even remember what classes I was taking. If I looked back in the folders, I saw the titles of the papers. I didn't know what I did. You know, my Great Books class, freshman year, didn't make much impact on me.

It's just that those things are a little bit too far in the past to really recall off the top of my head.

*Interviewer:* Okay. Right. Were you putting them up there because they were, like, the paper you got an "A" on? Or because it was a paper that was convenient to upload?

*Interviewee: I* tried to do, probably, the papers that I did the best on, and papers that were the longest, and were the most substantial of the semesters.

*Interviewer:* Yeah, okay. By "substantial," you're talking about, like, you had the most personal investment in.

*Interviewee:* "Substantial," like, a research paper, a final paper, not the most—

[…]

*Interviewee:* Yeah, that kind of thing.

*Interviewer:* Okay, great. If I use the term "reflective writing," what does that mean to you?

*Interviewee:* Like "personal."

*Interviewer:* Okay. You mentioned "personal" writing earlier. Do you do personal writing?

*Interviewee:* I used to. Then I kind of, like, fell off with it. I guess "reflective," anything that is self-reflective. It could be academic as well. Like reflecting on stuff for a class. I've done, actually, a lot of that and I've really enjoyed that.

*Interviewer:* Have you? In what context have you done that kind of work?

*Interviewee:* My final paper for my favorite class this semester on labor movements with my former thesis advisor, and, like, he's a sociology professor. That class, I did a project, instead of doing the normal stuff for the class, I did this whole extracurricular thing. I had this whole other thing going on. Then my final paper was to reflect on that process and experience. It was the process and experience of an extracurricular assignment. I got to really analyze it. It would be like, "This was a challenge. This is where I fell short. This is challenge. This is how I dealt with it. This is what was good. This is what can be improved next year."

It was a great experience when you, like, "reflect" on my experience, and to really have that be final paper. It was a good experience. The semester before, I took a class on "[title of course]." That was a really an excellent class as well. What we

were asked to do is respond personally to the books, to the novels, to everything that we read and experienced throughout the semester. I got to respond to movies, respond to this, respond to that. That was the kind of stuff that just comes from the heart, and it doesn't have to be filtered through a super-academic lens. I enjoy those kinds of reflections, as well, if it's on something that's powerful and important.

Like, on novels. I really love that. I do. Reflecting on short stories. Reflecting on literature. I definitely have not done, like, as—it doesn't strike me as—it's not the thing I've done the most of.

*Interviewer:* Right. Okay. What do you think is the value of that work for you? It sounds like it does have an intrinsic value.

*Interviewee:* Yeah. That's an example of the phrase I was going to use. I was just going to say, it's like "intrinsically valuable." It just is. Reading really, really good writing. Like reading a Toni Morrison book makes you a better person than you were the day before you read that. Like reading is the most important thing. Reading good writing is super important. Having that knowledge is important. It just is. I don't know.

*Interviewer:* Yeah. It doesn't need to be useful. *[Laughs]*

*Interviewee:* Exactly. It doesn't need to be useful. It's personally useful.

*Interviewer:* Yeah. Okay.

*Interviewee:* Sometimes it's also socially relevant, in which case, like, obviously, it's important.

*Interviewer:* Right. Right. Okay. You said that peer review was one of the places where you've gotten the most feedback from your writing, and that that's been a useful experience. Do you want to say any more about that? Can I get you to say any more about that? *[Laughs]*

*Interviewee:* Yeah, sure. The peer reviewing that I did last semester for my thesis was pretty useful. The problem was that (this was no fault of the professor or the class) it was hard to get people motivated to do a lot in the beginning of the semester. It's the kind of thing that mostly gets done in the last four weeks. The things that I should—but the feedback that I got from peers at the early stages informed what direction I took my paper in, and they gave me the things. It was like, "You can't cover all these things in your paper. You need to narrow it down."

People gave me useful information. Also, totally, you know, like, "Hey, you're a good writer! You're a good writer. You're a really clear writer. It's good writing."

To hear that from another peer, was, honestly, it's not something that happens all the time. It was important to me, 'cuz I know that I'm getting good grades, but it doesn't feel like it's coming from someone in the same way. It's not like I really have professors who sit me down and tell me, like, "Hey, you're a really good writer."

*Interviewer:* Oh, really? Yeah, okay.

*Interviewee:* That would be my experience on peer editing this past semester. Before that, I took one creative writing class. It was, like, peer editing. It was a semester that I was incredibly busy. It was one of the only semesters I've taken five classes. It was just, like, everything was too much, and it didn't really leave me the time to do the creative editing that I would have, maybe, enjoyed or, like, the environment that I might have thrived in. I wasn't able to thrive in it as much as I would have liked to.

*Interviewer:* Sure. You mentioned that you delegate a lot of your extracurricular writing to other people, but that you comment and you provide feedback, do you gain anything by giving feedback to other people?

*Interviewee:* For the sake of my own writing, or just for—?

*Interviewer:* Yeah, for the sake of your own writing.

*Interviewee:* I don't know. I kind of feel like I process other people's writing, but that it doesn't directly—like I don't think to myself, when I see someone making an error, I don't think to myself, when I'm writing later, like, "Oh, there was a"—. I never make the connection. But, if it, subconsciously, somehow, informs it that that's a possibility, I try to use good grammar, because other people's bad grammar is the thing that jumps out to me.

*Interviewer:* Okay, yeah. Okay. Now that you're about to graduate, and this is like—tell me what you tell the freshmen that you're mentoring. What would you tell them about writing? What would you tell a student who is coming in to the University about writing here?

*Interviewee:* That writing is incredibly important for yourself, for your academic growth, for the literal—if you're studying liberal arts, in order to get an "A" in any class, your writing needs to be a certain level of "good."

*Interviewer:* Yeah.

*Interviewee:* It just does. I don't know that anyone is going to help you get there. I don't know what that experience is. I don't know if you're already there, how much more you'll get, but you need to be a good enough writer. It is just of the utmost importance. You will do a lot of writing. Every class, I turn in some

writing. I don't know. Not, like, necessarily, some classes a lot. Some classes, not that much, but writing is something that you're always being graded on.

*Interviewer:* Out of your experience, what would you tell people if they aren't getting resourced? Like, if people aren't giving them the kinds of resources that they might need, what would you—how would you recommend people go about building, or developing, getting what they need?

*Interviewee:* Um, I would say—well, two things. Well, you know, I've always been like, I always think it's really important to be proactive about getting the resources that you need. It's not always easy to do and there are a lot of obstacles that a lot of individual people have. It just so happens that upper class people are better at getting resources than lower class people. Certain groups of people are better about getting them. They're out there, and you have to take initiative if you want them. No one is gonna to tell you to get them. No one is gonna to tell you—people will mention Sweetland, but, like, no one is gonna to walk you over there.

I've never been to Sweetland. I've never had any of my papers edited at Sweetland. I think it would have been useful, but I turn in papers, and I write papers one hour before they're due to two hours after they're due. Like, I am so last minute! I have never been able to use resources, and rarely have papers had the opportunities of being turned in twice; and if they did, I would edit myself. I wouldn't really—I just have never been proactive about that.

What I would say, is, like, something that I've actually, personally used is, like, bouncing it off of, occasionally, whether this is shameful to admit or not, I would bounce them off my Mom sometimes. I would get her to read papers. Mostly because she's, um, a fluent Spanish speaker; so when I was taking Spanish classes, it would be like, literally, obviously, useful. Sometimes when I would take non-Spanish classes, I would want her to read what I write, both to know I'm writing, and also just to give me a little feedback sometimes.

*Interviewer:* Sure, absolutely.

*Interviewee:* Like, often on applications, and stuff, where I have to present myself. 'Cuz I've done, actually, a shit-ton of applications. I don't know if it's bad that I'm cursing in this interview.

*Interviewer:* Oh, no. It's totally fine. Totally fine.

*Interviewee:* You'll just like, "star, star," star it out.

*Interviewer:* None of us care. *[Laughs]* None of us care. It's a no judgment zone.

*Interviewee:* I have to, like, work on that as I enter the professional role. But, whatever, I'm still in college right now.

*Interviewer:* There you go. There you go. *[Laughs]*

*Interviewee:* Yeah. That's, like, another resource that I've used. Even if your parents aren't native English speakers, or aren't particularly helpful with writing, I know I would never send anything to my Dad—

*Interviewer:* Your parents are non-native?

*Interviewee:* No, no, no. My parents are native English—

*Interviewer:* Oh, they are. Okay.

*Interviewee:* If your parents are non-native English speakers, obviously, them proofing your work isn't going to help much.

*Interviewer:* Right. Okay. I see what you're saying.

*Interviewee:* Also, if your parent are native English speakers, but they're just not academically helpful, and they're just not, you know, there are a lot of other people that you can bounce your work off of. Like I think if you have a friend who you really trust, and they're not too busy, you can get them to take an hour of your time, I think. I think peer feedback is pretty important. Not from just people in your class who you sit next to for one hour and everyone says, "It's good." It's awkward to be, like, "It's really bad!" *[Interviewer laughs]*

*Interviewer:* Right. Yeah, it is. It is. Yeah. Huh. Yeah. Okay. I've been kicking around ideas about peer review, because I teach writing, and—

*Interviewee:* Here?

*Interviewer:* Yeah.

*Interviewee:* So what class—?

*Interviewer:* Um, I'm doing [English course] this semester.

*Interviewee:* Okay.

*Interviewer:* I, you know, *[claps hands]* peer review. Sometimes it's awesome, and often it sucks. I feel like I'm constantly trying to think about that issue.

*Interviewee:* Something that's really awkward about it, just, like, to let you know, as an educator, is that sometimes I'll be in a room and people will just be like tearing apart someone else's—like the peer review that they had to take home and read, to multiple people, which is awful!

*Interviewer:* Yeah, that's terrible.

*Interviewee:* Like—

*Interviewer:* That's no good.

*Interviewee:* —I was at someone's house, just hanging out one afternoon, and their friend came over, and they had do some work. They were like, "This is literally the worst thing I've ever read. This is the worst thing I've ever read." I was like, "I won't read it." When I read someone else's writing, it's like, something about "confidentiality," and like "humiliation" that people don't even know about.

*Interviewer:* I was gonna say, that has nothing—I'm so glad you said that, 'cuz that has never occurred to me.

*Interviewee:* I'm certain that no one has ever said, because, like, chances are good, I'm never going to meet the kid who, like, someone else was like, "It's the worst thing I've ever read."

*Interviewer:* Yeah, no. I'm actually really, really glad you said that.

*Interviewee:* But I find that multiple people make fun of other peers, at least, to me.

*Interviewer:* Yeah, that's not cool. That's not cool. I have to think about that. Wow. Yeah. No. Useful? Useful tangent. I'm really, really glad you said that. That, literally, has not occurred to me. You know, faculty do it on Facebook, right? It makes me crazy. Like I will have peers listen to this stupid ass thing that this kid just said. They'll, like, "crow-thing." I'm, like, "Nooooo! Nooooo!" I've seen this from people who get teaching awards. It makes me crazy! Anyway—

*Interviewee:* It's the favorite worst nightmare as a teacher. My students have—yeah, no, it's a nightmare. On one hand, I believe that people need to be able to vent what they need to vent. On the other hand, it's, like, "How do you that appropriately?"

[…]

*Interviewer:* Okay. This is kind of a random question, but it's on my protocol, *[inaudible 00:53:52]*, have you done any new media writing? Writing for blogs, websites, Twitter, Facebook, that sort of thing? Again, for your curricular or extracurricular stuff?

*Interviewee:* What is writing for Facebook? Like posting on Facebook?

*Interviewer:* Yeah. Like, yeah.

*Interviewee:* I haven't really posted personal things. I don't like to personal things on social media. I hate social media. It's a necessity for activism.

*Interviewer:* Interesting. I was gonna say—

*Interviewee:* If I can delegate that to other people and let them do it, that's cool. I don't like to put myself out there on social media very much.

*Interviewer:* Okay, yeah.

*Interviewee:* I'm not really into new media.

*Interviewer:* Okay, yeah. You haven't been required to do it for any of your classes.

*Interviewee:* Not really. I'm trying to think. Maybe one class tried to get me to do a blog post at some point. Oh, yeah, I had one class, my sophomore year, that wanted me to do some stuff over a blog thing. *[Interviewer laughs]* I really wasn't super into it. I did it. It was cool, but I didn't find it to be super interactive. When I googled my name, like, a month ago, teachers never do that in high school.

When I googled my name a month ago, I found blog posts from my sophomore year of high school.

*Interviewer:* Interesting.

*Interviewee:* I really don't think it's appropriate for academic, for, like, me to be academically required to participate in something that I don't believe in. That's adding to my digital footprint, and adding to the amount of stuff that people can find about me when I google my name. I just feel like that's totally inappropriate. They made me do that—

*Interviewer:* They were in a super-interesting line of thinking.

*Interviewee:* They made me do that before I even knew what I was doing. I can't delete this shit. This is part of my internet footprint, or whatever, footprint.

*Interviewer:* —finger—right.

*Interviewee:* I don't have any say over it. People told me to do this in my sophomore year of high school, my sophomore year of college. Like, times before

I even knew what a disaster "big data" and surveillance is. Surveillance is a really, real fear. I'm not paranoid. I'm not crazy.

*Interviewer:* No, you're not.

*Interviewee:* Leftists are being surveilled all the time. Everything that I do is, like, not necessarily being surveilled, but has the potential to be surveilled. I know that that stuff is not incriminating, but the fact that I would be—it's like I feel like it's something that makes me really uncomfortable. To be required to do it for class just seems obnoxious.

*Interviewer:* Yeah, no. That's—again, hugely interesting, and thought provoking. I don't even—like I really want to dive into it, but that would take us so far—that's a study all on its own, right? That's a really, really important consideration, and something that I don't know that we thing enough about, right? Because you are learning, and I've been talking with people over the last two weeks, people who are like, "Yeah, I went back to this thing I wrote my freshman year, and, omigosh, I don't want anyone to see that!"

*Interviewee:* —and it's on a blog.

*Interviewer:* —and you do, right. You need private space to grow, right? I really think you do.

*Interviewee:* I believe that.

*Interviewer:* Yeah. That's super interesting.

*Interviewee:* Oh, god, I believe that.

*Interviewer:* Yeah, yeah. Huh. Sorry. You, now, got my brain going in a million directions. Okay. *[Hits palm of her hand on table]* Let the paper bring me back. I'd way rather talk to you about it, 'cuz that's really fun. But, okay, so, we've already talked about the pieces of writing that you've chosen. Um, okay, I feel like this is kind of what we are talking about. I'm just gonna formalize the question. What do you want instructors to know about teaching writing to undergrads?

*Interviewee:* Yeah, no, I definitely feel like we've talked a lot about this. Um, but just to sum it up very quickly in a nutshell, like feedback is really important and, if possible, one-on-one, face-to-face feedback, as opposed to just comments on their writing—

*Interviewer:* Oh, interesting.

*Interviewee:* —might really make the difference, because even some thoughtful comments on my writing are, like, that I view those as things to correct in that paper. But to get holistic feedback on myself as a writer would be incredibly valuable, even if there is not time. Obviously, I know, classes, at best, you have thirty people in the room. At worst, you have 500—

*Interviewer:* Right. *[Laughs]*

*Interviewee:* —um, even if you have a room of thirty people, eight people don't even give, like, a "flying _ _ _ _." They just, like, don't care about anything.

*Interviewer:* Right.

*Interviewee:* Maybe you have three or ten people in the class in there who might actually care or benefit from some real feedback. I, personally, would happily take, like, meet my professor after the semester, or at the end of classes, like, at a later point, to get some feedback. If somebody gave me the opportunity, I would take it. I don't know that everybody would. Most people probably would ignore that e-mail, not even fill out the course evaluation. I fill out, like, every course evaluation. I would take that opportunity. I don't know if the average student would. I just know that I actually care a lot about interaction with professors. I care a lot about feedback. It would be really valuable to me personally, but I know that that doesn't represent everybody.

*Interviewer:* No, but what is the loss? All right? I think about this a lot too. What is the loss in saying, "Hey, if anybody wants this, here it is." And the people who do want it, then have it. The people who don't, don't.

*Interviewee:* I'd want a teacher—if, like, I was gonna get feedback, it would have to be in a course where I had done substantial writing, produced enough writing. I know that it would be asking a lot of a professor to take all of my writing and to give it one more look over, my first to look at my last. Then I also feel like they would want to create that false narrative of like, "improvement over the semester."

*Interviewer:* —which doesn't always happen that—

*Interviewee:* —which really doesn't. Also, like, to turn it over my papers. Like, sometimes, in the beginning of the semester, I have a lot of energy. Sometimes at the end of the semester, I'm thoroughly burnt out, especially with ten other things. I'm just in a place where my writing is not going to be as good. It doesn't have to be like, "… and this is how you improved over the semester."

*Interviewer:* Right.

*Interviewee:* It's, like, maybe just in, like, candid observations about my writing and things that I should be thinking about. 'Cuz this is the thing that I'm really feeling, is having not gotten this feedback, really, in a substantial or a valuable way, especially on final papers.

*Interviewer:* Yeah. I mean, if somebody just sort of said, "Come and do what we're doing. Come and say, 'So what do you think?'"

*Interviewee:* Yeah, I would love to tell people what I think. I'd love to have that conversation. *[Laughs]*

*Interviewer:* Right. "Tell me how you think you've grown, and then I'll talk it back to you how I think you've grown," and—

*Interviewee:* Or, like, if you don't think I've grown, it doesn't have to be such a positive, productive conversation. It can be like, "Hey, I just want to give you some feedback before you go into your next semester of classes here. Writing is really important. You're doing a good job on similes, but you need to"—

*Interviewer:* Yeah.

*Interviewee:* Like, you know, I mean, it doesn't have to be so "shiningly positive."

*Interviewer:* Right, "but here are some things to think about. Here's what I saw happen, even if what I saw was you started the semester high energy, and now. you're low energy."

*Interviewee:* "Now, you're low energy."

*Interviewer:* —and that happens. That's reality, you know.

*Interviewee:* Yeah.

*Interviewer:* How do we deal with that?

*Interviewee:* Yeah.

*Interviewer:* Okay. Anything else you want us to know that we haven't talked about?

*Interviewee:* Um, I feel like you guys have done something to make the Sweetland Center approachable; sometimes make good hours, sometimes do this or that. I guess, maybe, it was just the fact that I can't do everything at this University. I take advantage of as many things as I can, but I just haven't ever found the time to get there.

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*Interviewer:* So it was like it's—. Yeah,

*Interviewee:* I feel like this is just another thing that I'll look back and be like, "Well, that's another thing I didn't do, that I'll never have the opportunity to do." I personally feel like, I look back and think that my writing is really important. I didn't always think it. I didn't always value it in my mind. Maybe, like, getting all the notices about the studies and participating in this for four years is another thing that has reminded me of like, "People think this is important. People are focusing on this. I should focus on it too. I think it's important too."

But, yeah, I'm definitely a little bit disappointed that it's something that I haven't—disappointed, personally, that I haven't been taking advantage of this because, obviously, there is a space where people get feedback on writing. There is a space. It's just not—maybe if somebody told me in one of my classes like, "You *must* go," that would help, as opposed to, "Here's a resource if you need it." 'Cuz I was like, "I don't need it. I'm doing okay. People keep giving me 'As' and my writing is still mediocre? I don't need it." *[Interviewer laughs]* That was how I felt, a lot of times.

*Interviewer:* Yeah, sure. Sure. That makes a lot of sense to me. Okay.

*Interviewee:* I think I've gotten a lot undeserved "As" at this University.

*Interviewer:* I believe that. I've given a lot of undeserved "As." I believe—

*Interviewee:* —you're probably not the only—I don't think you're the only professor that says that. I've talked to other who, like, are friends who are GSIs, and it's just—

*Interviewer:* —so that works—

*Interviewee:* —it's because there are so many people who don't deserve to pass, who need to get "Cs." Like, it just, I think maybe it skews—like I'm an A student compared to, like, your D students. Do I really deserve an "A" every semester? I don't know.

*Interviewer:* Yeah, it's hard to know. It's hard to know. It's super subjective. I mean, and so much of it depends on what your philosophy behind grading is. I don't believe in grading as rank ordering, because I hate rank ordering people. I hate it. *[Laughs]*

*Interviewee:* Yeah, that's a question of *[voice trails off]*. I'm glad that you don't like it.

*Interviewer:* Yeah, it's—a lot of complexity to these issues. I think you've hit on some really interesting, really thought provoking complexities, and I'm really thankful to have had the chance to talk with you and to carry those with me as I move forward. Thank you for taking the time. Thank you for sharing your experience with us. I'm sorry that it hasn't been what—I think we all would have hoped it could be. You know, um—

*Interviewee:* —yeah, you know, I mean, I'm sorry. I don't mean to be hyper critical—

*Interviewer:* No, no, no. It's important for us to have your experience, because you are not alone in this experience.

*Interviewee:* Right.

*Interviewer:* It's important for us to hear your story if we are gonna think better about—

*Interviewee:* I hope that it helps, and I definitely like sharing.

*Interviewer:* Uh huh. Good. Thanks.

*Interviewee:* Thank you very much—

*Interviewer:* Yeah, absolutely,

*Interviewee:* —for giving me the opportunity, and, hopefully, it will make some difference down the line—

[…]

*[End of Audio]*