

Interviewer: This is ***, and I'm here with ***. It is April 29th 2013. ***, just to get us started, kind of like a grand tour question, how would you describe yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: Well, I guess I've been more of an academic writer over the past four years, obviously, just because of school. I feel that my writing has really developed because of the whole minor in writing portfolio. I had to look at some old essays from freshman year and they're really funny and kind of terrible. I thought it was okay to open my essay by quoting an emo band.

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: I had a lot of weird ideas. I feel like I have vastly improved on the academic writing scale. Not to be super-self-absorbed or anything, but I consistently do well on writing projects. I look forward to doing them. I've also been really trying to expand my writing. For the capstone project, I wrote a short story just so I could write outside of academic discipline.

I think to overall describe myself as a writer, I would say that I'm a fairly accomplished academic writer who's trying to grow in other areas.

Interviewer: Great. You talked a little bit about just now how you were as a writer when you first started here at university.

Interviewee: Yep.

Interviewer: What else would you say about that?

Interviewee: Well, when I first started, I was very married to the whole five-paragraph essay structure. I remember my first [Writing course], I asked my GSI [Graduate Student Instructor], "How do you write a seven-page paper? Do you just make the five paragraphs really long?" I had no conception of more than five paragraphs.

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: That quickly became apparent that, yeah. Like I said, I really liked to make pop culture references, not even just in the introduction [laughter]. I think my writing had a lot of voice and a lot of personality that it might not have now just because I've gone through the whole machine thing, but it was definitely also less polished. It stuck to the thesis statement not as well, and I feel like I've come a long way. Yeah.

Interviewer: It sounds like it. It sounds like you've got a different language for even talking about writing than you had before [laughter].

Interviewee: Definitely. One of the pieces that I put in my writing minor portfolio was this introduction letter for my [Writing course] GSI about what kind of writer I was. I

don't remember doing that at all, and I was like, "I really liked to talk about movies and ..." I don't know. That was weird, but [laughter] you should definitely write that down—

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: - for the study. Freshmen are weird. Who knew? But yeah, so...

Interviewer: As you graduate then, you talked about how you feel pretty confident in your academic writing.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: I wonder what your goals are for yourself as a writer once you leave the university.

Interviewee: Well, since I'm going to law school, I obviously want to develop in that kind of arena of writing. I've gotta learn how to write briefs and legal documents, and I don't even know actually. I'm gonna find out when I get there, but [laughter] I've got to develop a lot in the legal arena, which is obviously a little bit—it's even drier than academic writing. It's a lot more to the point, and it's a lot more formal. I feel like I can handle that, but obviously, I'm gonna need a lot of practice there.

I would also like to continue writing more fun things like short stories and stuff just so that I can continue to do stuff that I enjoy while I develop my more formal legal skills.

Interviewer: Do you imagine sharing the short stories of the kinds of writing you do?

Interviewee: I would like to. I need to find out more about how to do that. I've been looking up literary journals and stuff online and trying to find ones that seem legit and not like you pay us a hundred dollars and then we never get back to you again. That's been interesting. I would like to ideally—I don't know if what I have now is good enough, but I'd like to at least try.

Interviewer: Thinking across the experiences you've had here, what do you think it means to write well?

Interviewee: I think that's very subjective actually. To write well in one class is completely different than to write well in a different class. I think almost every writing-heavy class that I've been in has spent at least one lesson teaches us how to write for that class. This is usually after everyone bombed the first paper.

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: This happened like 400 times. I'm not even kidding. A lot of the times, it's writing—occasionally, it's writing what the professor wants to hear, and I hate that kind of writing. I think that's terrible. To be a generally good writer means to learning how to

write in a whole bunch of different disciplines and feeling confident when you do. I think it's really hard to be an overall good writer because there's just so many different types of writing. Yeah.

Interviewer: It sounds like knowing the conventions of the different disciplines is an important part of it.

Interviewee: Yeah..

Interviewer: Maybe being able to be flexible between them.

Interviewee: Yeah. Knowing your strengths, knowing which writing you do well and which you need to work on and working on those areas and stuff.

Interviewer: Are there things that you need to work on still?

Interviewee: Probably. There's obviously some technical stuff that is still kind of hard. The whole who versus whom thing. Never gonna get that. I can never remember that. I think that I could make my arguments a lot stronger. I could probably be a better researcher cuz research is such an important part of writing. It's like half the battle. I think that sometimes I digress a little bit. I can work on integrating things a little bit more.

That's just in terms of academic writing. For new media writing, I could just learn how to do that at all. I know that we focused a lot on that in the minor in writing, but I'm not out of place where I feel confident with all sorts of new media e-writing. With fiction and stuff, I think it's more becoming more confident in writing dialogue and feeling certain in that, like the story progression and stuff. A whole bunch of different things, a whole bunch of different areas.

Interviewer: Yeah, always room to grow [laughter].

Interviewee: Yep, definitely.

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

Interviewee: Well, I took [Women's Studies course], which was [title of course], which was also an upper-level writing course because we had to write a 12-page research paper on a topic of our choosing. I believe that [History course] was an upper-level writing, but I'm not really sure. I'm pretty sure though.

For my concentration, I took—oh, my God, what was it called? [Title of Political Science course]. It was a lot of fun though. It was really interesting. I wish I knew the numbers for you, but... [Laughter]

Interviewer: No, that's okay. That's [cross talk 08:46].

Interviewee: [Laughter]

Interviewer: I don't remember the numbers either.

Interviewee: That's good [laughter].

Interviewer: This semester, I know what I'm doing right now and that's it [laughter].

Interviewee: Pretty much, pretty much. Yeah, yeah. It was like [title of course]. It was about different voting systems.

Interviewer: Interesting.

Interviewee: Yeah, I liked it.

Interviewer: What were your experiences like in those courses?

Interviewee: The [Writing course] I think could have integrated—or not the [Writing course]. The [Women's Studies course] I think could have integrated the writing a little bit more throughout. We had to write shorter reflection papers, but those are really easy and it wasn't very in depth. By the time we got to the 12-page research paper, it felt like we hadn't built up to that. It was just kind of like you kinda did nothing but take notes and study for exams this whole semester, and now all of a sudden, tons of writing.

I feel like an upper-level writing course should focus on developing the writing more, and I think that that is something that the people who work on that course could work on. The [title of Political Science] class was a little bit better about this because they had us write, and we were in groups, and we all had to write essays at different times about different topics. We had to write about four or five different topics and had a final paper.

I just feel like that that course really set it up so that there was room to develop, and it kind of set a lot of very specific guidelines for what the professor wanted. The assignments were also pretty challenging, and they required a lot of research and looking to the class frameworks but also didn't, I don't know, restrict us to the class frameworks.

Interviewer: I wonder about your experiences as a writer in those classes.

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: How did they help you or...?

Interviewee: Well, the Women's Studies class with the 12-page research paper was really challenging just because I hadn't written anything of that scope before. My papers had tended to be round the seven to ten range, averaging around eight. Just in terms of sheer

length, that was a challenge. Also, kind of bringing a whole bunch of research together into one topic. That was kind of challenging, but it was also kind of really interesting.

The [Political Science course] was really helpful just because I just had to keep writing and keep writing and keep writing. It was always about topics I didn't know that much about. The piece that I remember the best was about Ireland and their voting system and how it's different than the United States. I had to learn all this stuff about that and integrate it into the paper. It was kind of like I was learning about this while I was writing about it and trying to sound like an expert, which I probably wasn't. It was very good integration of research and writing and how those go together.

Interviewer: Did you learn any specific skills that you can name about how to do research on the topic that aren't familiar with and write about it.

Interviewee: Start with books. Don't start with the Internet cuz books will usually be a little bit more specific. Whereas, the Internet, it's just harder to find really concrete stuff from a reputable source, especially about stuff like government cuz you can't really find a New York Times article that's like, "This is how Ireland works." It just doesn't happen.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Don't procrastinate when you don't know anything about Ireland. That's important [laughter]—

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: - just about Ireland. Just kind of how to write a thesis statement that is pretty original with information that you have to bring in very heavily I guess, if that makes any sense.

Interviewer: Yeah, how do you do that, if you were gonna tell someone else how to do that?

[...]

Interviewee: It depends on the class that you're taking. You have to rely heavily on the class frameworks, which was something I really wasn't prepared for when I came to U of M [University of Michigan], the idea of this class is gonna teach you how to think about things in these ways. That just confused me, but so I was like, "Oh, you're gonna teach me hard facts." No, it's more like paradigms or ways of thinking of things.

You have to apply the class frameworks to the information that you find outside in books or the Internet or whatever, and then, I don't know, come up with some way to combine the two and make it into kind of an original thesis statement that is arguable. Yeah [laughter].

Interviewer: Do you remember what your thesis was from that paper? The gist of it?

Interviewee: It was that because Ireland has a voting system where it's like—I already forgot. I knew this really, really well when I wrote the paper. Because it's kind of like a first past-the-post 14:14 thing. You get a certain amount and then you vote for them all again, I guess. It's more focused on candidates than on parties. They have five or six viable parties, whereas, the United States only has two because we have majority rules.

It was kind of like comparing those two systems and why one has a whole bunch of parties and why people don't identify as like personally with the parties because it's more about the individual candidates because of the way the voting works. It was a lot more succinct and pretty when I wrote it.

Interviewer: [Laughter] Well, still sounds like a really interesting thing to write about though.

Interviewee: It was. I liked it [laughter]. That's why I'm a poly-sci [Political Science] major, but anyway...

Interviewer: You said then that was your concentration writing course?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Did you take any other writing courses?

Interviewee: In political science? I would argue that all of their classes were very writing heavy because political science as a major is a lot more theoretical than it is—like you can't really take a test on it, at least the way it's done at this university. I mean, there are classes that are like, "Okay, this is The Constitution and this is the three branches." Fill in some bubbles, but most of them are about applying theories, so almost every class I took was very writing heavy.

Interviewer: Do you feel like the writing concentration course helped you in those other political science classes?

Interviewee: By the time I started the writing minor, I was nearing the end of my political science courses to be completely honest. I think it helped me with the whole research thing because I did have to do a lot of research for [Writing course] while I was in upper-level writing for political science. I think the writing minor was very valuable with political science in that it, I don't know. I worked on a lot of outside of academic writing within the writing minor and I guess I kind of expanded my view of what political science papers could be.

Interviewer: Interesting. Thinking about the minor capstone course—

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: - [Writing course], what impact would you say that that course has had on your writing overall?

Interviewee: Well, the capstone course was a very interesting experience. A lot of it was—we had kind of like the project, the portfolio, and then we had these mini-assignments that kind of existed outside of the sphere of everything else, but also severely impacted our grade. I kind of focused mostly on the project, which was the story that I referenced earlier and the portfolio, which was a lot of looking back at older writing and finding a way to write about it.

I would say that writing the story helped me kind of actualize a skill that I didn't really know if I had or not, and writing the portfolio gave me a lot of help writing about writing, which it's a skill. It's harder than you think it would be cuz you sound really self-centered for ages.

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: "I did this because of this, and my life is so interesting that I'm putting it on the Internet."

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: I have a lot of mixed feelings about the portfolio, but yeah, I wish that that course had been a little bit more focused in developing specific skills, but I mean, we were the first cohorts, so they're still working stuff out I think.

[...]

Interviewer: Back to this other question though. Would you say that [Writing course] changed your writing process or had any impact on your writing process?

Interviewee: If I say no, are they gonna be really mad?

Interviewer: No. Nothing's mad [laughter]. We need to ask questions—

Interviewee: I don't know.

Interviewer: - and of course, we value your honesty [laughter].

Interviewee: My main criticism of the writing minor as a whole is that it's not very focused at this point. I realize that that's because they're trying to accommodate a whole bunch of different people and a whole bunch of different majors in kind of helping them all develop the skills that they want to develop. I feel like that is almost it's biggest weakness because you can't make an individual program for every individual student without making it independent study, which [Writing course] turned into.

For about three months straight, we all just had workdays every day, which was just us working on our projects or portfolios by ourselves. While independent study is super valuable, I think that the writing minor really needs to think critically about what skills they want us to develop or what skills that they want to focus on us developing instead of just kind of letting us do whatever we felt like that week.

I realize that that's kind of part of it, but I don't know. I feel like I developed skills that I wanted to develop, if that makes sense, but maybe not as much as if they'd been a little bit more directed.

Interviewer: What skills would you say you did develop that you wanted to develop?

Interviewee: Like I said, a lot of writing about writing and reflective stuff, which we started in [Writing course] and kind of carried over into [different Writing course] into sort of finding an overarching story to your writing. That's harder than you would think. Then writing fiction, I felt like I wanted to cuz I hadn't written any fiction during the—well, no I did cuz I had took creative writing. Just sort of having that experience of writing fiction under really strict deadlines kind of, I don't know—it helped me develop that skill, which was something I'd wanted to do.

Interviewer: Sure. Yep. Would you say writing about writing changed your process? You think you'll take something away from that experience?

[...]

Interviewee: Yeah. I guess the process of writing about writing made me think more intentionally about my writing as developing, which I hadn't really thought about before. I was just like, "I write these papers, and they happen." Writing about the fact that these papers have been written, it kind of made me think that I was developing as a writer, which just wasn't something that I thought about on a regular basis. I thought about it as more a static like I'm a writer and I write this way rather than it's growing and changing and stuff. I think that that was beneficial.

Interviewer: Do you think that it changed at all your sense of yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: I mean, this whole process made me think of myself as a writer at all [laughter].

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: Just cuz, I don't know, you have to tell everyone you're in the writing minor, and the whole portfolio is like, "I'm a writer because of blah-blah-blah." I guess it just kind of, I don't know. Like I said, it made me think of myself as a writer in the first place and then as kind of an okay writer. I mean, at the very beginning of this interview, I was like, "Oh, I think I'm a fairly good academic writer." I probably wouldn't think that

about myself unless I had taken the writing minor and gone through all of my papers and thought about how I'd developed. I think that's pretty beneficial.

Interviewer: Sure.

Interviewee: It kind of creates an identity that's a little bit more solid.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Something that might come in handy for you as you're moving forward, right?

Interviewee: Yeah.

[...]

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah, it sounds like your skills sets are really aligned with that kind of work. I wonder about your e-portfolio.

[...]

Interviewer: They're all so interesting. Yeah, tell me about what your most memorable experience was creating this.

Interviewee: Like I said, kind of looking back at past writing and seeing how far I had come, and I kind of organized my portfolio around a theme. I put in a lot of stuff that I didn't have to just because it fit the theme. It kind of surprised me how much I wrote about women and gender and feminism and activism and more specifically, the history of people within the feminist movement. I knew that I was a little bit obsessed with that because I took a bunch of women's studies classes that I didn't have to just cuz I was interested in it. I'm a member of [Center in Ann Arbor]. Actually, I was a coordinator at [Center].

[...]

Interviewee: I knew that I was interested in that, but I hadn't realized how much I'd spent—how much time I had spent writing about it. That's why I have this whole activism and gender section cuz probably a good half of my main college writing pieces were about that. A whole bunch of my materials for law school were about working at [Center in Ann Arbor], about what I want to do with my legal career, which is mostly help women. I was really kind of surprised about that, and it kind of made me happy because I was like, "Oh, I wrote about good things through this whole time."

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: I mean, at the same time, that kinda made it hard because I still had to fit some of those requirements in there, and I was like, "Other stuff I did..." At first, it was other writing samples, and people were like, "That's like your—" We edited each other's

portfolios, and people were like, “Oh, that other just makes it sound like that’s the lame writing.” I’m like, “It is the lame writing though, so…”

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: [Laughter] Then my final project is like a story, and so it was like okay, I have this big theme stuff, and then I have the other requirement stuff. Then I have this story that has nothing to do with women and gender, so I don’t know. Just sort of finding a way to integrate all of that was very interesting. Like I said, I liked seeing how much I’d written about one thing, and I also liked seeing how that one thing and my views on it had developed from very simplistic to a lot more complex and challenged and stuff.

Interviewer: That’s interesting. What were your goals then for the narrative that you wanted to tell?

Interviewee: I guess I really wanted to—I guess what’s explained in this reflective essay is the best way to explain that. I wanted to show how I had used writing and writing about all these things that I was passionate about to learn about those things and become more passionate about them. When I started college, I was like, “Feminism means you like women. I’m a feminist.”

While I don’t doubt the identity of anybody who’s just like, “I’m a feminist because I believe that women should have equal rights,” I learned a lot about how that identity is a lot more complicated than that and a lot more—it’s steeped in this very rich and occasionally really difficult history. I learned about all those things through writing about it. I talked a lot about that Irish political identification essay.

I was learning about the topic while I was writing about it, and so this whole essay just explains how I learned about a lot of my identities. I learned about things that I had a lot of raw passion about but didn’t really understand through writing about them. Then with my final project, again, it was something that I had a lot of raw passion about. When I was really little, I was like, “I’m gonna be a novelist,” and I’d never actually tried to write a novel.

Taking the opportunity of [Writing course] to actually try to write 45 pages of something, it was like I learned that I could do it, and I learned how to do it. Does that make any sense?

Interviewer: It absolutely does.

Interviewee: That’s good [laughter].

[...]

Interviewee: Yeah. It’s a lot of reflection.

Interviewer: You talked a little bit about the design of this. What choices did you make in the design of the portfolio?

Interviewee: Well, I picked Google Sites cuz it was the most intuitive platform to use. I tried WordPress [content management system] for a while, and it was just like this confuses me too much. I used this background because all the other ones are really ugly, and that's just true. I spent a whole class day looking through all the different themes. I was like, "These are all so stupid." I don't know. I just liked how simple this one was. I liked it cuz it wouldn't be too busy if I added pictures, and I did for a lot of these things. If I wrote about a book, I had the picture of the book.

If I wrote about [Center in Ann Arbor], I had some pictures like this is a report on 2011-2012 and what I did that year, and that's everybody in my group wearing the same shirt cuz that's what we do. Or for [Writing course], I wrote about urban exploration, and that's like something from an urban exploration website. I thought that the more blank background made it easier to insert pictures without it being super busy or annoying, so...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Yeah. Other than that, I was pretty restricted by the Google Sites and the fact that I don't know how to HTML anything. They tried to teach us in [Writing course]. I was like, "I can't do that. I'm sorry."

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: I can't website, so...

Interviewer: Were there other choices you made on purpose? You said this one to keep things less busy for the reader.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Were there other choices you were making with the reader in mind, so you could have impact over this experience in some way or another?

Interviewee: Like I said, I added the pictures to make it more interesting. Nobody wants to read just texts all the time. Just while I was writing all the reflective pieces, I tried to keep in mind this person doesn't—the ones from Sweetland, they don't know me. They've never met me. They don't know what my major is. They don't know what [Center in Ann Arbor] is, so I made sure to explain throughout the portfolio this was for this class; that's what this class was; that's what this assignment was.

I think a lot of the times when you're reflecting for an audience, you can forget that they don't know what you're talking about.

[...]

Interviewer: Sure. You talked some about some relationships that you noticed as you were kind of surveying your work?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Say more about those relationships among the different artifacts that you pulled together as you were creating this portfolio.

Interviewee: Well, obviously, all of this activism and gender. I did a lot of writing—I mean, not a lot of writing, but enough writing about [...] the women's movement in America. Especially the white upper-class women's movement in America. She kind of reflected the despondency with limited female roles, and her writing reflected a lot of that. I wrote that freshman year. It's not amazing. It's based off of a book, a biography that I found. Then this essay about [...] a prominent figure in British upper-class white women's liberation.

[...]

Interviewee: Those two artifacts are really similar because I took a biography/autobiography and placed it in context of the time period and where it was in the women's movement and how it related to that. I think, I don't know, just looking at those two essays, especially it's like I'm writing on a similar topic doing a similar thing with this essay, but the writing is so much better [in the second artifacts] because I wrote that one fall semester for a 300 level class as opposed to a 200 level class. Neither of those classes were for my major, but I don't know. The circumstances are really similar.

Interviewer: What makes that one better, the [women's liberation] one?

Interviewee: I don't know. The argument's a lot more focused. I digress a lot less. I mean, freshman year, I was just really into [female author]. I was like, "I love The Bell Jar. It's so great." There's a little bit more fangirling in the [female author] one, whereas, I didn't know who [different female author] was. I was just like, "Oh, public service." The writing's a lot more developed and a lot more focused. I mean, there are a lot of relationships between the pieces like these two right here—[title of pieces].

They're both about the need for increased sex education for teenagers. Only, one was written in freshman year and one was written junior year. I guess one of them's more developed. One of them relies a lot on pop culture references. Actually, the other one does too. Maybe I haven't developed as much as I would like.

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: Maybe I'm just obsessed with pop culture, but yeah. I don't know. There's a lot of different relationships between things and there's earlier reflective writing versus later reflective writing or earlier writing about experiences versus later, so yep.

Interviewer: It sounds like one big part of this is highlighting the ways that you've changed or grown as a writer.

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah, definitely.

Interviewer: All within this same kind of interest.

Interviewee: Yep [laughter].

Interviewer: It seems like you've kinda sustained a particular interest and a particular set of problems.

Interviewee: Yeah, definitely. Yeah. I was a little worried that everyone would get bored with my portfolio cuz it's just like women and gender, women and gender, women and gender. Whatever.

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: I'm interested in it, so yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, and it makes for a pretty cohesive project, certainly, but also a cohesive learning experience at the university. You've kinda kept that part more constant.

Interviewee: Yep. Yeah. I know a lot of people struggle to find a story in their writing. They were just like, "I wrote essays for classes and that was it." I was like, "Ha! Oh, I have a story! I can write about this all through college."

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: Almost nothing—well, I mean, obviously, I wrote about other stuff, like urban exploration, but...

Interviewer: Do you think that creating this portfolio has had an effect on your writing?

Interviewee: I don't know. I have written almost anything after I finished it, I guess. It'll probably make me a little bit more self-conscious about my writing. I mean, I have to see next time I have to write a major project for something if I think about this while I'm doing that. Just cuz, I mean, I finished that a week or two ago. I mean, when I'm in law school, I'll let you know [laughter].

Interviewer: [Laughter] Okay. What would you expect? Would you expect that—?

Interviewee: I would a little bit more self-consciousness. Not in a bad way, but more like self-awareness I guess of just where this fits in the overarching story of my writing. I think it'll be a little less haphazard cuz I did all of these things without realizing that I just

kept writing about it and kept writing about it. I really didn't think about it until then, and I think writing it will make me a lot more aware of what I'm writing and why I'm writing about it and what its connections are to other things that I've written about.

Interviewer: Sure. What do you think that people interested in writing development like people at Sweetland, what do you think we could learn about writing development from your e-portfolio?

Interviewee: Well, that it happens a lot quicker but also a lot more slowly than you would think just cuz, I mean, like I said, you can take very similar artifacts from different times in my college career and say right here she was doing this and right here she was doing this. I don't know. Just that I guess the only way to really figure out if someone's developed in writing is by digging deep into all their pieces and I mean, who actually wants to do that? That would take forever. My outside reader actually for this read all of my essays, and I was like, "[Name of Individual! Why would you do that?]" [Laughter]

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: That's so much reading cuz I mean, I know—I don't know. The thing about writing development is like you can only understand it unless you get into all this material. I think that the only people that can really do that in a really meaningful way are the people that have written it. They're also the only people who are super-invested in it, so I don't know. I don't know if you can learn about that specifically from my portfolio or just from everybody's, but yeah, just that learning about writing development is very, I don't know, nitty-gritty, sort of down in all the terrible opening sentences process.

Interviewer: Part of the reason for that you're saying is that it's a slow process to develop and it's—

Interviewee: Yeah. It's slow. It's gradual, but on the other hand, it's only been four years, and I've come pretty far, if I'm gonna toot my own horn. Because this whole process has been super braggy, and I kind of hate it, but—

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: [Laughter] It just I don't know. Four years is not that long of a time, but my writing now is a lot different than my writing before. Like I said, I still have a lot of areas to improve on. I don't know. Yeah.

Interviewer: Thinking about your gateway course—

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: - the intro to the minor, how did you experience that? I guess the question is how did your experience in the capstone course compare to your experience in the gateway course?

Interviewee: Well, the gateway course was a lot more focused on new media like blogging, and we had to take a paper that we'd written before and change it and make it into new media. [Writing course] didn't care so much about that, which I was glad about cuz I can't do media. I mean, there was obviously that difference. They were similar because we had to create a portfolio for both of them. I wish I could be like, "Oh, look at this portfolio and this—," but I can't because I changed my old portfolio into this one. The old one is gone forever—

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: - which might be okay. I don't know. I feel like [Writing course] because the portfolio was more of like an overarching project, in [200 level Writing course], it was something we did in the last two week. It was super rushed, and none of us knew what we were doing.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Interviewee: I think that one of the things that [Writing course] did well was present it as kind of a long-term project rather than something you could do in ten minutes before class.

Interviewer: When you changed your first portfolio in this final one, what were some of the changes that you made?

Interviewee: Well, the background [laughter]. I had this dorky corkboard thing cuz I was like, "Go. It's like the corkboard in my room, and I stick stuff to it." I don't know. I'm a lot more corny than I think I am, and I made it a lot more cohesive. I made more of a story with it because with my [Writing course], there really wasn't. It was just like, "Here are all the requirements. I grew as a writer, look." Whereas, this was more like, "Oh, this is how this compares to this and relates to this." I don't know.

The tone is a little bit more serious [inaudible 44:51] [Writing course] had a lot more pictures and a lot more I don't know quipping I guess. Yeah. This one's bigger, and I think it's better. I don't know. It's a lot more focused.

Interviewer: Both of those courses, the gateway and the capstone, emphasize reflective writing in many different forms.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: How would you describe your experiences with this kind of reflection?

Interviewee: At first, it was really hard just cuz I haven't really done anything like that before, and it was kind of like—I don't know. It felt kind of artificial. It was like, "What am I even doing this for?" I'm just writing about myself. That's really weird. I mean, I

still have trouble with it, like obviously, this whole time I was like, “Why do I have to write about me this whole time?” It got easier, and I started to see the value to it a lot more as it progressed. Like I said, in the beginning, it felt really artificial. It felt really weird. It’s was like, “Why are we even doing this?”

I don’t know. It was just kinda pointless, but in writing this, it kind of felt like it had more value. It became a lot more nuanced. I don’t know.

Interviewer: What do you think made you feel self-conscious when you were doing it to begin with? It sounds it still does make you feel kinda self-conscious.

Interviewee: Yeah, it’s just like, I don’t know. I mean, even this interview. I’m talking about myself like, “I’m a writer. Yeah.” I don’t know. In our culture, we’re really self-deprecating, especially—like [200 level Writing course] was ridiculous. All of our blogs they were all really self-deprecating. It was really funny. Actually, it was really awkward, cuz everyone’s blogs was like, “Oh, I’m doing this right now, and I think it’s awesome, but it’s probably terrible.” It wasn’t just me. It was everybody [laughter].

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: I don’t know. We just don’t live in a world where being like, “I am awesome” is a thing that you should ever do. We live in the age of irony, and I mean, this entire interview has been me making jokes, so clearly, it still affects me. Sitting down and writing really seriously about how you have developed as a writer, it’s just hard for everybody just cuz, I don’t know, you’re not supposed to be like, “I am awesome in these ways” and really mean it. I don’t know. That’s why I thought it was challenging.

Interviewer: You’d say that you’ve gotten less self-conscious over time?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: It’s become more comfortable for you over time.

Interviewee: If you can even believe that, yes [laughter].

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: Yeah, it came a lot more naturally with this one than it did with the first portfolio, especially with the initial assignments and [200 level Writing course]. I remember those being a lot harder and being like, “I didn’t develop as a writer. I just write stuff.” Yeah.

Interviewer: Are you still using reflection in your current writing?

Interviewee: Like I said, it’s been two weeks, so... [Laughter]

Interviewer: This is the last week you're thinking that you've written?

Interviewee: Yeah. I'm kind of in the middle of writing my final paper for something, and mostly I just want it to be over. I haven't reflected as much on—I mean, I'm a lot more like is the best paper I could be writing? Is it just something I'm trying to write so that I can graduate already? So I don't know. It's a little more like self-conscious in a productive way, but I wouldn't say I'm using reflection very deeply yet cuz I'm not, I don't know. I'm not doing that much writing.

Interviewer: I mentioned at the beginning it sounds like you using different language to talk about your writing. I wonder if reflecting if you feel like it has given you new language or new ways of talking about your writing like new terms or new concepts or...?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm. Absolutely. Like before I started the minor in writing, I hadn't written about my writing at all, and that's why it was so hard at first because it was like this isn't a thing that I do. And now that I've been doing it for two years, it's obviously easier. I can talk about it in a much more, I don't know, articulate way. I have things to say about it, which I think is different.

Interviewer: Is there anything specifically that you know that you have picked up from your five-paragraph days [laughter]?

Interviewee: Well, everything. Like additional paragraphs. Oh, my God. Mind blowing.

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: I don't know. Just saying how something has changed or if it has changed. Words like intentional and focused and concepts like—stuff like beyond my grammar has improved cuz it totally has, but I can use semicolons now. Just a way to talk about how it—I can develop a thesis statement a lot more or like and this is how. I can use research in a much more nuanced way, and this is how.

Interviewer: When you look at other people's writing, are you able to give critique of it?

Interviewee: Yeah, I mean, throughout my college career, there's been a lot of critique and writing each other letters about what our writing is doing or not doing. We had to do that in [Writing course], and I feel like it came pretty naturally. I have friends and my family sends me their essays all the time, so I feel like that's a thing that I can do.

Interviewer: What have your experiences been working with other people throughout the minor?

Interviewee: Pretty positive. I really like all the people in the minor. Some of them are kinda whiny, but so am I, so it's okay. I mean, it's a really small cohort, so we all got to know each other pretty well. My roommate's in the writing minor, so that kinda helps. If

you ever interview her, she's really cool. Her name is [...]. Doing the editing and stuff and the peer editing, it was really nice cuz I felt like I could trust them with my writing cuz you see them all the time for two years straight. You know that they're pretty good or at least very solid writers, so you know that they know what they're talking about when they talk about your writing.

That was just really nice to have a community of people that really cared about writing. Whereas, if you're in a required English class and someone's editing your paper, you don't really know how much they write or how they care about writing or how much of an authority they are. Just, I don't know, creating that community was really beneficial for those groups works.

Interviewer: Sure, sure. You did a lot of peer revision—

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: - feedback back and forth?

Interviewee: Yeah. We did our portfolio and on our projects. We did it a lot more in [200 level Writing course], and it was helpful.

Interviewer: Two questions left.

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: One is about what you think professors should know about teaching writing at the undergraduate level. Do you have words of wisdom or points?

Interviewee: Stop doing that thing where we write our first paper and it's terrible and you tell us how to write again because we all already know. We all just don't know what you want specifically. I don't know. I just think professors need to know that their way of writing is not the only one that we have to learn. We had to learn everybody else's too. I don't know. Just being a little bit less personal about how you feel like we should write. I don't know. Just cuz, I don't know, maybe teach us more discipline standards rather than—I don't know.

I felt like I've written things for so many different professors like personal feelings, and I don't really like that cuz I think it's kind of—it doesn't give us skills that operate outside of that specific class. I don't think that that's valuable.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: I mean, it teaches us how to write for different things, and that's kinda good, but I don't know.

Interviewer: Other things?

Interviewee: I guess just, I don't know, be intentional about teaching writing just because it's one of the more important skills that you're gonna have. I say this as someone going to law school who's looking down the barrel of a ton of writing for the rest of her life, but it's one of the most important things you can teach in college. I mean, if you're not learning math, there are not that many objective skills that you can learn.

I think that writing and analytical writing, first of all, it teaches you how to think. Second of all, you're gonna have to write stuff for the rest of your life. I still have to help my parents write stuff cuz in their concentrations, my mom was a science major and my dad did like managerial studies. No one sat them down and were like, "Okay, this is how you compose a thought around one..." I don't know. Be intentional about teaching it cuz it's important.

Interviewer: About the minor program specifically—

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: It's relatively new.

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Are there suggestions you would have for instructors or administrators of the program that you haven't talked about but you would want to expand upon?

Interviewee: Focus. Just make it more focused. Like dear Lord, just focus it. I felt like they were often trying to do too many things at once, and I think that the minor in writing really needs to figure out what its identity is as a minor and what it's trying to teach us. Cuz if it's trying to teach us reflection, then it's doing that relatively well, but focus on it. Maybe call it the minor in reflection or put that on its advertising cuz none of us knew what we were getting into when we started it.

Just sort of ditch the point the system, which I don't know if you know what that is, but we had to do a portfolio and a project. Those weren't really necessarily for points in our grade, but then we had to do a whole bunch of other mini-assignments that were for points. I don't know. It was a lot of busywork, and I don't think it was very beneficial, so ditch the point system and focus on the project and the portfolio.

Find some sort of unifying theme so that it doesn't feel so much like an independent study. If you wanna make an independent study, that could be cool. Especially [Writing course], I felt like that would work really well as an independent study. I don't know. Just kinda figure out what you want to do with it I guess, which sounds kind of mean. A lot of the time, it just felt like they didn't really know what they wanted to do with it, which is understandable.

We're the first cohort, but figure out what that is and just, I don't know. I mean, the most important and most fundamental lesson of writing is that you've gotta focus your piece around a thesis statement. I think that the minor in writing still doesn't know what their thesis statement is.

Interviewer: If you were helping to write a thesis statement of the minor—

Interviewee: [Laughter]

Interviewer: - what would it be? What would you think would be a really useful...?

Interviewee: Let me think. Clearly, it's very easy for me to tell them what to do, but I don't know what I would do.

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: I don't know. I think that they should pick a style or type of writing that they want us to learn and help us learn it, I guess. I guess that contradicts my whole don't write for professors thing, but, I don't know, just sort of if it's reflective writing, emphasize reflective writing. If it's professional writing like I'm gonna help you write for your discipline, emphasize that. If it's like I'm gonna gonna help you achieve your writing dreams, emphasize that. Just pick one and stop trying to do all of them.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Yeah. I mean, I don't know what they want to do exactly, and that's fine, but they need to pick one instead of doing all of them cuz then we learn little bits and pieces of all of it. I don't know. I think it would be more valuable to have a focus.

Interviewer: To know that focus going in—

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: - so that people can make decisions about whether or not to enter the program or not.

Interviewee: Yeah, cuz when I entered it, I thought it was gonna be more of develop your academic writing and make it better. I don't know. I thought it was kind of gonna be like writing bootcamp where we just write tons of essays and critique them and figure out what we were doing wrong with experts. I don't know. It turned out to be a lot more like personal development, which surprised me. It was valuable, but I don't know, I think they need to do a better job of being like, "This is what we are." I think they have to figure that out first though so...

Interviewer: Well, I think that's really good feedback—

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: - and that's something we can definitely put a lot of thought into. I like the phrase that you used about creating a thesis statement for the minor. I think that's got some—

Interviewee: [Laughter]

Interviewer: Staying power [laughter].

Interviewee: I hope so.

[...]

[End of Audio]