

Interviewer: ***. I'm here with ***. It's the 29th of April. [...].

[...]

Interviewer: What is next for you?

Interviewee: I'm going to med school next fall.

Interviewer: Oh, wow.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Do you know where yet?

Interviewee: Yeah, in [city]—

Interviewer: Oh, cool.

Interviewee: - Medical College at [state].

Interviewer: Very cool.

Interviewee: I'm excited.

Interviewer: Hence the shirt, huh?

Interviewee: Yeah, well, I'm from there, too.

Interviewer: Oh, oh—that's great. You get to go home.

Interviewee: Right.

Interviewer: Nice, nice. We're gonna talk a little bit about your experiences in the minor today—we'll talk a lot about—I'll ask a lot of questions about writing and you think about writing. We'll start with some really broad, general questions. Then we'll discuss your writing experiences here at [University of Michigan] and your experiences with the Capstone. We'll talk a little bit the Gateway course, but mostly about the Capstone and your ePortfolio from the Capstone. That'll be it—pretty straightforward kinds of questions. My first question is a really broad question. That is, how would you say that you describe yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: I think we had this on the online—

Interviewer: The survey thing?

Interviewee: Yeah, survey, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: I would say more than anything—my goals I guess as I've been a writer—the last couple years especially—has been more of a reflective kind of writer—wanting to record and observe more than anything. I've known ever since the Gateway course that I was going to pursue medicine—I wasn't really gonna try to be a professional writer in any sense. I really enjoyed writing so I wanted some way to make it important to me. I felt like that was the best way to go about it.

Interviewer: Entering the minor, you mean?

Interviewee: Right, right, right. Yeah. I felt like that could be my last chance to do this kind of thing. I really focused on trying to capture what I was feeling at the time and make it a way that I could look back at writing some day and think of it as I was doing it then—if that makes sense.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. That makes perfect sense to me. How would you have described yourself as a writer when you started here at [University of Michigan]?

Interviewee: I think I was a little more ambitious then 'cuz I obviously wasn't sure that I was gonna get into med school and all that. I wanted to keep my options open. I started out a little more aggressively maybe I could say—in terms of wanting to make strong—maybe sometimes controversial arguments—really focusing on trying to move people with my writing—whatever would end up reading it. Then over time I gradually got to a more complacent—I guess not complacent, but a little more hands-off approach maybe—just wanted it to be for me rather than for other people.

Interviewer: When you started here did you think that you might pursue some kind of professional—

Interviewee: I wasn't sure at all—obviously 'cuz I liked writing so much. I felt like that was an option—obviously medicine was always my first goal, but I wanted to keep things open in case it didn't work out. I wanted to give it my all until I was sure that—

Interviewer: That makes sense.

Interviewee: - I didn't wanna go somewhere else with it.

Interviewer: As you graduate then, and head to medical school—what are your goals as far as your writing is concerned?

Interviewee: That's why I like the Capstone so much. It gave me a lot of ways to learn how to write reflectively and not—it took up so much of my time. That was one of the coolest things, I felt I learned in the minor—is that with all the blog posts and everything—is that writing doesn't have to be well-polished, well-formatted articles or papers or whatever. It can just be little snippets and that's enough to capture what you're going for at times. I'm hoping that when I move on that'll be something I'll be able to keep up without it taking too much time but still kinda getting my urge write out.

Interviewer: That makes a lot of sense to me. As you think about all of your experiences here at [University of Michigan]—you started here as a freshman?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: As you think about your experiences here at Michigan all four years—what do you think it means to write well? What does good writing look like?

Interviewee: First and foremost being satisfied with it individually.

Interviewer: You mean as a writer?

Interviewee: Right, as a writer if you write and revise and look at it then end and be okay with it—not feel like you were forced the wrong way—which I guess might not be the worst thing sometimes—but being satisfied with it and accomplishing the goals that you had and that whoever gave you the assignment had is what you need to be successful.

Interviewer: Which upper level writing courses did you take?

Interviewee: I took [Ecology course]—that was at the [University of Michigan Biological Station]. Then [Political Science course] [Title of course] and that was here.

Interviewer: What were your experiences in those two courses?

Interviewee: The one at the Bio [Biological] Station was amazing. That was probably the coolest experience of my life—in general. In terms of strictly the writing—it was the definitely the most scientifically intensive I ever took. I was really surprised how much effort needs to go—obviously we did a couple months of research and I thought that would be the main part of our final paper which was the big part of the course. The amount of the effort that had to go into organizing everything—analyzing it—then writing it up in a scientifically appropriate was pretty staggering. It was a really cool experience 'cuz obviously I really like that kind of stuff. I liked it a lot. The second class—[Title of course]—interesting in a

different kind of way. It was an upper level writing class, but it was in political science so it was something I really had no—

Interviewer: Background.

Interviewee: - right—no experience in at all, really—especially writing that way. It was an upper level class—obviously most the other kids in there were poli sci [political science] majors. We had a lot more papers in that class than we did in the ecology class just ‘cuz it was a longer semester—learning how to build up to that—the final paper and learning how to adjust my writing every, single time—figuring out there was always things I needed to work on. That was interesting. I kinda wish I would’ve taken that class before my other upper level writing class because I learned so much from it in terms of writing for a science, I guess I could say.

Interviewer: That makes sense to me. Do you still make use of what you learned in those two courses in your writing now?

Interviewee: I took one last upper level biology class to finish off my major. I do a lot of writing for that obviously. The synthetic and analytical techniques I learned the ecology class was really helpful, definitely. In terms of the political science class—I don’t think I’ve used those tools at all yet. I’m not sure when I will again. I was interested in the subject so I really cared more about what I learned rather than how I learned to write there—‘cuz I don’t think I’m ever gonna do political science writing again. The scientific parts—especially for the ecology class—it was definitely helpful so far. I think it will be in the future, too—obviously as I’m continuing with science.

Interviewer: Great, great. What other writing courses have you taken?

Interviewee: Let’s see. There was the Gateway, and then the freshman level—

Interviewer: Did you take [English course]?

Interviewee: I took [English 100 level course]—yeah. Then I took [English 200 level course]—[Title of course]. I had to get an exception for that. I thought it used to be part of—one of the allowed classes. I remember talking to an advisor, and they told me to take it. Then I had to get an exception for that to count as the English class ‘cuz apparently it’s only [English course].

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Interviewee: I’m really glad I took [Title of course]. I never would’ve had a chance to do something like that—

Interviewer: Yeah, that’s really different—

Interviewee: - [cross talk 08:21] as an undergraduate.

Interviewer: - than your other stuff.

Interviewee: Right, yeah, exactly. It's definitely the most challenging writing I've ever done—but really interesting—never will get a chance to seriously try that stuff again with a grader and everything.

Interviewer: So [English 100 level course], [English 200 level course]—those two upper level courses, the Gateway, the Capstone—

Interviewee: Yeah, and then obviously there's little bits of writing for other classes.

Interviewer: Yeah, that makes sense. How have those writing courses affected the writing that you do in these other concentration courses—the courses that you're using to prepare for med school—where you're having to little bits of writing, but they're maybe not writing intensive courses or other classes that you've taken?

Interviewee: [English course] was really a good jumping off for me. It definitely convinced me that I really wanted to do writing in college and that I guess I'd be—I wouldn't be bad at it. [Laughter] That was the biggest thing for me—to figure I wanted to do the minor in writing. Obviously writing—it's a lotta work. It's not the most fun thing for a lotta people—even for people who like writing like me—

Interviewer: Yeah, it's still hard.

Interviewee: - sometimes it can get pretty tedious and hard—yeah. Figuring out that as a first semester freshman here that that's something that I could possibly excel in—that I still enjoyed—that was huge to me. Figuring out to do the minor and for just convincing me to do writing in general as I was here—outside of purely class work and stuff. That's where the most growth I think I had with those short writing pieces was—was not when I was not in classes—when I was thinking about maybe incorporating something into a blog post. The short reflective writings I do—maybe half of them ended up going on the blog and half of them I ended up keeping for myself—the things that I didn't really wanna share on there. I think the classes were great for convincing me and inspiring me to do writing, but not so much the content that I did for the classes—if that makes sense.

Interviewer: Right, right—that makes sense. How often have you used the skills or strategies that you've learned—maybe in other places as well? Have you thought about—you use the skills or strategies from your writing class in things that are outside of school at all?

Interviewee: Yeah, definitely just with the reflective kind of writing that I do.

Interviewer: Like those key pieces you were saying you keep for yourself kind of thing?

Interviewee: Right, right—I think that’s probably the extent with which I do it. I haven’t really attempted much substantial writing outside of classes. It’s mostly just short pieces—mainly ‘cuz I don’t have a lotta time—

Interviewer: Well, I mean—

Interviewee: Right.

Interviewer: Let’s talk about the Capstone course a little bit. What impact has the Capstone course had overall on your writing would you say?

Interviewee: It was great for summarizing what I learned more or less. I feel like growth as a writer in the Capstone—I definitely learned some good techniques for writing and stuff and how I view myself as a writer, but I thought it was definitely most valuable for figuring out what I learned and getting that set in my mind to help define myself as a writer.

Interviewer: Has this course had an impact on your writing process?

Interviewee: Writing process. I think a little bit—yeah. I had [an instructor] fantastic. He taught us a lot of cool ways to think about writing. It didn’t change my writing substantially, but it gave me new ideas to how to think about it.

Interviewer: What affect has the experience of the Capstone project had on you has a writer?

Interviewee: Me as a writer.

Interviewer: Putting together that Capstone project.

Interviewee: Right.

Interviewer: How has that maybe shaped the writing that you do or the way that you think about your own writing—

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: - or anything like that.

Interviewee: [The instructor] always said throughout that we needed to come up with a theme for our portfolio and everything and for both of the big pieces we wrote—the Evolution Essay and the Capstone Project. So getting that theme for both of those is a good way of objectifying myself as a writer—just kind of a one sentence explanation of who I was as a writer over my undergraduate career. I think that’s a good starting point maybe for how I’m gonna view my writing in the future. I talked about this before—I came up with—I want it to be reflective and recording who I am what I’m feeling at the time. That’s what I hope it came across as in my portfolio.

Interviewer: Why did you pick the project that you chose then? I know you’re thinking about being reflective. What led you to the particular project that you ended up choosing?

Interviewee: I was thinking back on my whole—all the classes I took [...] and all the writing did both in official minor writing classes and outside—obviously it was science-heavy with all my classes. At the same time I had time I had other interests as well. I took [writing course] and a couple other not exactly scientific courses that I didn’t need for either my major or my minor. I tried to find a way in my project and my portfolio to talk about how—I guess I didn’t personally synthesize those at any point, but I wanted to attempt that in my final project. Those were two really important parts of undergraduate career, but they had to remain distinct obviously the whole time. There was really no overlap. I wanted, as my final reflection, to bring them together and talk about them.

Interviewer: That makes a lotta sense. The next couple of questions are actually about your Capstone Portfolio.

Interviewee: Sure.

Interviewer: Hopefully my computer will connect to the internet as it’s supposed to. It’s been struggling lately.

Interviewee: [Inaudible 14:28]

Interviewer: Yeah—dissertations kill computers—

Interviewee: It does that, yeah—especially in the library—yeah.

Interviewer: I think we’re connected. If you’d like to pull it up.

[...]

Interviewer: That’s alright. Wonderful. What was the most memorable aspect of creating this portfolio?

Interviewee: Hm. This was the first time I used Wix [web development program] definitely. I don't wanna get in the semantics of it, but it was pretty difficult learning how to construct a website—off a totally new tool—'cuz I used WordPress [content management system] for the Gateway.

Interviewer: What made you decide to switch?

Interviewee: Everyone in my class recommended it. They'd used WordPress in the past and most of them have used Wix as well. They said it's a lot easier. Looking back I wish I'd stuck with WordPress just 'cuz I think I had the mindset going into that I wanted to do the same things that I did in my Gateway more or less—just reorganized and a different look to it. Doing things like embedding pictures in text and embedding geomag [Geomagnetism] 19:20—which is what I did my final project on. It was a lot more difficult in here.

Interviewer: Oh, really?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: I've heard Wix has more flexibility.

Interviewee: Yeah, but it might just be harder to learn how to get to all the flexibility.

Interviewer: Yeah—to do it.

Interviewee: Overall, I'm happy with what—

Interviewer: Yeah, it looks nice. What was your goal for the portfolio as far as the narrative that you wanted to tell or the overarching theme or that kind of thing?

Interviewee: We talked about this a little before. I wanted to just look back on the most important stuff that I've done as an undergraduate and look at how the two different aspects that science and the other stuff—which I had described as meaning or interpretation—less scientific things—more like creative writing or philosophy and stuff like that—how they can work together more or less.

Interviewer: How well do you feel your portfolio addresses that goal?

Interviewee: I think that's pretty much the only main goal it addressed. I talk about it. I provide examples.

Interviewer: You had those two tabs there with the scientific and the interpretive.

Interviewee: I try to show the contrast between them in terms of where I started and where I finished and how I work ideas of the other side into each piece a little bit—which was kind of difficult to do ‘cuz obviously when I was writing these papers in the first place that’s not what I had in mind. Trying to find little, subtle things where that happens made it a lot more interesting to construct this. It’s pretty much exactly what my Evolution Essay was about as well. I talk about it a little more explicitly there.

Interviewer: That’s weird. Let me see what happened. That was bizarre. I’ve never seen it do that before. Okay—there we go.

Interviewee: Then the synthetic part is just my Capstone project. That’s even more of an explicit explanation of it. I think it came across pretty well that I was trying [*fading voice 21:28*].

Interviewer: Did you design the portfolio to give the reader any kind of particular experience of—

Interviewee: Yeah, that was another part of it. [The personalized design]. I tried to—

Interviewer: [The personalized design]?

Interviewee: Kind of—yeah, yeah, yeah. More like the scientific stuff. Then I alternate between the trees and the stars—kind of corny like science and meaning kind of thing. I tried to make the specific background reflect what the emphasis was in that particular paper. That was supposed to add to it a little bit.

Interviewer: Yeah, that’s cool. Did you notice any relationships among your artifacts as you were putting them together into this portfolio?

Interviewee: I definitely noticed common threads. I think that’s what I was trying to get across with the differences between the entry level and the upper level—just the trends of being able to separate a little bit better as I got through my college career in terms of “this is the scientific and the meaning” and then trying to bring it together at the very end. Besides that, I can’t think of much that I saw in common I guess.

Interviewer: That’s fair. Do you think creating the portfolio has had an effect on your writing?

Interviewee: Yeah, definitely—just being able to organize all of this and categorize what I did as an undergraduate and then put a thread through it all. It really helped define me, I guess as a writer—at least in the past—told me what I wanted to try to do with it in the future.

Interviewer: What could people who are interested in writing development—program administrators—people in Sweetland or people like me who are interested in studying writing—what could we learn about how students develop as writers from your portfolio here?

Interviewee: Develop as writers?

Interviewer: What would we learn as writing development from your portfolio?

Interviewee: I guess the main lesson about development in my portfolio would have to be more with that separation that I talked about—how maybe that science specific kind of separation—how maybe at the start of a college career when you're writing about science—there's a tendency to not be able to separate it from deeper meaning or non-scientific explanations. Then as an education gets more streamlined for the sciences—you lose that abstract point of view when you're writing about these things.

Interviewer: Now I wanna think back to your Gateway course as well. How did your experience in the Capstone course compare to your experience to your experience in the Gateway course?

Interviewee: Sure. The final project from the Gateway—I remember—it wasn't as substantial as this one. It didn't take the entire semester like this one did—which makes sense 'cuz this one was more reflective. At the start of the semester we should've had an idea about what we wanted to write about. In the Gateway it felt like a lot more write about. That's how it works—with the remediation thing—you couldn't get to the remediation until you repurposed it and all that. I definitely feel like the Gateway was a little more focused on actual growth in the class as opposed to reflection—which I think was a good way to go about it. In the last semester—I don't think anyone was really driven to really change their writing too much. I think reflection was the way to go with it.

Interviewer: What have your experiences been of working with other writers throughout the [minor in writing]?

Interviewee: I don't think in any of my classes I really had any collaborative projects, but peer reviews have been so extremely helpful. You get a lot from your professor 'cuz obviously their professional teachers in writing and stuff, but there's nothing quite like the feedback that people who are in the same situation as you have. Especially in the Capstone—[instructor] really focused on peer reviews for pretty everything we wrote. That was insanely valuable for learning how to frame it ways that we as students wanted to frame it.

Interviewer: What are the differences that you see between the Gateway and the Capstone ePortfolios?

Interviewee: Sure. I think organizationally I actually put in a similar way. I had the scientific and I called it journalistic back then ‘cuz I wanted to chronicle the two diverging paths I had as a writer. Then in my Capstone I really focused a lot more on bringing it together in the end—whereas in the Gateway it was more about classifying them separately.

Interviewer: The Gateway and the Capstone courses emphasized reflective writing in various forms. How would you describe your experience at that kind of reflection? I know you talked earlier a little bit about reflection. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about the different kinds of reflective writing you learned and how you feel like that’s affected you—and your experiences.

Interviewer: With the Gateway—it felt like a lot more motivationally reflective maybe—just kind of looking into what made you as a writer and driving you to pursue more. As a [...], when someone ask you why I write—you kind of want to figure it out more than you already know. At least for me it was—I was going in to it not having done a lotta writing in the past and wanting to set a definition for myself that maybe I hadn’t accomplished already—if that makes sense—something I wanted to shoot for. Whereas with the Capstone I had already done so much writing that I wasn’t exactly planning on doing a lot more. That kind of allowed it to be more purely reflective at looking back. I think that’s what they were looking for there.

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

Interviewee: Sure. I think every time I write something now—at least since I’ve started with the Evolution Essay and everything. I ask myself how it connects to this kind of overall theme that I had that I’ve seen with my writing—whether it’s different and whether that’s good or whether I need to anchor it a little more in what I’ve been as a writer to make it really mean something to me.

Interviewer: Has all that reflection given you new ways to talk about your writing—new terms or concepts or anything like that?

Interviewee: Maybe—defining it definitely doesn’t hurt when I’m trying to explain what I’m going for with it other people. I don’t talk about my writing a whole lot outside of my classes and everything. Obviously it was really focused on the themes in the writing class. I think I’d be able to explain it a lot better to someone if they asked me what my writing was all about in the past and what I’m trying to do with any kind of piece.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. The minor is still pretty as I’m sure you’re aware. Are there any suggestions you would have for instructors or Sweetland administrators?

Interviewee: I think it'd be nice if the requirements—at least for the English part—were a little more a broad. Like I said—[English course] didn't count for me, and I thought—

Interviewer: You had a good experience in that class?

Interviewee: - I thought that was one of the most valuable classes I ever took. At the same time I understand if it's not exactly what they're going for with the minor 'cuz what I got out of it is that they want an argumentative class there—which makes sense also. I guess there is a separate Creative Writing Minor, right?

Interviewer: Yeah, I think maybe it's new. Yeah, I think there's a new Creative Writing Minor.

Interviewee: Okay. When I signed up for the [Minor in Writing] I thought it's any kind of writing. It seems like it's really been a focus on argumentative writing throughout—which is fine, but maybe if they were a little more specific about that—

Interviewer: [Cross talk 30:12] clear. Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Let's see—besides that—I don't think there's much. You weren't required in the Capstone class to contribute to the blog at all. I kind of did miss from the Gateway where we had a requirement of one post every week or two—just being able to—the motivation to put something on there. I don't know.

Interviewer: That's a good suggestion. More generally, what do you think the professors should know about teaching writing at the undergraduate level?

Interviewee: The professors that I had were fantastic—definitely. I think they definitely knew what to get out of us in these kinds of classes—the Intro, the Gateway, and the Capstone. In terms of what they should know—like I said we're minors in writing—we want to write. In the Capstone obviously we did a lot of writing—like peer reviews and stuff—but we only really wrote two pieces—the Evolution Essay and then the final. Even small pieces of writing I wouldn't mind—just writing a lot—small pieces—just keeping up with the writing and thinking of new ideas a little more often 'cuz it was nice to have the theme all the way throughout, but it felt like I had one or two thoughts the whole semester if that makes sense.

Interviewer: Yeah, no that makes good sense to me. Do you have any other comments or questions or things you thought I might ask that I didn't?

Interviewee: I don't think so. I think we covered pretty much everything I was thinking about.

Interviewer: Great. Wonderful. Thank you so much for coming and talking with me and showing me your portfolio. [...].

[...]

Interviewer: [...]. Thank you so much.

Interviewee: Cool. Thank you very much.

[...]

[End of Audio]