

Interviewer: So my question for you would be: have you ever completed a new media project for a graduate level course.

Consultant1: Not completed, no. I haven't... Uh, well, for a graduate... I took, um, at the Masters level... I took, um, Writing in Electronic Environments. So I did complete, um, a website... a series... a couple of different websites for that class...

I: Okay.

C2: Um, but strictly using images and, you know, sort of the Macromedia suites there.

I: Um, so basically once for... and it was for one...

C3: Yes.

I: ...Masters level course. Okay.

C4: And it was a production course.

I: And so it was required.

C5: Mm Hmm.

I: And I guess I should have asked as well... How would you rate your comfort level with computers?

C6: I would say I'm pretty comfortable with computers. I've been using 'em since I was a kid. And, you know, been doing web stuff since I was in college.

I: Okay. And, how would you rate your comfort level with new media tools?

C7: Um, pretty comfortable. I actually took some... I... when I was teaching, I actually found I wasn't using them. Um, my first job was in IT consulting so I did use stuff for that job and, actually, when I was an undergrad, I had done some web sites for the school... Um, and that was... 'cause that was like the nineties when nobody knew how to do it yet.

Um, but then I... I didn't really play with it at all. So the newest tools I'm not familiar with. I have, sort of, a learning curve with some of those. But I... because I knew how to code HTML, I get what they're trying to do.

I: Mm Hmm.

C8: So...

I: Okay. Um... sorry. [pause]

C9: It's okay. [pause]

I: So, have you... so you haven't ever completed a new media project when it was an option. You could have done writing, or...

C10: Correct.

I: Okay. Um, you did have one instance where you started that...

C11: Yes!

I: Okay. Um, why don't we go ahead and...

C12: Talk about that?

I: ...talk about that.

C13: Okay. Well that was for Text & Technologies... Um, the required course in the program and we talked a lot about new media and new media scholarship throughout the semester. And, so, when it was an option at the end... especially because I was working on blogs... and I thought that because I was analyzing them for, sort of, elements of identity construction, I thought, "Wouldn't it be nicer to be able to link directly out."

You know, to be able to bring the images into the... to the argument and to the paper would be nice, but to be able to actually give my readers and option to go out and look at these blogs directly in their own context, um, I had thought would be very powerful and because I'm also interested in feminist research and feminist perspective, I felt like that would give these people who had not chosen to be in my project [laughing]... Um, who I had selected... It would give them a little bit more of their own voice. Um, so I was very, very big on that [laughing].

And, initially I was even going to make it a blog... because I was commenting on blogs. Um, but the problem with doing it as a blog I found quickly was... To use the different conventions the way they are used is to immediately alert, um, the blogs you're talking about that you're out there and writing about them... which, since I'm new at this, I was a little uncomfortable with.

Um, because of that Web 2.0 functionality... that ability for them to talk back when I wasn't, maybe, ready for anyone to talk back to me yet [laughing], I quickly sort of decided that might be a conflict, um, that would create, sort of, unneeded problems in putting the paper together. So, I sort of abandoned that... though I felt badly about it because, again, sort of looking at it from the feminist lens... well, if they wanted to talk back, shouldn't I have been open to that and all the rest of it. But, again, timeliness... completion of a project... sanity... sort of ruled those out for me [laughing].

So then I still wanted to do it web-based because, again, I thought at least I could link out. There wouldn't be that, sort of, Web 2.0 aspect to it, but again, at least my reader could still have that contextual nature. And so I spent probably... After I had sort of gotten together what the argument of the paper was, I spent a good three or four days mapping out pages, deciding what content would be on them, collecting images, um, collecting some sound... and then came the point when I had to put it all together and that's when it just fell apart for me.

Um, it was coming close on the deadline and I just wasn't... I... I didn't even get that far in the actual production because I'd spent all this time mapping it out because I was trying so hard to make sure that there was an argument... [pause] to make sure that it wasn't sort of completely free-form. I'm not a poet. So, you know, for me it has to have some sort of structure in order to be writing.

Um, and so when I started trying to put it in to the pages and work some of the stuff in, I just found that my voice went funny. Um, I didn't know who I was talking to anymore [pause] in the new media stuff. Like, I felt like I was almost being personal and confessional in places that I was not comfortable with in an academic setting. Um, and it generally just sort of got to that point where I said, "I don't know how to do this." I don't... I know how to put the information on the page, but I don't know how to... how to turn this in. And, I guess I'm just enough OCD that that was enough to scare me off and I ended up writing a regular paper. And, it was... at that point, it was easy. It was sort of the last minute...

I: [laughs]

C14: ...um, you know, where all of a sudden I had to take all these notes and create, you know, the twenty page manuscript, um, when it wasn't in that form at all, but I found that was faster.

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I: So that leads me to the next question then. Do your... do the instructors you've encountered generally offer that kind of option explicitly on the syllabus, do they just kind of as they are going over courses say, "Oh yeah, and you could do..."

C15: Mm Hmm.

I: ... or do they wait for a student to ask, or are they not even open to it?

C16: Um, it was on the syllabus that it was an option in the three cases. Um, like I said they were all with the same professor. Um, [pause] it... it was on his syllabus that you could do it. But like I said, it was sort of... when we were discussing the papers, if no one asked about it, he didn't go any further with it. It was just sort of on the syllabus for you to ask about. Um, and if nobody did, we just sort of kept going. Um, and then in Text and

Technologies, we had discussed it, of course, because, sort of, that was the content of the class. And I don't think that there's any other course... I mean none of the courses I'm taking this semester have it on the syllabus... none of them have discussed it. Um, [pause] I would imagine if I was super keen on doing it, I could talk them into it, but I think it would have to be a conversation.

I: So that leaves me with a question then. How comfortable do your instructors seem with regards to assigning or accepting a new media project?

C17: The professors I, I have right now I [pause] think they would want to be open to it, but I think that they would be at a real loss for how they were going to assess it because I don't perceive of them as having a lot of experience in this area... um, or even a particular interest.

I: Okay. If you don't mind me asking...

C18: Mm Hmm.

I: ...if you can remember off the top of your head, the three classes that you took at your Masters level. Do you remember...

C19: Mm Hmm.

I: ...what they were that it gave that as the option?

C20: Um, it was... actually, one was at the PhD level too... It was the Cyber Cultures and Digital Writing it was an option... um, Teaching College Composition it was an option and Composition as Applied Rhetoric it was an option.

I: Do you mind me asking who it was that...

C21: That was...

I: I think I know who it was... that was Kevin.

C22: Yeah, it was Dr. Depew. Yeah.

I: Um...

C23: And, of course, he's into computers and writing...

I: Sure.

C24: ...and all that kind of thing.

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I: So, in completing these types of projects, what have been the biggest challenges and obstacles?

C25: I think that... I think that idea of finding the argument and finding the structure and knowing that it works, because of course the whole idea in new media is that you're giving your reader a lot more options. They become more a "user" as opposed to a reader. Um, and I find that... You know, I know that when we were in Texts and Technologies, we were all very frustrated with a piece that is new media that just seemed to click you through the same paragraphs that would have just been easier to read if it had been in... in a more manuscript form. Um, and so, I didn't want to do that because that's what I had just criticized [laughing] somebody else for. Um, you know, trying to figure out then what... what are sort of the different pathways somebody could take. And maybe it's sort of my issue with control because [pause], though I want them to have options, I'm afraid of [pause]... I'm afraid I'm not getting my point across. And I'm especially afraid in turning something... I mean the absolute deep-rooted fear that drove me to a manuscript paper was grade. I mean, I... I just... I could not... I could not figure out what kind of grade... whether I... If I completed what I had, I had no concept of how... how good it would be. And, I like getting good grades.

I: Can you talk to me a little bit more about that? I mean, tell me a little bit more about some of the questions that were coming to your mind and what you were thinking about. Because I think this is... this is really where...

C26: Yeah.

I: ... where you and I...

C27: Yeah.

I: ...really started talking about one of those last nights of class about, "Oh my gosh. This is really flipping me out" and...

C28 : Right. Um, I mean it just came to a point where [pause] I want a certain GPA... I need a certain GPA... to some extent. I mean it's... it's for me... I'm planning on going for a tenured track position after this... and I, I get a "B" because I took a risk... that's not... that's not something I'm necessarily going to be comfortable explaining.

Um, and it also has to do with, sort of, image... Like I, I respected Dr. Romberger and I didn't want to turn something in to her where I was afraid she would look at it and go "What is this steaming pile of nothing?" [laughing] You know and so I couldn't turn something in to her I wasn't... I wasn't, sort of, pretty confident in... Um, that I wouldn't think she would at least go. "Hmm. Okay... Kind of clever." You know, something like that.

And I just was unsure of... I, I was afraid of looking elementary and basic in my web design because I haven't used the latest tools a lot. I'm comfortable with the concepts. I've talked about it all. I've read the, the Wysocki and the, the different pieces and, and I think about that stuff, but at the end of the day, I'm walking away with a grade. That's going to be the record of this class.

And, you know, if I hope to get a recommendation from the professor, I would like the work I had produced to have been, sort of, consistently positive... maybe even... maybe not as memorable, but, sort of, consistently positive. And I feel... I felt a real anxiety about that. I mean that... that was a... that was a problem for me to think that [pause]... How would I know if it was good enough for the standards that were set for the class?

I mean, that was a class with some pretty high standards. Which is great... but... Oh, I don't know... I... It just all comes back to this insecurity about producing something of value... um, or producing something that, that meets the academic standards.

And, like we had talking about, it's just not defined yet. I mean, there we were picking on someone who had done new media article because we didn't think it was... it was cool enough. You know, where was the intrigue... where was the interest? So, you know, for all... we're all such harsh critics of what it looks like and how we use it and what the limitations are in somebody else's work... um, that I think that some... in some ways that, sort of, inhibited me to take a lot of risk.

I: Did you feel like... you know with that assignment, in particular, I mean you knew if you were going to write something, it had to be twenty pages...

C29: Right.

I: ... it had to be this...

C30: Right.

I: ...it had to be that...

C31: I was counting words. I had a, a word count in my mind. Even though I knew... Well, gee, how do images factor in to that then or how would sound factor in to that or, or those kinds of things. But, I still had it in my head that it had to be at least, you know, five thousand words. You know, if you sort of take the two fifty per page... I, I did the math out [laughing]... and slowly 'cause I don't do math quick.

But, if I was thinking, well the sort of minimum amount on a page is two hundred and fifty words... so twenty pages... five thousand words... so if I count all the words on my [coughs]... excuse me... If I count all the words on my different pages then that "equals" a twenty page paper. [pause]

But then, does that? I mean, is that even a, a fair way to equate it? It's just sort of what I latched onto in my head.

I: Um, so would you have felt more comfortable or less comfortable if there had been more [pause] concrete guidelines?

C32: For the new media side? What it should look like? Yeah... I think that if I had had some sort of model to follow [pause] that spoke to me... I think the problem for me is that sometimes, um, the new media scholarship loses me in its "arty-ness." I'm not an arty person... I like it. I appreciate it. I feel I am a creative person, but I'm not arty... If I, if I can make that distinction.

Like I said, I'm not a poet. Um, that, that's not how I operate. So, if I had had some sort of models, I might have been more willing to try them on for size. And then I don't... I'm someone who... Give me a model. I don't mind tweaking it and making my own adjustments. Um, but I do like to have something to go on first.

I: So, if you had the option... You're sitting in a class and you had the option to either write a paper or do a new media project... what factors would dissuade you... or keep you from doing the new media project. What are things that make you go, "Yeah. No, I'm not doing it this time."

C33: Um, honestly, first thing I think of is the amount of work in the course because I think the new media stuff... because things break unlike in a paper. You know, you don't all of a sudden not know how to get from page two to page three [laughing]. Um, so that sort of usability testing and error checking, um, and that, that stuff takes so much time, um, that if I... if it was a course that was sort of heavily laden with other things, I think I would... I would not do the new media.

Um, I think that the... I... it would have to also be content that I thought would be meaningfully published on the web. It would have to have some use for someone... even if it's just someone in the same institutional context I'm in. But it would have to have use for being new media. Like, for instance, when I was thinking of the blogs, the use was to go out and look at the, the sort of, contextual situation.

Um, so if there was, if there was a reason for it... I mean, if it, if it's just, for instance, the paper I wrote last night for a different class that was, sort of, very old... you know, conservative... The class was kind of conservative. The paper format was kind of conservative and a little prescriptive. So I, I wouldn't have even asked in that situation because [pause] the professor probably isn't that comfortable with it. So, I would be afraid to have someone assess something they're not... having taught myself, I know that I have given some very poor assessments if I don't know what I'm, what I'm doing with it [laughing]. Um, and because I want to meet [clears throat] the expectations of the class.

Now, that's why I really wanted to do it in Text and Technologies because I felt it fit with the expectations of the class. I felt it had a purpose and that was an issue of time... um,

ultimately. But, yeah, I think... I think fear of how the person is going to assess it would keep me away. I think fear of how much time it will take would keep me away. Um, and, it would have to be... I would have to have a relevance in mind for it. I'm... again, I wouldn't just... it wouldn't be for the sake of... let's talk about, you know, composition theory... online.

I: What factors would encourage you or what could a professor do to make you feel more comfortable with attempting a new media project?

C34: Um, you know, honestly, something like what we're doing in our empirical research class where things are being brought in over time. Um, I think if I could, sort of, bring in a very scaled-down version of something... a, sort of, kernel of what a new media might be and let it grow over time and, sort of, hang new things off of it... that I think I would feel more comfortable with because I would be getting that feedback on it.

Um, having a model, like we talked about... or, sort of, saying here's three different ways some prominent people have done it. Try to... you know that, sort of, old fashioned idea of imitating someone else's style first... um, to try it on and then letting, you know, letting yourself play with it down the road.

Um, and I honestly think that time in class playing with the stuff... because it's, it's like writers workshop at that point. I mean, you're... you are doing something creative. Um, and though, you know, we all think we're, we're beyond it when it comes to writing papers 'cause we're such experts at putting together the twenty-page manuscript.

Um, you know, that's one I don't think any of us are super comfortable with. So I think having more, sort of, writing workshop time. I know that, again, when I was teaching... If I was teaching something new, I had them work on it in class... even if there was this... you know, I, I always used to have students... I just sort of say this to throw it in... Um, "Well, I know what I'm doing so I'm going to do, you know, my homework for math class" or whatever, because it was high school. And, and, I would just... I would always stop them and say, "No. Just 'cause you know what you're doing maybe that's something then that you can share out with everyone else."

And I think that that's what valuable writing in class, um, is that time to, sort of, look at the other person's screen... have them look at your screen... talk something out... go, "Oh, right." You know, what about this... what about that kind of thing.