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Sustain Interview Project

■■■■ [J] interviewed by ■■■■ ■■■■ [G]

Interviewed on 4/16/13

G: ■■■■ J: ■■■■ ■■■■

G: I'm here with ■■■■! Just joking, I haven't said that to anyone else. Um, so I just want to capture what happened to you in Sustain. Or what's been the lasting impact, or has there been any. Lets just start open ended that way.

J: Sure. Um, I would say Sustain was really difficult. The classes that were sometimes involved with it--There was a lot of extra time spent learning all the material that we weren't being taught in class. And when I had to take some like physics and stuff like that in class this quarter it was way different, I mean just the fraction of the time that was spent actually learning the material um, as opposed to Sustain where it was like hours and hours in the study lounge. But I mean over all I enjoyed the experience. I met a lot of great people. I learned a lot about myself and like um, figuring out that as much as I love working on projects and being out in the community and stuff like that I like structure. I like a lot of structure Ive realized. Um. And you know non profits and stuff like that who aren't necessarily in structure rely more on people to their own devices to get things done like while it does work for me in smaller cases I like having a to do list and like having expectations of me--kind of thing. Um. Which I don't think is a bad thing I think I definitely needed to realize that because it was just one of those things that I would have figured out later on in life--maybe too late in life. Um. But I mean I learned that I definitely want to be here at Poly learning and getting the education I came here to get. And I definitely think that I got that with Sustain. A lot of the conversations that we had between like the English class and then the also ■■■■ history class were really great. I really enjoyed those. And the communication aspect, or like the communication class we took which was also really good. And I didn't think that it would be any different in terms of those classes and like a regular, like another Poly class, so that was really good. But I think it was a lot more in depth analysis now than it would have been if I was in a regular class, which was nice. And then I also applying to our non profit so that was cool. Um. Would I recommend it? It depends on the person. I really think so. Like if I know someone who is just here to just graduate get a degree then I would just say don't do it because it's not worth your time. Um. But if someones who truly has the drive to like--if ■■■■--if I would have met him before I'd be like, this would be the program for you. This is what you need to really understand what it is to start your ideas and like get out into the world and start making them work. Um, but I definitely don't think its for everyone. And I don't know--Im on the fence about myself and whether I would have been a good person in it. I definitely enjoy--like um--I would do it again--but I don't know if I would've really succeeded as much as the other people that could have been--like would have been a good fit for it. Um.

G: What else did you learn about yourself?

J: Huh?

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G: What else did you learn about yourself?

J: Um, I learned how to kind of get out of my social bubble. My own little bubble. My world bubble. Um. And just kind of be okay with uncomfortable situations and not knowing what's going on. That's hard for me because I like having control. Especially in work situations where its like everything is chaotic and really know what's going on--I like having control over that. It's definitely taught me a little bit more patience and--uh, just let go. Um. I learned that it's definitely hard to motivate myself to do work that I don't want to do, that I don't think is going to be good for my education or that I don't necessarily see fitting into my education. Um. Stuff that I'm not particularly interested in like physics. I mean as much as I like going to lecture and listening to Pete talk and all of his crazy experiences and all his fantastic knowledge that he's got so much of is just like when I'm actually doing problems I just don't see the importance of it even though I know there's an importance later on. Um, so that was interesting to learn. And I was kind of disappointed to learn about myself that I didn't have the motivation that I thought that I did. But it turns out that I have more motivation in other areas. So I think it's ok. Um, I'm trying to think about what else.

G: What do you think you're motivated by?

J: Huh?

G: What do you think you're motivated by?

J: Experience and adventure. I mean like,--

G: Hands on? Is that what you mean about experience?

J: Hands on experience and I mean like I'm getting my pilots license right now--

G: Are you really?!

J: Yeah.

G: Wow!!

J: It's really fun. And I mean like, I sit down and I study my aviation regulations book for like two hours and there's no way I would do that if I wasn't interested in what I was doing.

G: Yeah.

J: So the motivation comes from something I've always wanted to do for a really long time. I mean like I've always wanted to be in the aviation industry. That's where I see myself being. And like, getting my pilots license is just another step in the right direction

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for me and like I'm just motivated by something I've always wanted to do. And yeah it's so--so like fun and fantastic. And amazing and I love being around planes in general and that entire atmosphere. And so its--that's what motivates me. Something I've really wanted to do for a really long time. So I think thats--like with physics while it's useful it's just not something I'm that interested in.

G: Yeah. How are your classes going this year?

J: This quarter they're going really well. Last quarter was kind of a struggle. I took a lot of difficult classes--

G: So that was winter?

J: Yeah. I had computer science. And I had a teacher who this was the first quarter he's taught it and he was part of the Industrial Engineering department and he's never taught the class before and he was just really really hard. I mean most of the class went into the final having zero points.

G: [laughing] zero points.

J: Yeah, if you didn't have a working program he'd just give you a zero. So there's no partial credit. [both laugh] And so like we go into the final and we're like well, how are you going to curve this?

G: Yeah, we all got J's and K's in this class.

J: Seriously. [laughing] It was ridiculous. But somehow I was one of those people going in with a zero and somehow I ended up with a B-. It's like I don't know what planet of math you're working on--laughing--so yeah, that was ridiculous. And then I had Statics which--I enjoyed the heck out of Statics but like applying the material and working out problems was really difficult for me. Um, and, Linear Analysis which I really liked. I had a teacher who wore the same thing every day.

G: Solid!

J: On the midterm he threw us all off because he wore plaid. [laughing] So we were all sitting there like, wait, what's going on? Seriously it all shook us up for the midterm. [laughing] So that was a good class, I enjoyed that class a lot.

G: What was it like to transition from Sustain back into the traditional model?

J: Um, I really didn't notice much of a transition to be honest. I mean like while classes were like way different, the study habits were reduced a little, not by much. Um, but classes are classes. You still show up, you still take notes. Um, maybe in a different fashion but not anything different. Um,--

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G: What was hardest for you about being in Sustain?

J: Probably the time commitment. Um, trying to be motivated to work through all the problems and try to teach myself a lot about stuff was really difficult. Because it's like I can't do anything for too long. I just can't do anything for too long, I just go crazy. I mean and like working and going to school, like while it seems like a lot I don't think I can do anything else because just going to school all the time--

G: Interesting.

J: I would not make it. So I have the balance of working and then school and you know working out and personal stuff but um, yeah, it's just too much--[laughing] I mean just doing school it's overwhelming and so Sustain, the commitment--it was difficult especially because a lot of the classes were interconnected too, so you never really had separation so it's like right now I can devote a couple hours to Dynamics and then I'll go to work. And then after work I'll go a couple more hours to Economics. And I can have the separation and I can make my own ties between those two classes. So I'm like taking a Process Improvement Fundamentals class right now and I'm taking and Engineering Economics class and I can--I mean--they overlap a whole--almost everyday. It's like a lesson that feeds into itself. But it's like I'm the one making those connections. It's not the teacher making those connections for me. And I like that because I feel like it keeps better track in my mind about what exactly is going on in the big picture and the small financial picture.

G: Did you used to do that before?

J: Yeah, I did that a lot.

G: Make connections between classes?

J: Yeah.

G: So your brain works that way.

J: I'm always looking for puzzles--always looking for sequences and patterns. Like I just--it's something that makes more sense to me is patterning.

G: Yeah, that's cool. Anything else about your experience or, you know, you look back and go, "huh."--whatever that is. [■■■■ laughs.] I'm looking over there like that's your past.

J: Um, I had a fantastic time meeting some friends I will probably have for a very long time. I learned to see a lot of value in education. Um, so like I mean like my for example, I'm trying to think of the best one. Physics my fall quarter was all about

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electronics and circuitry and stuff like that and it happen to be at the time when I was working at the Electrical department at Home Depot. And so everyday I'd show up to class and ask applicable questions. Like so, a customer came in and he running 50 amps but he's running for 600 feet so what kind of gauge wire does he need? And then my teacher would you know go crazy--

G: [Laughing]

J: And just be like, Yes!! And he loved that I actually had like, questions that were like relatable.

G: Yeah. Yeah. He's been dying for someone to ask him that for weeks--what gauge wire do I need?

J: Seriously. Exactly. So he would like start going into analysis about what kind of resistance--or how resistance would increase over that amount of time and stuff like that. And so, making that connection I really liked. And um, but it also taught me the value of actually enjoying what you're learning. So now when I'm learning things I'm not necessarily learning the entire thing I'm learning stuff, like the concepts that interest me. And being able to apply it some where else. Like in engineering or at Home Depot. So like when we're doing statics, we're doing trusses and designs and stuff like that. And like learning where the pressure points are. Like I had to go and build something at Home Depot and I was like "Oh, well, like you should probably build it like this," because you know you're able to disperse the forces easier. And um, so it's like learning--that was one of the things--learning the things--or finding the things about what I was learning that I was interested in and then being able to apply it with something I was learning in Sustain. And, I can't think of anything else.

G: That's good. That's all good stuff.

J: Yeah.

G: I've not asked anybody this question and for some reason I'm about to ask it of you. Are you ready? This is funny--I think you're like the 12th person I've talked to.

J: Ok.

G: Is there anything you're chicken to say right now? Why haven't I asked this question yet??! Or that you would say but you feel hesitation around. Chicken is, ya know, that's my word.

J: I mean I definitely, I haven't been involved in Sustain this year just because it's been crazy. Um, and then I hope that that doesn't--I mean I hope that most the faculty doesn't see that as me leaving them out. I really hope not. I really loved working with ■■■■ and ■■■■ and everybody. Um, and [thinking]...chicken.

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G: Chicken, chicken, chicken. [laughter]

J: I guess I was kind of surprised like the first--I thought it was going to be more organized the first couple of weeks--that was really stressful. Because like the third week we still didn't break up into classes or anything. And it was really intimidating. But I had faith in you guys. I was like, it's going to work out.

G: What was intimidating about it?

J: It was intimidating that it seemed, I mean, well--

G: I don't disagree with you--

J: No, I'm not saying--actually-- now that I'm thinking about it intimidating isn't the right word.

G: Ok.

J: I was ok with it because you guys were--with the chaos. I'm just sitting here I was being an observer for it and while I was a little anxious about starting classes and things like that I was just like, well we'll get through what we get through and we'll learn what we learn and we'll see if this program works kind of thing.

G: yeah.

J: There was like a level of trust in that broad calmness to myself--I don't know about you guys, um, so it was a little nerve wracking those first couple weeks.

G: I remember it being a little nerve wracking. It's interesting to just think that you know it's this experiment to go what will happen if you let students actively, actively, actively participate in what a program looks like for them which means you open the possibility of just like what I would call massive inactivity.

J: Right. And that's what it could have been. It really could have been. You guys kept a good job on making us keep up our end of the bargain.

G: Well, but that's what was so interesting you know in our side conversations. We're off the map here but we're going to keep talking anyway--

J: Ok.

G: That um, you know our--what I remember from our conversations were some of us going, "Oh my god!!" you know, panic. And that this kind of anchor point was what if we don't panic. What if we don't control it? What if we wait and see what emerges out

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of it. What if we suspend our control of it? And it made me want to barf sometimes because it was scary to watch.

J: I think it was scary too because it's like--like if we really like as students if we didn't have something that was like assigned or anything like that and we weren't really learning anything that we were interested in doing like we would just completely put it off to go and do other college things--other classes, stuff like that. Which is, I mean as much as I think we're trying to get around that it's difficult to do on a self motivation level.

G: Well I think the vision too is that when you do that in a community, maybe you've got a shot at it. My own experience after Sustain really was that it was very hard to pull off alone. I couldn't swing it. But um, I feel like I saw some beautiful stuff happen there.

J: Yeah.

G: You know? Watching you guys was--

J: Any epiphany moments for you?

G: For me? Should I turn it off? [■■■■ laughs] Oh gosh it's interesting that you were talking about control issues. I think I just had to stare at mine big time. I had to just say you know down in here even if I say I love students and I want to help them learn, interestingly a lot of this is about protecting my ego. And so, terrifying! You know you said the word scary, or--so scary. So scary to be involved and say ok, well, what's the worst thing that could happen? And a lot of things came to my mind!! You know what I mean?

J: Yeah.

G: So maybe not--so I'm using words like scary and terrifying but for me I really felt--I think many of us did felt the risk of it. It felt like a big risk. But also like what will happen if we don't risk this?

J: What will happen if it doesn't become a risk?

G: Yeah, or where will students be if we don't risk this? What if a student stayed in the traditional model?

J: So when you were first approached with the idea of Sustain what did you think--how did you envision the program?

G: Maybe it's because I'm over 40 but I just really don't have like--there wasn't some extant model in my brain at all so I really came in--I think my experience was um, trying to figure out my own place in it and to try and figure out how much input should I have

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and, oh they expect me to have a lot, you know, as much input as anybody else so that was a new experience for me with that group. Really, really scary. Its been fun to talk to all you guys though, and hear about your experiences and yeah.

J: Yeah. It was definitely an interesting time. I just keep--I just always walk past that room and I just like shudder. [Laughter]

G: Is that your group study room, is that what you mean?

J: That was the yeah, the one with the spinny satellite chairs.

G: Do you miss anything about it?

J: Um, I mean I miss the collaboration. Um. Im lucky because the IME--or the Industrial Manufacturing Engineering relies a lot on collaboration so that's kinda cool I get to still have that. But I know that Mechanical Engineering and stuff doesn't really do that and its very individual work. Um, other than that I don't feel like I'm--I mean I miss the people. I miss the faculty and everything. But I mean I don't--the classes--I'm still taking the classes the same way I'm taking those ones. But my project--I have so many projects going on at school right now that it's hard to miss a project because I'm just overwhelmed with them right now.

G: Yeah.

J: Um, but I do miss going into the community and like talking to people and stuff like that. That was always a lot of fun.

G: Yeah.

J: Or just also, I just loved seeing what other people were doing. I mean like ■■■■--have you talked to ■■■■ yet? He's planning on going and staying here in San Luis over summer--he was explaining to me over Facebook I can't quite remember what it was but um, and like he's going to go live on the Avila farm or whatever and he's going to try and do sustainable living for like the entire summer. And I mean just like him and ■■■■ who's still doing work with the QL Plus lab and ■■■■'s doing work with QL Plus as well, ■■■■'s doing Wildflower--

G: ■■■■ is doing QL Plus too.

J: Yeah. So just like all of that --seeing that is just awesome. I think it's great.

G: Yeah. And ■■■■'s doing Something called Sprout Up I guess.

J: I haven't heard. That's cool!

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G: Yeah, she's doing some kind of sustainability teaching.

J: Oh, that's neat!

G: I know.

J: I mean like yeah so all --like all of them combined are doing basically everyone, I think ■■■■, even though she decided to leave Cal Poly like shes probably doing great. I haven't really talked to her, I should.

G: ■■■■, yeah. Cool.

J: And, yeah. I just think it's really cool to see where everyones going to go. There were so many talented people in that group. So.

G: It sounds like where you're going is up in the air.

J: Yes. [laughter]