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Sustain Interview Project

██████ (E) interviewed by ██████ (G)

Interviewed on 5/2/13

G: . . . talking.

E: Okay—would you like honest answers or ones that are nice for Sustain?

G: Oh. . . I love that you asked me that at the outset: honest. Cause it's not for marketing—it's for research.

E: Okay.

G: And I loved that you asked me that because I have had some students that I feel like, "It was great!", you know.

E: I can give you really like canned answers.

G: No—no. I'd really rather not because what we're doing is funded by the National Science Foundation. We're really studying what happened. It's a big picture question. So—I'm here with ██████.

E: Should I come closer so you can hear me?

G: You're fine. You're fine. . . Um. Really, we're just wanting to ask the question, 'what happened to everybody? Like—as you look back at the experience, what do you feel like happened to you. And then also what happened, like, what's physically happened, what's your narrative, since then—and do you have any connections to make between it? That all—like all. It's a lot.

E: No idea. I'm not really sure.

G: Oh yeah, yeah. Okay, so maybe what I would say is just start talking about your experience in Sustain honestly, and then we'll—I'll make sure that we get through all the parts of the big picture question by the end.

E: Okay. I don't know if like my experience in Sustain is going to be like different, not because like of Sustain as a program but like what I was going through when I was going through the program.

G: Right.

E: Because a lot of what happened last year to me had like an effect on that experience things. So, I don't know.

G: You still count.

E: Okay.

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G: And also let me just throw this one last thing in there—and that is, there's no wrong topic. So really what's of interest is anything that comes to your mind about that experience looking at it now.

E: Okay.

G: Okay. So you could say something. . . it probably would be helpful for you to say what do you mean when you say 'what I was going through'—I mean if you were to say just a couple of words about that for everybody else, that might be helpful.

E: Okay.

G: I know, but . . .

E: For everybody listening out there—

[laughing]

Last year during spring quarter of . . .

G: whatever year that was . . .

E: ...2012. So I--

G: A year ago—isn't that weird?

E: Jesus. So, yeah—I have to be done with my makeup work by the end of this quarter.

G: Riiiiiiight.

E: Or I take my Econ class again. Ok.

[laughing]

Well, so on May 20th of last year my grandfather died. Actually, I got the call that he was in the hospital dying while I was writing my paper for my English class, my Sustain English class. Um, very big research paper, like 12 pages. Twelve pages?

G: More, actually by the time you finished.

E: More pages

G: Yeah—it was a honker.

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E: I—spent the whole year working on it and was finally typing up everything and got this call and then I didn't really want to look at that paper ever again. It was hard. Um. And. I found out... a little bit before that, like a few weeks before that, that my sister had a brain tumor and she was going through a whole bunch of testing and we had to figure out how we were going to proceed with treatment because we didn't know what we were going to do. We found out she was going to have to have brain surgery at some point.

G: That's a lot!

E: Yeah, so it was pretty emotionally draining quarter. And actually, in that respect, Sustain—that's one of the reasons why I was glad that I was in Sustain, because at that point I had um had already been with most of my teachers and students that were my peers for a quarter already—for the quarter before we were all together—so, I knew everybody and they knew me, at least a little bit, so it was a lot easier to... sort of go through this hard time because I—when I was having problems, like people knew that that wasn't like I was a basket case and I was like—

G: Right.

E: —crazy girl having a panic attack outside for no apparent reason.

G: Yeah.

E: I was going through something. And then also my teachers were very understanding about it because they like knew me, I guess and I'm a pretty decent student—

G: Absolutely.

E: --and I felt like people knew that so that it wasn't that I was slacking off—

G: Right.

E:--and having—when I wouldn't come to class it wasn't because I was like ditching because I was out smoking behind the dumpster or whatever. . . I was crying in my bedroom by myself.

G: Yeah yeah.

E: But um, so I really did like that aspect of community as part of Sustain. It was interesting because I think part of the reason that I didn't have as much of a, as much of a ... community feeling that a lot of the other people got, and I guess a lot of the other people are like super close friends with like their Sustain groups or something—I don't know. I feel like that happened to other people, and it didn't really happen to me. But I

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feel like part of that is that I joined Sustain with my best friend and roommate at the time, so we were always like an isolated unit by ourselves.

G: Yeah—that's interesting.

E: And I guess John was part of that too. Then he, he left—he joined the Air Force, so he's not here anymore. And he was . . . a special character all unto himself, so that was interesting, but . . . so it was . . . like it was great that I had . . . I mean . . . I don't know how to say this . . . but it was kind of disappointing that I wasn't part of a larger Sustain community, didn't connect to more kids in the program the way that other people connected to the kids in the program. I feel like a lot of people were like 'we would get together and do all this stuff in the Sustain days' and I didn't really have that, so it wasn't really as much of a . . . everybody-included community feeling, so I guess I'm part of like a fringe group on the outside of that one, but it was a little bit, a little bit sad, I didn't really like that. It was . . . some of it was like, seemed pretty cliquey, and I didn't really know when that started or how it happened or how I wasn't actually a part of it, so it was weird . . . but . . . I don't know . . . um . . . and . . . I really liked . . . about it, the parts about it that I really liked about the actual classes were, um, the personal relationships I was able to develop with my professors. Like I really did like that. Like, I spent a lot of time talking to, like: you . . . talking to ██████ --

[laughing]

--about English-y things and my paper and after I had to take an incomplete in the class and all that extra time I had to spend.

G: We got to hang out a lot.

E: A lot!

G: Yeah.

E: And it was great. Um. Actually, I wish you had been here last quarter cause I needed a teacher recommendation for the London program, and I was like '██████ would've written me a recommendation letter, --

G: I would.

E: --but you weren't here, so I had to go to my other English teacher. That was interesting. That's a different story.

[laughing]

G: Who was that?

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E: Uh—██████, ██████, and he like hates computers so he just went and talked to them in person.

[laughing]

--‘You’re supposed to fill out [mumble]’? No—he just took me down there and like talked about me in front of me—and the people in the program.

G: I love it. Did he give you a good recommendation?

E: Yeah! It was great. And I’m enrolled—

G: --Did you get in?

E: --in the program.

G: Oh that’s great.

[laughing]

E: It was just so embarrassing, because you know how I hate it when like people look at me and like talk about me—weirdly—I’m just sitting right there and he’s talking about how great of a student I am and all this stuff.

G: I love that he walked you down there.

E: I’m like red faced and just like ‘oh god what are you doing?’

G: I love it...

[laughing]

E: Um, and I’m pretty sure the only reason I passed Physics was because it was Sustain Physics, so it was like . . . more talking-through concepts than actual like doing physics.

G: Well, I mean, only similar in the way that you were just talking about the math class you just took

E: Yeah

G: Conceptual, as opposed to mathematical—or on the continuum, more conceptual but yeah—

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E: And that I could have like dialogue with my professor about certain things and that wouldn't...I wouldn't have to wait for office hours to go talk to people because like they were always around.

G: Yeah.

E: So if I had a question or whatever, I could just—

G: --Right

E: I was already there—everybody was there. And there was also like a bigger group of people that, that were all together all the time and there were those break periods where if you had a question you could ask somebody. . . that period of time was also really helpful—like getting homework done. There was a lot of times where I couldn't—I mean, like, like getting work done—

G: Do you mean Studio hour?

E: Yeah—Studio hour. I forgot what that was called.

G: Yeah.

E: I don't know what we were supposed to be doing but there were a lot of times that like I'd just do my homework and it was really great because I had this like period of time where I had to do something and I couldn't leave and that forced me to do what I was supposed to.

G: What's really funny is that you could've but you didn't. [laughing] You didn't feel like you could, but you could've actually...

E: But I felt really bad whenever I would leave early—I was like, you know how there where was like, there was one period of Studio hour where it was like me and like three other people in studio hour and like people would always leave and there would be like me and one other person in there and I would feel so bad about leaving. I was like, 'we can't just leave—what if one of the teachers comes in here? There's nobody here—like that would be so mean. They all know me, they know where I'm supposed to be right now. Like, it's not like I'm anonymous girl in like a class of 100 kids and I can walk out.

G: That's interesting—the idea of kinda building accountability is interesting...

E: Like—I mean—

G: --just a relationship—

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E: --It's, It's interesting because in the program, like we weren't really held accountable for things, like they didn't, like it wasn't like 'you have to be here and do this' stuff, everything was pretty like—lenient? But because of that, and because we were able to develop these personal relationships with these professors, like I felt more compelled to do what I was supposed to be doing because I didn't want to disappoint people. And I don't know if that's just like I'm crazy and have lots of guilt issues with people that I feel connected to? But—I don't know—it just seemed like it helped me be a better student than I probably would've been my freshman year [laughing]

G: Sure—sure—yeah.

E: Um, and it really helped me realize that I need to develop more personal relationships with professors, like that I should like go like to office hours and like talk to people, which was really helpful...when I was trying to get into the major? And it's been helpful since. Like I've been doing really well in school recently and it was actually really surprising. Everybody's really shocked—like I made Dean's List last quarter...

G: I love it!

E: Awesome, but um..

G: So that had carry-over for you, then, beyond your specific relationships with Sustain professors?

E: Yeah, like I, when I was in my 251 class last quarter with ██████, I—I went into his office hours a lot to talk to him about things and like have him explain things. And I was able to, like I normally when I...well, before, I guess, before the program, that one quarter that I had, it was—a professor was like sort of it felt really...the dynamic between a professor and a student, it just always seemed to me like it was...this like...this like barrier of like, I mean, you have to...respect your teachers and they're these people who control your future and you should just be like 'ahhhhh—

G: —Hierarchy—

E: --Scared of you..'

G: Right

E: -- and then like after going through the program, it's just kind of like..I mean, yes, you should respect your teachers and everything, but they're people—and that gap that existed in my education before between a student and a teacher is not quite as wide, I guess in university? I mean I guess with some professors, they are scary and unapproachable and I wouldn't ever go and talk to them, and I would be terrified, but for a lot of the time, it helps me feel a lot more comfortable going and just like starting up a

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...not-as—like a relationship that's not as strict in like the —like previous...preconceived notions of what a student-teacher dynamic is supposed to look like?

G: Yeah

E: Not in like a creepy way or anything--

G: No—I think what you're saying makes a ton of sense, and it's exciting.

E: Yeah

G: Something got opened up for you there.

E: So, like I was able—I'm now able to talk to professors a lot easier, like I can just have a dialogue instead of like a... I don't even know how to...

G: Prove-a-logue

E: [laughing]

G: --where you feel like you have prove something about yourself—

E: --yeah. So it's helpful in that respect..

G: What were you going to say though? I dialogue instead of a what?

E: Like a... [pause] I don't even...[pause] Like I would never have just gone and talked to a professor about things... like if I would've had to, I would've just like asked a question in class and if I didn't understand it, I probably would've just not said anything after that. Like I wouldn't want to appear stupid or like—I don't know, I wouldn't wanna appear, I wouldn't want to seem, like, I guess, casual, with my professors, which is weird, but I guess like makes sense if you think about it from the perspective of like that's how it was in high school and elementary school and middle school and everyone's like 'this is your teacher' and 'I am your teacher' and then, I mean, it's still like that but it's not quite as rigid, I guess, for a lot of the time...some of it is...

G: Yeah

E: I know I'm saying the same thing a lot. I'm like circling back on myself.

G: No—but you know, you're chewing—you're, you're chewing on something interesting, and I think—I mean, it's good stuff, it is.

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E: Um, things that I did not like about the program: I... a lot of the, like... I liked the idea of how the classes were supposed to be taught more than I think I liked the actual... what's the word?... where like, the actual what happened?

G: You can just say 'the actual what happened'

E: [laughing] Iiiiiii'm an English major—I'm supposed to know words

G: Naahhhh.

E: It's the weekend... for me, I'm done. I'm checking out.

G: No—just fill it in. We're just looking for meaning. You don't have to be quotable at every moment.

E: Um—

G: So you liked the idea better than the experience—is that what you're talking? Or better than the--?

E: There's a word for it for when you like put it into practice...

G: Iteration of it? Or the uh...

E: Can't remember what it is—frustrating.

G: Mental pause while ██████ tortures herself over finding a word.

[laughing]

E: We just had this discussion in my class about word choice...

G: Like the outcome? Or the? The goings on—so the operation of it?... You really want the word—

E: --I do.

G: It's okay—I can't wait.

E: It's okay, it's okay, I'll just keep going—

G: Okay

E: So like, I liked the—

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G: --Something about the—

E: So I liked the concept more than I liked the actual way it was put into practice, like, like the idea of having just the broad questions and you come up with the answers yourself and you do a lot of self-teaching—it's an interesting concept but it certain—in certain areas it didn't seem like I was actually learning enough to have it be like a meaningful experience. Like I was trying to teach myself stuff that I didn't understand, like all the helping-me-along, like, questions or dialogues or whatever weren't really helping. I was actually like lost a lot in some of my classes...I think the Sustain model worked well for your classes, like I, I mean, for what I was there for, like I did pretty well, I guess.

G: Mmmhmmm.

E: But...

G; The difference there wasn't me—the difference there was that I was teaching the—or the difference I see, at least, was that I was teaching the coursework that you are the most attuned to...so maybe it worked for you in the subject matters you have a natural affinity toward or capability toward, and it was harder in the classes...but I wonder what those classes would've been like for you—

E: Well, I can tell you that--

G: -- outside of Sustain

E:...I can--

G: --Tell me.

E: For a certain class, for this one class because, because I had, I took it in Sustain for my spring quarter, and I took an incomplete. It was my Economics class—

G: Ok—

E: --I took an incomplete in it—I should've withdrawn from it cause I SUCK at Economics

[laughing]

and now I have to make it up--I didn't know you could withdraw from classes and then I took an incomplete and they're like 'well, now you can't withdraw because you're already incomplete so you have to just make up the work and I was like what the f—

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[laughing]

And I just figured out I can do that!—this sucks. But now I am in the class again because I have to make up the work. And it--

G: --So you're just taking it all over again?

E: It started off as, it was like--

G: --Are you still with ■■■■?

E: Mmmhmmm. Yes—so--

G: At least you get to be with ■■■■...

E: I am taught by the same professor and the same course material but in a different way so now I'm just in the class in the Business Silo with 100 people and we have our clickers and we take quizzes and—

G: --How is it going?

E: Ehhhhh. It's going, I guess. I mean, I'm doing better in it now than I was in Sustain, but, I mean, part of it was in Sustain, like the, the course was...I mean, he would talk, and then...it's the same..he he decided that the final—all of our grade was going to be the final so we had these like in-classes quizzes or whatever, but it wasn't...didn't count for anything, like you just answered them and did the reading and kind of lectured or something, but I did not get it and if I would've taken the final I would've just failed it And I would've failed the class, and I now that because I just didn't understand what was happening in--

G: --Yeah

E: --That class, ever.

I did really bad. Like now even though I'm in a bigger class and it's less personal...he's teaching it now half the grade is the final and half the grade is quizzes and like homework, so we do, so I have more a cushion—

G: --Yeah

E: --than when it was like 'teach this to yourself and we're just all gonna base it on this one thing that we're having at the end and like just gonna be like whatever...European school' or something I don't know what his idea behind that was but it was—

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G: --Yeah

E: --terrifying. I mean I'm probably still gonna fail the final because I really do not understand economics AT ALL. It's horrifying how bad I am at this. Like, it's worse than any math class I've ever taken, and that's saying something because I have done horribly in math before..

G: I love it..

E: It's awful.

G: I love it.

E: But, um..but the way that he teaches it now, he's more teaching us the material so it's..

G: Yeah

E: ...with a class that I, I'm not good at, I don't have an affinity for it, I –

G: --Yeah.

E: --don't really understand the concepts. I clearly needed more instruction than I was getting in the Sustain model of learning.

G: Yeah

E: Because I'm sort of getting some concepts, like I don't fail every quiz—like I actually did pretty well on some of the quizzes...but...yeah, so. . . I do know how that is like . . . I –I do know how--

G: You do have something to compare it to—

E: --I do know how to compare the teaching styles of sustain and non-sustain because I have taken both versions of this course! I mean I don't know if part of it was because it was spring quarter of that horrible year—

G: So there was a lot going on for you

E: So part of it was probably that I just didn't go to class a lot because I was just crying in my room and depressed

G: --yeah, maybe

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E: --and even when I was there I was kind of worried and sad

G: Your eyes were really big, as I remember...

E: I walked around a lot with big eyes that quarter.

G: Big eyes—it was a very big-eyed quarter. Yeah.

E: So..

G: Any other things that you look back and you notice about the experience for yourself?
Or in yourself? . . .

Um. . . I . . . I liked the service aspect of what we did that year—how we had a project and we saw something through to completion, like even if it wasn't what we started out trying to complete, we wouldn't alter what we were trying to do, and to fix things and change what we were about, but we had a basic idea of what was gonna happen and we got, we got stuff accomplished, and it felt really great to be able to say, like, here's a thing we put together, it was our baby, we—we—

G: Yeah

E: We birthed this idea and raised it and its ours and look at it—there it is: we did that. And it was very rewarding as a freshman to see, to see this project come together and like...know that, I mean we could—it wasn't just me because that would have been a horrible, horrible idea—[laughing]—It probably have just been like probably would have painted posters if I was doing something by myself, just like, “look at this sparkly thing” but [laughing]

G: You're so stinkin funny.

E: [laughing] Glad somebody thinks so!

G: I do.

E: But, um...

G: Do you think you grew?

E: As a person?

G: Yeah—just any way. I haven't asked that question of anybody outright

E: Sorry I didn't apparently come around to that

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G: You didn't. I want to hear about growth! [laughing] I mean, I'm trying to figure out if, I mean I guess it's a lead—I guess it would be a leading question if I said, "Tell me how you grew?" but I really am asking the question, "Do you think you grew through that process?" so that, you know, "no" is a possible answer. [laughing] If it's yes, then how do you think you did?

E: Um, I mean I think every experience makes you grow in some way, even if I hadn't done this program I still would've grown—it was my freshman year of high school—my freshman year of high school?—

Funny—yeah.

My freshman year of college! Clearly I didn't grow so much, I'm a high school student, but um, I think that...because we had so much responsibility placed upon us, like I mean maybe I should speak for myself and not the whole group because I don't know about anybody else, but I feel like because I had so much, so much of what was happening was my responsibility, like it was 'you have to do this' or, I mean there is no 'or,' you just have to do this because no one else is gonna do it

Right

Like certain things—like you have to get this stuff done, you have to teach yourself this material because you're not gonna learn it any other way, and like you just have to—you have to...do the work on this project, you have to come up with the ideas, you have to meet with your groups, you have to meet with your advisor, your liaison?

G: Project Manager

E: Mmmm?

G: No?

E: Was it Project Manager? Like the person who was like part of the, the actual

G: Oh community—Community Partner!

E: Community Partner. That's what it was. You had to set up your meetings with your community partner. You had to be on time for things, you had to, it was sort of like having a job on top of school work, and it was...it was very int, like I feel like I grew more as a—I grew more as a real person than as a student, I think.

G:Huh-huh. Tell me more about that. What do you mean?

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E: Like, I feel like having the projects was more like a preview into what it's like in the 'real world' like it wasn't like completely like that, you're still doing stuff like, I think it was still a school project, but it seemed more like a... it seemed more like it...if I had worked for a non-profit organization and had to put a project together.

G: Sure, well you were out in the community—so yeah.

E: We were doing like a real job—it wasn't like you're getting graded on this test you have to take, it was like your application of it in the real world was the test. So like--

G: Right. Right. It wasn't theoretical.

E: —it was, it was learn by doing! Welcome to Cal Poly! That was probably one of the few times that motto has applied to the things I'm doing here. It's actually learn by learning—there's not a whole lot of doing yet.

G: So it felt like having a job to you?

E: I mean it felt like, yeah, cause it was, it was very much like there are deadlines and there are, like you have to get this done, you have to get this report done, you have to get this...you have to get certain things about your project going at certain times or you're not gonna finish in time, and then you're not gonna have a project to present at the end, like you're not gonna it ready when you need it ready, so like it was like lessons in how to manage...time and work and real people things instead of studenty things, which is, like we set deadlines for ourselves and we did all this stuff, so it was learning how to like judge when stuff needed to be done.

G: Did all of that stay with you as you left or did you--do you feel like you—or was that in the program or did that stay with you at all?

E: I don't know since I left the program I haven't really had to apply it in any sense of anything cause I'm just doing schoolwork now, so I don't have a job, I'm not a person.

G: Not a person! [laughing]

E: So, yeah.

G: That's good. I'm glad we talked, ██████. If you have anything else on your mind about it—it's all great stuff.

E: Glad I could help. Sorry I was rambly.

G: Not rambly—terrific. Super fantastic. Anything that you share is great.

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