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Sustain Interview Project

██████████ (R) interviewed by ██████████ (G)

Interviewed on 4/9/13

G: So. We just do this so we can capture it for later. So now re-say everything you already said—no: retell, briefly about your change in majors cause I think that's worth capturing.

R: From where? I—I don't even know what I said...

G: So, what I heard you say was that you've been on this journey to try to figure out what you really want to do—

R: --Yeah—it's...I've, I've been on a journey trying to figure out what I want to do—do you want me to tie Sustain into this?

G: [laughing] No—

R: I feel pressure now that the thing is on!

G: [still laughing] okay no—here's how it works. Really, all we have to accomplish is a conversation—

R: okay, cool.

G: It's a reflective conversation, which I want to have with you about your life anyway. The—we don't have to say 'Sustain cause me to...'

R: Yeah. Yeah.

G: You know—we're not looking to make any commercials. The question, 'how are you now and what are you doing?' You can sort of leave it to other people to decide whether—you know, you can say the parts that you think had to do with Sustain, and then some of these things that are happening to you, you could say 'no clue if Sustain had anything to do with it'

R: Yeah.

G: I just think that the major stuff is interesting and worth capturing cause other people, you know, yeah.

R: Sure

G: So, I heard you say you changed your major, um—from—what to what to what? Maybe there wasn't that many jumps, but

R: It's like four, it's not—I mean, it's a lot here but not necessarily other places, but um, so I'm civil engineering, technically. It's the box I checked when I came here and um I was really unhappy with that from the start. Actually, from the time I filled out the

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application I was already having like ‘oh—I should really want to do this’ but, um, I did it anyways. And then, um, trying to figure out what I wanted to do. I originally wanted to be Environmental Management, um, and Protection, and then I decided I didn’t want to do that, but I wanted to do Liberal Arts Engineering Studies because I felt like that was integrating and still kind of doing the Engineering thing, and now I totally scrapped all of that, and I find myself being a Sociology major and doing all that.

G: It’s exciting.

R: It is—it’s exciting.

G: Yeah—and I did hear you say, and it’s worth capturing because it speaks to me about courage that you had to say to some of your family expectations, some of your family’s expectations in order to claim that—that’s the part I want to make sure we write down, because it speaks to your courage—something happened where you got gutsy, it sounds to me.

R: Yeah. Yeah—I don’t really know what happened, just couldn’t...I guess I couldn’t be like let myself be something I wasn’t anymore just for other people, and I needed to do something for myself that I really wanted. You know—this is my career and my education and something I’m paying for...I can’t do it just because other people want that for me or that’s what society expects from me or...

G: yeah

R: ...something like that, so

G: Yeah—makes sense.

R: And I feel like doing what you actually love and following your passions opens up way more opportunities for you to actually impact your communities in really positive ways that accentuate your strengths and reap the most benefit out of your gifts and talents and those of the people around and kind of...

G: Yeah

R:...builds that way

G: Totally

R: And I think Sustain helped me figure that out. Not even trying to pitch it

G: [laughing]

R:...but just thinking about it now, I guess. I don’t know..

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G: How so?

R: Well, I think it showed me that there... in this technical community that we're in, like in my classes and everything, I'm surrounded by people who were like just Engineering majors and that's all they thought about and all they did and then being part of a smaller community that really emphasizes and focuses on the strengths of all the people in the community and making them work together to find the most sustainable option in everything, whether it's your relationship between teachers and students or collaborating to learn material or actually implementing projects, kind of using everyone's strengths together, um, I think it just was a really great—it demonstrated to me the power of that, and how effective it can be and how much influence it can have over people.

G: Yeah

R: I guess got me thinking on... how to implement that more effectively in my own life in different situations I'm in.

G: Yeah

R: That would be one of them

G: How'd you pick Sociology?

R: I have gone in and talked to the career counselors like so many times

G: And did that start for you like a long time ago?

R: Yeah—like, first quarter of freshman year

G: Oh—bless your heart, yeah.

R: Um, and I have gone in and I've talked to—I only talked to the Engineering one and then the Liberal Arts, um, counselor as well, but I've talked to both of them multiple times and have numerous occasions read through the entire course catalog at Cal Poly and every class, every major, every minor, every concentration and have literally sat on a couch like I'm in like a therapy sleep, like head back, eyes closed, and she's like reading them, and I would like raise my hand when anything sounded even remotely interesting, and I got this piece of paper that's like two pages long, like front and back of the things that I was like, 'I could study that—that's interesting', like, and then—

G: So, it was a long list for you—

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R: It was a long list, almost every single thing. I'd like—I don't know. I just have a lot of really random interest in—or things that I think are interesting or related cause I think really weird, and so everything in mind is like interrelated, and—

G: Do you have any different language for that than 'you think really weird'?

R: I don't know, um... I guess just everything in my head is interrelate--interconnected, and I see the ties between everything, whether it's sustainability and engineering and religion or like just random things that people are like 'what?' like that's—I kind of relate them in my head. They're--they make sense together, so it's really hard—it's been really hard for me to pick one thing to study because I'm like 'well, but then you don't understand the whole picture if you're not looking at these other things as well,' so

G: That makes sense to me

R: But, um, kind of like the next thing I did after looking at all those things is, we grouped them into categories of like types of information? Or like—types of subjects? And my two biggest ones were people and culture and, like environmentalism, but not exactly environmentalism, more like, I guess sustainability is the only word I know to describe it, and um, so kinda just was looking at things where I could study those broadly and um, I got down to the social sciences department, so it was either anthropology and geography or sociology and then I started thinking about careers that I could actually see myself doing, um, or things that I could see myself studying long term and um, I guess for me, like I really want to do hands on things that are like interacting with people in their actual lives and helping them out, so careers in sociology just kind of seem more relevant to that, um, lot like social work or like counseling and stuff like that, so I don't know. I figured why not--I needed to pick something so I just walked into the guys office and was like, 'I want to be a sociology major,' and he was like 'done. Check check' and filled out the paper and he was like, 'consider yourself a sociology major.' Cause I have decent enough grades to qualify, so he was like..by the end of this quarter I will be officially ...transferred over.

G: Fist bump—that's exciting.

R: It is. I'm very excited.

G: That's really exciting...tell me anything that you have in terms of reflection about Sustain. The gen—the big picture question that everybody wants to know is, just, 'what happened to you do you think?'

R: I don't—that's a really hard question for me to answer. I've—when I was originally going to work on this project I did a lot of reflecting on it, was trying to figure out really what the experience meant to me, and I still don't have a fully formulated idea, but um...

G: You're likely looking for a big one, to see—

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R: --I am—

G: To see connections between things, like you said before.

R: [laughing] Um

G: Do you have any small thoughts about it? Some non-interconnected insights?

R: Yeah—um, I think one of the biggest. I don't know. It's just a—hmm. Takes me a while to process...

G: It's okay—

R: Yeah, no I—

G: I can try to ask a better question, or a less big picture question, since your brain works that way, it could be too big a question for your head.

R: Okay

G: Not cause your head is small [laughing] but cause you're trying to make all these...um, well now you challenged me, didn't you?

R: Sorry

G: Did you think of something?

R: No. I thought I did.

[laughing]

G: Well, it's tricky—this will be a funny transcript—it's tricky because, you know, if you and I were just in conversation, I would ask some really, probably, pushing kind of questions to you right now

R: Go for it

G: But I think my role is more to kind of create an open space about whatever it is that you want to reflect on, so maybe just to start by describing, you know, maybe it's worth looking at and saying who you were before your Sustain experience and who you were after and then you can decide later about whether there was causation there.

R: Mhmm

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G: But was there anything—you know, another way to ask the question is ‘what’s your take away’ or maybe even smaller, ‘what’s it been like for you to be in a non-sustain environment?’ Any of those—

R: Any of those questions?

G: Any of those are fine

R: Okay, so I’m just gonna start talking and I might not even—

G: --fantastic

R:-- be able to answer any of those questions—

G: You can’t do it wrong

R: Yeah

G: Start talking

R: Um, I don’t even know where to start. So, I came to Cal Poly, um, I... heard about Sustain in Soar for the first time, and then I kind of didn’t think about it, but I kept the little card thing they gave you, so it was like in one my folders somewhere and I think—I don’t know—and you—I’m trying to find something to start talking about--

G: It’s fine—you’re not going to do I wrong—

R: Um—you mentioned that you were a professor for Sustain, and I like remembered going to that meeting and everything—

G: Were you in on of my classes before—

R: I was in one of your classes—I was in your writing 134 class freshman quarter—fall quarter, 1st quarter.

G: That’s right!

R: I was.

G: That’s interesting...

R: I know, and I was like ‘she’s one of my favorite professors—’

G: Oh, dangit

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R: This is awesome, like, I want to be around teachers who are engaged and want to push their students like this, so figured ‘why not?’—

G: Yeah

R: --and I never went to any of the Sustain like meetings or anything. I think I just filled out the application online and then showed up on the first day...

G: [laughing]

R: I don’t know, um...I—well, I was really unhappy with like where my education was before Sustain and I think that’s part of the reason like I wanted to apply in the first place is—I was really unhappy with what I was studying. I didn’t like where I was. I wanted—I was looking for something to grab on to, to find a community here, or a type of learning environment that could really push me in the ways I wanted to—um, so, I think that’s originally really wanted to sign up for it, um...I don’t know where I’m going...

G: It’s okay—what was the experience like for you?

R: It was really interesting, um. I’m kind of a quiet person, sometime--like when I first meet people—and I’m more like observant,

G: Mhmmm

R: --so, um, most of like the first winter quarter (which was also like a really weird time for me—had a lot going on), I just kind of sat back and watched people, and I wasn’t super involved in the student relationships and more interested in listening to what professors were talking about or like check-in/check-out, like the kind of, um, the overarching theme like of ‘success and failure’—that kind of stuff, really thinking about that and like observing the community and the way it worked? And so I think in some regards, I didn’t necessarily get the full Sustain experience because I wasn’t necessarily present for all of it. I wasn’t engaging in the entire, like, process fully, more just watching it happen. And I think especially the spring quarter, the second quarter that we were all together, when people really had like strong friendships and were really, um, cemented in their like kind of, their small project groups and had like a lot of those interactions, I was even less a part of it because I wasn’t...um, so as far as that, I think I wasn’t necessarily...fully engaged in the Sustain experience, but it was still really positive experience for me, um, shaping the way I think about problems or think about how we communicate with each other as people, um, you’ve really had an impact on that, so like it was so—so really, really positive, powerful experience, but I don’t—I just feel kinda like I don’t—it wasn’t quite the sssss---I think it was different for all of us—

G: --Sure

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R: --But, yeah, um...I don't know. I just feel like it's not entirely the same experience that a lot of my peers had in it—

G: I didn't think it was different, what you just described relationally—

R: Yeah

G:--How you feel like it was different. Is there any other way you felt like it was different?

[pause—and background talking from someone else in the room “You guys should go to pie night!”]

You can skip it—she just was on our transcript—~~STRIKE THAT LAST THING BY THE STRANGER~~

R: Come to pie night!

G: Come to pie night.

R: Um...I don't know.

G: Okay

R: I think that may just be like the biggest thing is that I wasn't necessarily involved in the like, I've heard Roger say this like two or three times and I think it's like one of--it's one of my favorite quotes ever, is like: 'relationship is the medium for unprecedented result' and I think that is one of the biggest things that Sustain is and provides and kind of embodies more than anything, more than sustainability of education and integrating those other things is like forming relationships with people and like using that as like the springboard for anything you want, whether that is sustainability through all these projects or integrating your education or whatever, but I think because I was so quiet I didn't form as many relationships as I would've—that would've made that an even more powerful experience, because that is such, at least from my observation or my take away from it—relationships were really the foundation and the most important part of it—

G: yeah...did you walk away with some profound relationships for you?

R: Um

G: Yours truly excluded

R: Well, obviously

G: obviously

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R: Um, no seriously, I think just you as a teacher is probably one of like one of the most awesome relationships that I've found in that just because I don't know—I think—I've learned a lot from talking to you and interacting with you, as a student or like weird things like this, um—

G: This is weird, I agree—

[laughing]]

R: Um, I don't know. I mean, not as much as I would've liked. There are definitely, I think—██████████ and ██████████ both, I would love to know way more, I guess on a personal level almost? Or even just on that collaborative, professional level, than I do, um. ██████████, I think he's really cool too, um. I would love to know them more. I always find myself doing this—I'm not thinking of any of the students, um. I'm really awkward with people my own age.

G: Huh

R: I—I don't know. But definitely a lot of them too. But not—I—I'm saying the same thing, but not as much as I would've liked to, cause I wasn't as engaged in it.

G: Hmm. Do you see any difference in yourself that you think is connected to having experienced Sustain—and again 'no' is a feasible answer.

R: I have no idea. Um, I definitely do, there's a difference in my self from my last year self--

G: --Yeah

R: --Or, um, from the like person I am now, but there's even a difference from the person I was two months ago from the person I am now, and I think Sustain definitely had some role in that, was a catalyst in some form, but I don't—I don't know entirely how much of that is from that interaction, but—

G: What was it like to go back into the regular classroom—in the fall?

R: Um...

G: Traditional classroom, I mean.

R: I think it was..it wasn't enti—It wasn't like a jarring experience, um, it was pretty easy. It was kinda just back to the, back to the—what the saying? I don't know—the grindstone, something like that?

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G: Just the grind. maybe

R: The grind, that's the one [laughing] Um, yeah, I don't know I mean I've been in the same kind of education system for ...twelve and a half years before that so it was kinda just a small speed bump in my education history, I guess, and then just back to same old same old...it was definitely different, um, but I think I was a little more prepared—it like prepared me to kind of create small opportunities in that same education system? To have more personal relationships with professors or something like that

G: Like what—tell me about that

R: I was more of an advocate for myself. Um. I never went into office hours before Sustain. And I didn't really during Sustain either, but, um, I did after that. I went in and introduced myself to my professors and made sure that they knew who I was, and that you know, if I had a question it would be like 'what's up, ██████████?' rather than like 'Mmm—girl in the back, like, purple sweatshirt,' you know'

[Laughing]

G: Yeah

R: So, that was, I mean that's a small thing but it's—it's making a difference, I guess.

G: I think it's a big thing, actually. Yeah... You said the word 'advocacy'—you're advocating for yourself.

R: Yeah

G: Yeah. I've heard that from a number of other students, actually.

R: interesting

G: yeah. Interesting to think about the power of relationship—not just your relationships with the sustain faculty, but that you understood something about—you transferred something about that, you know?

R: Yeah.

G: Pretty cool. Yeah. Anything else about your experience? How your head is now about learning? How your head is now about your education? I mean—you just, you started out saying some really interesting stuff about that, so—you're not doing it wrong, I'm just saying—do you have more to say?

R: Um. [pause] I don't know. I—I've always kind of thought this, but like I guess maybe more so now, or I'm acting on it more now, and this has kind of given me the opportunity

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or the willpower to do so, but just that education isn't just like, especially in college—like you have to go to school, through high school. Like you're forced to—it's a like state law, or whatever, but um—You know, this really is, for me and, like, so I can have an impact on my community and have a positive influence on my life and the people around me and owning that and know that what I'm doing in my classes is important and that I need to get the most benefit out of them, and you know, use that information in projects and in real life, and not just sleep through lectures but be engaged and be a fully committed student, I guess, an engaged student

G: Yeah—what communities do you imagine having an impact on later?

R: Me?

G: Yeah

R: I have no idea. Um.

G: Do you see anything in your head about it?

R: It's an interesting question because I've been thinking about that a lot recently just because I am kind of more focused on what do I want to do and what do I wanna, you know—what areas do I want to have impact on and um, I'm not entirely sure. I do want to do a lot of, or I want to do work with people who need help, I guess—

G: Yeah

R: --That's just a broad, whatever

G: Yeah

R: Um. Something that I have worked a lot with that I think is really cool, and I can totally see myself doing more stuff with is like um high school middle aged students and like bullying? that's a big thing that I was really involved in in high school and recently have found opportunities to continue being involved in? Which has been really awesome for me, um, specifically LGBT kids, which is also close to my heart and really awesome. Um. I think it would be really cool to work with, um, homeless or like poverty and like issues with that and all the things that come with that whether that's like class issues or race issues or just, you know...I don't know

G: that's exciting

R: Yeah yeah. But, I wanna work with the people who are down on their luck and need somebody to be like, 'hey—you're still awesome—the world's not a completely shitty place.'

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G: That's like a fantastic last thing to say.

[laughing]

R: Done.