

Professors' thoughts on writing

For this project I wanted to compare three professors' experiences with writing. I wanted to look at the first exposure to writing and their earlier experiences as well as the writing that they do regularly now and what the writing process looks like to them. I interviewed three professors who all teach in different departments. My first subject was E. Eric Boschmann who teaches in the department of geography. I have taken a couple of different geography courses from him, one involving reading a book that he wrote about the geographies of metropolitan that I was particularly interested in. Subject number two was Curtis Coats who taught an Introduction to Film Criticism course that I took as an elective. Last was Steven Hick, a GIS professor in the college of natural sciences and mathematics and University College who has experience working for the government, in particular law enforcement. These three have such different background experiences that I found them perfect people to interview. Each interview that I conducted went far different than expected, with each professor emphasizing certain experiences or aspects of writing than I had planned for.

The results I got were fairly unexpected, but even so, I found an incredible number of similarities. When I asked each professor about their first memory of writing, they each defaulted to explaining some formal writing they did for middle school, then touched on a vague memory they had of writing creatively in elementary school. Hick talked about being the editor of his school's newsletter in 5th grade, and Boschmann had made a little book for national reading week in early grammar school. All professors also recalled teachers throughout their academic career that taught them the base of writing that they have now built careers out of.

As far as types of writing that each of my professors does regularly, as one would expect, its mainly academic and formal pieces. I saw it coming that they would have that in common, but what really stood out to me was their emphasis on collaborative work. Hick as I mentioned has done a good amount of government work, and in his interview, he discussed how important it was to have multiple people working on different aspects of projects. While talking about the writing process and what he hopes his writing will accomplish he said, "we need to look at the data, so we would like to -and I'm gonna say we because we're not going to do it alone- but we would like to help institute some change here in the future". Hick spoke directly about the importance of collaboration, while the other professors talked more vaguely about collaborative work, what they do, the importance of the collaboration, etc. Curtis frequently writes screenplays which involve him, actors, editors, directors, and more. Boschmann collaborated with another professor at the University to write the book that I mentioned earlier, so he had a lot to say about that specific partner work. Obviously these three forms of teamwork are different, but it was interesting to me how without prompt, they each brought up their own experiences.

Two of the professors that I interviewed work primarily in the science field, so it was interesting to hear their thoughts on creative writing. Both Hick and Boschmann discussed their lack of time for writing. They are both a bit older than the third professor that I interviewed, and it was clear that these two simply had better things to do than explore creative writing. Hick mentioned a friend that teaches creative writing at University College, and he expressed a desire to take a course from him just to learn more, but there was an underlying tone of that never actually happening. Boschmann touched a bit on his uses of creative writing, saying “I do like personal journaling. not on a daily basis, but more when I’m trying to process something and that’s more for my own benefit and not for anyone else to read”. The pressure of someone writing needing to be for someone else seemed evident with that statement.

Throughout the quarter we discussed the revision process quite a bit, so I wanted to see how my professors approached it. Hick had a unique take, as he doesn’t really do much revision. “The editing with most of this technical documentation I’m talking about comes when You give it to the client as a draft and then they mark it up and they send it back and you”. His revision process was based on other people’s marks and revising the things that he is told to revise. When asked about changes in the writing process that he has seen, Hick mentioned the development of word processing software, and how editors can now be computers rather than a basement of women rather than focusing on his personal process or specific shifts. Coats on the other hand had a revision process that involved strategies we have talked about in class. As a writer, Coats has to leave his pieces alone for some time before he can revise them with fresh eyes. This made sense to me as he is doing more creative writing than the others.

Throughout the interviews, each professor had a somewhat specific topic of interest that they brought up on multiple occasions. Boschmann has a history with the city Asuncion, Paraguay. He has written about it, done on ground research there, and is just inspired by the place. Coats has a lot to say about toxic masculinity and how it applies to scholarship and elsewhere. When asked what he hopes his writing will achieve, Coats responded “I want people to engage questions of toxic masculinity and other things that interest me as a critical scholar”. It was really interesting to watch each professor talk about what they were passionate about and how it inspires them to write and produce. This project really helped me understand the different applications of writing after college, and how people in different veins consider writing differently.