



John Thurgood Interview: Transcript

May 6, 2020

Amanda Reavey: Hello. Welcome to the Stereotype Life where we talk about mental health, disability and access in higher education. My name is Amanda, and today I'm here with John Thurgood, a doctoral student and Advanced Opportunity fellow in creative writing at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee. He has been a teacher and educator for 10 years and has taught all over the US.

Hi, John. Thank you for being here today.

John Thurgood: Hi Amanda. Thanks for having me.

Amanda Reavey: So we just finished our first years as PhD student. Can you believe it?

John Thurgood: Unbelievable. I can't believe it's been a year already. I, uh, was thinking, you know, while we were doing it, it just seemed like it was taking forever, you know, doing each assignment and each week just seemed like such a heavy workload. And now that it's over, it feels like it only took a week, it's like what we compressed into one year feels like.

Amanda Reavey: Yeah, well, we I feel like we went through the gauntlet, like we're a whole new person since August.

John Thurgood: Yeah. I can't wait to, like, get out of my shell and experience life on the outside of my apartment. Even with quarantine or even without

quarantine. I feel like I was before quarantine. I was just like in my apartment, struggling with my assignments all year.

Amanda Reavey: I hear that. I do want to talk about teaching during quarantine, but first I'd like to talk about your work as a writer because your fiction writer, right?

John Thurgood: Yes, ma'am.

Amanda Reavey: Yeah, so on your website, which listeners can visit at johnthurgood.com, you quote Kyle Minor's *Praying Drunk*. "Our job is to identify the distance between the story we've been telling ourselves about our lives—the received story or the romantic story or the wishful thinking—and replace it with the story that experience is revealing about our lives, the story that is more true." Can you see more about that? What drew you to that quote?

John Thurgood: Yeah, I mean, Kyle Minor says it better than I ever would. But yeah, I mean, just writing in general, I think, and there's a lot of good writing out here that out there does it. But you know, people can get stuck in their own nostalgia and writing about their past in a way that is so wistful and like wishfully thinking upon their own kind of experiences in a way that, uh, paints it in its own relief in a way where you're not kind of thinking about the experiences that were happening around you or the, you know, the kind of historical movements that are happening around your own experience. So, yeah, I don't know. Yeah, I think like when you're writing, it's better to kind of look for those harder explanations than it is to kind of move toward that initial impulse of writing, which is kind of re-imagining yourself as a better person or re-imagining your experiences as being these kind of experiences that lead to some sort of personal growth where sometimes, you know, like not every personal experience has to be a learning experience. You know, it doesn't have to. You don't have to, like, say that Oh, this terrible thing happened to me, you know, like you know, like, whatever tragedy might befall any of us. You know, you don't you don't have to look at that and then re-imagine it and twisted around until you grow as a person. You know, because maybe you didn't grow as a person. And that's that's kind of the harder explanation, right? Maybe your growth was something that

was a lot harder to explain, or not very positive at all, you know, or something like that. So, uh, yeah, I don't know. I'm getting in the weeds now, but yes.

Amanda Reavey: Yeah, well, talking about yeah, like, is kind of a coming of age sort of thing where we grow up and as you're growing up and the world is expanding, you realize something's happened and we don't epiphany. We don't have some kind of, you know, realization about anything. It's just something crappy that happened.

John Thurgood: Yeah, I guess. You know, I don't know. Telling stories, writing stories is ah, it's fun. And it can really get you into some really interesting ways of thinking about your own experience. But I think, uh, I think you know, growing as a person is different than writing a good story. So conflating those two things might be, uh, the wrong way to do it. I don't know. Yeah, I guess these are all thoughts I still need to think out more. Even kind of figure out. That's why we're in the PhD though, right?

Amanda Reavey: Right. Figure out whether our characters need to learn something. But how do you think, um how does your writing life... I mean, you were also an adjunct instructor, right? Um, after you, while you did your MFA, no after you did your MFA?

John Thurgood: Yeah, I did my MFA. And then I took a year off. And then after that, I got a job teaching as an adjunct at this small state university in southern Indiana. And, uh, yeah, it's weird being an adjunct, you know, you're not really part of the faculty or sign a new contract each semester, and you kind of feel disconnected from whatever is going on with the university, with the campus, with the power of it. So I was doing that and also trying to write at the same time and just getting a lot of rejections. I mean, I published, during that time. But not very often, you know, dealing with like being an adjunct and kind of struggling with the amount of money that you're getting paid,, the lack of kind of responsibility, which is also coupled with kind of a lack of respect in a way, um, just really kind of pushed me anyway, to really question what I was doing, you know, as a writer, as it has a as an instructor or professor or whatever. So, yeah, I mean, initially, that whole quote with Kyle Minor is really kind of, you know, thinking about what you're doing and writing with much more purpose. And, you

know, being here at UWM has got me thinking about teaching with more of a purpose to, you know, and, uh, what that really means.

Amanda Reavey: How has your purpose changed?

John Thurgood: You know, as an instructor, or as a writer.

Amanda Reavey: Well, both cuz I was also thinking about that we have this romanticized notion of what it is to teach and write. And but then we have these constraints of time and money. I mean, it sounds like your purpose has changed as both a writer and an instructor.

John Thurgood: Yeah, I think you know. Yeah, coming here especially like the last few stories that have turned in for workshop, I've really been struggling with not just writing a story that is fun and interesting or compelling or whatever, but really writing a story that talked about, um, folks and skateboarding a lot. For some reason, I spend so much time not writing about skateboarding. Uh, I grew up skateboarding. I've been skateboarding my whole life. It's a big part of my life. So I realized, like, why am I ignoring that? I have been doing it for so long. I know a lot about it. I know a lot about the experience of it, and it's just weird, like romanticization of being a skateboarder, where you're like, I see the world differently, you know, through the skateboarder's eyes. You know, I can't remember how many times I've heard that, somebody say that in some skate video. You know where it's like, you know, I'm a skateboarder. It's a lifestyle, you know. But really, I mean, skateboarding is weird because it's not really a lifestyle. It's still a sport. It's still a toy, you know, and I think like looking at it through that lens, it it's like putting on blinders. You know, you don't really see that skateboarding is this kind of like individual thing, but it also ties into, like a really weird like neo-liberalised narrative of the individual and how the individual within capitalism has to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. And you're on your own. And you know everything comes on you, you know, like all of your own creativity is, is all your own personal growth is dependent upon your own creativity and initiative, which, you know, that's a weird narrative, you know. And that's, it's so weird that skateboarding has become so popular in the past, you know, 20 years. So I think because there have been ebb and flows within skateboarding too it's just this new popular popularity of it. It's way more than

ever had happened in those ebb and flows before. And so it's interesting to think about that. And why skateboarding has had that arc. Right now, I mean, all that's real abstract. I'm sorry, but yeah, so thinking about that with teaching too, you know, like I love that teaching narrative of, like, the Dead Poets Society where you're like, throw away your book, you know, rip out the first page.

Amanda Reavey: Yeah.

John Thurgood: And, uh, I'll gonna just you know, we're all just gonna think on our own. You know, it's a liberal arts college, and we're here to learn how to think, you know, and I like that idea, but it is. You can get caught up in the romanticization of that and not really think about how you're doing it. You know.

Amanda Reavey: I suppose you know, it does change your relationship, though. Um, to. I mean, you're new to Milwaukee as well. So skateboarding through the city, I feel like, would change your relationship. And how you, um, how you see the city.

John Thurgood: Yeah. Skateboarding in Milwaukee is has been amazing. I love this city. It's got a really great, really strong, vibrant skateboarding community. And there are a lot of spots and, uh, you know, seeing the city through a skateboarding, uh a skateboarders eyes is is different. You know, you you're looking for spots. You know, like, uh, I do that wherever I go. I have lived up in a lot of different places and, uh, you know, you kind of figure it out. You moved to a new city, You're like, Okay, what's the skate shop here? You know, what is this? What's the vibe of the skate shop here? You know, where the parks, do they have any skate parks? What is the vibe at the skate parks? And then you make those connections, right? And then you kind of start to find skate spots, and then you get to see parts of the city that you wouldn't normally go to, right? Because for whatever reason, you know, cities put skate parks in, uh, like the worst neighborhoods. It's kind of ah, it's kind of a trope. You know, they call it the, uh, like, uh, I can't remember what's exactly called. But it's like the urban broom or the over the urban sweeper, right? You come in, you put a skate park in an area of town that needs some, uh, love the skateboarders come in, kind of clean it up a little bit. And then all of a sudden, there are, uh, you know, coffee shops and art

galleries and whatever, you know. So there's that, uh, so you would go, you know, as a skateboarder you go to neighborhoods you wouldn't normally go to, you get my point. But because I think if I moved here just for the program, I probably would just stay in my neighborhood. Go to the neighborhood where the university is right, and then maybe you go downtown. But now I'm, like, doing all over. It's been interesting. That was a long way of saying that I love Milwaukee.

Amanda Reavey: I'm glad you like Milwaukee. I basically grew up in Milwaukee. I moved here in high school, or, um so I've lived in this city since I was, like, 14 years old. But as even you probably know more about the city than I do because you, you know, they always say you should come back to your city as a tourist because then you'll actually understand and see more of the city than you know, your 20 block radius or whatever it is. But how has reconnecting, connecting to the city informed your teaching life?

John Thurgood: I think the program here, you know, the composition program at UWM is really cool because they focus a lot on your location, right? Uh, and I think you know, spatialization really kind of a buzz word, you know, teaching for a lot of places. But, um, this program really does take that to heart and getting students to understand or think about where they're living and the communities that are circulating around them, you know, and how they can become a part of that and how you know, pretty, basically, they already are right a part of that, right? If they're living here and they're doing things outside of their job. They're doing things outside of their family. They're doing things outside of the university. They are part of the community. You know, getting students to think about what community they are already a part of and what communities they already understand a lot about already can lead to some really interesting research. And that's what that's what I've been doing in my classes. At least you know, I had one student last semester. He did a podcast on ghost signs around Milwaukee and tracked down all these old all these old this old signage, you know, all around the city that was, you know, painted on the side of brick walls. Or, you know, just like old signs that were still up around different industrial areas, that these businesses have been foreclosed for decades. But the signs are still out. And how that is this really interesting tradition, like artistic stylings of or like artistic illustration style within Milwaukee, within kind of these more like industrial cities. And you know, this fast, you know how it tied it to his own graphic design work and you know,

like art was really cool. And how, you know, that community was something he was already a part of. But he dived into it and figured out who Ah, a lot of these people were who were painting the signs. And, um, and a lot of the work that the historical society has been doing to preserve these signs and stuff like that incorporate these signs into, you know, uh, different things around the city. Really cool.

Amanda Reavey: Yeah, well, that relates really well back to the Kyle Minor quote too, like the the idea of what are these stories that we're a part of that we don't even know we're a part of.

John Thurgood: Yeah. Yeah, exactly. I mean, it's just I mean, I think really the root of it is just being a little more considerate, right? In taking the time to think about, you know, where all this stuff came from and appreciating it for what it is, you know, appreciating things outside of your own experience and then using your own experience to kind of reflect on those.

Amanda Reavey: How do we how do we support students in that in those kinds of explorations?

John Thurgood: Yeah. I mean, the funnest thing for me is to just kind of see a student light up and realize like, Oh, I can write a paper about that. You know, they have all these really cool things they're already doing in there like, Oh, wait, that I could bring that into academia, like the academy wants to know about that? Yeah, they do. And that's exactly why they need you, right? They need your voice like they are. They're out there talking about whatever they're talking about, and you're actually living life right now. You can bring in that life experience into all of these, you know, abstract ideas and concepts that they are, you know, trying to nail down. It's your life experience that will help nail down those concepts even more.

Amanda Reavey: Because it made it makes him invested, then too if they get to explore something that they're interested in.

John Thurgood: Yeah, totally. I had one student last semester just gonna talk about all the students from last semester uh, turning this this project where he

was talking about the different mountain bike tracks that are around Milwaukee. You know, there's a really, really cool mountain biking community around the area and, you know, he was talking first about at first about, you know, like how it's great exercise, you know, like, kind of like his own perspective on it, and then slowly kind of got into kind of preservation And how these mountain biking tracks are, you know, to a certain extent, you know, hurting habitats are, you know, moving in the habitats and things like that. But how you know, keeping that in mind while you are doing this activity can affect how you build these tracks, right? How you maintain the areas around these tracks and how you preserve, you know, different habitats with this kind of activity in mind. Right? So I think, you know, having him kind of dive into this subject really helped him think about what he was really doing, you know? Sure, he's getting a lot of exercise. I'm sure he's kind of expressing himself and sure, he's like getting together with his friends and doing something that isn't drinking right it isn't hurting other people, but at the same time it really you know, once he started thinking past that, he really started thinking about what it meant to be, uh, you know, living in Milwaukee, which eventually will lead to, you know, the thought of like, well, this city wasn't always here, right? So what was here before the city? What was here before the bike track? You know, that sort of stuff.

Amanda Reavey: I love that like these and again, I go back to that quote that Kyle Minor's quote like we're stories within stories within stories, and it's kind of there are stories that are before we lived and there are stories, going to be stories after, we've, we've lived.

John Thurgood: Totally. I really like that book to because it's ah so many different like it's all these similar stories kind of stacked on one another that are all a different kind of like genre are all a different kind of mode or or type of storytelling, you know, and it's like all these different stories in all these different ways of telling them, like stacked on top of each other, and then you have something new right, and then you have like a new conversation going on.

Amanda Reavey: Yeah, so it sounds like you have really good relationships with your students and thinking about, like, all these different conversations that are occurring, do you have any advice about creating a community within your

classroom or in reciprocity among your students? Especially now that we've moved everything online due to the pandemic.

John Thurgood: Yeah, my students. It's really weird, you know, thinking about trying to get them to engage in a classroom community. Right now, you know, it's almost like a too much of a burden to ask for them because they're who knows if they're even in Milwaukee right now. You know, moving everything online after spring break has been an interesting process. But because we had that first 8 weeks face to face, I feel like I really got to know my students and how they operate and kind of what they can do, you know. So when I ended up moving everything online, I have everything set up asynchronously. So I'll put prompts up, and they'll respond to those prompts just to the prompts, right? And because I don't really want to ask too much of them right now, that's all I really haven't doing. Right, these prompts. They're responding to them, and, uh, then I have my kind of big project that's due at the end. They do a rough draft, and then they turn in their final project. And I thought about, you know, having a discussion board where, you know, you would post your discussion and then respond to people, and I just I just didn't want to put that burden on them right now because I don't know what their home responsibilities are right now. I don't know, composition class should even be like a high priority for them right now, but so I just wanted them to have, like, these kinds of clear, clear cut assignments right where they don't have to keep coming back. You know, like you do your assignment, you're done move on with the rest of your life, you know? So that's kind of how I had it in mind for this this time period.

Amanda Reavey: Yeah. That makes me think about what our job as an instructor is because we want to be empathetic to their situation. You know, maybe they're back. They're living back home and that environment not conducive to online learning. Um, but also making sure that they get what they need out of the class. How do we, how do we balance that?

John Thurgood: Yeah. I mean, I have been thinking about this a lot too, you know, kind of like their rigors that are involved with the course. You could you want you want that rigorous thought to hold the right, even during the pandemic. You want them to come out of the classroom having put some serious thought into whatever it is that they're working on. So, yeah, I mean, I think my goal was to

kind of you have two choices, right? You can either have them keep up with all the initial assignments, right? And then just make sure they get those assignments in and grade them on a curve. Or you can cut back your assignments and make sure that they're able to spend time on those assignments that are left with a certain amount of rigor. Right? And that's good. That's been my approach. So I've weaned back my course curriculum a little bit so that they can focus on the assignments a little more, and, um, and just so I know that by the end of the course, they at least engaged with the assignments that are left with kind of a high level of of interaction, you know? That kind of approach, I think.

Amanda Reavey: So it's almost like you have to revisit the goals of the course and then figure out what's necessary.

John Thurgood: Yeah, yeah, definitely, that's what I've been doing. I think, uh, so in the course the way that it's set up now there are three major projects. Um and so I basically just erased my last final project and have them focusing on the second project as the main goal, which is a research brief. They do a kind of deep dive in researching one issue or one topic around Milwaukee and, ah, you know, before they were just turning in one kind of final project. And then I would give them the opportunity to revise it later for bonus points if they wanted to do so. Now what I have been doing is just turning in a rough draft, we talk about it, and then they turn in a final draft for their final project. And, uh, the conversations around their project so far have been really interesting, you know? And those wouldn't that mean that wouldn't have really happened if we had moved on to the third project in class without the pandemic. And it definitely would not have happened if we had moved on to their project during the pandemic.

Amanda Reavey: Yeah, so we have to create kind of these these new contracts and, well, I guess also, in addition to creating these new contracts with students, I've been kind of wondering how to keep them engaged. Especially students that maybe, you know, they don't necessarily. How do we? I'm rambling now, but how do we engage students and their different learning styles when I mean, they didn't sign up to do online teaching?

John Thurgood: Yeah, that is I mean, that's a really kind of moralistic question, right? An ethical question, I guess. Uh, you know, they didn't sign up for an online

class, you know, at the same time, you know, who knows what they're going through right now. So the way that I've been thinking about it is, you know, every semester you have. So I was an adjunct for four years, I and I noticed, you know, every semester we had, like, one or two students who are going through a very serious life struggle, right? And with that student, you you let them know. Okay, Okay. I understand what you're going through. Let's make a new deadline, right? You kind of set up these new contracts with them, you know, and you kind of move with them and that sometimes the deadline moves back. And you do what you can to kind of make sure that even though they're going through something, they can still make this time productive and do school, you know? And in the end, you know, sometimes maybe it just means that they're not, you know, ready for this course at this time, right. And they maybe need to withdraw and then just sign up again at the end of at the end of the struggle. Right, if that ever happens because, you know, for some people that life is just always a struggle, right? So, you know, and that's a really hard conversation to have. And I've had to have it once or twice in my teaching career so far. But thinking about this year, you know, you're not just having one or two students go through that you're having your entire class go through that right? Every one of your students is going through some sort of serious life struggle right now. And so how do you do that? How do you restructure the class? How do you re-sign those contracts with every single student? So that you know that they understand that you're doing your best to make this a productive semester for them, right? You don't want all of the work they've done so far to be lost, right? You don't want every single one of your students to have to just think, well, this semester wasn't the right semester for me. I'll just sign up for this course again when I can. Because, you know, we we teach that at an access school. This is an access university for a lot of students. They're coming in wondering if they even should be in college. You know, and so you don't want those kids to make that decision right now, right? You don't want them to think like Oh, I guess I'm not really college material during the pandemic, because that's not fair, right? That's really unfair. So, yeah, I've just been trying to think about like as a composition instructor, you're the kind of first line, right? So let them know that they can do this. This is very possible. And, you know, all you need to do is figure out, you know, like how you fit into the right now and how you know to see yourself as a college student. I don't know if that makes sense.

Amanda Reavey: Yeah, that makes sense. Like we need to as instructors, we need to understand as best as we can where they're coming from and then create or maintain or somehow express that we want this open line of communication like we don't need the details, but, you know, talk to us. We're people. We're human. We understand that that the world is more than just our classroom.

John Thurgood: Yeah, exactly. And it's those details that are important to you, right? You don't You don't want them to have to feel like because you want them to talk to you. But you want them to know that they don't have to tell you everything. You know it is, it's hard to like. It's hard to get that across in a digital format. It's like reach out to me, you know, let me know how you're doing. But like all I need to really know, it's like, how are you doing with the assignments? You don't have to let me know about every, you know, because a lot of that stuff is really personal, you know. You don't want them to have to feel like they need to tell you why they need an extension, because I think, you know, going into college, I think a lot of students really feel like professors do not want to give you an extension. Asking for an extension, you have to have a very valid excuse. And so a lot of those valid excuses right now are, like, you know, very emotional and very personal. So I think it's, you know, it's important to be clear with your students like, Hey, I just want to know, like, how do you feel about these assignments? And then once you once they email you I just had a student email me, you know, 30 minutes ago, asking a like, Hey, I just don't feel good about how I'm standing in the class right now. Boom, conversation has been opened. Now we can get into some details, right? So I just emailed him back and I asked him, how do you feel about the shortstacks? Do you feel like we need to, you know, because all I you know, most of those short stacks are just personal responses, you know, just asking for, you know, some kind of interaction. And then kind of asking that person about how they feel about the final project, right? You know, they respond back to that, and you kind of open up that dialogue and kind of narrow down the contract. It's all about, like setting individual contracts once, once the deadlines are missed. You know, you really just have to kind of create your new deadlines because students need deadlines. They really need them. Yes.

Amanda Reavey: Yeah. It sounds like we're also actually talking a bit about access like we shouldn't have. Students shouldn't have to prove with paperwork and all

these other things what's going on. We should we should trust our students and and you know that they know what they need. And hopefully they would tell us like your student did with, you know, saying, you know, I don't feel good about what's happening or what? You know, the student that just emailed to 30 minutes ago?

John Thurgood: It's interesting to think about like what I would have done if I'd started teaching this class online, you know, from the outside because, you know, having that, like, eight weeks of face to face, I really you know, I already know them, you know, I have a personal connection with them. So this kind of like asynchronous stuff and, you know, just having them turn stuff in when they can, because I know that they're going through a lot works, right? But if I was going to teach this online classroom from the beginning, I think I would have to set it up to where having these asynchronous prompts, but also maybe, like once a week meeting with them with, like, a video chat or something like that. So I could see their faces and really kind of understand how they feel and just spin, like, 30 minutes, just saying like, all right, you know, round robin, how's everyone doing? You know, just to get a few?

Amanda Reavey: Yeah. Like having that face to face to face interaction really helps set a really safe classroom environment. Like for me, one thing I've been struggling with teaching online is that I rely so much a nonverbal cues to get a sense of how students are feeling and whether they're understanding the materials. So been thinking a lot about how can we support and guide students in an online environment? Like, how can we replicate that social aspect?

John Thurgood: Yeah, totally. And it's like almost like being comedian, you know, like, you get up there and you're like working your own material. You know, you got this new joke you want to polish, so you try it out. You know, it's like that with your course curriculum. You know, like you you got this new nugget that you want to teach kids, you know, like this new approach and like doing it online, it's so much harder because you can't really understand if they're getting it or not.

Amanda Reavey: Are there positives to teaching online or anything any like, strategies that you've implemented for teaching online that you'd actually probably use if you were face to face?

John Thurgood: Yeah. I mean, I've learned, you know, being a student right now too, seeing how my different professors have adapted over this time has really given me some really great ideas. You know, I really like the idea of the discussion board online. It really does add a lot more work thought. It's a lot harder than just having a discussion in class because you feel the pressure of we're really kind of organizing your thoughts in a way that you don't really have to put that much stress on when you're just talking about it and in conversation during class. But I don't know if I would do that every week, right? So because that's too much of a burden to have them doing this discussion board while also trying to keep things more interactive, you know. So that's one thing I have, like, learned like it's really good to have a place where they can organize their thoughts and kind of, you know, bounce thoughts off of one another in writing. But it is also really good to not only do that, so

Amanda Reavey: Do you have any advice for anyone like, for example, if we were to continue teaching online in the Fall? Um, and we have new graduate TA's incoming graduate TA's, do you have any advice that you would give them for, you know, kind of balancing being a student online or even not online and teaching at the same time?

John Thurgood: I would just say, you know, don't be afraid of doing those zoom meetings or doing those like Microsoft teams video chats, You know that. That's gotta be something that's been very helpful for me.

Amanda Reavey: Yeah. Do you have any other insights or resources you'd like to share or any last thoughts. I really love going back to this quote again that we had at the beginning of just, like, kind of this bump between teaching and learning. And, um, this lived experience that you know, where we're all going through?

John Thurgood: Yeah. Just thinking about students in the classroom and getting them engaged. Uh uh. I always think about, like, my own interests and how to get them to think about their own interest in kind of a similar way and how their own interests can really be a big part of their academic life or their growth as an adult, you know, and their interests throughout as a student and ah, I always think about like when I was a kid, I was really into music, you know, like going

everywhere, uh, to like, record stores to find and seeing what bands led to what other bands, you know, huge real world to find music when you're a kid, especially before the Internet, you know? So I remember going over to my dad's house and looking in his closet and finding all these old records like Blondie and the Moody Blues, just all these really great bands that I, you know, like as a younger kid. You know, I think I was maybe 16 at the time, so if he would have just showed me that stuff and I was like ten my search for music would have been sped up an incredible amount. You know, like, I I would I wasted so much time just finding a you know about, like, Led Zeppelin er or whatever. You don't think forever to hit that point. And it would have saved me like years. So I was think about that for my students, you know, like, how can I save them those years? Like, how can I bring in the stuff that I'm excited about so that, you know, they don't have to search for that stuff on their own, you know, and kind of like Sure, sure up some time for them so that when they're here at they only have four years, you know, so that when they're here during this four year span, they can really focus on the stuff that they want to focus on, you know, immediately. They don't wait until their general ed is over. And then kind of, you know, muddle around for a little bit. They could just immediately get into it. And so I think, like, as a composition instructor, that's like a big, a big source of inspiration for me.

Amanda Reavey: I love that, like, this idea of excitement that we can figure out how to pique their curiosity and then, as instructors, um, we can be catalysts for, you know, not just a successful academic life, but also just a catalyst for broadening their world.

John Thurgood: Definitely. Yeah, I think that makes sense. I want them to leave my classroom knowing that they belong. You know, as a student, you like that idea where they deserve to be there and their thoughts are important. They mean a lot and they can mean so much more, you know?

Amanda Reavey: Yeah, like maybe in the intro, um, PowerPoint that first day. Just say what you just said is you belong here. Your thoughts are important. Let's get to know each other.

John Thurgood: Yeah, that'd be awesome.

Amanda Reavey: Well, I want to thank you so much for being here today and, um, for discussing what it is to be a student and a TA amid the pandemic. So thank you so much.

John Thurgood: Thanks for having me. It was great.