Interviewer: -- grateful that you’re willing to talk to us about it, and if there’s anything that you’re not particularly interested in answering, you don’t have to. We are recording this so that we can go back and look at the text, but we’re

not going to release names of anyone who’s responded to our questions.

Do you have any questions for us? Okay.

Well then, so you told us that you were involved in teaching innovation, which I bet was a big job during COVID. Can you tell us just a little bit about what was happening for you and your group as the university was just rapidly responding to changes and setting policies? Oops. You’re on mute.

Participant: Sorry.

Interviewer: There we go.

Participant: At the time, our department was called the Department of Online Teaching and Learning, and we’d been monitoring -- my supervisor and I had been monitoring kind of what was going on, and started thinking about how do we need to prepare. We had been fortunate that our department had already been experimenting with remote work, where everyone had at least one day or one afternoon that they had been working remotely for the six months prior to this becoming an issue. So we had a pretty good plan internally for our department, how that was going to be handled, what the expectations were. And so, we shared -- we did share our agreement that we were using with the rest of campus when the decision was made to go remote.

We had also purchased -- I think we purchased 200 or 250 webcams, because we knew that several faculty did not have -- faculty and staff did not have laptops from the university that they could take home, and we didn’t know if they would have webcams at home. It turned out we went through all of them, almost as soon as the announcement was made.

And so, you know, it’s one of those things where you can usually remember exactly where you were when the announcement was made that we were going completely remote. We were on spring break. I was over in Mojave and got a call from my supervisor that said, “Hey, I just sent your entire team home, because the campus is closing down.” And so, there was a lot of texting back and forth on our team of what does that mean for us.

We immediately started working with the CETL, the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, that was there at the time, and put

together webinars on how to operate -- just everything from simple things. We had faculty that would reach out and say, “I need to know what this Canvas thing is. How do I get to it?” We had the faculty who had been using Canvas and were like, “I really want to up -- I see this is an option to really improve my course. Can you go through it and start giving me

suggestions?” And just everything in between.

So we started doing several webinars towards the end of spring break on just the basic functions of Zoom and how faculty could do breakout rooms, and we found that for about two weeks, that was a big part of what we were doing, was just meeting with faculty one on one, or holding webinars where faculty could learn how to do certain things for their courses. So that was a big part of what we were involved with when it started.

Of course, then the CARES money and [00:04:02] money came out, and we were asked to very quickly come up with a plan to add technology to all the classrooms that could be utilized by faculty to stream their courses. And so, basically we had about three weeks in the month of May where it was decided we need to prepare for the fall, and as a part of that, we needed to make all the classrooms ready.

We tried to communicate with faculty as much as we could. There were lots of suggestions on what could be done. And so, we proposed three different models, one that was very low-end, essentially just buying more webcams; one that was very high-end, where we essentially turned every room into an IBC classroom; and then kind of the middle of the road, where we just put a really robust camera in the back of the room that was connected to the computers in the room, so that faculty could stream their courses that way.

We ended up going with the middle option, which meant that summer, my team, which includes instructional designers, Canvas support, and multimedia, spent the summer helping the company get everything installed, make sure everything was working, and putting together a training that was mandatory for all faculty when they returned in August. They could either join that training remotely, or they could come into a classroom and learn how to operate the cameras, but it was mandatory that every faculty member had to go through that training.

And so, that August we spent multiple days, all day long doing different

trainings, trying to accommodate everyone’s schedule, so that everyone could be trained on that. So yeah, that was kind of how everything started for us.

Interviewer: Okay. So in addition to upgrading classrooms and making sure there were lots of webcams available, were there any other kinds of changes you had to make about work from home and hybrid work environments?

Participant: For just my team, or for the campus? Interviewer: Let’s talk about your team first -- Participant: Okay.

Interviewer: -- and then anything you want to add about the campus.

Participant: Yeah. As I was saying, my team had been experimenting with remote work already. We had actually been switching or transitioning everyone away from desktop computers to laptops. And so, out of the 12 people we had at the time, I think seven of us already had laptops, so that wasn’t an issue, and the other five people had computers at home that they were comfortable using. And so, really we didn’t make a whole lot of changes. We just basically said, okay, we’re going to follow our initial agreement. We’re just expanding it out to five days a week.

I would say if there was probably one thing that we really had to -- well, I take that back. Our multimedia team actually started two weeks before we went remote. It was a whole new team to our department. They were hired, their start date was two weeks before the decision to go remote. And so, that was a little shock, because they were just trying to get to learn how they worked together.

I know they spent a lot of time running external hard drives. We bought several external hard drives for them, because at the time, the university did not have a server set up for our department, and so in order to transfer media files and things like that efficiently, they would just drive back and forth to each other’s homes and drop it off to each other. So they had to figure out a few things on their own, how they were going to work.

We did have to reach out to our IT department, and we added multiple Jabber accounts, so that we would be able to answer our phones. We got it set up to where our phones would forward to our Jabber accounts, and we could then continue to answer the phones without having to come to campus and be in the office. So we were able to do that remotely, and

we’ve continued that. We’ve kept most of those Jabber accounts available, because we still have -- you know, every single employee still works

remotely, to some extent. And so, we added those Jabber accounts to be able to handle that, that need for campus.

Interviewer: Okay. Great. When all of this was happening and you were making changes very rapidly, who got to make decisions? Who was instrumental in implementing them? That kind of thing.

Participant: Yeah. A lot of it was coming down from either the president’s office or

the provost’s office, saying, you know, for example, “We have this CARES money, and we need to do something.” And it was myself and my supervisor at the time, [REDACTED], an associate provost, who put together the proposals of here are all the different things we could do, and this is how it’d work. Here’s the pros and cons. But ultimately, it came down between like the provost, the president, and the president’s council on saying yes, let’s go this route.

You know, we tried to include faculty voice as much as we could, so that we could get their perspectives. And we know that they were hoping for the higher-end version of what we were able to provide, but ultimately, based on the amount of money it was going to cost -- because that was the other big thing that we found, was that because we were trying to do this in such a short timeframe, along with everyone else in the world trying to do this in a short timeframe, just getting a team that could commit, or a company that could commit to come in and basically do all the installation, with us doing the troubleshooting on the back end of connecting things with IT, that was going to cost us quite a bit of money. I think the installation cost almost as much as the equipment.

And so, yeah, most of the decisions were being passed down to the provost’s office. But for example, making the camera training mandatory for all faculty, that was not from our office. That came from the provost’s office. The president’s office and provost worked together to provide the options, especially even long-term, even beyond the beginning, like how are we going to transition back to the normal, so to speak, and how was that going to play out. So a lot of that came from the top down.

Interviewer: Okay.

Participant: At least from my people.

Interviewer: Okay. And you mentioned this idea of back to normal, right? Participant: Yeah.

Interviewer: It sounds like you kept hybrid for at least your staff, and you still have hybrid classrooms with all that equipment in them, so those things sort of stayed. Are there other things that you kept from what you learned during the pandemic, or did you say, you know, this was for a short period of

time, and now we’re going back to normal?

Participant: I think it depends on the areas of campus. You know, from a teaching perspective, I know one thing that faculty really struggled with was trying to manage all the modalities at once, especially as we started coming out of being closed. They were getting really frustrated with having to basically offer online, face to face, remote synchronous, all at the same time.

But I do think one thing that was kept was several faculty use more of a float or blended approach now. Rather than just having the set days for the class, they have things that they expect students to read before coming to class, or watch before they have to come, so they can actually have discussion in class. And so, I do think we did see some of that.

I know our Disability Resource Center, DRC, ended up creating a new accommodation for students that may have the need for courses or classes to be recorded, and utilize that technology that was installed to provide that type of an accommodation for a student. And so, some of those things were kept.

Obviously, my team, we actually expanded the remote. Whereas before the pandemic, we only had one day a week, we now have three team members that are fully remote, which was something that the university wasn’t willing to really bite on pre-pandemic. We had a couple of instructional designers, for example, that we interviewed, but they wanted to be remote, and the university said no. After the pandemic, we’ve had

three people go fully remote in different states, because their families were moving and they continued to work for us.

I will say some places on campus, some departments have started looking at things like, for example, faculty positions. We’ve had several faculty positions that have gone remote. And so, with them going remote, they typically will either teach -- we don’t have a whole lot of asynchronous remote courses anymore, but we do still -- we have a growing online population, and as a result, those faculty that have gone remote typically teach all online, rather than doing any kind of synchronous remote.

Some departments are kind of following what we’re doing with more

remote. I do note that there’s at least one department on campus that is

like, “Nope. We’re going back to you’re coming into the office 8:00 to 5:00, and we’re going to proceed that route going forward.” They tried it. It just -- I will say for the last year they’ve tried it, and they just decided recently that it just wasn’t working the way they wanted it to. There were things that were falling through the cracks, and they felt like it was just better. Because of what they do with helping students, it was just better to have everyone come back into the office, so.

Interviewer: Okay. Can you talk a little bit more about staff challenges with remote and hybrid, and whether or not you notice differences for different types of employees? Whether that’s men versus women, or the type of job that you had? Like you just mentioned, there are some jobs that work better in person, so if you can sort of compare and contrast for us a little bit here?

Participant: Yeah. You know, as far as men and women, within our department, I feel like -- I don’t feel like it’s been an issue. I think if anything, time zone is more of an issue than the gender. I guess I will say I do have one

employee who just had a child, and she has openly stated that she’s not sure she would have continued working if she wasn’t able to stay home

and see her child occasionally throughout the day. And so, I know that that was a big benefit, and is a big reason why she’s continued to work for the department.

Across campus, I think the biggest thing I’ve seen is what is the role, and what are the job duties that it entails. My department’s very much, you know, instructional design for online courses, Canvas support, all things that can pretty easily be done remotely. The one team I have within me, or within my department, is our multimedia team, and they have to kind of be here to shoot video. You can’t just fly a drone across [redacted city] and

shoot the video via drone. You’ve got to actually come in and set up the cameras, and mic people up, and stuff like that. So I guess even within our own team, there are those differences, that pretty much all my other groups can work remotely, not a problem. They’ve got to have some on- campus presence in there.

I think the biggest thing I’ve seen is that -- this is going to sound horrible. Supervisors that have been with the campus for a longer time are the ones that are trying to go back to being normal. They were the ones that wanted to go back to normal faster than others that were trying it out to see if it could work, and then determining because we’re doing X, Y, and Z, we’ve got to have people on campus more.

And so, I think that’s what I’ve seen the most, is supervisors that are newer to campus -- and I won’t necessarily say -- I don’t want to make

this sound like it’s an age difference. I really think it’s more of like, those supervisors such as myself that have been on campus for less than five

years, have different experiences, that make it seem like we’re more accommodating to that idea of working remotely. Those that have been here, you know, ten, fifteen, twenty years, “This is how we’ve always done it. This is what we need to get back to,” is kind of what I’ve seen.

Interviewer: Okay. Did you and your staff have to take on additional work to ensure that the implementation of all of the changes that were happening with teaching could be successful?

Participant: Yeah. We did a lot more in training than we had been doing, and it was actually -- a lot of that was -- a lot of what happened is what led to our [teaching and learning departments] being merged. As the pandemic started and continued, it became obvious that what [one of the teaching and learning departments] was doing was still teaching pedagogy. We were just doing it through the online medium, and a lot of what we were suggesting was also being done by the [other teaching and learning

department]. That’s why the provost last summer said let’s merge these

two departments, and let’s just have one department that directs faculty.

Because we did find that as we increased our amount of professional development for faculty, faculty started becoming really confused of who do I go to, especially since we had so many different modalities. “Well, does those modality go to you?” And there was a lot of -- I think sometimes [one teaching and learning department] felt like maybe we crossed a line or stepped on their toes, because the faculty would come

and say, “Can you observe me teaching via Zoom,” and they felt like they should be the ones doing the observation, not [the other teaching and learning department].

And so, as we went through the pandemic, it became pretty clear that we were doing the same things, but faculty were getting more and more confused of who do I go to, and they found that, “I really prefer this group or that group to go to and ask my questions,” but then we were having to direct them, like, “Well, this is face to face, so you’d really need to go talk to [teaching and learning department],” or they were getting online questions and having to forward them. Faculty were just getting that frustration level higher and higher, on top of everything else they were trying to do.

And so, you know, the training increased, and then once we merged, our responsibilities this past year have been significantly more involved across campus. In fact, my wife and I, this morning she asked me. She said, “Do

you feel like you’re in more meetings this year?” And I said, “Oh,

absolutely.” Since the start of the merger, I’ve been asked to be on more things, more involved with other things. And we were joking, because essentially I started about 8:30 this morning in meetings, and I’ll be done at 9:00 -- or excuse me, at 4:00 this afternoon. I’ll get an hour break before I get to go get my taxes done. So it’s not quite as bad as a root canal, but, you know. But yeah, I mean I think we’re all finding, my entire department is finding that we are significantly busier now that we have added roles because of that merger happening.

Interviewer: Okay. [Participant], I’m cognizant of time. I have about one and a half questions to go, but --

Participant: Yeah.

Interviewer: -- we booked until 11:30, and got a little bit of a late start. Are you okay if we go a few minutes longer?

Participant: Absolutely. We can go to noon.

Interviewer: Okay.

Participant: No more than that, but --

Interviewer: All right. Did you do any kinds of evaluations about what people were thinking about the changes that were going on?

Participant: We didn’t do anything formally, but [U3] at the time had several anonymous surveys that faculty could complete. For example, our faculty senate had an anonymous survey that faculty could complete, and then the associate provost would respond to that in a Word document. There were several comments about their frustrations. Staff association had something similar at the time, to where you could submit and voice concern, frustration. There were some surveys here or there by different groups.

But I don’t recall there being like one institutional formal, like, “How’s everyone doing?”

I do know that meetings -- so for example, we have an all academic leaders meeting. It has roughly 100 people that joined -- deans, department chairs, directors, program coordinators, things like that, or positions like that. A lot of those, the first five, ten minutes was just conversational, like, “Let’s just check in with everyone. Are we doing okay?” And sometimes that would kind of take over a meeting, depending on what group.

Especially smaller groups, that might take over a meeting. The larger

groups, not so much, because no one likes to talk in a larger group. But in our smaller groups, there were some meetings that it was just checking in with each other, and being like, “How are we doing?” Things like that.

Interviewer: So there was a lot of checking in, it sounds like, about how people were managing changes. Were there evaluations or conversations about what changes are working, and what changes are not working?

Participant: Again, I think it depends on the area. I know within my team, we definitely had those conversations, and we’ve continued those. I meet with our remote workers once a month, and just check in and say, “Okay.

How’s it working? What can we change? What needs to make -- what do we need to do to make you feel more engaged while you’re remote?” I think some areas did that much better than others. I think some, it was just get the job done, do what you need to do.

I can recall Provost [REDACTED] multiple times encouraging people -- as we started to come back, he would encourage people, “Just go for a walk this afternoon. Take an extra half hour and just go walk around campus, or walk uptown and grab a soda or something. Just get out and take care of yourself.”

I will say probably the biggest change coming out of the pandemic has been [U3]’s push for mental health and well-being. This past fall, they unveiled what they’re calling [REDACTED], which has different

resources to help faculty recognize when is this just like a normal stressor in life, like, “I didn’t get enough sleep,” up through, “I’m having really serious thoughts of harming myself, or I just don’t feel like I’m in a good spot.” And so, they’ve created a system to help faculty and staff identify, not just with students, but with each other, and that was something that was really promoted this fall.

They added additional resources like timely care, and things where students, staff, and faculty can all go on and get additional counseling and support. So I think if nothing else, really there was a much greater increase on the mental well-being and wellness of everyone on campus, when you look at pre-pandemic versus now. So yeah. Can you -- is that answering --

Interviewer: Yes.

Participant: Okay.

Interviewer: Yes. Thank you. You mentioned engagement, and that was something that you have worked on internally with your own staff. If there are -- this is

something that I think people are struggling with, right? We want to support people to do hybrid or fully remote work, but we want to ensure they feel engaged. Do you have, you know, your top three ways to --

Participant: Yeah. I actually have a list up here. Interviewer: --to help people feel engaged?

Participant: Yeah. We’ve done a couple of different things. At least once a month, rather than having all the in-person people gather for the department meeting, and then having the remote people join in, we do hop on Zoom, and that way everyone can see each other’s faces very clearly. As we were making this transition back to normal, and we started having these people go fully remote, that was one concern they had, was this idea that it’s great to be part of the meetings, but when it’s a webcam up on top of a big TV, and you’re trying to see the whole room, it’s hard to tell who’s about to talk. It’s hard to feel engaged when it’s just a big shot of a room.

And so, one thing we do is at least once, and usually it’s twice a month, we’ll hop on in our department meetings, just on -- everyone’s at their own computer, even though many of us are in the same room. But it allows you to get that direct face contact, versus someone’s side of their head as they’re looking around the room.

During the holidays and other things where we’ve had celebrations, I’ve Door Dashed food to those people, so that way they’re getting a treat as well. That was probably the funniest thing, because the first time I did it, I didn’t tell them I was going to do it, and all the sudden these cupcakes started showing up to their doors, and they’re like, “What’s going on?”

We also will occasionally do kind of virtual games. We’ll hop on and do like a Jackbox game, like Fly Swatter or something like that, where

everyone’s going to be on their phone answering questions, like a trivia game, something like that. And so that has helped them feel more engaged, when it can be something a little more fun and laid-back.

We had a -- I had the remote workers and their team leads discuss what tools would be best for us to communicate with. And so, we took two months and experimented with Zoom. We took two months and experimented with Discord. Then we talked about what the university provides us with, Gmail and Gchat and all of that. And so, we let the remote workers kind of lead that discussion, because if we were going to change to something like Slack or Zoom or Discord, we wanted them to be able to say, “This is why it benefits us.” In the end, they ended up saying,

“We prefer to stick with Gmail and Gchat,” and just use it a little differently.

Then we’ve had some remote employees, and even some here in office, say, “Hey, this is going to be my Zoom hour for the week. I’m just going to -- here’s my link to my Zoom hour. Do you want to hop on and just chat with me?” It doesn’t have to be anything official. It can just be, “Hey, look at these crazy pictures of my dog,” or, “What are you going to do this

weekend?” And so, we’ve had some team members that have opted to do that throughout the week. So yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, great. Well, I think you’ve sort of given us great suggestions about many of the questions that we had here. Is there anything that, as you have gone through this conversation, you’ve said, “I’m waiting for them to ask me about this,” and we haven’t done it yet?

Participant: Not that I can come up with off the top of my head. You know, I guess to me, the biggest thing -- and I don’t want this to come off sounding like I’m bragging or something, but really, the biggest thing that helped my department through the pandemic was the fact that we had been experimenting with things like remote work. And as a team, we’ve talked about not that we ever want another pandemic to happen, but how do we keep looking ahead and saying, “Here’s the next thing we need to try”? And it may or may not work out, but trying to keep that mentality of what made us successful, what we felt made us successful.

President [REDACTED], who was here at the time, had us come in and do a podcast with him, and several of the other groups were talking very doom and gloom of how bad it was. And I said I feel bad, because I felt like this was a time for my department to shine. You know, things that

we’d been trying before, things that we had knowledge in, we felt like we had that opportunity. And we don’t wish -- you know, never in a million years would we ever wish that this was the reason why we had to shine, but we want to keep that mentality going forward, I guess is the biggest thing, is we felt like we put ourselves in a good position before. How do we prepare for the next big thing down the road?

Interviewer: Yeah. That’s a really interesting insight. I think you’re the first person that we’ve talked with who sort of has talked about the entrepreneurial aspect of continuing in this way, of anticipating change and being ready for it. I think that’s a really interesting insight. Thank you.

Participant: Yeah.

Interviewer: We so much appreciate you spending this time with us this morning, and as I mentioned, we will eventually have all of the information compiled, and we’ll be happy to share that with you. But we appreciate all of your insights. We learned some good things today. Thank you.

Participant: Great. Yeah. If you guys have any other questions, or need clarification down the road, don’t hesitate to reach out. I’m more than happy to hop on another Zoom call, or just respond via email.

Interviewer: Okay. Thanks. Have a good rest of your day. Participant: You, too.

Researcher: Thank you.

Interviewer: Bye.

Participant: Bye.