Moderator: [Researcher], can you record? Thank you. You are on it. Perfect. said she was having some audio problems, but hopefully it’ll work this time.

First of all, I should say this is [U3] focus group for people who worked mostly on campus during the pandemic. I know some of you might’ve done some on campus and some remote, but we’re interested today in talking about the on campus. In general with this research, there’s been more research done with faculty members and students and their experience during COVID but not as much with staff, especially with female staff. We’re very excited to get your insights and experiences from that time. Thank you so much. If we could just start out with each of you telling us a little bit about the work that you do at the university. , is that how you say your name? Would you mind starting us out?

Participant: No, you’re fine. It’s actually long E, .

Moderator: . Awesome. I love it. Thank you. , could you start us out? Participant: I work in the copy shop that’s located in the library. I oversee that. Moderator: Awesome. , what do you do there?

Participant: I’m an academic advisor on our campus, so constant student interaction.

Moderator: Awesome. ? Oh, she just texted. She has to step out for a bit. , can you hear us okay?

Participant: I can hear you okay. I work in the copy shop with inside the library. Moderator: Perfect. ?

Participant: I do admin support for the school of business here on campus. Moderator: Awesome. , is your audio working now?

Participant: I can hear you. Can you hear me? Moderator: Yes. We can.

Participant: Excellent. I’m the network administrator in the library.

Moderator: Awesome. Wonderful. Thank you all so much for being here. Hopefully, we’ll get back soon. Sorry for the technical issues. For the rest of the questions, feel free to jump in. I’m not going to call out names or anything. You can say anything at any time. If you could just tell us how

the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your work activities at [U3]. Loaded question, right?

Participant: I’m happy to start. My work with students as an advisor prior to the COVID-19 pandemic was very heavily face-to-face only. I would have occasional phone appointments and phone meetings with students, but really I would say ninety percent or more of my meetings and conversations with students took place face-to-face in my office or visiting classrooms. With the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, we very immediately had an almost complete reversal. Obviously at the very start when there was so much unknown, everything went completely remote, and I didn’t see another student in-person for I’d say three months at the start of the pandemic because students were not welcome on campus; like coming in to do events and things. Really everything was very online. And so that first few months was a hundred percent Zoom and phone and learning new technology. I think that was a big struggle for our team here in advising was the learning of new technology very quickly.

The first...at the start, we were headed into spring break week, but

immediately after that we’re ramping up towards registration time, and so this is the time of year that we’re expecting to see ninety percent of our students within a one-month period. All of that moving into an online space was a huge challenge and lots of roadblocks to work through. Then continuing on after that, starting that following semester, we did return back to significant face-to-face activities and coursework, but I would say I still, even now, have probably forty percent of my appointments end up being on Zoom. Prior to the pandemic start, it was only ten percent that would be phone appointments, if that.

Participant: For us here in the library, in the copy shop, I don’t want to say we didn’t have a choice to work remotely, as to coming in, but we kind of didn’t because we have to complete work orders for people and they need to come up and pick up their projects. I don’t have copy machines at home or fax machines. Really for me and , we really couldn’t work from home, and so we had to be creative.

 came up with the idea to make masks because it had just all happened and you couldn’t find masks. We had like Shakespeare, faculty, staff, whatever, donating material, and we would cut them. And we would have our students that were here working--that wanted to come in and work-- they would cut out the masks and we would sew. We made hundreds and hundreds of masks. That helped pass our time since we had to come in to work. But I will say, after about a month or maybe six weeks of coming in to work, we would have our lights on, but the building lights inside, they

would all be off. I told them they had to turn them on. It was getting so depressing and dark. I know people can’t come in the building, but we need lights on. It was hard. It really was hard.

Moderator: I can imagine. Light makes a difference for sure. Anyone else? How did the pandemic change your work activities?

Participant: Mine were pretty reduced. I do admin support for the faculty. I do the marketing, event planning, and then also help organize and be the point of contact for our student clubs. A lot of those activities were reduced. My memory is pretty choppy, but I’m trying to remember how exclusively I was at home and for how long. My work was really reduced to monitoring emails and responding and then making sure our student workers, the ones that run our front office, that they were checking our voice messages and emails there and letting me know if there’s anything I need to respond to.

Participant: I had quite a shift. I work in Human Resources right now, but at the time I was working in International Affairs. I was their business manager over there, but I did help with a lot of things including recruitment and help with students, especially going over funding in their accounts, scholarships, things like that. I feel like I got a whole new job when COVID hit. All of a sudden it was, we can’t travel internationally anymore. We’re looking for all sorts of virtual recruitment options.

Everyone is all hands on deck. Everyone is participating in online recruitment fairs. What can we do to bolster online ESL classes since they can’t come in person anymore? We’re building now content for online

courses because embassies are closed. Students can’t get their visas. They can’t come here. We’ve got to give them some other online options. I feel like I got a new job when COVID hit.

Participant: For me it didn’t really change a lot. I do IT and so a lot of that can be done online. I connect to my servers, remotely connect to desktops, individuals, but losing the PR part of that was hard. I missed the social with colleagues. There’s some things you just cannot do. To check on a printer you have to actually be there sometimes. There’re certain things you have to be in-person to do. It did not impact my position really much at all.

Moderator: Interesting. [Researcher] and [Researcher], I just want to mention, since we have a smaller group today than normal, please feel free...if you have any follow-up questions that you want to throw out there, please feel free to jump in.

Researcher: Sounds good. I think right now this is just fantastic discussion. This is good.

Moderator: Awesome. The next question for everybody is, was there any change in flexibility in your job now when compared to pre-COVID work?

Participant: I feel like we saw a huge shift in our office from very structured, you will be in to work. Everyone...someone has to be there at eight o’clock. To a point, it was still that way where we needed someone in-office, but there was all of the sudden way more flexibility, and if you’d like to work from home…because there were options to work from home successfully. Or even if there were options beforehand, which there were, we were utilizing them now. It gave us the tools and ability to work successfully from home.

Moderator: Is that still the case now, , that there’s that more flexibility?

Participant: I actually changed jobs about a year ago, but from what I’ve seen in the department, it has maintained.

Moderator: Interesting. Thanks. Anybody else? Any changes in flexibility with your job?

Participant: I would say there definitely was a huge shift in flexibility for our area. We were really encouraged heavily at the very start of the pandemic to work solely from home, remotely entirely. I was not able to. At the time I didn’t have reliable enough access at home, and so I had come in and I was working in the office with doors closed and masks and things. I was still mostly in the office even at the start of everything because I didn’t have the resources. But during that time, everyone was highly encouraged to be at home, and then slowly over time, the encouragement, obviously, became be here if you can be here. But our office has been able to maintain a slightly flexible option for people whether doing a four-tens kind of a schedule or one remote workday where you do work from home for one day. Realizing that we had adapted to that kind of a lifestyle in that short period of time that we were so much at home, it was hard to come back from that. We have been able to maintain that. It’s actually been really good for a lot of our team members to have that little bit of flexibility for whatever works for their personal situation.

Participant: For us, particularly me and , nothing really changed because like I said, we had to come in to work, complete orders, whatever, and then people would come pick them up. Also, the front desk for the check-out, they had to come as well because if people wanted laptops, books, they had to whatever. Truthfully, if we’re looking at it, faculty, they had a lot more freedom to work from home which they can because they can do that stuff from home. There was a lot of the staff that still had to come in. Even

now, we’re just kind of whatever. But I see faculty, they do have the option where they can work from home one day a week, or if something comes up, they can work from home. I know that is a good thing that came out of it. Unfortunately, and I can’t work from home. Our jobs really just are the same and our work hours and whatever.

Moderator: I think that’s why we’re so grateful to hear from you because you’re right, it’s such a big difference when you have a job that can be done remotely and a job that just can’t. It’s helpful to hear that perspective. Has anything changed at all? Or it’s really just throughout the pandemic been well, maybe try to wear a mask, but really you have to be here that same time, you do the same--

Participant: Yes, we had to wear masks. They brought in the plexiglass for us. We felt like we were in fishbowls. We weren’t as busy, that’s for sure. I didn’t have a lot of student employees working for me. I normally have eight. I think we had two or three just because campus still wasn’t quite open. We weren’t able to offer as many student jobs, which was sad. We can tell that we’re busy now. The pandemic thing, I think, is now out of the system and so we’re just really busy and so thankful for it because before, it was slow.

Moderator: That makes sense. Anybody else have anything they want to add on flexibility before we go on to the next question?

Participant: From my administrative role, I feel like we have mostly snapped back to how we were before the pandemic. A few more meetings are held via Zoom. I also provide faculty senate support, and they have not gone back to every single meeting face-to-face. The majority are still via Zoom. So, some of those things remain, but I think for my role, I for the most part, have resumed things as they were.

Moderator: Thank you. Have there been any change in communication levels in your job when compared to pre-COVID work? That could be, was communication healthier pre-pandemic? What about during the pandemic? And how are communication levels in your job now?

Participant: I will say one good thing that came out of the pandemic is Zoom. and I would have to, you go to the meeting this time, I’ll go to the meeting next time because one of us always has to be here. Well now, ’s out there at her desk, and we can both come to the Zoom meetings. I actually attend more meetings than I probably would have, like campus-wide, when they have the meetings they have. I think I participate more in the

Zoom because that’s kind of just me, kind of how I am. I know for the

better, I like the Zoom. I don’t strictly want all Zoom, that’s for sure, but I’m loving the Zoom.

Participant: I would agree with that, too. I appreciate more hybrid options for meetings and being able to Zoom. It has allowed me, too, to participate more, which I’ve enjoyed.

Participant: [Moderator], can you share the question one more time? I just want to make sure I’m understanding it.

Moderator: For sure. The question is, was there a change in communication levels when compared to pre-COVID work?

Participant: I feel like there was a change in communication levels in regards to

quantity and quality. I’m thinking about the many group meetings that we did have, and when you’re all in a room together, everyone is on their individual laptops anyways and it was very difficult to share documents unless there was a projector in the room or a T.V. cart. Many of those meetings have continued to take place via Zoom because of the ease of accessibility to share documents and share, I guess, projects and be able to have a visual on those. I think it’s helped change the quality of the

meetings that we’re having since everyone can see, everyone’s on the

same page, everyone’s focused on one thing. Obviously, there’s always going to be some level of multi-tasking that some people choose to do, but usually it helps keep people on the same page. But I do agree with ’s comment also; because it is so accessible, the quantity has gone up and there’s a lot of meetings.

Participant: I also felt like I discovered that some communication went down during COVID. You’d send an email to a colleague that was working from home, and sometimes it was a day or two before you heard back from them. You couldn’t just pop in their office and say, “Hey, have you taken a look at

this?” I felt like there was a little bit of decline in that office communication for sure.

Participant: Sorry, I have too much to say. Piggybacking on ’s comment, I think

because there wasn’t an option to meet in-person, there was a huge influx that email was the only communication that took place. People weren’t in- office, meaning you couldn’t pop in. They weren’t at their phone. Most people don’t or didn’t share their cell phone so there was a huge influx in email. Whether for personal issues or not adjusting well to working well from home or huge influx in emails, there’s been a lag. I honestly don’t

think I’ve caught up from that. Will I ever? Will we ever? That’s a personal problem. I’ll keep that to myself.

Moderator: Not just you, . Anybody else have thoughts on communication levels changing or not? Maybe your thought is it didn’t. All right. Great. Based on your experiences during the pandemic, what differences did you see between men and women in their experiences at work? Were the changes that took place, if there were any, did they affect men and women differently? Were some things more difficult for one gender versus another? Were some things more beneficial for one gender versus another? In general, did you see any differences between men and women?

Participant: For me, my husband works on campus as well in IT. Between the both of us, I didn’t really see a big difference because he was able to come in to work every day, too. He tried working from home. They had the option. He didn’t like it. He felt more comfortable coming into the office with all his stuff right here than being at home. So, I really can’t say because we

both drove to work together, left work together kind of a thing. I didn’t see that.

My son, though—I’ve got all boys--and my kids though, they work at a restaurant here in town. My son was getting ready to have a baby…well actually, just had a baby. She was born in February of COVID year. And so, he had to get back to work. He had to find something. He had to get a job. He got a job down in Vegas and was living with my parents for a while and worked there until he could then come back to [redacted city] and find a job. But my daughter-in-law, she stayed home with the baby. I don’t know…because he felt I’m the dad. I need to go out. I need to get working instead of relying on the…what was that stuff they were getting? Worker’s comp or whatever it was that they were getting. Yes, he didn’t want to depend on that. He did for about a month or so, but then he went to Vegas and got a job.

Participant: I feel like in regards to differences between men and women on campus…I’m sorry, I just want to make sure I’m understanding the question, men and women experience on campus or…?

Moderator: Yes. What differences did you see in their experiences at work if there was anything that changed due to the pandemic? Was it more difficult for one gender versus another? More beneficial? Their experiences at work, was it the same or were there some differences there?

Participant: I feel like I saw more women on campus during the pandemic, and not to say that they weren’t all given the same opportunity to work from home, but I do feel like many of the frontline positions where you do need to be in-office, women mostly held those positions, which is why I feel like I

saw more women on campus is because they were not in the administrative leadership positions where there was a little bit more

flexibility. Or the ones that were there, that’s great, but there’s just more in the frontlines held by women than men. My opinion of me, myself, and I.

Moderator: Thank you.

Participant: I don’t think this is necessarily related to the experience in general, but anecdotally, I noticed a lot more females in my own area leave their jobs during that first year during and after the first initial wave of everything pandemic related. Significantly more women than men in my own areas were leaving their jobs, going elsewhere, or just leaving work entirely.

There weren’t nearly as many…I think four-to-one of the people that I had seen and worked with. That’s not necessarily experience during life on campus or anything but definitely a factor.

Participant: This is . I brought her in here so she can talk if she wants to. It was kind of busy out there so she really couldn’t talk.

Moderator: Awesome. Thanks, . And thanks, . I was actually just sending you a message to make sure that you could hear us okay.

Participant: ...talked about a lot of stuff in front of them, I guess. I don’t know. I was just listening.

Moderator: Wonderful. If you have anything you’d like to add right now, feel free. Or if you want to wait and listen a bit more, that’s great too.

Participant: I would just like to comment on the men and the women, if I noticed anything. I thought a lot more women were staying home because children were out of school and babysitters were not taking kids because the scare

factor of all of it and the unknown. I felt like I’ve seen a lot of women from campus that were staying home because they needed to be with their families, which I felt was great. I’m glad they were extended that option so they could be with the kids.

Moderator: Just to ask a follow-up question, were they typically staying at home and leaving their jobs? Were they typically trying to balance working the job and doing school with the kids? Do you know?

Participant: I think they were doing the work from home thing so trying to balance the kids and still doing work. But I think that also falls back to getting responses from people on email or stuff because they were busy with their kids at home as well. I couldn’t work from home. I would never be doing

my job. I get too easily distracted or dishes need done, kids needed paid attention to, so I get that point of it.

Moderator: That makes sense. I bet it depends partly on what department you’re in

whether you’re going to see more women go home to work, more women stay on campus. I’m sure it depends a lot. Anybody else have anything they want to add? This is great. Awesome. Well, thank you. I think I heard one or two of you touch on this already, but based on pandemic decisions for work activities, what types of changes to your work are still in effect? If there were any changes that were made due to the pandemic, which of those changes are still happening?

Participant: I know that in my department when we had switched over to doing a lot more virtual recruitment and participating in virtual recruiting fairs globally, it was a bit of trial and error finding which ones were more quality and had better participation than others. But that is still something that is heavily used, especially when considering cost and the number of participants you get to interact with. The technology that is available within global fairs has come a long way. I know that that is still heavily used in tandem with in-person recruitment now.

And online courses--I’m only speaking from the ESL perspective on it, when creating online courses--but that has been huge, especially when we…I think that they’ve hit the tail end of embassies being closed or not being able to get visas. But it’s been really helpful for international

students to be able to take online ESL classes before they get here so that they only have one or two semesters left of ESL before they can matriculate into a bachelor's degree, or they do it all online and are able to come here right away and do a bachelor's degree. Those are some things that I have seen continue to maintain, as well as the flexibility, or at least understanding in the need to be flexible, in the work schedules.

Moderator: Great. Thank you.

Participant: I think one thing that has changed in the way that I do my job is there’s a lot more that can be done online. There are very few forms that need to be signed with a wet signature anymore. So many more things can be done

virtually using…uploading secure upload tools, a student can do something from a hundred miles away, and I can sign it, and we can process things. That I think is a very positive change that has continued and we’ve been in the process across many departments of creating even more opportunities for online forms and online signatures and let’s do away with forms completely. Let’s move to something created as an IT

tool and that’s I think been very positive in the way that I do my job

because there’s less paper to keep track of, which is fewer mistakes that can be made. Like I mentioned before, we’ve continued to use Zoom as a huge tool in the way that we work with students and the way we work with each other. It’s so very easy to hop onto a quick Zoom call with a colleague versus trying to coordinate times across campus that we can meet in-person where it’s easy to just say, “Do you have two minutes?

Let’s hop on a quick Zoom.” I think that’s been very positive both for inter-staff relationships and working together as well as working with students in that way.

Participant: That reminded me, in the library we now have QR codes where they can check to see if we have a book they want to check out or a laptop they want to check out. One guy even has a QR code for if you want a job, for a job application. I’ve noticed that really took off and it still is. It still something if you need QR codes, barcodes because that’s what they were doing [unclear] in high school. It’s cool because we can update our QR codes to whatever we want to at the time plus it’s real life. And then they don’t have to necessarily get on their phone or come in and maybe look for a book or whatever. They just use the QR code, which again, is kind of nice.

Moderator: That’s cool. Sounds very convenient. Was there any kind of change in equity in your job during the pandemic?

Participant: Could you be more specific at all about what you’re looking for?

Moderator: That’s a great question. [Researcher] can probably add to this, but I take it as a very broad question, so any way in which things have shifted that makes things more or less equitable. That could be when it comes to gender. It could be race. It could be between those who are able to work on campus and those who aren’t. It could be any area. [Researcher], what would you add?

Researcher: I think what we’re really getting at is, were there accommodations made for some groups but not for others in terms of the equity of…it could be, I got add comp because I got this. I got a new computer because I’m working here at home and I’ve got stuff in the office. I got access to a variety of other things. Was that equitable across the board for people in positions like yours or were there differences there? One of the things we heard in another focus group, to give an example, is that when some men were on Zoom meetings, they could actually flat out say, “I’m on my

computer. Nobody bother me. Nobody talk to me.” But women were still doing a variety of other activities in the office, and it wasn’t as equitable across the board about how planning was made for people to do their job

or to interact with others. There may not have been, okay. Just because we’re asking a question, doesn’t mean it happened. We’re just curious. Did it happen?

Participant: I don’t feel like I recognized anything. I feel like things continued as normal, which was equitable and as funds were available. I don’t know. I feel like it didn’t impact my area that I noticed.

Moderator: Awesome. Thank you so much. We are actually wrapping up now. [Researcher], [Researcher], do you have any follow-up questions? And then, is there anything that you all wish that we had asked that you’re

thinking, “Gosh, when are they going to get to this question?"

Researcher: I actually do have a question that I’m curious about. When you’re looking at communicating with co-workers during the pandemic versus before and now after again, did you find that there were any difficulties with trying to communicate about feedback? You guys mentioned a lot of it being hard to reach someone via email. How did trying to get that to change...how did that impact with the pandemic?

Participant: Honestly, I feel like we got more feedback because so many people were disgruntled and wanting to share. That’s my opinion. I think more people were on their computer because that was their only mode of working.

Also, we talk about the satisfaction surveys that were sent out during that

time, “How can we help you? What resources do you need?” I feel like we got more feedback, or at least more feedback requests were sent out, than at any other time before. Because of that, maybe it was the amount of responses that were received or maybe it was just they were publishing what they had received, I feel like I saw a lot more surveys come about during the pandemic than at other times.

Participant: I feel like in my division we had way more frequent check-ins than we had had previously. Like a quick, a Slack sent out, “Hey, thumbs up, thumbs down, how is everybody feeling today?” Checking in at every level, from our vice-president checking in across the board, “Reach out to me. Tell me how you’re feeling,” and actually wanting to know the answer. I sent a message about how I was really worried about my four-year-old. He’s got severe asthma and this is a stressful situation. He took the time to write

back a very personal response to what I had said. I honestly didn’t expect that. I felt like I was very heard, especially like one whole calendar year following the start of the pandemic. I do think that that’s gone down a little bit. I don’t necessarily think that’s a problem. Things are calming down and that’s fine, but I definitely felt very supported and reached out

to during that time, and that was new. I hadn’t had that in previous experiences.

Participant: We even did something here at the library, a virtual lunch. At twelve

o’clock, everyone would just hop on Zoom, eat their lunch, and we would talk about things. A lot of people were at home so their kid would walk by or their cat would walk by and start talking or whatever. Personally for me, I got to learn a little bit more about the person and their personality and stuff like that. It would’ve never happened before COVID, never.

Moderator: This has been awesome. Thank you so much for being here. It’s so good to learn from your experiences. We really appreciate it. I guess we’ll end a little early. An early-ending meeting is always a good thing, right? Thank you.

Researcher: Thank you, everybody. Very helpful. Thank you. Participants: Thank you.

Moderator: Have a great week everybody.

Participant: Bye-bye.