Interviewer: Okay. I just put that consent cover letter in the chat so you have that to refer to.

Participant: Perfect. Thank you.

Interviewer: Yes. Thank you. We really appreciate you agreeing to meet with us. Participant: I wish I could have got more of my teams on board but that’s okay.

Interviewer: No worries. No worries. This is wonderful. Are they still interested in perhaps doing a focus group later on or do you think it would be better to just do this?

Participant: I think we’re okay to do this for now. If there are some things that come up that I’m unable to address, maybe we can circle back to that.

Interviewer: Okay. That sounds wonderful. All right. Well, let’s jump in. If you could just tell us briefly about the experience at your institution trying to rapidly implement policies from HR during the COVID pandemic. What kind of changes were made for staff about work arrangements when work from home happened?

Participant: Quite a bit, actually. We did not have a policy on remote work at all at [U2]. We actually had to create that policy on-the-fly using a lot of different pirating from other institutions, if you will, to implement that policy as quickly as we did. We did have a lot of policy addressing how to deal with your employees at a supervisor level, but we didn’t have an institution-wide impact. And as we all know, we have the campuses around the state of Utah, that was a little bit of an impact as well in trying to implement it there as well.

Interviewer: Yeah. So many changes.

Participant: Yeah. So many different things to keep take into account. But the hardest part, which actually, I say hardest part; it really wasn’t that difficult. Our HR team’s pretty on-the-fly when it comes to implementing things like that. The policy was rapidly approved through executive council and implemented within, I believe, a week and a half of our switch to remote work.

Interviewer: Wow. Wow. Well, I was going to ask you if you felt like they were appropriately timed changes. I’m impressed. A week and a half.

Participant: We did a lot of temporary policies and that’s how we were able to get it approved and implemented so quickly. Our long-term policies which we now have in place to address any other remote work, emergency actions or remote work in general, which has been a huge benefit to a lot of our employees now is that we actually have a remote work policy that addresses those that can and can’t work remotely.

Interviewer: Very cool. Who made those decisions about what policies to change and how?

Participant: It was a lot of the executive council. We had a – we called it the COVID Action Committee. That was our group that we pulled together to make the recommendations to executive committee. Ironically, the president was part of our action committee so it was pretty seamless when it came to implementation in executive committee.

Interviewer: Oh, that’s awesome. And were you a part of that committee? Participant: I was, yes.

Interviewer: Okay.

Participant: Yeah. I was actually the chairman of that committee.

Interviewer: Oh, awesome. You’re the one to talk to then, for sure. When, if at all, did those changes get reversed or were pretty much all of them permanently implemented?

Participant: During the temporary policy implementation, we ran that clear until fall semester of ’21, ’22. My bad, ’22.

Interviewer: Okay. Nice. What kind of challenges did you encounter with staff at your institution in trying to implement the changes?

Participant: I’m assuming it’s the same issues that a lot of different institutions had and that is the – we called it the essential employee list. The fairness or inequality that was created at their perspective of so many folks being permitted to work remotely while others were required to come to campus on a daily basis. And I have no doubt that that was a nationwide, worldwide issue that that created.

Luckily, we already had some essential employee policy in place that addressed that through other campus closure policies that we had in place. We had predetermined those groups and they were aware of their status as

essential employees. However, when we got into the second round or the second wave of implementation, that’s when it became very troublesome for some folks.

Interviewer: Yeah. That’s such a tough one.

Participant: It was very hard to navigate.

Researcher: Can you talk a little bit about that?

Participant: Yeah. It’s a very – and I appreciate this. I’m going to be as open as I possibly can with you all. I hope you appreciate that. It was very difficult because the majority of the essential employees were the lowest paid individuals on campus, that included our dining services folks, a lot of our facilities cleaning individuals that go around and clean our buildings, were deemed essential. Our RA’s were deemed essential even though we didn’t have a lot of – we still had quite a few students living on campus. Not a huge majority but to make it fair for everybody, we had to implement a system-wide RA as an essential employee. Same for RD’s.

A lot of the research people in the academic side were not even burdened by it because they wanted to come do research anyway. They didn’t want to lose their progress and their projects that they’d created so that was an easy part of it. But it was mostly those lower paid, essential employees where the issues became.

Ironically, we had a lot of contention in our public safety department as being deemed to – they felt like it was unfair – not stemming so much from the pandemic, this is a long conversation with public safety with any institution is that they’re not the highest paid individuals. They have a lot of responsibility when it comes to safety on campus. But were not given some of the perks, if you will, from local jurisdictions around the state of Utah that were given bonuses for working through the pandemic or given a little extra time off or things like that that [U2] did not offer to our employees that other places did. Not because they are not treated fairly, it was the difference between higher education and some of the allocations that local government was allowed to spend their CARES funding on. The institutions of higher learning were not allowed to spend that money on.

Interviewer: Yeah, that makes sense. Were there any challenges for men versus women in terms of the shift to work from home?

Participant: If they were, it was not voiced by our HR department. That was kept internal by them. I didn’t hear of any personally or experience anything

like that through the folks that I supervised. But there may have been. It just wasn’t vocalized through that committee.

Interviewer: Okay. And I imagine is the head of the committee it probably changed your job up during that time. What additional work did you take on to ensure successful implementation of those changes?

Participant: A lot. An awful lot of work. Although most institutions have a lot of academics centered around epidemiology and other things like that, we just didn’t have anybody operating at that level through normal operations that had epidemiology associated with the safekeeping of our campus.

Quickly, and it was a joke that we actually did that I was a PhD candidate for epidemiology now. As we worked through this, I had to learn so much and work with our public health partners to implement a lot of the things that we implemented on campus. A lot of learning in a very rapid period of time. A lot of policy adoptions as well that just increased the workload. It’s just like most people, it was 16, 18 hours for a year straight, honestly.

Interviewer: Oh, gosh. Were you able to cut back on any of your normal work or was it just added right on top?

Participant: Ironically, I was a new employee when the pandemic hit. I started in August of 2019 as a result of a restructure and revamp of our emergency management program on campus. It was basically a wipe the slate and let’s start all over conversation. So I started in August of ’19. December of ‘19 is when we started seeing it was going to be coming to the US and started that planning process. And by January 20, it was here and we all know the timeline. March approached quickly and we all went remote at that point anyway.

The duties that I wanted to begin implementing on campus – there’s a lot of benefits as well. I’ll get to the benefit. But there’s the trying to understand the university and how to begin these one-year evaluation periods to make changes in emergency management on the campus were all put on hold for three years. So because we really didn’t have any emergency management plans on campus, I was actually able and didn’t have a lot of burden on some of my staff to implement some of the pandemic things that we implemented.

Interviewer: Okay. Thank you.

Participant: Of course, the great benefits is that it sped up me learning the [U2] way of operations in a very quick time. So when the pandemic ended, I had a lot of steam behind me to implement a lot of the things I wanted to implement on campus.

Interviewer: Well, that’s awesome. I love your positivity. That’s wonderful. Participant: I appreciate that.

Interviewer: Was there any evaluation of what staff thought about the changes that were made or if not an official evaluation, maybe just what was your perception of what staff thought about the changes?

Participant: We sent out quite a few surveys initially as we’re trying to get a feel of – and it was during that period of time, not so much the first year when we had the major closings. The following year, after spring semester, when we started looking at bringing folks back to campus and bringing some of the student groups back to campus. We have a summer citizens program on campus. And bringing those folks onto campus is when we really started evaluating the impact to the essential employees, what we could do to reward them and make them feel the value that they provided over that first year for the pandemic but also convince them that we had to get back to a normal period which the majority of them were very open to and wanted to get back to quickly.

Interviewer: Nice. Did you notice any differences between men and women on the perceptions that people have about the changes?

Participant: You know, I don’t think I noted any. No, I really don’t think we did. We actually created our own contact tracing at [U2]. Had our own entire unit created for the contact tracing on campus. We appreciate our public health partners, of course, but we wanted to implement something a little bit more robust that created situational awareness for our students to monitor the mental health piece quite a bit. That was our main focus behind that. Through that contact tracing, I don’t recall any differences vocalized to my team as we went through that.

Interviewer: All right. Thank you. What are the characteristics of an employee who did well with these changes?

Researcher: [Interviewer], before we go on to that can I just get back to this idea of your own contact tracing unit. Did you work at all with the state health department or [another university] in the training piece for contact tracing or did you do all of that on your own as well?

Participant: We actually adopted John Hopkins’ program and that’s what we used as our training aid for all of our contract traces. We ended up hiring 26 of them roughly is what we had full-time staff-wise that were doing the contact tracing. So we used the John Hopkins. We also used a lot of [the

local health department] as our main resource. We didn’t interact a whole lot with the state through building that program. We did have, through higher ed meetings with a lot in our conference about their thoughts and how that played out for them. So that part of it we did do. But mostly it was done through [the local health department].

Researcher: Okay, got it. Thank you.

Interviewer: Sorry. I hear my six-year-old. Sorry about that. Participant: You’re fine.

Interviewer: What are the characteristics of an employee who did well with these changes?

Participant: Drive was one of the big ones. We initially had quite a bit of turnover as we’re trying to navigate through this and trying to identify the employees that we thought could become leaders in our program to help continue the program on and to grow it because it started off as roughly five employees. Remote work, all of our contact tracers worked remotely so a lot of it was are you comfortable working remotely? Understanding that your entire days, that were very long days, will be done remotely. We had to, maybe not so much a characteristic but we had to identify that ability to be conscious of FERPA and HIPAA and not violate any of those laws inside of your household and your workspace. We did require them to have a secure area to work. We bought MacBooks for everybody. That was all how we protected the information that way.

As far as the employee, though, you had to have that drive. You had to have that accountability to yourself and you also had the ability to communicate incredibly well. When we did the hiring of these groups, I did all the interviews myself to make sure that I was comfortable with their communication skills and their ability to interact with not just the faculty members, not just the students, not just the staff but also to work through the testing services that we provided on campus as well and communicate with the healthcare professionals. So it had to be a very diverse group of people that had great communication skills.

Interviewer: That makes sense. Who struggled with the changes? Participant: What do you mean by – changes in which manner?

Interviewer: Changes to working from home or other changes that the committee had to make to make things work during COVID.

Participant: Oh, man. I don’t know, honestly, that I could answer that question because I don’t really – from my perspective, we didn’t have a lot of that vocalized to us. We created a couple different teams to work in conjunction with our contact tracing and we called it the COVID Care Team, which is a part of our [U2] Care Team, anyway. We just brought them over to provide that to the students. But we also created an HR Care Team. And any issues that were vocalized by any party during the contact tracing or by the investigative piece or anything like that was all funneled directly to them to deal with it at that professional level.

Interviewer: Awesome. I’d like to see if [Researcher] has any other questions she wants to ask. But first of all, [REDACTED], is there anything that you’d like to share with us or that you think we should have asked or you wish we would have asked?

Participant: No, I don’t think so. I really don’t.

Interviewer: Awesome. Well, what you’ve shared has been so helpful so thank you so much.

Participant: You’re very welcome.

Researcher: I just want to make sure we’ve got your title attached to our interview.

Tell me your job title, if you wouldn’t mind. Participant: I’m the Director of Emergency Management.

Researcher: Okay. All right. I can’t think of anything else. You’ve actually brought up a couple things that are new for us to think about so thank you for that.

Participant: You’re very welcome. Thank you for the opportunity. I appreciate it. I’m

glad I can help.

Researcher: All right. And we appreciate your struggling through our awful connection problems today and setting it all up. And if it ends up on your end in the recording and I don’t see it here, I’ll let you know. But I think it’s all set up to record here.

Participant: Outstanding. Yeah, just let me know and I’m happy to share it with you. Researcher: Okay. Thank you so much.

Interviewer: – wonderful.

Researcher: Have a great afternoon.

Participant: Thank you very much. I hope you have a good day. Researcher: Bye.

Participant: Bye.