# U3 Non-HR #1 Written Interview

**March 2023**

[introduction here & note of appreciation—going to ask about your perception of COVID-19 on staff at your institution as well as HR’s role in managing issues linked to COVID-19]

* Tell me briefly about the experience at your institution trying to rapidly implement policies from HR during the COVID-19 pandemic.
  + What changes were made for staff about work arrangements when work-from- home happened?

Devices were relocated to home spaces to accommodate a full working setup remotely. In the beginning, there wasn’t much talk about flexibility in schedule – we were all still working the same hours and time of day, just in a different space.

* When changes were implemented, were they appropriately timed for the issues that needed to be addressed?

I believe they were timed as well as they could have been. It was a very hectic and uncertain time, and everything felt like it was reactionary. That’s because things were changing so quickly and in unpredictable ways. I do think changes were implemented in a timely manner, and those decisions were made based on health data, expert opinions, and the perspectives of all university groups.

* + Who made the decisions about what policies to change, and how?

For specific policies, the VP over HR primarily worked on [the official flexible work arrangement policy].

* + Were you involved in the planning or only in the implementation of these changes?
  + I worked on the task force that evaluated the current situation with the coronavirus and planned for campus responses to those risks or to employee and student concerns. We didn’t consider the decisions for sending people to work remotely, bring them back to the office, or write up a policy for it. But we did all the planning for signage on campus, expectations as people came back to in person, communication to the campus community about current circumstances, etc. I guess I would consider that implementing the changes, or preparing for campus as a whole to implement.
  + [When (if at all) did those changes get](https://www.suu.edu/policies/08/03-1.html) reversed or permanently implemented? [The official flexible work arrangement policy] got permanently implemented in August 2020. Many of the other campus adjustments were reevaluated on a per semester basis and phased out based on current data and recommendations from health experts.
* What challenges did you encounter with staff at your institution in trying to implement these changes?

There was a lot of concern and worry overall.

* + What issues did staff raise about challenges?

Many were concerned about the COVID-19 situation generally and staying safe and healthy during this time. Others felt anxious about working in a remote setting, maintaining work and relationships in a changed environment, and having the resources they needed to be successful in a different location.

Primary concerns were having sufficient hardware and equipment for remote work, maintaining access to campus network and files, and having the ability to meet virtually.

* + Where there any challenges for men versus women in terms of the shift to work from home?

We didn’t hear concerns that provided context along gender lines. I didn’t perceive a different in those challenges.

* + What additional work did you take on to ensure successful implementation? Weekly (or bi-weekly) meetings as a task force to ensure coordination and proper communication with campus. We had reps from IT to talk about options for hardware and connectivity, along with reps from all campus groups (staff, faculty, and students) to share concerns and also disseminate information.
* Was there an evaluation of what staff thought about the changes? [if no evaluation, ask

about people’s perceptions]

There was not an evaluation but the task force stayed connected to all groups in an attempt to hear their concerns and address them appropriately. The University President held several open forums to discuss the current situation and take questions from employees. I think that was the best way to gather feedback and keep up with the constant change and evolution of the situation.

* + Was there an evaluation of whether the changes were successful?

Since the permanent changes in [the official flexible work arrangement policy] have been implemented, I’m not aware of an evaluation of whether they are successful. I think that would be worthwhile.

* + - Did you notice any differences for men and women?
  + How satisfied were people with these changes overall?

I think by the time people could come back to work on campus, most people were relieved to have something familiar and predictable. We could connect with each other again on campus, even if through masks. Most of those reactions were to the pandemic generally. And I think the overall response to [the official flexible work arrangement policy] has been satisfied.

* + - Did you notice any differences for men and women? Not from my experience or feedback.
* What are the characteristics of an employee who did well with these changes?

Someone who works autonomously and keeps organized and on task did the best with these changes.

* + Who struggled with the changes?

Those who depend on a lot of collaboration with others (which we were used to happening in person) and who use the queues of the office to keep themselves on task. People with young kids also struggled because of the online schooling and more frequent interruptions at home.

* + Are there particular positions that the changes worked well for?
  + Are there particular positions that the changes did not work well for?
* Is there anything else you would like to share with us about your experience with COVID-19? This was unlike anything any of us had dealt with before. The constant evolution of the pandemic was hectic and hard to keep track of. I think it’s easy to forget the chaos in every part of every person’s life when we reflect on policies, reactions, and leadership during that time. While not all decisions were perfect, I think our campus did well bringing a task force together who represented all groups. That group became quite cohesive and authentic with each other, which helped us carefully consider and respond to various concerns from people. We certainly did the best we could with what we had. And while a policy about flexible work arrangements helped create pathways for changes to be more permanent for individuals where it makes sense (pandemic related or not), I think we all shifted our mindset since then in a way that has opened up opportunities for working differently.

[thank you—note of appreciation]