**Interview Transcript**

**Participant 20**

Interviewer: Okay. So, to get started, do you mind just like introducing yourself, telling me a little bit about who you are, where you're from, and your education and employment background?

Participant: Okay, great. My name is \_\_\_. My parents are from Laos, so I am Hmong so first-generation Hmong American. I have my bachelor's degree in cultural anthropology and did my master's degree in college of sphere at Nova Southeastern University so. I’m 40 years old. And I think that’s all.

Interviewer: Yeah, do you want to tell me a little bit more about your current employment?

Participant: Oh yes, my current employment. I work at the University of Minnesota as a program advisor so in the Learning Abroad Center, so I worked with frontline terms of like working with students who are interested in study abroad.

Interviewer: So your current role, can you tell me a little bit more about the day-to-day activities that you do?

Participant: So I worked a lot with our terms of student advising so students who are interested in study abroad, they would sign up for information sessions, so we have few openings that they would meet with an advisor. We can answer some of the questions to them what programs we offer, if they're looking about billing, financial aid. We kind of go through all the academics as well too soon, looking something specific to their major. Or something that they would do that's maybe necessary to measure, but they just want to go through a study abroad experience. So, I help with a lot of the front end and back end through the application process. I do work with specific countries and the program, so I oversee some of our emphasis in Thailand program. So students are interested in going to do a study abroad in Thailand, we have a lot of Hmong here, who are asylum seekers, so many of them would like to go to Thailand, because Laos is right there and they have a lot of Hmong refugee camps in Thailand. So, I’m one of the, I guess, the advisors that help with those students who are interested in doing a major as well as I shared to seeking with that. I also work with programs are interested in going to London, Spain and Sydney.

Interviewer: And Sydney? Interesting. So, you're working with students primarily during the day?

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer: Yes, do you interact with colleagues as well and, if so, like how many people do you see generally and in what capacity?

Participant: Um I worked with… we have a team, so I have other teams and other program advisor so on everyday basis we kind of meet, because we have here’s about…I want to say about 50 some programs we have. I have worked about with three or four major programs that we work with so, then we have a team that we generally work with in terms of a specific program advising. So, we meet with them, I have three supervisors that one may supervise as that works with me in terms of professional development, but I also have two other advisor that work specifically with the programs, so I’m actually one of the program advisors and we have our program directors who oversees the billings and the front end of the program itself, so then working with our partners in terms of to make sure that programs is running. What those costs and buildings and stuff will break down to, so we're kind of behind the scenes, and I work right with directly the students, so I do work with a lot of colleagues on an everyday basis as well.

Interviewer: This is a very social job, then.

Participant: Yes, very social job yes.

Interviewer: How do you feel about your job, if you could rate it on a scale from one to ten, what would you give it?

Participant: Right now, I’m just very new to this position, so I would rate a good 8 out of 10 right now, because I do get a lot of support working with the Supervisor, so like I said, I have three different separated supervisors but they're all for specific functions, so I kind of do like that. I also like working with the team as well, too, so then I have five other colleagues. They are on a part of a team, so we worked with multiple programs from across the board. So we can have like a weekly or bi-weekly meetings to discuss about techniques in terms of how to better advisor students, whether it’s face-to-face or and or via zoom or even coming up with questions or anything, any problems with application Apps that we generally work with that if students are having any problems with the back end of like “hey I tried to apply but it's not working,” so we can work on the IT stuff as well with that.

Interviewer: What's the culture, like in the overall like atmosphere of the workplace?

Participant: I will tell you I am the only male minority in my, I guess, in my area, we do have other students of color or colleagues of color as well, but in terms of male, I am the only one, so it's a lot of white, predominantly white colleagues in higher ED so. So far, it's been…it's good because there's a lot of other colleagues in other different departments that we can kind of collaborate with um…but again being the only male Asian in the office is kind of unique in that sense.

Interviewer: Sure so, are you saying you're the only Asian, you're the only man who's not white or if you're the only man period?

Participant: Um. As right now I think I’m the only man of color in the Learning Abroad… in my Learning Abroad Center because I have not seen…. oh yeah so there's a lot more female, of course, in the high education field, a lot more female of color, but in terms of me, I think I’m the only male of color.

Interviewer: What would you say the demographic’s like or composition’s like in the department?

Participant: I would say 90% white and 10% everything else.

Interviewer: Got it, what about gender?

Participant: Gender more female than male so I think he's close like 70:30.

Interviewer: 70:30? Gotcha. And what about age, are people like kind of spread, or is it...?

Participant: Yeah, it's pretty spread in terms of like we have a young group to our meals age group into as well as our older group so it's actually pretty wide range.

Interviewer: Gotcha, alright. So, would you call the like the mood of your workplace like a fun laid back or casual type place, or would you consider it more serious, professional, formal?

Participant: Right for this, for the University of Minnesota, I’ve worked on pretty much every type of institution large, small. For this large institution, they're more of a serious fast paced, very fast paced, because we're working with I you know overall university so I’ve got like 50,000 students, we have we send them over to me 300 to 500 students study abroad it every year, so I work with probably about 70 to 100 students. So it is a lot of advising with students on every day or weekly basis, as well as completing application so I want to say it's it is you know there's fun with it, but in terms of crunch time, deadlines that we have to complete by, it's very like get things done.

Interviewer: Sure, sure. Do you feel like you can be yourself at your job, or do you feel like you have to act in a certain way?

Participant: I’m kind of… in scope on this is I'm new to this position. I'm coming been… I have like I say I wouldn't want to say be myself as more of like, you know, be more courteous because I’m not exactly sure how the, I guess, the environment is going to react if I were to… let's say become a more traditional because I do know in this kind of fields, more the kind of predominately white. So, if I were to… I guess a good example would be is…most feel very comfortable is saying like “hi,” like in via like email like so on so, “hi \_\_(participant’s name), how's it going,” but for me, I’m always used to being bored the polite courteous because it's taught my call to be polite, courteous to those who are older, where I said there's like “dear so and so” in a more formal manner. So that's something that I’ve noticed a little bit with that. It’s like the formalities very different because of my personal background versus what the cultural background in the office is very different, so they kind of like… They're like “oh hey \_\_(participant’s name), you can be more informal if you like.” But I told him like I haven't been taught to be informal. So for me, I was like trying to get used to that, but my boss will kind of understand because I had to explain to them. I was like I have come from a different background where I have to be formal all the time, because if I didn’t, usually my parents would beat me and be like “hey that's rude; you're being rude; you have to be very formal to every person you meet.” For that, so to have that kind of understanding of like “you have to be formal wherever you go”. That's something that they're kind of getting adjusted to in a way, because I kind of tell them like “nope, I’m being used to be formal my whole life,” and that's part…That's going to change. But like I said I can be myself but I’m slowly to kind of get familiar with what other people. I guess it’s just said I’m not…I am somewhat worried and concerned, sometimes of what they may make you feel. Because it is a large institution and they're like said predominantly white, so it's kind of like okay I’ll just blend in really quick get my work that needs to be done, but with the students is very different, compared to like the colleagues.

Interviewer: With the students yeah. Um what's the student composition like?

Participant: The student composition is usually well diverse because University of Minnesota so we do have a very good…um I guess a high population of students of color as well as international students, so if you're looking at a pretty good breakdown of university of Minnesota I would say, close to like, you know, 65% white, but 35% is like everything else into the international, so it is a pretty good. We do have a good high population of monsters that are here too, so hence that's one of the reasons why I chose this position, because I am able to work with our... I get to work right… (audio cut for 10 seconds)

So I get to work with students who are here to seeking so any study abroad programs with that so. That is something that I do enjoy working with and I love about that, but this position as well, but they said, we have a very diverse so, since is my… I’ve been here six months. My first goal is to work with among students and then from there we'll work with our agents to populations. Love to work with our Japanese American students, Korean Americans as well, so our international students as well too. So I would say it's pretty diverse here. In terms to populations, it’s very diverse here.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's great. That sounds pretty diverse. Do you ever feel like your race matters in terms of how you're viewed at work?

Participant: Um because we're the University of Minnesota and St Paul Minneapolis has very big Hmong population, I feel that it is now if other prestigious institutions that work that it's definitely a no, but I think University of Minnesota, they know that we have a good number of Hmong students who actually do apply to the university. So, having that kind of like support and that they know that's actually important, especially for the students are looking to study abroad that they have someone it's like them, who have done a study abroad experience was really beneficial to the office to have some sort of mental for these particular students. This population

Interviewer: Yeah. Do you ever feel like you are stereotyped or have experienced any sort of racial comments?

Participant: Um. I will tell you that I want to say racial comments, but, as you know, it's more of the usual like “okay he's Asian so that means is probably traditional,” maybe he's…so, like because in our culture is more masculinity or it is patriarchal. For that particular piece, so there's already assumptions that in place like “oh hey you're good in math” or “hey you're good, you must be good in certain areas.” So I want to say not racial but more of like the expectation as you come in. They're like “okay you're Asian. You’re male. We need an Asian male as colleagues to work with our Asian male student population.” However, you know, for diversity work, you know everyone should be willing to work with many different groups, but because I’m already living it, I think right off the bat there, I think, like “oh hey you know, you could join this Asian American that we have here on campus that could help with working with this,” you know, with the Asian student populations, or our Asia Pacific islanders as well too. So it's kind of like automatically push into like a pigeonhole effect where like “okay you're Asian male, and you're the only one in our office as Asian male, so we want to join these committees.” But I told like nope that's not one of the goals set that I am that… I want to pursue to be that, um I guess, you say that leader or that part. My goal was to work with Hmong student population first and then slowly work my way. If I want to reach out to other ethnic populations, then I’ll do that.

Interviewer: Do you consider yourself an emotional person?

Participant: I used to be, but after I think it’s with education and get to know yourself and being educated like going to college, get your master degree, you learn to be, like I said, have tougher skin. So anything that's kind of thrown at you kind of like you're able to either work through it or be able to have a better understanding of like things that are happening. So, you have a better understanding of yourself or the situations. So you're not as upset or emotional when it comes to that.

Interviewer: When you are feeling a certain way, do you tend to wear your emotions on your sleeve, or are you more private and reserved about what you're feeling?

Participant: Very private reserved.

Interviewer: Um do you want to expand on that a little?

Participant: Um so anytime I feel like it's more like you keep everything yourself. It's not something that you…. I think, because being part of our culture is like you're not men are supposed to be married, supposed to be this tough... You're the breadwinner type while you're not supposed to express emotions. So we generally, we don't…We just carry our emotions. We don't even… like we don't… I guess you can say we carry emotions that play on our sleeves to show it. It is more like we carry all these weight on our shoulders and like kind of like…They'd be like “okay, you know you think about it, but you move on.” You're not where you're like trying to like “oh hey you need to do this, you need to this” but it's more like “okay I’m dealing with a situation. We kind of find a solution.” If you can't find solution you just… You just move on. Then you deal with it later. So allow that carry heavy burden here you're just carrying everything. Everything so like for me example like “okay you're the first person in your family earned a master's degree. In the family, so, then it is your job responsibility to help others who are in your boat, especially our male Hmong’s population are drastically decreasing in terms of even high school graduation. So you're supposed to help, not just your job but outside of community as well too, because that's something that you are expected to so. Then you have to carry all that as well too, and then you meet with students with that similar backgrounds, with no support, so you can't like say more burden to carry guns like “oh now, I have to think about community as well too” because it's not about self-individual anymore. It's more about community so then now you add those pieces. Then you’re just supposed to suck it up and do it.

Interviewer: Can you think of any particular times when you felt emotional at work?

Participant: Um, so I noticed that when… because of me being a person of color, what I make mistake or if I were to stay there or do something that they feel more offensive. It's a little bit different now feels my colleague, who was white, I know that for a fact that I felt that before towards where if we were to say, if we were make the same mistake about like either application or work with a student, they... How they handle it is very different, and I’ve noticed that, so if they're white male and I’m Asian male, it's very different in how they approach that.

Interviewer: Can you give me an example?

Participant: A good example is like you know when I forgot to do… Let's say a student left for the country and I forgot to make sure that they completed all the application requires prior to leaving. How they approach it was like very like.. “I expect you to know this already. Like you knew what you're supposed to do,” versus more like “oh hey, you know if it happens just remember for next time,” like “you can do this.” It is more like direct say like “hey, you should know better. We have high expectations for you.” As like wait a second. I’m new here, so I’ve only been here five months of the year. They have high expectations for me already when someone else has been here, you know, longer and supposed to know this item. So like we both kind of made mistake, but how they approached my male colleague was very different from me, and I felt and I spoke to my supervisor about its home like. I felt like I was being attacked because I was like I’ve only been here five months. I don't know all the procedures yet. So if you… if I didn't know I really apologize for like “hey I’m sorry that this happened. I’ll make sure it doesn't happen again.” But it's also very different terms of like when they were telling me like “hey we expect you to know this. How is it that you're able to fall through” versus my male colleague “ I understand you’re new. Just make sure that you know this doesn't happen again. The reason why it shouldn't happen again, because here the important things they did.” They drew down, step by step, versus me where they’re just very direct.

So I really felt that solid state, so I did I was able to express that, to my supervisor, “hey, I didn't like that when you guys were discussing that, because I really felt a very different, because I understand we are a team and I get that, but how the way you respond to the other versus me was very different approach.”

Interviewer: Yeah, what did they say when you told them that?

Participant: (laughs) They recognized it, and that's something that they are, I guess you can say, going to work on. That's what they tell you that kind of help I guess you'd say. What I said to kind of diffuse a situation. Generally, they acknowledge it, but for me, it's more like “you say you're going to do it, but how is the exactly you're going to do that,” so I am monitoring them in terms like next time, if I were to, Like say, it wasn't like a major mistake, but like say I’m still in learning process, so there's a lot of processes that are involved, and being here five months I already know mostly like I would say 75% of processes, where other new colleagues that have been the same time, they probably only know half of it.

Interviewer: Sure, sure. Can you think of any other times when you felt, you know, particularly anxious or upset or irritable at work?

Participant: For this new position, I think, because I’ve worked with three different supervisors and all three supervisors have all three different types of personalities, so I think for me, it's just… The challenging part is trying to cater to their personality types, and the hard part is that it's easy for me to care to… not cater but to work with my one of my supervisors who's African American, so it was easier for me that go ahead. We can have our discussions, and very straightforward through. The other two, who are white, for them it’s a little bit different. I would have to cater to kind of their needs, and like the criticism that offers, constructive criticism, which they call it's not as constructive compared to what I’m understanding feeling, because again, because supervisors are to help you become better and to understand it, but when you add the cultural, or like I said the whiteness piece to it, it's very complete different compared to my other supervisor of color. It's completely different because she understands like “oh hey, I just need to do this if you have questions to kind of do this” so instead of like more like say micromanage versus micromanage. Very different.

Interviewer: Sure yeah. So, when those sorts of things happen like how does that make you feel?

Participant: It kind of questions like if I made the right choice. Sometimes when you do that, where the environment like I said, the most part of me is being able to fit really good like not being able to just be a team of stuff but be able to be I can be who I am when I have them having to judge me a question me like. “Oh hey\_\_\_(participant’s name), I see that you are doing this. Let's have you work with more of our multicultural stuff because we see that you've done a lot of work in this diversity field”, and I was like for me it's like a “No, I didn't sign up for that. You didn't ask me for wanting to do that. You already assumed that I would do that.” So that right off the bat exactly been fine monster very have all the committees that they will like me to participate in and I’ve… When I decline all of them, I guess you say they're very disappointed. when I declined them all, I don't like no. I don't want to do that. Nope I don't want to do that I’m sorry. No, I don't have time to do that.

So it’s always kind of pressure, but luckily for me it's… For me they know that at home, like, I met I only I’ve taken this job because it's close to the home. Um so it's more like I have different needs. I have different needs that's why I took down his position, not to take on other more, I guess, to fulfill a lot of diversity. I took this position because I love work with students, and I love doing study abroad. And that worked and especially work with our student population. That's the reason why I wasn't here for anything else but that. So I have related that to my supervisor I know there's certain goals that they would like to have. Over kind of compromise with that terms of the goals for this company year, but, like said, I do feel supported with my supervisor when I when I reiterate that but we'll see how much that changes as time around, as you know very well versed in my position.

Interviewer: Do you ever get emotional when you're working with students?

Participant: Yes, I do, especially with students of, you know, with students of color, students were very similar backgrounds, where we know where there's when they sit there say that “I get no support from the student” or like “my parents can’t afford study abroad,” or “I didn't know where to start and no one's helping me.” I do get attached with that because I know it's like to be a first-generation student. I know it's like that English is not your first language. I do notice like where all the pressures of, you know, like said, you're the first in family to go to college and everyone's writing on you. Your parents or writing or the pressure of them saying like you need to that, so that it forces the path for others behind you to fall, so I understand, so I do get very emotional attached to those particular students who have the similar backgrounds.

Interviewer: Sure, sure. Has anything changed or been different about your work since the pandemic?

Participant: Um since the pandemic, ah yeah. I think because of pandemic, you know, study abroad was hit very hard. We’re dependent of travel. If there's no student travel, you can’t make any, I guess you say, income or resources with that. However, since I have backgrounds in multiple areas in terms of international recruitment, international orientation, international programming, so I was very, I guess, it's diverse with that. So even though most of my colleagues were laid off, I was not because I had the other experiences when it came to other areas so they're able to keep me on by work when I was working in different areas. So that's I think that was a huge change when it came to that, where you see your other colleagues, you know, being laid off, but yeah I stayed on because I had other experience and other areas. I think that was the only big change because they just say Okay, you were doing this, you have experienced this, we need you to do this now. Instead of asking me “would you like to do this,” it was more of like “you're going to just do this or you're not going to have a job”, no more so it's more just like you just have to do it, and work with them. So I guess that's may be the change when… the biggest change in mind with the Covid was that you were required to do it, even though you didn't ask you to fail. Just like you do it. If you do it, you're going to still have a job. If you don't do it, you'll have to find all the means.

Interviewer: Sure. In the last couple of years there's also been an increase in the news of incidents of violence against Asian Americans, is that something that's affected you at all?

Participant: I have, yes, especially when you are walking alone by yourself, you know, or even just going to like a grocery store, and you're like the only Asian male. Yeah, I do feel that and, I think a lot of our even our student population as well as even my colleagues who are also Asians. We started have a group where, you know, they talk about those issues, and we even express those issues to the university because, like I said, I feel comfort walking around because there are police officers always running around but again it's not every day, you're going to be walking around you're going to hear some of those racial slurs that can come out like always first thing they do is like “go back to your country” is the first thing they tell you. But I will say “hold on I’m an American citizen, I was born and raised here in the States, hold on” um. So yeah, I did we do have that fear. I haven't had a very like a safe, I guess a closer encounter with that, yet I knock on wood, I hope they do not because I think that's something that you know you fear about the most is like just walking and go to grocery stores, someone just comes up and throws a punch at you for no particular reason. That is something I definitely worry about.

Interviewer: Does it ever affect your work at all?

Participant: If it happens to me, it would affect my work. Now if I’m listening to a news stuff, I do let my supervisor know that you know I do let her know that sometimes we, we need to take like a like a like a mental health days like hey I need some time off through because we have something like that it really does affect you in a way, because you know that it hits close to home. There's no reason for him to hate us, because what we're you know I like to tell people like “yeah we're probably the hardest working group there is.” We are. I’m like my parents can we add to my peers are hardworking they still working, even though they retire, my mom still working. She's supposed to be tired enjoy her timing, but she doesn't do. She's still working.

Interviewer: What kind of work do your parents do if you don't mind me asking?

Participant: My mom’s still doing farmers market they've been doing that for the last 45 plus years. So they'll garden and they'll just go to a farmers market and they'll sell products. That's all they be doing this whole time.

Interviewer: That's amazing. They grow them in like a garden at their home or…?

Participant: We have we have like us some land that we purchase and then we just like two three acres. And we just, they just plan you know vegetables herbs and then every year kind of like if I’m not working I’m probably helpful in a little bit with that. And then weekends will come or different places around the seas, they'll have different marketplaces, farmers market places. They'll have that and will help sell with that.

Interviewer: Sure, that's really cool, and yeah is there anything else about your workplace or your job that we haven't discussed that you'd want to talk about?

Participant: Um. I will tell you that there's a huge difference from big institutions like University of Minnesota big 10 school versus like smaller institutions that work that, or even private institutions that I worked at there is a I think high a big publix you institution they're more aware in terms of diversity work, because they're… Because it's very based on their student population so university as a huge diversity of students, so they need to hire more. They understand, they have to hire more. Diverse staff now, when I was we're getting university placerville will you have 1000 students a year. It's 95% white. And you have a 5% of population of color and even with staff, you have 2% of staff when it comes that very different dynamics, and they want you to be able to every single community there is. They have extra work that they're required they say it's not a requirement as volunteers, but they fall on tell you to. So they throw a lot of the like this is what you're going to do, we need you to do it, but really is that it's supposed to be their job to do it, but because they're not familiar with the area, or with the group. They want you to do it, and I know that's why I left this institution but we're small institution as predominately white that's what you see quite a bit where they were, they make you do things that you it's not part of your assignments, but they put it under “other duties as assigned.” I’m honest with that I hate that word, because when you put other duties as sign, it could be everything and anything that they don't want to do like are something my white colleagues don't want to do, or want to do it and they'll put it out to you say “hey we need you to do this.” But if I tell you know they're like “no, we really need you to do; next you can't really tell them no.” For that, because you're worried about consequences I haven't worry about consequences, yet, but I know there'll be. I do worry about that it's like what happens if I say no, like will they represent me if it's something that they want me to do or as part of my position. But I do know is that written in my position but it's under other duties, a sign, I will say “hey, I will need extra compensation for that.” So if they have me doing other things, I will ask for compensation, but they don't give to me so I’m not going to do it. So. I was able to kind of navigate through that well before I was not able navigate. Whatever they tell me do I had to do it.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, that's very interesting um. I have a couple of demographic questions for you that may have come up already.

Participant: Okay.

Interviewer: You're located in Minnesota. Can you remind me again where you were born and grew up?

Participant: So I was born in Louisville Kentucky, raised in Wisconsin on the farm, so you got farmer, you got southern, and then now here in the Midwest. And I know your dad, I went to graduate school when your dad worked there.

Interviewer: I was wondering.

Participant: I went to nova southeastern university now and I was like say what would your dad Dan so he reached out to these like “hey, can you help us.” Oh yeah sure, I’d love to.

Interviewer: Oh well, I appreciate it. Thank you so so much for doing that. You said yeah you said, your age already. You're 40 that's great Okay,

and your parents were born in Laos, but you were born in the United States.

Participant: born and raised here, yes.

Interviewer: gotcha alright cool well Those are all my questions for today and I know you're in your car, so I’m sure you want to go.

Participant: No, no I’m perfectly fine. it's not really go home yeah I have other responsibilities and duties that going to do either way because, you know, like I said being Asian male in the family, in a patriarchal it’s they have more responsibilities on the sons. Especially the ones with the educated one where the…you know, that's the one thing that the pressure that we still have to live with the fact that because you're the most successful one, you're supposed to pay away for everyone else, so they see you working hard and do this, the other ones are hopefully see that be like well how do I be like you. And then they'll come to me, and I like let me show you if you’re really ready, I can help you with those steps because again for me, I never had anyone teaching said I actually had to you know make mistakes and learn from mistakes, and that kind of go through that so. I know, eventually, I will, you know, the pressure is to work on my PhD because that's one thing that parents all dream about is. I have a son as a PhD and have a doctorate degree, you know how it is to be doctors and lawyers, and I’m like I don’t know if I want to do.

Interviewer: Sure, sure.