

Transcript of Interview with SM by Oscar Ortega

Interviewee: SM/Anonymous

Interviewer: Oscar Ortega

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Location (Interviewee):

Location (Interviewer):

Abstract: This is an interview with a student of St. Mary's University, who is also a member of the student assistant crew which works in the university's drama department, who describes how her job, which is primarily done in-person and in service to theatre productions on campus, has changed with the vast majority of school no longer meeting in person and events such as theatre productions cancelled, as well as what the department is doing in the meantime and what steps it is taking to guarantee student worker safety in the workplace.

Oscar Ortega 0:02

Hello, _____.

SM 0:03

Hi. Hello, Oscar.

Oscar Ortega 0:06

Hi, thanks so much for being here with me. I should have said that sooner, but I'll say it now.

SM 0:13

No, thank you for inviting me to this interview. I'm proud to give my take.

Oscar Ortega 0:18

Oh, no, absolutely and like, you know, especially like, I think it's important that everybody who has something that they can say about the situation should be able to share their story.

SM 0:29

Yeah, of course.

Oscar Ortega 0:31

So, just real quick for the record. Can you please introduce yourself?

SM 0:38

Yeah, sure. So I'm _____. I'm a sophomore computer science major with a minor in math. And I work for the drama department at St. Mary's. I'm a student assistant crew in the drama department.

Oscar Ortega 0:52

Yeah. So- and then I guess we'll just jump right in, like we already talked about. So I guess we will just start chronologically, like, before the semester started, were you planning on, like, how did you feel about going back into work like...?

SM 1:09

So before the semester started, obviously, at the start of the semester, everything was shut down. So we didn't have any work. And it was a very, you know, we were very unclear about how the semester was going to go. And I figured that we were going to go back to work. But I knew it was going to be different somehow, but the details were very fuzzy. And it was just, you know, it was a very, very unclear situation. But luckily, my boss Dion and my supervisor Bodie had a plan, excuse me, and that plan was to go into the semester without a show, because as you know, personally the, the show that- from our spring was unfortunately cancelled. And we do not have a show this fall. So we were just going to go into the semester, organizing and inventorying and getting everything set up in the drama department for whenever we do have a show next. And you know, that's what we've been doing. We've been working with props, we've been working with costumes, just, you know, we've been working with our platforms and flats and all of our items just to get everything in place because that's really all that we can do. You know, not having a show because I don't know if I, if I has- have said this before. But as a drama department work study student assistant, we usually tech and build the set for all of the productions that St. Mary's puts on. So without one, we're kind of at a loss. But luckily, Bodie and Dion have made really good use of the semester by, you know, asking us to inventory and organize.

Oscar Ortega 2:59

Oh, well, that's really good. And yeah. You had not mentioned it, but it was no, but it's no big deal. I'm really glad that you did. And I'm really glad to hear that, by the way. Um, you know, that's, that's the drama department, we always find a way to work around it, I guess.

SM 3:16

Show must go on.

Oscar Ortega 3:18

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. Even the show of life. But, um, so then I guess... so having dealt with what you did, how was it? Like, was work- like, what was the atmosphere of work? Like, did you go into it like, a little bit worried?

SM 3:39

Yeah, for sure. I went, went into it a little bit worried. Especially because last semester, a lot of our work studies actually graduated. So we were going into this semester with four students that are currently enrolled already, or still and being in the drama department. And then one of the students ended up you know, having to work from home in El Paso. So they didn't get to be a student worker in person because our job is currently still in person. And two of the other student assistants ended up having other complications that because of the pandemic, they were not able to continue working with us. So it ended up you know, being very scarce the amount of, you know, people that we had, but luck- and, you know, with the pandemic, it's really hard to find new recruits and new people who want to be hired. So it, you know, it's been pretty difficult there. But luckily, we do have, you know, we have gotten two new recruits who are wonderful. And currently, we are still very short staffed, just three of us, but, you know, we're still looking for people to fill those spots and, you know, we're working with what we have. The environment was very different because I remember last semester, you know, all of us, there was a whole group of us, we would, you know, do our work; we would gather together to help each other build the set, paint the wood, and, and listen to music while we did it, we would move things, we would have big events, like loading in the set into the stage, and then striking all the set from the- the play that we did. But you know, this semester, since we don't have a production, it's been very lackluster, almost, because we don't have anything that's a big project to work on. So, you know, it's been very, very different, the- the environment overall. But, you know, luckily, like I said, Bodie and Dion have been really good with finding ways to, you know, use this time to get prepared for future semesters. And, you know, we've been working our way around having, you know, very short staff and, and having, you know, not having a show, so, I've been pretty lucky to be a part of that. And, and I'm excited for, you know, for the growth because it can, it can only grow from here, so.

Oscar Ortega 6:13

Yeah, no, that's definitely true. I mean, well, that's really helpful. I guess, I guess the last thing that can really be asked, because you've already, you've been fantastic. This is all amazing. Thank you so much. Um, I guess just the work itself like, how did you feel like, being short staffed, like, you know, because of course, this is- we're in a pandemic, there's a viral factor to take into account. How- first of all, did you feel safe while you were at work? And I mean, you don't have to go too deeply into that, like, I'm not asking you to expose anybody or anything, but did you feel safe going into work? And do you think that having less people, with that in mind, do you think it helped or hurt?

SM 6:58

Yeah, so that's a really good question. And, you know, we have an implementation of like, a room- limit to the amount of people that can be in one room at one time. And so, you know, it is probably for the better at this moment that we do have less people than we usually do because, you know, it is, you know, at least we are able to maintain social distancing standards, and maintain safety within all this, but it still has been very limiting. Because, you know, of course, our- we have very small little rooms for our prop rooms, our costume rooms, Dion's office and stuff like that. So when, you know, we're having to be split up to be working alone in those rooms, so we can maintain the social distancing standards. So it has been very, it has been affecting us a lot. But, you know, I think that with, with all of this happening, it's been really difficult, but we've managed to keep going, and, you know, nobody likes to organize, nobody likes to inventory and count all the costumes and count all the props and make lists, and, you know, we would all rather be painting and building and, you know, loading in the stage and getting ready for a show, like, of course, we'd rather be doing that, but this is what has to be done. And, you know, we really love to prioritize safety, we got a bunch of new, you know, face shields and, and stuff like that, that we've been utilizing, and, you know, maintaining social distance, maintaining that room limit, and being extremely safe and careful. So I think that, you know, it's, it's not ideal, of course, it's not ideal, but it's got- its what we have to do in these times. And I think that that's the most important thing. You know, it's most important to stay safe and to, to stay careful. And, you know, not having a show is the best thing that- that is, you know, available right now, nobody would want to risk their safety or their lives to put on a show, or to have- to hold an audience. So, you know, it's the best thing that we could be doing. And, you know, we hope, obviously, we hope to have- having shows in the future. We're planning on some, you know, very- we're planning on some shows in the future to- ways to be safe while having a show. And one of those ways is to basically create our own you know? We're, we're working on a devised theater piece, where we can make the show in whatever way that we please so that we can ensure that it's the safest and the, the most convenient way to ensure safety for everyone. So, you know, that's just what we've been doing. And, and, you know, I think that it's just, it's a really, really difficult time right now for everyone, especially for theatre kids. But you know, we're getting through it so. But yeah, I really thank you for, for doing this interview.

Oscar Ortega 10:11

I mean, thank you for doing this interview, you've been amazing and like all- it's, it's good to know these kinds of things, especially when we're all so disconnected. But I'm glad that not only have you been able to keep going, but that it's actually been not a terrible experience. That's, that's really good to know. I think everybody could benefit from knowing that nothing has completely stopped.

SM 10:38

Yeah, of course.

Oscar Ortega 10:39

But again, thank you so much.

SM 10:43

Thank you. I really liked this opportunity. So thank you so much.

Oscar Ortega 10:47

Of course. All right, then. And then I guess we can wrap it up. You have been wonderful.

SM 10:54

Awesome.