Tony

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Interviewer: Your name will be recoded and no identifiable ways. Could you tell me what year did you graduate and also what degree that you obtained with us?

Tony: I graduated in 2011, and I had a Bachelor's in African-American Studies and also a Bachelor's in Sociology.

Interviewer: OK good. So you double majored then?

Tony: Hmm hmm, yes.

Interviewer: Nice. So we'll start with the first question. So technically, we're exploring the school-to-work transition. And so there are certain demarcations like the undergraduate experience. And you guys come in as first-years, you grow up, you experience graduation, and someone like you successfully completes two of our degrees. And this is like a very important rites of passage throughout your experience. Now how did you feel about your transition?

Tony: Hello?

Interviewer: Hello, can you hear me?

Tony: [Pause] Yeah, I can hear you.

Interviewer: OK, I said how did you feel about your transition from school to work? Tony 1

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Tony: Uh, I don't think really understood. I think I was unprepared. Because it was like, I was in school the whole time of like the meltdown, all right in 2007/2008. And I think I was kind of out of touch with what was going on in the real world. So when I graduated, I don't think I was really prepared for how the work environment was or how like difficult like it was to get a job now, you know, after 2007. So I think like, I think I just didn't know what I was up against when I came out.

Interviewer: Yeah, so you finally, you know, OK so you're excited, you successfully complete two degrees, which actually puts you in a better position than many Americans, because to complete the degree is a huge accomplishment. Would you say because you didn't know, were there some events that you had anticipated, that you thought would occur after graduation and part 2, are there things that didn't occur that you thought would happen once you graduated?

Tony: I mean one of the things I thought would occur, I thought it would be easier to see interviews. I think it was just hard just to get interviewed. And I guess that was something I didn't really anticipate. And something that I didn't anticipate, I didn't anticipate that it would be so like difficult, you know, to actually get a job in the network once I graduated. So I didn't anticipate that, the difficulty of that.

Interviewer: Were there some things that did turn out good because you did get the degree?

Tony: Yeah, I ended up doing AmeriCorps, so I did City, so I think that a lot of like students, a lot of Midwest students, Midwest and Michigan State did City, and so I think that kind of helped me with my City Year application, which is…you

know, City of Detroit, which is what I did pretty much maybe a few months after graduation. I think it helped me get that job, so I mean it was definitely helpful.

Interviewer: How long would you say you were on the market from when you graduated?

Tony: Well, I took a, I worked for Mosaic during the summer, so I just took that job again for the summer. So I had employment, but it was just temporary employment. But until I found the City Year job just doing that job, I think I graduated May, and I worked that summer job with Mosaic, so I think it was probably about early August when I finally got the City Year job. So June, July, it was probably no more than like three months.

Interviewer: And it sounds like, you know, sure it wasn't you had hoped, you know, with the bachelor's and an African-American Studies degree, so what would you say, you know, during this transition was social support for navigating life after college? And what strategies did you find helpful?

Tony: What social support did I use?

Interviewer: Yeah, as you went through this period?

Tony: I think the social support for me, I think what I did, like City Year is a lot of fellow like

recent graduates who were kind of like in the same boat. So it was like a lot of us like we enjoyed City Year, but obviously we didn't think, we probably felt that we would probably get jobs, you know, making at least 35, 40 thousand dollars, right? But I think we were kind of like our own social support, because I mean we were able to like learn from each other different ways. So like, you

know, with our resumes and things like that. And what was the second part of the question again?

Interviewer: What strategies did you use for navigating that period?

Tony: Oh, I think one thing that I did is just that I took advantage of all the opportunities. I mean when I did City Year, I just did, I just really, I just did whatever. I think I didn't really have, I took advantage of all, like whatever opportunities there were to volunteer, to do extra projects, I kind of just did whatever I could. And I think that kind of helped me navigate that process too, just being open to different experiences as they came along.

Interviewer: And that's good. So interestingly, it sounds like that's a good way to like the recent graduates are finding their way with City Year. Is there anything particularly challenging with this type of work or organization?

Tony: You know, I think it's, I mean the challenging thing I think was that, it wasn't the actual job, it was just kind of like, just other graduates, right? So maybe people who got, so maybe some of your friends, they got a job working at Quicken Loan so they got another job someplace else working like Target or something and they were making like forty, fifty thousand dollars. And they kind of looked at you kind of different, cause you weren't making any money. That

probably was the most difficult thing coming out is they still had a few people who were actually making [unclear] money and then you were making a thousand dollars a month.

Interviewer: So uh, with City Year, so the salaries seem to be considerably lower. Tony 4 March

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Tony: Uh, uh, definitely, because it's AmeriCorps. Yep, it was twelve thousand dollars for the year, but it was like ten months.

Interviewer: Wow. So what do you do on the off months then?

Tony: Well, it's only a ten-month program, so after that it was just finding something else.

Interviewer: Oh, and how did you work that?

Tony: Well, after I finished that, I think I applied. It was crazy. It's a crazy store. I applied for this job to do uh, I applied for this job to do like do a, like group home, do a group home. And I remember because it was actually July 3 was my first day, and I did the group home. It was Don Bosco Hall. And the first day I got there, I hated it. And I quit the next day. Yeah I quit July 4. I quit. And then I spent the whole summer of 2012 trying to find a job. And I didn't find a job until August 14(?). I mean that summer I was pretty much unemployed until August 14 (?) [Typist's Note: I can't tell if he's saying until 2014? or July 14 or August 14?] I followed my connections on my networks, which was limited at the time. And then I ended up taking a job being like a site coordinator at a home care facility, so pretty much it was like home care. I did some home care for a few months.

Interviewer: Wow, so how did you handle that? I mean that's kind of, I mean you get this Bachelor's, you have it in Sociology and African-American Studies. You find that,you know, you have to tough out an entire summer and then you land this opportunity. What do you think to yourself?

Tony: You know, I think for me it was humbling, you know, like, because I think for me I think for me I think I took care of two people in the house. I was the site manager for both of them. And it was crazy cause the guy was as big as me, so you had to take him to the grocery store, so I was in Ann Arbor. You had to everything for them, even go to the bathroom. You had to wipe them. You had to clean them. So it was very humbling, because I think you graduate, you're kind of [unclear] graduated, and here you are a year later, you know, cleaning somebody cause you work in home care. And then you know, people around you…I think it was just a humbling experience for me. So I think it just really, and it really like motivated me more to just really go after what I really wanted. Cause I just saw that life wasn't as easy as I thought it would be.

Interviewer: So with that said, did you find that the degrees that you garnered, was that helpful on those jobs?

Tony: Uh, I think the degrees were helpful. Like I think, I think that the biggest issue was really was the network. Like the people who were able to get jobs before, they either A) understand the importance of building a network while in school or B) had family members or connections that they could utilize through their families or friends and things like that. So really coming back

home and not having any networks and not really having a family that was connected really [unclear] the degrees gave me a lot of, it helped me, it helped me like think things through. And it really helped me think, you know, on a more like strategic level of how to do things and to think things deeply. But I think I just didn't have any networks or connections. So I just didn't, I just wasn't prepared.

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Interviewer: Ok, good, good. Yeah, and you're right. Because it's almost like, the skills you learned from us, you applied it to your situation. Uh, OK, let's see question number three. It says, The undergraduate years provide an opportunity to explore learning in and out of the classroom. And this might be a little redundant, but to what degree did the academic and social college experiences prepare you to find gainful employment?

Tony: I think it helped a lot. Especially like the [unclear]. Cause I did Alternative Spring Breaks. I Alternative Weekends. I did a lot of stuff with semester in Detroit. I did [unclear]. I joined my, I was part of my fraternity. So I did a lot of things on campus. So I think that really helped me, probably more so than the actual like school stuff, you know. Like school stuff, I think you kind of get to learn how to think strategically and think things through. But really just actual stuff I did on campus helped prepare me for the actual like practical stuff that you might do in a job.

Interviewer: And that's good. So, Matthew, so your form of gainful employment now is doing, you said, the home care, right?

Tony: Oh, no, no, no. Like I had jobs after that. No, right now I'm actually doing another

AmeriCorps Program. It's through Detroit [Unclear] Networking in Detroit. So I've actually had like, I've had like, since I've graduated, I've had like five jobs since I graduated college, which is crazy when I think about it, cause it's only been like two and a half years.

Interviewer: Yeah, exactly, so you've changed jobs five times in a very short period of time. So, you know, and this leads into question number four, because in terms of the job market and the current economic state, to what degree do you think maybe that has an impact in your transition from school to work?

Tony: I think that the thing it did for me from the transition from school to work, I think it made me think outside the box about obviously like what opportunities I actually wanted. Cause I mean seeing the economy, and seeing people like who really worked hard and get laid off, it really pushed me more into like

entrepreneurship and also pushed me more into like building a career, you know, to not necessarily focus on a specific job. It just made me more aware, just being able to transition through different opportunities. And it really forced me to really focus, like really discover what I wanted quicker in my life. Because, like you said, with limited opportunities, you really need to know who you are and what you're doing nowadays because sometimes you have to switch, you have to change industries sometimes. Because the economy is not as good as it once was, at least as far as jobs.

Interviewer: So, and that's a good point. So with that statement, you know, in terms of career aspirations, so when you came to college, what were your career aspirations? And to what degree now that career aspirations, you know, you're somewhat in it short and long term, like where are you with that?

Tony: Like when I came out, I think I didn't know anything. I think all I knew is that you go to school, you become a doctor, you become a lawyer. I was very limited

in all the different things that I could do. So I really didn't understand all the different opportunities out there. Now that I've finished, you know, I'm interested, I'm doing, I'm in grad school right now studying Urban Planning. So I'm interested in Urban Planning. Long term, I'm really interested in

entrepreneurship. You know, one of my close friends has a business, and I work closely with him, his own business that he started a few years ago. So I'm really moving towards that in the future. But short-term I'm interested in working as an urban planner or economic development, but long term entrepreneurship.

Interviewer: So interestingly while you were developing at Midwest University and working on these degrees, were there, did you show, did those type of abilities and interests, were they present or you just put them away to focus on Sociology and AAS?

Tony: Are you talking about like as far as urban planning or entrepreneurship? Interviewer:

Yeah, absolutely, uh huh.

Tony: No, it was something that actually I really didn't get into….Well, urban planning I thought

about it working with Semester in Detroit, it was something I thought about probably towards the later years when I was actually really involved with Semester in Detroit. Entrepreneurship was just something that really came to me once I actually worked and was in the work force. So that came after I graduated.

Interviewer: Yeah, what do you think was the catalyst for those new decisions? Tony 9 March 10,

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Tony: Really just the difficulty just from the transition from graduating and the job market. So just seeing how difficult it was to navigate the job market and just sometimes, to be honest, sometimes the uncertainty. I mean it's a lot of uncertainty obviously starting your own business, but just the level of uncertainty to me was just kind of something like that scared me more so than starting my own business.

Interviewer: Yeah, so in some ways, it's almost like, you know, going back to question Two, I almost get a sense like it's also a strategy for you to navigate what has been particularly challenging.

Tony: Yeah.

Interviewer: So when you look back and then we're trying to portray, you know, is there a way to

kind of prepare people sooner than later. Are there any things specifically you think we could do to improve the transition from school to work for millennial college graduates?

Tony: Yeah, I think that like, I think it really comes when you have first-generation college students or college students who come from low-income areas or low-income areas. I think that's really an issue because it's like you come into college and you actually get a good education, at Midwest University you get a very good education. Like my education was really good. I had great professors. I think the thing is just that transition is difficult once you leave because once you leave the campus, a lot of times you don't have the same resources as you had when you were in school. And it's just hard navigating that world after school

when obviously you have a network or even people who can tell you how to network or how to build those connections. So I guess for me it would be kind of more like, I think there should be more like on campus, just more like more of a movement to build more like groups and organizations that actually promote networking and like job skills and soft skills amongst like first-generation college students. I think that would be like a great thing. Cause when I was there, they might have had it, but I really didn't know about it.

Interviewer: So, uh, were you connected at all to the Career Center at any point?

Tony: I think towards my last year, I think as far as like, I think like resume, I think I got some help with my resume. You know, but I wasn't as connected as I could have been, looking back.

Interviewer: Now interestingly as an academic adviser, I always just assumed like even in your discipline, right? in the major? So you guys don't have like parts where they weaved in how to get a job with the major, even when you're in the department with the concentration adviser?

Tony: Well, I didn't really get that. Not really. I think my concentration advisers, I think it was really for me, like, not really, because I think typically for me, like I would just research what I needed for the classes. Cause it was more focused making sure you were aligned for graduation. So I really didn't get a lot of information about how to use it towards jobs or [unclear]. Cause I don't think I was even thinking. I think there were probably opportunities for that, but I think it wasn't even on my radar when I was in college.

Interviewer: Yeah, looking back, what do you think was the hindrance for keeping it off your radar?

Tony: I think just didn't really understand. I think I didn't really understand the connection. I know it's bad when you think about it, but I didn't really understand the connection between, you know, like your degree and then putting it together for a job. I just thought there would be so many opportunities when I graduated that I would be OK. And that was just a big misconception that I made. And I think it really like made it hard for me once I graduated.

Interviewer: And that's interesting, and I know sometimes, some of the students that are recent alumni, are you in contact with others and you start to compare stories and have discussions about life after graduation, what tends to come out of those

discussions?

Tony: I think it's a lot of the same stuff. It's kind of mixed, cause I have some friends who like were able, you know, like get employment right after and get decent employment. I have a lot of them who kind of flounder. I have quite a few who went on to graduate school. But I think for a lot of them it was kind of—outside of just the minority, like the few who were able to get jobs—a lot of them was the same kind of thing. Like, you know, it was difficult finding a job. It was difficult getting opportunities coming out of college.

Interviewer: Yeah, and surprisingly what I'm hearing from a collective is, you know, here Midwest University's a great institution and people just thought, you know, that would do it. And uh they were a little taken back when that didn't happen. Now

were you able to network with like faculty? I would imagine with two sets of faculty, what was your interaction like with faculty?

Tony: I think I had a pretty good relation with Professor Ronald Woods. Hanes Walton a little bit, but really Ronald Woods was a professor that I really had a good relationship with. With the Sociology Department not really. And I think that was something I didn't really understand the importance of building close relations with faculty, you know. I would go to office hours if I needed help or something, but that was something I didn't really understand the importance of. So outside of Professor Ronald Woods, I don't think I built any strong relationships with like faculty, with actual like faculty at the school.

Interviewer: Yeah, and that's a good point. Because I'm starting to see a couple of trends there too. Cause we just thought, you know, hey you guys would build those relationships and explore their networks. But it almost sounds like there's a step missing about how to do that. Now you said you were in a fraternity. Were they helpful at all with the networks in that sense?

Tony: Yeah, I mean, they were. I mean I know I had a like job offer for Quicken Loans that I didn't take, but one of my fraternity brothers that worked at Quicken Loans for that. But outside of that, it wasn't a whole lot, the opportunities besides that.

Interviewer: Now did you always want to stay in Detroit, but had you thought about relocating to another area?

Tony: I think I never really, I mean now I'm open to move wherever, especially once I finish, but when I came out, I really didn't. I didn't understand it. Like I didn't

really see the importance of like, I didn't really understand the importance of going abroad. And I really didn't even really think of moving outside of Detroit. I figured there would be plenty of opportunities for me coming to Detroit with a Midwest University degree. And like I said, that was just a misconception that I had. Had I been open to going any place across the country, I probably would have had better luck.

Interviewer: Yeah, and interestingly, I hear that they're rebuilding Detroit. I'm not quite sure what that means, but in some sense, maybe some of these entrepreneurship and urban planning, any desire to try to figure out how to do that?

Tony: Oh like in Detroit?

Interviewer: Yeah, combine your new Urban Planning and entrepreneurship. Cause I mean I hear it's being rebuilt, so…

Tony: Yeah, yeah, it is. It's crazy cause [unclear] being rebuilt by millionaires, so it's like the downtown. It's funny cause I actually live in an apartment downtown that some outside investors came in and just renovated. But those opportunities are still limited too. Because I think the thing is when people think of Detroit, they say there's so much opportunity, but people forget about Southeastern Michigan. Oakland County is one of the richest counties in the country. So you know, like well Detroit is struggling. A lot of people who live in southeastern Michigan, you know, they still work in Detroit. So, you know, while Detroit may be struggling, there's still limited opportunities throughout Detroit, because a lot of people in southeastern Michigan work here as well too. So the opportunities that I thought

were in Detroit, and then the opportunities now, I mean you have to have money to really take advantage of the opportunities you see right now with Detroit, going on now.

Interviewer: And that sounds like it would take a little while to amass that kind of resources, huh Matthew?

Tony: Yeah, it definitely will.

Interviewer: Cool, my other question is there anything else you want to add? Anything maybe I've overlooked in terms of questions?

Tony: I guess for me, what are the kinds of trends that you've seen so far from the different conversations that you've had?

Interviewer: Oh, OK, hang on a second. [End of recording]

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