Director of UA's Cambodia Microcampus Appears on HGTV's 'House Hunters International'

Hillary Vance and her mom have always been big fans of "House Hunters International," watching the HGTV series together on a weekly basis.

When it was time to move overseas to begin her work as the director of Southeast Asia programs and the UA's microcampus at the American University of Phnom Penh [1] in Cambodia, Vance and her husband saw an opportunity to try to be on the show.

In this Q&A, Vance ? who began working at the UA in 2013 and is pursuing a doctorate in higher education ? talks about moving abroad and her 15-plus minutes of fame when she appeared on the show. Her episode aired Feb. 1.

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Give us the scoop on how you were picked for the show.

My mom has always been a big fan of HGTV, and we would often watch "House Hunters International" together. When my husband and I knew we were moving overseas, we looked into how they cast the show because we thought it would be fun and my mom would get a kick out of it.

We contacted the production company, and we didn?t hear back from them for a while, until after we?d already moved to Cambodia. After answering some questions and conducting a Skype interview from Cambodia, they picked us to be on the show.

What surprised you about being on the show?

Nothing was really a surprise but it did take five full days of filming around Phnom Penh. We got to know the crew pretty well and we?ve stayed in touch.

What was the best part about being on the show?

The best part was surprising my mom with the episode when I came home for a visit. She was in disbelief and she loved it. It was really the whole reason I wanted to do the show, because I knew she would get a real kick out of it.

What are some big adjustments you?ve had to make going from Tucson to Phnom Penh?

Phnom Penh is very different from Tucson, and also different from Siem Reap, where we lived the first time we were in Cambodia. We?ve moved from a house with a yard in Tucson to an apartment in Phnom Penh with our two cats and our dog.
I sold my car in Tucson and bought a motorbike in Phnom Penh. The traffic alone is a big adjustment, as well as riding a motorbike during rainy season. We might have monsoon season in Tucson but it's nothing like in Southeast Asia.

A big part of your work is overseeing the Phnom Penh microcampus and expanding its educational access for international students. Has the microcampus opened to students yet?

Yes, we have three undergraduate dual degrees up and running: law, civil engineering, and business administration. The business program is the most popular degree at our partner university.

What does a typical work day look like for you?

One thing that defines work for me is that there's rarely a typical day. While I do have an office at our partner university campus, my schedule is often unpredictable. We frequently receive visitors and prospective students who come to see the campus and learn about the programs we offer.

I also assist our partner with recruiting across Cambodia, and I travel often to other countries in the region in support of developing our other microcampuses in Southeast Asia. The work never slows down so it's never dull here.

What has been your favorite part of working at the Phnom Penh microcampus?

I love that I get to interact with our students and university partners in person, as opposed to only interacting with them via email from Tucson. It makes a big difference to the relationships we have that we are physically present here. I also love being back in Southeast Asia and getting to see new places in the region.

What has been the most rewarding part of your experience as the director of Southeast Asia programs?

I really feel like we're contributing in a positive way to higher education in Cambodia. The students remain in their country and are part of their community here, while still being able to attain a UA degree that is recognized internationally. We are also opening up more possibilities for students from the U.S. to come and experience Cambodia.

I fell in love with Cambodia and Southeast Asia on my first visit in 2010, and I love that I get to share that with others in the UA community.

Do you see any other TV shows in your future?

Probably not, unless I could somehow qualify for "Jeopardy!" Anyone will tell you if there's one thing I'm good at, it's pub quizzes!

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Links:
[1] https://microcampus.arizona.edu/