A HANDS-ON CAPSTONE
COVID-STYLE

In the fall of 2020, I and a team of three other Media Production majors embarked on our senior capstone film. I knew it would be challenging when I took on the project, as well as accepted the responsibility of being the Director of Photography as well as an editor, but I didn't expect my skills and knowledge of the major to be tested as much, and as thoroughly, as they were. However difficult, I'm thankful to have had such an outstanding support system of my three group mates, as well as our incredible professor, to make this project what it is now.
As New York began considering the reopening of the state, the government released a document outlining both the mandatory and recommended practices that professionals in media production follow as the industry was opened back up last year.

"Reopening New York: Media Production Guidelines for Employers and Employees"
In order to ensure the safest and most productive film set for this project, a "COVID Captain" was appointed at the start of the project. This individual was in charge of maintaining COVID-consciousness among everyone present on set. They were also responsible for putting all of these guidelines in writing to ensure they would be followed by all on-set personnel.

Shooting day one: Early morning rehearsals behind Convenient Deli
PREVENTIVE MEASURES TO BE TAKEN AGAINST COVID-19

• Frequent hand washing should be mandatory, and hydroalcoholic gel should be made available throughout the production office, workshops, or filming locations.
• Workers should utilize appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), including but not limited to goggles, face shields, and masks that cover the nose and mouth.
• Disposable face masks should be disposed of in proper receptacles.
• Contact tracing and distancing: Encourage you and your household to report any contact when you cough and sneeze using a tissue, throw it away immediately afterward, and wash your hands. If this is not possible, wash the tissue or cover the inside part of your elbow and wash your hands and arms immediately afterward.
• Avoid touching body parts such as eyes, nose, and mouth. Encourage to avoid any hand contact with the eyes, nose, or mouth to avoid possible infection.
• Sharing objects such as mobile phones, computers, pens, work tools, etc., of another person should be avoided.
• Implement air-conditioning, production reports and contracts when possible. Avoid handshakes, hugs, and touches that encourage physical contact between people.
• The use of remote and individual transportation should be encouraged.
• In case of use of public or shared transport, masks should be worn, and social distancing requirements should be adhered to as much as possible.
• Identify who may effectively be able to work from home for part of their job.

GUIDELINES FOR PRODUCTION OFFICES, LOCATIONS, AND OTHER JOB FUNCTIONS

• Cleaning of visibly dirty surfaces followed by disinfection is a best practice measure for prevention of COVID-19 and other viral respiratory illnesses in households and community settings.
• Facilities should be disinfected in accordance with the procedures advised by the DOI (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-covid/cleaning-disinfection.html) DSF. Frequently touched objects (dials, chairs, doorknobs, surfaces of the toilet and bathroom, taps, keyboards, telephones, etc.) should be cleaned with disposable materials and disinfected daily with a household disinfectant containing 70% commercial bleach prepared on the day of use.
• For lists of the most effective disinfectants against COVID-19, please visit the following link: https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/select-disinfectants-use-against-sARS-CoV-2.
• For electronics, follow the manufacturer’s instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products. Consider using alcohol-based wipes or sprays containing at least 76% alcohol to disinfect touch screens. Dry surfaces thoroughly to avoid pooling of liquids.
• The frequency of cleaning of the production offices should be increased, with emphasis on areas of common use. In addition, an adequate supply of cleaning materials should be maintained in order to carry out sanitation tasks.
• Hygienic/sterilic gel dispensers should be properly stocked and maintained with sufficient frequency to ensure supply. In addition, disposable tissues should be made available along with marked containers for the proper disposal of them.
• Avoid manually opening and closing doors on the premises whenever possible, or access should be left open to avoid the need to open them.
• Allowing outside personnel into the production offices should be avoided as much as possible. Limit number of people in areas as essential personnel only.
• The arrangement of the workspaces should ensure that safety distances of at least 6 feet are maintained. If it is not possible to maintain this distance, the use of masks should be mandatory.
• Every office should be made to hold all meetings via phone or the internet. If not possible, the safety distance of a 6-foot must be maintained. To the end, at least one empty desk should be placed between each member of the meeting as a minimum safety distance measure. If this is not possible, masks should be used.

REFERENCES

• In order to facilitate communication between team members while respecting the recommended safety distance of 6 feet, devices such as walkie and mobile telephones, Bluetooth, and Wi-Fi should be used. These devices should be for individual use only and should be distributed before and after each day.
• Electro and replacement batteries should be continuously charged and stored in the case to be used.
WRITING THE SCRIPT

FEAT. ONLINE MEETINGS

Our script was written entirely via Blackboard Collaborate, and underwent multiple edits and re-writes before being finalized. Of course, our creativity was limited by the fact that we could not film with mask-less actors in public places. We didn't want to make the film about the pandemic, but we couldn't avoid it completely, which is evident in the scene outside of Convenient Deli.
The entire casting process was done virtually. We held auditions on Zoom and crew meetings on Blackboard Collaborate. Once our actors were cast, we introduced ourselves and held our initial rehearsals entirely on Zoom.
PRE-PRODUCTION PLANNING

STORYBOARD/SHOTLIST

Page from the early pre-production *Crumble* shot list.
As is per usual, all crew and cast members were required to sign in at every shoot. However, in addition to this, the NYS COVID-19 guidelines dictate that every person on set also undergo a daily health check-in that included their temperature reading for that day.
Aside from our own hands being cleaned and re-cleaned at every opportunity, the equipment (most of which having been provided by members of the production team) was routinely wiped down after every use.
ON-SET ADAPTATIONS

NON-COVID ROADBLOCKS

Aside from on-set COVID restrictions, sometimes we ran into issues with maneuvering the camera to get the perfect shot. It did make for some entertaining behind the scenes, though.

Some alternative camera maneuvers to get the perfect shot.
After the production process of *Crumble*, the editing was broken up between myself and our director, Matthew Chiarelli. The editing process took a week and a half toward the end of the semester to complete. Despite having a bit of a COVID exposure scare, and a mix-up with editing software consistency, during this process, the film was eventually fully completed and exported in time for the end of the semester.
Sharing the job of editing between the two of us, Matt and I ran into a few issues attempting to get the files safely from one of us to the other. At one point, there was an in-person transfer of the hard drive using a paper bag, double masks, and gloves. Despite accidentally using different versions of Adobe Premiere at the start, *Crumble* was thankfully finished with no COVID-related hitches.
PLAGUED FILMMAKING

LESSONS LEARNED

Having spent all of that time working on *Crumble*, I would certainly consider it a learning experience. The thing about being in the production industry is that you constantly need to learn to overcome obstacles being thrown your way, whether that's budgeting or a global pandemic, adaptation is a necessary skill. Knowing what I know now about this type of filmmaking (and it now being warmer out), I would try my hand at filming something that takes place exclusively outdoors, as that seems as though it would offer more freedom in creativity while staying safe.
Crumble