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by

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NIGHT SHIFT

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NIGHT SHIFT

by

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Report

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Abstract

NIGHT SHIFT

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This report will summarize my work as a graduate student in the University of Texas's M.F.A. program in Film Production and will chronicle the process of producing my short documentary thesis film, *Night Shift*.

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INTRODUCTION

Background

BEFORE THE PROGRAM

Before coming to UT Austin, I served for three years in the US Peace Corps. I did a lot of teaching and community organizing work and I developed a commitment to public service. I learned that individual projects didn't change people's lives, but involvement in well-designed change processes did. When I came to UT, I wanted to see if it was possible to combine my long-time interest in filmmaking with my newfound passion for social service.

M.F.A FILMS

For all four of my films at UT, I tried something different. In my first year, I tried collaborating with nonprofits in my area to create films about their work and the social issues they assist. I collaborated with the Interfaith Action of Central Texas for my KA documentary and made a movie about their interfaith community. For my KB film, I worked with the Literacy Action of Central Arkansas (where I'm from) to tell a story similar to the struggles their clients face. For my Pre-thesis and Thesis films, I tried to capture trends of larger social issues that were unfolding within the communities where I live and work.

As for my artistic development, I think I've done pretty well at pursuing the intent I set for my work on my first day at UT. My cohort met for the first time to get an introduction to the program and we were asked what kind of work we want to make. I

said I wanted to make films that told stories of people connecting across social boundaries that usually keep them apart. With the exception of maybe my KB film, that's what all of my movies have been about.

In my KA film, people from different religious groups came together to dialogue around issues of faith and community. In my Pre-Thesis film, two neighbors in a gentrifying neighborhood reconnected after a long period of initial distrust. For my Thesis film, immigrant members of a custodial team come from all over the world to form a work community in the halls of the CMA building. I hope that by showing my Thesis film to students and professors of the RTF department, I will help to connect the two groups who work in this building with each other.

Nonprofit Studies Portfolio

Along with the requirements for my MFA in Film Production, I also fulfilled the requirements for a portfolio in Nonprofit Studies with the RGK center. I took courses in grant-writing, nonprofit management, volunteer management and social documentary. These courses taught me a lot about the current trends and norms in the nonprofit sector and how to implement, support and evaluate social impact. I learned a lot about the tools and techniques nonprofits use to meet the expectations of funders, governments and local community members. After graduating, I hope to explore how to apply these social change techniques in the filmmaking arena. My final paper in my social documentary class explores questions of how impact is being defined and evaluated in the documentary field. I'm learning that this is a relatively new area of study and hope that my efforts will have something to offer in that pursuit.

DEVELOPMENT

Meeting My Subjects

For the first two years of being a student at UT, I slowly got to know the night shift custodial team that cleans our building. Before coming to Austin, I had picked up the Mongolian habit of always greeting the cleaning crew in the building you worked in and I continued this habit when I got to UT. I would wave to the cleaning staff when I passed them in the halls during late-night editing sessions. They would wave back and, before long, we had developed conversation routines.

Minh always stopped by my Tuesday night proctor shifts and told me stories about what it was like to be in prison after the Vietnam War. Araceli always took her break on the couches near my proctor desk at the Digital Media Labs. We had the same basic conversation about what time we would finish work every time we saw each other. Neither of us speaks more than a few words of each other's languages. Ash, their team leader, was constantly coming by and checking the floors in the hallways and classrooms where I was doing my work. I began to get little glimpses into their lives and it felt good to become familiar with their late-night community.

Once I ran into Minh on the elevator during a break from our Producing class. Our professor, Megan Gilbride, overheard our conversation and, when Minh departed, she turned to me and said, "You need to be making a documentary about that guy!" That was the first time this idea occurred to me.

I spent the next couple of days having daydreams about making a documentary about the night shift team in our building. I liked the community they had built between them and all of the people I'd met had such interesting life stories. There were so many people in our department who didn't know who they were and I could tell from the way our relationships had formed that it was a rare thing for a student to say hello to them. I thought a lot about how natural it is for people in my position to assume that janitors have crappy lives and hate their work, but that idea seemed to be so inaccurate about this crew.

I felt excited about the idea, but thought a film about the night shift custodial team would seem unoriginal if I made it as my thesis film. I thought my thesis film had to be the coolest thing I'd ever made, so I abandoned my simple *Night Shift* idea in favor of a script I'd been wanting to write about my sister and me.

I spent all summer working on the draft of the *Sisters* script, but the night shift doc idea stuck around. Every time I ran into Minh and Araceli, and every time I had an inspiring conversation with Ash, I'd think, "Why am I not making a film about these people?"

By the time school started up again, I was wavering between making the *Sisters* film or the *Night Shift* doc. At one point my solution was to make the fiction narrative as my Thesis and make the documentary as a side project. That's when I realized that I really wanted to make this documentary no matter what! Since it wasn't actually feasible to make two films in one school year, I decided to make the movie my heart kept coming back to. I also thought it would be another good opportunity to stick with my plan of trying to learn how to make films that could enact social change.

Pre-Production

So in early August 2014, I began seeking permission from Facility Services to shoot the film. It took until about 2 or 3 weeks into the fall semester to get the final permission and that was when I made the decision to transition my Thesis plans from the *Sisters* film to *Night Shift*.

I hoped that this film could have a local impact on the communities that operate within the CMA building. I hoped it would be meaningful to the team to have a student take an interest in their work and their lives and I also hoped that showing this film at the RTF screening would help students and professors start recognizing the janitors they see everyday. I liked the idea of there being an implicit impact in the creation of the film and also the potential to have an impact once the film is screened. This way, the process of making the movie was as important as the final product.

To prepare for shooting the film, I assembled a crew of three cameramen and two sound people. I learned from shooting my Pre-Thesis film that only having one DP was risky business if that person was also a graduate student. Sudden shoots were too hard to accommodate for our busy schedules and I'd often end up doing camera and sound by myself. I wanted to try just being the director on my shoots, so I made a plan to have three different DPs who could shoot and two sound people who could record.

We had a series of meetings all together so we could develop a shared approach to how the film would look and hopefully minimize the difference between footage shot by different people. This worked pretty well!

To develop a look for the film, we looked at movies like *Sweetgrass* and *Jiro Dreams of Sushi*. Both of these films used a really quiet camera, usually on a tripod, and *Jiro* also incorporated smooth dolly and crane shots. They both chronicle the details of someone's work life as well. The space that our subjects work in is very tidy and well organized and we wanted to mirror that so we decided to take a formal approach to composing the frames of each shot and keep everything on a tripod. We also planned to shoot a lot with prime lenses, but that didn't prove very logistically feasible. Here were the visual rules we ended up with:

- No handheld camera
- Symmetrical/Formal framing
- Some dolly shots
- Use prime lenses

In addition to a visual plan, we also worked to develop some shooting rules and limitations to help make sure we captured the kind of film I was setting out to make:

- No sit down interviews
- No interviews in general
- Stick with one person long enough that they become at ease around the camera
- Stay in the building (only leave for justified story purpose)
- Pay attention to the emotion of foreign languages being spoken, even if you can't understand the words

We hoped that by keeping these rules in mind, we would be able to capture a nice-looking observational film that mirrored the quiet tidiness of the CMA building at night.

A major struggle during pre-production was finding a suitable camera to shoot on. We wanted to be able to change out lenses on the camera, but the only camera available in equipment check out that could do that is the Canon 7D, which has a fairly small sensor that records pretty muddy images. We also had access to a Sony EX-1, but you can't change the lenses on those. Also, all of these cameras were only available for short periods of time and have to be reserved far in advance, which makes it difficult to shoot documentaries in this way. Our solution was to use a Canon 6D that one of our DPs owned. It has a full frame sensor so it's able to record the kind of clean, bright images we were looking for. Unfortunately, we only had access to that camera when that DP was shooting, so sometimes we still had to use the 7D. I think it would help documentary students a lot if a Canon c100 was made available to Pre-Thesis and Thesis check outs. Anyway, by mid-September, we had our crew, our equipment and the permission we needed to start shooting.

PRODUCTION

Shooting

SHOOTING BEGINS

On our first shooting day, we immediately abandoned our “no interviewing” rule. Ash took us to a bathroom that Nancy was cleaning and immediately began sharing information about what she was doing, how their team works and what’s important to him about their job. Basically, he started giving me an interview whether we were planning to shoot that or not.

So I sent the camera team into the bathroom to film her working and took Ash down the hall to interview him with a lavalier microphone attached to a zoom. He shared observations about his work and told us about their routines. He was really passionate about even the seemingly mundane details of their work. He also talked a lot about what he imagined the students’ perspective to be on their work and it broke my heart because I knew it probably wasn’t true.

“It’s good [the students] know exactly what we’re doing here and they’re surprised how much we are doing here. With everything. And how much restrooms, classrooms, conference rooms, copy rooms we clean it’s a lot...and they appreciate it a lot.” (Ash Interview 09.11.2014)

We managed to stick to most of our other shooting rules, but I’m glad that we broke this one. The real situation was that Ash really wanted to talk and share his

perspective with us starting at the beginning of Day 1. I felt that it would be dishonest to just totally deny that because of my pre-production vision for what the film would be.

Also, his idealistic thinking process really interested me because I think Ash probably sees plenty of evidence to the contrary of what he's saying, but he chooses to believe it anyway. How is he able to do that? Does he see the contradictions in his thinking and choose to ignore them? Or is he ignorant to the fact that most students don't think twice about the work that the cleaning staff is doing? Whatever it was, it's a quality that I really admire in him and wanted to know more about how he does it.

Though I had originally planned to make a portrait of the team as a community, this first day of shooting made me start thinking that maybe I should narrow in on Ash as the main character. In my journal after this first shoot, I wrote:

Right now I'm thinking of making Ash the main character and his team the supporting characters. I want them to have full selves too though. I will do audio interviews with them (with lavs!) and transcribe them like I'm doing for Ash. Then distill it into the highlights and write a portrait that shows what kind of person I think they are.

COVERING THE BASICS

After spending a few days shooting and interviewing Ash and his team, I sat down and wrote a treatment of what a typical day in the life of this team looked like (see appendix). In my previous documentary, I had failed to capture enough footage of what was normal in the world of my story, so things that were out of the ordinary didn't stand out as clearly.

I wanted to make sure I had all the basics covered in this shooting process so, after I made that treatment, I made a list of all the basics that I didn't have any coverage of. For example, I didn't have any coverage of the team using the vacuum cleaner or waxing the floor, I still needed good coverage of their exercise routine and them taking a break in the break room. I needed shots of them arriving on campus. Things like that.

Each day we arrived for a shoot, we would seek out what was special that was going on that day. If nothing was forthcoming, we'd switch to the basics shot list and try to get coverage of those items.

I also chose 5 people on the team for us to focus on: Ash, Lau, Minh, Araceli, and Sara. They all had interesting stories and were good on camera so I focused on getting interviews and verite footage of them.

FOLLOWING ASH'S STORYLINE

In addition to filming the key members of the team, I was also still considering making the movie about Ash. So, one day, I asked him to tell me about his leadership philosophy. A summary of the key points of this interview reads like an inspirational BuzzFeed article:

Ash's Leadership Values

1. Develop a good system for doing your work and follow it.
2. Focus on the details but also see the big picture.
3. Don't wear yourself out and remember to take a rest sometimes.

4. Believe in the ripple effects of your work. You may just be cleaning a toilet, but you're keeping the students from getting sick and those students are the future of our world.
5. Express appreciation for your colleagues' efforts whenever possible.

During this time, I was also taking two management classes in the LBJ School, one on Nonprofit Management and one about Volunteer Management. I was seeing a lot of the same ideas mirrored in my readings:

A good leader should:

- **Creating a compelling purpose**
- **Honoring the past and present as you create the future**
- **Building relationships**
- **Connecting the parts of the system**
- **Creating opportunities to show people that their voice counts**
- **Making the whole system visible**

I was learning a lot about leadership during this time and it was exciting to see Ash's behavior modeling a lot of the qualities that my readings suggested. So when Ash told me he was applying for a promotion to a higher supervisor position, I was excited to follow this storyline.

We only found out about his job interview two days before it happened, so we scrambled to obtain access and were denied. Nevertheless, we decided to film him before and after his interview to see how it went.

After that, we continued checking in with him about his plans for the rest of the semester. Ash was turned down for the position and faced a period of bitterness and

defeat. He was planning to quit working at UT, but in the end was unable to do so because he wasn't able to get a new job with adequate benefits to support his family. By the time our primary shooting period was over, we were waiting to find out if Ash would really leave UT or not. (As of now, he hasn't.)

Shooting Struggles

We faced two main struggles during production: finding time to film with the subjects that wouldn't distract them from their work and using one camera to cover all the subjects at group events.

Though our filming was mostly observational, I think both Ash and the team saw it as something best done when they weren't busy. We would make a plan to shoot on a specific day (or days) each week, but sometimes we would show up and Ash would tell us that the team was too stressed to be filmed that day. I appreciated that he looked out for his team in this way. Often he would let us film him in the supply office instead, but rarely invited us to come with him on his rounds during busy days. This was somewhat frustrating to me as a director, but I also feel that it's more important to respect the daily life concerns of the subjects than it is to push for the shots that I want.

The other difficult shooting situation was filming group events like the Pizza Party and the Appreciation BBQ. Those shoots were really chaotic and it felt difficult to get good intentional coverage of what we wanted. In contrast to the quiet recording of repetitive cleaning actions, filming these events felt out of control. It was also a lot easier to make exposure and sound-recording mistakes in the heat of the moment and I often left these shoots feeling like the footage we got probably wasn't that great. It was interesting to see how these became some of the most dynamic scenes later, once I was able to sort through all the messiness. That's a lesson I'll take with me into the next film project: that

chaotic shoots often lead to great scenes. I hope that knowledge will help me stay calm and confident next time I'm shooting something like this again.

HOW MUCH TO COVER?

Another challenge I faced while in production was figuring out how often to shoot and balancing school and work with late night shooting on weekdays. We planned our shoots so that we covered all time periods of the shift at least twice. We often were able to shoot for 3-5 hours each time and managed to plan at least one, but sometimes two shoots per week.

The plan to have three people DPing worked really well. Often one or two DPs would be unavailable for weeks at a time because they were in production for their own movies. But, between the three of them, we were always able to find someone to shoot. It wasn't so easy with sound though. We didn't start out with enough sound people to cover our shoots as successfully, so I often had to get my boyfriend to fill in. Luckily he's familiar with sound recording! Still, next time, I will recruit more sound people to be on call for shooting.

Also, I don't think we shot with Ash enough. I think in order to pursue a change-based character story like the one I was trying to follow with Ash, I would have needed to be able to record full shifts for many days in a row. Next time I am planning to make a character-driven film, I will plan to shoot in intensive increments that cover the character's whole daily life for that time period. This wouldn't have been a possibility for me while also being a student, but I think it's the best way to capture that kind of story.

WHO TO TALK TO?

Another challenge was deciding whom to talk to when controversies regarding Ash's job, the floor stripping, or understaffing came up. I had decided early on that I was going to stick with the team and try to represent life in the CMA building from their point of view. However, as these new storylines evolved, I felt tempted to be more journalistic and film UT officials and the team's supervisors to get their perspectives on what was happening. In the end though, I decided to stick to the film I had decided to make and not film official people. I think that was the right decision, given the timeframe that I was trying to finish in and the scope of the film as a short documentary. However, if I had had more time, I would have liked to explore those possibilities.

ENGLISH OR OTHER LANGUAGES?

Another major decision I faced in making this film was whether or not to interview the team in English or in their own languages. When I started filming, I wanted to show people speaking in English whenever possible. As someone who has worked hard to learn foreign languages before, I feel proud when I am able to communicate and be understood by a native speaker and somewhat ashamed when we have to switch to my native language in order for them to understand me. I knew of at least one of the custodial team members who prided himself on being able to speak English well and I wanted to honor that in the way I shot my film.

However, when I showed footage in class, my classmates and the professor said they wanted to hear people speaking in their own language. They were frustrated by the slowness of their English. I was torn between a responsibility to my audience and a

responsibility to my subjects and/or my own vision. In the end, I decided to get the footage that would meet some of the audience expectations and I did my primary interviews in the people's native languages. For people like Minh and Araceli, it had to be this way anyway because they have very low English abilities. But I really regret interviewing Lau in Vietnamese and not English because his English is actually very good and it's something that he's very proud of. That's one thing I really regret about this now that the movie is almost finished. I wish I had stuck to my original plan with Lau at least.

BUYING EQUIPMENT

My final major lesson learned from production was that I need to own my own equipment. The department's equipment check out process is not organized in a way to be conducive to documentary shooting because you have to plan your checkouts at least two days in advance. Often events come up suddenly for a documentary and we need to be able to get equipment faster than that. I didn't want to buy my own camera while I was in school and paying for access to school equipment, but I think having one would have made this movie better. I'm buying a camera as I graduate now and hopefully won't face this problem again.

POST PRODUCTION

Technical Decisions

CREATING A WORKFLOW

While I was shooting, I kept up with importing my footage to Avid regularly. Since I wasn't using sync points while I was shooting, I had to develop a workflow that would include using PluralEyes to sync the four tracks of audio I recorded for each shoot.

This is a complicated process when editing in Avid because PluralEyes can only return to Avid as a sequence. If I wanted to turn the clips into subclips, I wouldn't be able to have any additional audio handles to go with the video, so I decided to use subsequences instead.

This was a different approach to managing footage than I had ever done before. In some ways I liked it, in other ways I found it more difficult. I liked being able to drop all the footage for one scene onto a sequence together and keeping all those scene sequences in one bin together. I used to make individual subclips and keep them in individual bins, but that was a lot more complicated because it relied on me remembering what I had named each clip in order to find the content I wanted. By using sequences and subsequences, I could leave notes for myself and find specific pieces of footage by scrolling through the timeline.

By the time I finished shooting, I had all my footage imported, synced and divided into sub-sequences. As the fall semester came to an end, I began watching and logging my footage.

LOGGING AND TRANSCRIBING

This was a long and tedious process, but one that helped me familiarize myself with the strengths and weaknesses of my footage. Sometimes I am tempted to rush through watching my footage or to only pay attention to the pre-conceived parts I had already decided I liked, so I decided to transcribe all my footage and, in that way, make sure I paid attention to every second of it at least once.

I typed word-for-word transcripts of all the interviews and dialogue in the footage and made notes about what happened in each clip. I mostly only used the interview transcripts later, but keeping notes about what people did helped me tune into the details and start to notice things about the characters I hadn't seen while shooting before. For example, I started to notice that, although Peter is a very good worker, he doesn't actually like having supervisor responsibilities very much and tends to prefer implementing Ash's decisions over making and enforcing his own. I hadn't noticed that at all while we were intermittently filming, but it became very clear as I logged my all my shoots consecutively.

For my next film, I think I will approach logging my footage differently. I will still make transcripts of all the interviews, but instead of writing down everything else that happens, I will just write down the key emotional moments I like. Then later I can come and watch the footage more closely if I decide to actually use the scene those emotional moments contain.

Finding the Story

When I started assembling footage, I wasn't sure if I should make Ash the main character, or focus on the team. The first assembly I did was a freeform collection of some of my favorite moments. I liked how it came together and it showed the heart of what I liked about my footage. I was hoping to weave Ash's storyline into this collection of portraits and verite footage and use that as the backbone of the film's structure.

However, I was concerned that Ash's story was told primarily through interview material, so it might not be interesting enough. I was inspired by what I had learned about leadership while filming him though, so I decided it was worth trying. I worked with Madli to make a rough cut of Ash's story and the result was kind of disappointing. It was all talking and I found it kind of boring. Other people that watched it said Ash came across as being an insincere character. I decided to scrap the idea of having his storyline be the structure for the film.

One lesson I learned from this was to show footage of my characters to different people early on and get their reactions to them. How do they come across on camera in the eyes of strangers? I also learned that capturing a person going through an emotional change is hard to do. I have to figure out how to capture their story cinematically (visually) and that requires either a lot more directing or a lot more observational filming than I did on this project.

At the advice of my committee, I put together a new version of the film that was primarily verite footage and structured around a day-in-the-life of the team. This worked a lot better. Ash became an equally featured character as some of the others and I focused on Lau, Minh and Araceli for the portraits.

This version of the film went through a number of different structures (see appendices) before landing on its final version. The structural arc is based more on the underlying emotion and audience response to the scenes, rather than being plot-based.

Finishing the Film

After making all the story and structure decisions, there were still a number of things to do before finishing the film. Music was a major challenge of this finishing process. I am not a particularly musical person and have had only unsatisfactory experiences with trying to compose music for my films, so this was the most daunting part of post-production for me.

I got an early start and reached out to a musician friend back in February. He plays in a local band here and I love the sound of their music. He and his band agreed to compose music for me and I planned to arrange the recording session. The song I was using as temporary music that I wanted them to copy sounded a like informal classical music with violins, key and a few other instruments. This band played all those instruments so I was confident that whatever they could create something that would be a good fit.

Unfortunately, in the weeks leading up to recording the music, the band booked a string of shows and informed me that they wouldn't have time to work on the project. This left me in a last-minute scramble, but luckily, I was able to find another musician friend to create something for the film.

She played all the instruments herself: melodica, glockenspiel, and banjo ukulele. We also had a violinist come fill in some violin parts. I worked with Matt Kosmrl to record clean tracks of each instrument and used some of my audio mixing time to sweeten the sound and balance the instruments.

Besides mixing the music, most of my audio mix time was focused on matching recordings from different clips so they sound smooth and cutting out background noises.

The hardest scene to mix was the Pizza Party scene because there were any layers of competing audio being used to create the feeling of a lively space.

Other than that, I did minimal color correction on the film. The goal was mostly just to match shots and add contrast to the flat images we recorded. Since we shot with the 6D sometimes and the 7D other times, the most challenging aspect of color correction was matching the images recorded from those two cameras. Overall, the finishing process for the film went smoothly, especially because the film doesn't have anything too stylized in it.

CONCLUSION

Over this last year, I have learned a lot about how to make a documentary. I think this film is a great technical improvement on my previous documentaries in terms of it having a coherent visual style and a simple story. I didn't succeed at capturing Ash's storyline, but I learned a lot about how to do it better next time. Most importantly, I learned a lot this year about how to facilitate a process that would have an impact on my community.

I think *Night Shift* comes closer than any of my other films to achieving the goals I set for myself at the beginning of graduate school. I wanted to make movies that would have a positive social impact and would tell stories about people connecting across social boundaries that usually keep them apart. Drawing from my Peace Corps experience, I felt that the process of making the film should be just as impactful – if not more – than the final finished product.

By simply producing this film, I have made the small impact of connecting a few students (me and my crew) to the custodial staff in our building. We are now all on a first name basis with the custodial team and we keep in touch with them as we pass each other in the halls. In that way, the production of this film has facilitated the development of a small student/custodial community within our building.

To me, this kind of community development is one of the most impactful tools that documentary filmmaking has to offer. Filmmakers and their subjects cannot help but become entwined in each other's lives as they spend hours and hours together during

production. After that, filmmakers spend even more hours, weeks and months deciphering their relationships to and interactions with the subjects through the editing process. Even if the final film is terrible and no one sees it, the time spent together has formed a connection between two groups of people who would likely have not gotten to know each other otherwise. In this way, the act of making documentary films actively serves my personal goal of connecting people across social boundaries, despite what happens with the finished product.

For *Night Shift*, I also hope the finished film will be able to have an impact when it screens in the end-of-semester screening. I hope that seeing the film will help the academic population of our building begin to recognize and maybe even connect with the custodial staff. However, the impact of seeing my film once will not be nearly as effective as it was to produce the film. If I wanted my film to have an even greater ability to connect the student population with the custodial team, I would need to facilitate a hands-on filmmaking experience that would bring them closer together.

One possibility for this would be to turn some of my raw footage into an editing class project. If students were assigned to spend hours and hours working with footage of the custodial team in their building, they are bound to develop a more personal connection to the staff. In this way, the process of making (editing) a film would be what brings the people together, not the final products created by the footage.

Moving forward from my graduate education, I would like to continue exploring how the experience of making a film can be harnessed to bring about social change. The foundation of a lot of social conflict is an inability to empathize with people who are

different from us. It's easy to distrust others or to judge them when we don't know the circumstances of their lives. The act of making a documentary film almost always brings two communities together that were not previously connected. The filmmaker will always be an outsider to the subjects' community and I that provides a powerful opportunity to connect and build new communities. This process of community development through filmmaking has the potential to make more sustainable impacts than simply screening films about social issues. The production of *Night Shift* has been instrumental in teaching me this and I plan to keep moving forward in this direction as I head out into "the real world.

Appendix A:
Treatments

Preliminary Shooting Plan

August 2014

Introduction:

The Night Shift is a short observational documentary about the custodians who clean the CMA building on Friday nights. They all come from different countries but have formed their own community here in the halls of the College of Communication. They speak bits of each others' languages and share big moments in each others' lives. They love their team leader, Ashraf, and take pride in their work. Many of them have hard skills and training from their home countries – for example, Minh is trained in acupressure -- and they barter these services with one another. Overall, they have a happy work life and this is what I want to document. I want to challenge viewers' assumptions about the lives of custodial workers.

Possible Structure: Organize around the beginning, middle and end of a shift

Visual Style:

- Tripod/Static Shots
- Dolly Shots
- Prime Lenses
- Symmetrical/Formal Framing

Shooting Rules:

- No handheld
- No sit down interviews
- No interviewing on camera
- Follow them long enough they talk to camera easily
- Stay in the building, only leave for justified story purpose
- Pay attention to the emotion of foreign language, not translate

Scene Ideas:

- Arriving to work – greeting, getting ready for shift
- Aerobics together
- Bartering acupressure for a haircut (Minh)
- Working/Cleaning
- Interacting with academic community
- Celebration
- Leaving work (type of transportation for each)

Equipment:

- 6D
- Tripod

- Prime Lens Set
- 2 Zoom recorders
- 2 Shotguns
- 1 Lav
- Slider? Dolly?

Film References:

- *Jiro Dreams of Sushi* (Story, visual style)
- *Sweetgrass* (Visual style)
- *Cutie and the Boxer* (Editing style)

Themes and Questions:

- These people have lives and are happy
- Who in this building really has happy lives?
- Cleanliness vs. Messiness
- Micro-community (janitors) vs. Mega-community (University)
- Purification of the building
- Who maintains things for us?
- How students see janitors vs. how they see themselves

Possible Antagonizing Forces:

- Big cleaning project
- Administration/Large University system
- Team tensions
- Broken equipment
- Understaffed
- Someone doesn't show up for shift
- Team members leaving or joining the team

TREATMENT
Night Shift
October 30, 2014

SUMMARY:

Night Shift is a short documentary about the custodial team who cleans the CMA building every night. The team members come from all over the world and have developed a close-knit work community here at UT. They share bits of each others' languages and work together to pull off large amounts of quality work. Their team leader, Ash, works hard to bring them together as a family and encourages them to take pride in their work and love what they do.

CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS:

ASH (male, 40s, Egyptian): Ash is the Team Leader. He is optimistic and openhearted. For him, everything is “*amazing*” and everyone is “*the best.*” He cares deeply for the members of his team and encourages them to think of themselves as all being team leaders. He enjoys managing projects and wants his team to be like a family. He’s quick to express appreciation and believes the work the team does has a big impact on students’ lives.

MINH (male, 60s, Vietnamese): Minh is cheerful and accommodating. He likes to interact with people and cares about doing a good job. He always has snacks for his friends. He’s had a lot of tragedy in his life and you can see this behind his eyes.

ARACELLI (female, 60s, El Salvadorian): Aracelli is sassy and playful. She’s always laughing and joking with her co-workers. She takes her break time seriously and thinks it’s ridiculous that we want to make a movie about them. “There’s nothing to see here!”

LAU (male, 60s, Vietnamese): Lau has a sharp mind and is kind of a know it all. He loves to learn and corrects people when they don’t have their facts straight. He cares a lot about the environment and spends extra time at work sorting recycling out of the garbage. He’s a total English grammar nut and thinks it’s exciting that we’re making a movie about them.

SARA (female, 40s, Mexican): Sara is hard working and reliable. She does her job well and is kind to others. She takes pictures of the floors she’s shined so she can show her husband what she did that night. She’s proud of her work. Her family just bought a ranch outside of Austin because living in the city was too loud. She says she likes her job because she gets to work with students.

PETER (male, 40s, Vietnamese): Peter is Ash's assistant. He is quick-witted and expressive. He's very business-oriented and keeps the team focused when they work on tasks together.

NANCY (female, 50s, Ecuadorian): Nancy is hardworking and shy with a kind heart. She's been working here for 15 years.

A TYPICAL DAY:

**Note: This is just the concrete basics of their world. Later I want to come in and add the human side using pieces of conversation and action from my log notes.*

4:00pm – The UT campus bustles with students and professors. With 50,000 people populating its grounds, the university is like a small city during the day.

4:30pm – Ash and Peter arrive to prepare for their shift. Ash walks around the complex, taking note of special projects for the night while his assistant, Peter, prepares supply bags for their team.

5:00pm – Classes let out, staff members end their day and professors head home. The campus empties out.

5:15pm – The custodians on Ash's team begin to arrive. Nancy, a Restroom Specialist from Ecuador, sits behind the bushes in a nook outside of the CMA building, making a last minute phone call and waiting for her shift to begin. Francisco, not in uniform yet, listens to his headphones on a bench in the CMA courtyard. Two team members make their way on foot from the south side of campus while Minh parks and walks in from the north. At 5:30pm, they all go inside and take the elevator down to the 2nd floor of CMA.

5:30pm – After some routine greetings, the team lines up along two walls. Ash stands front and center at one end, Peter at the other. Peter leads the team in their daily exercises. "One! Two! Three! Four!" The team follows along with varying degrees of commitment to the movements.

After the exercises are finished, Ash divides the team into units of four, each with a Vacuum Specialist, a Light Duty Specialist (trash and surfaces), a Restroom Specialist, and a Utility Specialist (floors). In their supply room, there is a placard with diagrams and descriptions of each of the jobs.

The members of each unit grab their own personal supply bags with gloves, rags and sponges they will need for their jobs and they head out to cover a different section of the complex.

5:45pm – Each Specialist does his/her assigned job. The Restroom Specialist wipes down the bathroom sinks, changes the trash, replaces the paper towels, scrubs the toilets and sweeps the floor. The Light Duty Specialist changes the trash and wipes the surfaces of each classroom, the Utility Specialist mops and buffs the floors and the Vacuum Specialist vacuums the carpets. They switch these jobs every three months.

Vacuum Specialist is everyone's least favorite job because you have to carry a 20-pound vacuum on your back for 8 hours every day. Dave says he got lucky because he started in the middle of the cycle and only had to do the Vacuum Specialist job for one month.

7:30pm – As the sunsets, the team takes their first 15-minute break. They warm food up in tiny beige break rooms on each floor of CMA, two to a room. On the 7th floor, Sara shows Ash pictures of the floors she's done and they discuss her plan to move to the day shift. On the 4th floor, Dave learns Spanish by watching YouTube videos on his phone. Sara and Aracelli go out to get some Jack In The Box, giggling and chattering as they get on the elevator.

7:45pm – Back on the 2nd floor, Peter mobilizes the team to begin a special side project: strip years of old wax layers off the hallway and office floors then scrub the underlying tiles until they shine like new. Later they will apply new wax.

This is a team effort and different people cycle down to do their part in addition to their regular jobs. At one point, Ash arrives from his supervising duties to help them roll extension cords.

9:00pm – For the second break of the night, Ash has planned a Pizza Party for the team.

ASH: “We usually do something like appreciate for them you know. We always do that every two weeks, every three weeks just because sometimes they stress from too much work, it's too much work. So sometimes we need to get them away from that. Like you're coming for party, not coming for work. Oh they are happy with that.”

The team fills the LBJ conference room on the 5th floor. They share music from their home countries on their phones and try to coax each other into dancing. They share stories from their lives and discuss current events and past memories. Ash and Minh get in a disagreement over how many people died in the Vietnam war. The team finds out for the first time that Ash's wife is American.

10:00pm - After the party, the team returns to their special project. It's time to rewax the floor. Minh and Aracelli are the most skilled waxers and they work together, even though neither of them speak English very well. Mostly they just talk to each other in their own languages and somehow still manage to communicate.

11:00pm – Ash and Peter do an inspection of the re-waxing job on the 2nd floor. Ash is very impressed with the work and expresses tons of enthusiasm and he snaps pictures on his phone of the work they have done. Ash says he likes to draw his team into the bigger picture during inspection so their individual efforts don't feel like a waste.

ASH: “Sometimes I take my team and we walk around. I say come on, I will show you what you've done because each specialist he focuses on his work and I am the one I have the big picture for all of my area, me and my assistant, and sometimes they do a lot of work and we like to show them how much work you've done in 360,000 sq. ft. It's not only you come to do the restroom there is another specialist doing something else.”

1:00am – In the last hour of their work, the team begins to pack up. They put machines away in closets, take barrels of trash to the dumpster, wipe down extension cords and empty vacuum bags.

1:45am – The team lines up back where they started. They turn in their now empty supply bags and sign-in their keys. They congregate outside the elevators, waiting to be dismissed.

2:00am – Ash dismisses the team, telling them to have a beautiful night, and they go out their separate entrances. Ash, and the Vietnamese men head out to their cars in the staff parking lot. Two of them (literally) scamper away on foot. Nancy waits for the bus and Aracelli gets picked up by her husband.

The building is empty and spotless, ready for a new day of studies.

Appendix B:
Schedules

Night Shift

PRODUCTION SCHEDULE

Fall 2014

TEST SHOOT PERIOD (2 weeks)

- See who's comfortable in front of the camera
- Get to know the shooting environment
- Get to know the crew and the equipment

TECHNICAL PREPARATION PERIOD (2 weeks)

- Discuss look and shooting style with crew
- Build equipment list
- Get committee approval and equipment access
- Train crew on equipment
- Plan and test post-production workflow

RESEARCH PERIOD (2 weeks)

- Log test footage
- Interview potential characters
- Create character profiles for potential characters
- Get to know what's normal in this environment
- Search for something new that's disrupting normalcy (ask the janitors!)
- Create story hypothesis

INITIAL SHOOTING PERIOD (2 weeks)

- Follow main potential characters and capture their routines
- Capture B-Roll of routine environmental occurrences
- Stay on the look out for complicating factors and sources of conflict
- Import, sync and log footage as we go

SECONDARY SHOOTING PERIOD (4 weeks)

- Focus on capturing occurrences that disrupt the routine
- Write about potential storylines
- Plan more formal shoot for capturing tricky cinematography moves with Dolly/Jib
- Import, sync and log footage as we go

END OF FALL SEMESTER

Night Shift
POST-PRODUCTION SCHEDULE
 Spring 2015

	<i>Complete by....</i>
Finish Logging/Transcribing Footage	COMPLETED
Shoot Remaining Content (Stripping Wax off floors, Ash's last day)	<i>Mid-February</i>
Organize all Clips by Character/Location	<i>Flexible</i>
Make Scene-by-Scene (Step) Outline	<i>Flexible</i>
Do Log Breakdown by Scene	<i>Flexible</i>
Pull Subclips for Each Scene - Watch Selects together	March 5
Revise Step-Outline	<i>Flexible</i>
Committee Meeting about Step Outline	<i>Week Before Spring Break</i> (March 9-13)
****SPRING BREAK****	
Launch Kickstarter	<i>After Spring Break</i>
Madli Begins Cutting	<i>After Spring Break</i>
Begin Working with Composer to Create Score	<i>After Spring Break</i>
First Rough Cut (1 week to work) (using pulled clips and step outline)	<i>March 27</i> (Before Madli's Trip)
Committee Meeting about Rough Cut	<i>Second Week of April</i> (Apr. 6-10)
Community Screening Feedback	<i>Second Week of April</i>
Fine Cut (3 weeks to work)	<i>April 27</i>
Finish Score	<i>April 24</i>

Final Week Schedule:

Monday	May 4	Picture Lock (1 week from Fine Cut finish)
Tuesday	May 5	Color Correction/Sound Mix for 6 hours
Wednesday	May 6	Color Correction/Sound Mix for 12 hours
Thursday	May 7	Meet with Committee in morning Finish Sound Mix in evening
Friday	May 8	Upload Master's Report by 3pm Turn in papers to tower by 5pm

APPENDIX C:
Post-Production Outlines

NIGHT SHIFT
Rough Outline
12.12.2014

Just taking a stab at a plot structure here. I need to finish logging all my footage to know what subtleties I want to get at, but I want to give the general impressions that “janitor’s lives are not what we think they are” and “institutional systems can accidentally squash a good thing that’s happening between people.” I’ve *italicized* the portions of this story I don’t feel like I have good coverage for. Everything else is based on footage I definitely have.

Act I

Here is a team of janitors.

They work the night shift at the University of Texas.

They are from different countries.

Their team leader is named Ash. He’s a jolly, idealistic guy. He’s applying for a new job to become the supervisor of all the teams in the area. He’s hopeful that Peter will take on a team leader position when he leaves.

They have a community built between them that’s based on communication, hard work and celebration.

There are many aspects about their lives and work that do not fit with most people’s stereotypes of janitors.

They are working hard on a project to strip all the wax off the floor and re-do it so it looks like new.

They spend all night working on this.

At the end of the night, they have done a great job and are proud of their work. Ash is exhausted but thinks the students will be so happy when they come in the next morning.

The morning arrives and students repopulate the building. No one notices the floors.

Act II

The team is understaffed today and they have to work extra hard to make up for it.

Ash slips away for his interview. He thinks it went well and tells Peter this.

At the end of the night, everyone is tired after a hard day of understaffed work. Ash feels bad that his team has to take on extra burdens like this.

The next day, the team attends an appreciation BBQ for all the night shift workers. The official thank yous are a bit hollow, but the team enjoys themselves anyway. They stick to their own little corner of the celebration and have a good time on their own. There's an award given out and it sounds like it might be given to Ash, but it's not.

<Scene that features the other team members>

Ash finds out that he didn't get the promotion.

Ash is getting bitter. He's angry that the university doesn't assign enough people to his team so that they can complete the work they are asked to do.

New supervisor who got the job Ash wanted is 23 years old. Nice, but inexperienced. He comments on the understaffing situation.

Peter decides to quit and do another job (I don't know what job, actually).

Ash decides to take a different full time job at the church he cleans. It will pay more and he will have more time with his family. He also won't have to work all night.

Act III

Ash tells his team he's leaving.

Team members interviewed say they don't think much will change when he's gone.

Ash works his last day. They all say goodbye.

Ash begins work at his new job.

OUTLINE - Ash's Story
03.24.2015

Act I

	Exercises (Typical Day)	Sunset	Floor Passion	Aracelli Portrait	Floor Inspection	Big Picture	Beautiful Spaces
Voice-Over	<p>Ash V.O. about their 13-person team doing the work of 40 people.</p> <p>He loves his work family and sees them more than his wife.</p> <p>Describe workload in terms of numbers.</p>	TITLE ON SCREEN	Ash is passionate about floors.	Aracelli tells about her life in El Salvador and working 16 hours a day.		Ash likes to show his team the big picture of what they do.	<MUSIC>
Visuals/ Verite	Exercises and beginning of shift	UT Campus at Sunset	<p>Ash prepares auto-scrubber for use.</p> <p>Team works on floor stripping and scrubbing project.</p>	<p>Aracelli talking to camera in bathroom. Students walk by and interrupt her.</p> <p>AND</p> <p>Aracelli mopping floor with Minh and Peter.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Aracelli and Minh wax the floor in socks.</p>	Ash, Minh and Peter inspect finished floors. Ash takes pictures.	Ash, Minh and Peter walk down hallway after inspection.	Dolly shots of shiny floors and spaces.

	Students in Day	Minh Arrives	Minh Portrait	Ash Goes to Interview	Clogged Toilets
Voice-Over			Minh tells the story of being a spy and losing two wives. “These floors shine because of me”	Ash tells what job he’s applying for. V.O. tells us more about his life.	
Visuals/ Verite	Students walk on floors in daytime. No one notices the team’s work.	Minh comes into CMA among the students. Stops to watch TV.	Minh scrubs the floors of CMA alone.	Ash drives to the interview. His wife calls him to wish good luck.	Peter and Lau argue about clogged toilets.

ACT II

	After the Interview	Pizza Party	Ash Intro’s Lau	Lau Portrait	What Lau is Proud of	Exercises (Stressed Day)
Voice-Over			Ash briefly describes how professional Lau is. He is a very green person who volunteers extra work.	Lau tells story of people getting suits made before coming to USA. Tells about having to leave his family at an old age.	Lau says the thing he’s most proud of in his life is that he’s learned English so well.	
Visuals/ Verite	Ash recounts interview and shows pictures of the floors he showed them.	Team celebrates with food and soda. They discuss culture and language. Ash tells Lau about how he learned to say “I don’t know” instead of lying.	Lau helps clean up after the pizza party	Lau sorts out our recycling. Digs in our garbage.	Lau talks to camera in hallway. Students come through and interrupt him.	Ash leads exercises then divides teams for the shift. He’s cynical about whether or not they will get the work done.

	Overworked	Ash Disappointed	Transition	Sara Portrait	Meet new Supervisor	Strip the Shine
Voice-Over	Ash talks about how they are overworked and it's not fair for 13 people to do 40 people's work.	<p>Ash admits he's upset because he didn't get the job.</p> <p>He told the truth in the interview instead of lying and they didn't like it.</p> <p>The person who got the job is 23.</p>		Sara tells us she plans to move to the day shift. She likes her team and she will miss them, but she never gets to see her children. The day shift will allow her that.		
Visuals/ Verite	Team collects bags and heads out for the shift.	Interview Visuals (Ash's face looks so bitter)	UT Campus at night. All is quiet, the moon shines on the building exterior.	Sara mops the floors and moves mop buckets.	Ash meets with the new supervisor. They talk about management's decision to strip the shine off the floors	<p>Ash fills us in on what this decision is about. He explains that this will create 450 hours of extra work for his team and he's really upset about it.</p> <p>He shows a sample of what the stripped floor will look like.</p>

	Ash Will Quit			What Ash is Proud of	Ash Carries On Until End
Voice-Over	<p>Ash has decided to leave his job at UT.</p> <p>This will allow him to spend more time with his family.</p>			Ash says the thing he's most proud of in his life is his daughters.	Ash says he will give 110% until his last day. He wants the remaining time with these people to be the best.
Visuals/ Verite				Ash shows us pictures of his daughters on his phone.	<p>Dolly in on Ash as he leads the exercises.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Dolly out on office as teams collect bags and heads out for shift.</p>

ACT III

VERITE-ONLY OUTLINE
04.07.2015

CAMPUS BUSTLES

Ash prepares supplies before shift
Students in Day

TEAM ASSEMBLES BEFORE SHIFT

Minh and Lau talk about football
Ash likes Minh's haircut

EXERCISES AND SHIFT BEGINS

Exercises
Ash divides them into teams
Team grabs supplies and heads out

DAILY WORK

Nancy cleans bathroom
Ash helps Sara with Trash
Sara cleans offices

SUNSET

DAILY WORK CONT'D

Aracelli pushes cart to bathroom
Aracelli in bathroom
Ash and Peter Auto-scrub together
Lau vacuuming with students

BREAKTIME

Aracelli and Sara go on break
Lau shows martial arts
What Lau is proud of
Lau showing martial arts
Lau takes break alone
Ash and Sara break together
Lau and Sara exit breakroom together

STRIP AND SCRUB FLOORS

Ash helps Peter and Minh plan floor strip
Ash helps Minh with auto scrubber
Minh auto scrubs
Minh and Juan navigate wet floors

Sara and Manuel mop offices
Peter manages Minh and Aracelli

STRUGGLE

Lau and Peter discuss clogged toilets (pt. 1)

NIGHT

STRUGGLE CONTD

Lau cleaning bathroom
Lau and Ash discuss student recycling
Lau sorts recycling

FACELESS JANITORS

STUDENTS IN DAY

A day's residue builds

MINH ARRIVES

UNDERSTAFFED

Ash makes teams on an understaffed day
Nancy vacuums frantically
Peter manages Aracelli and Minh
Clogged toilets (pt. 2)

REWAX FLOORS

Aracelli walks down the stairs
Minh and Aracelli wax floors
Sara waxes offices

INSPECTION

PIZZA PARTY

BIG PICTURE

Ash likes to show his team the big picture
Dolly shots of floors

WRAPPING UP

Lau wraps vacuum cable
Minh puts away auto scrubber
Aracelli closes down something

Sara and Peter put away mop buckets
Lights in spaces turn off
Team congregates in lobby to go downstairs

END OF SHIFT

Team turns in keys
They gather and chat while they wait
Ash dismisses them
They go out into the night

EMPTY BUILDING

OUTLINE

04.22.2015

INTRO

- UT Campus
- People making mess
- Timelapse to Night Shift

REGULAR WORK

- Exercises (cut instructions)
- Aracelli cleans bathroom - ARACELLI PORTRAIT
- Students at Night
- Lau Sorts Recycling
- *Ash likes to walk around and see how the students see things*

BREAKTIME

- Lau on Break - LAU PORTRAIT
- Silent Night
- Ash, Peter and Ming strategize about floor scrubbing

FLOORS

- Minh Auto-Scrubs the floor - MINH PORTRAIT
- Pizza Party (needs context)

STRUGGLES

- Night (Ant farm, Ash and Arturo walk)
- Ash says Management wants to strip floors
- Toilets clogged
- Vacuuming
- Ash backstory?
- Silence in CMA Lobby (NIGHT)

RENEWAL

- Minh and Aracelli wax the floor
- Ash inspects the floor
- *Ash likes to walk around and see how the students see things*
- Beautiful spaces
- Team packs up, shift ends

RESTART

- Students repopulate the same spaces
- New residue forms
- End on feet

TITLE: Floors won't be stripped, Ash's daughter now works at UT with him

Appendix D:
Lessons Learned

EDITING LESSONS LEARNED

April 2015

DURING PRODUCTION

1. Show assemblies of different characters to see if people like them or not. What are they responding to?

ORGANIZING FOOTAGE

1. Breakdown raw footage for each shoot into sequences that cover action for a specific event. Even if you leave and come back to film more of the same event in the same day, put it on a sequence together. If you come back to the same event on a different shoot day, then they can be on separate sequences. Also collect B-Roll of the same general type together on a sequence together (everything that happens in the rain in that location, everything that happens at sunset in that location, etc)
2. Make metadata columns to describe who is in each sequence, where each sequence happens and what type of material it contains (Action, Interview, B-Roll)
3. From here, watch the raw footage and decide which scenes will make up your movie.
4. Make notes on the raw footage sequences about what shots you particularly like.
5. Give this bin, full of all the sequences, to your editor!

LOGGING

1. Make transcripts for all interviews
2. Assemble Raw scene footage onto timelines by event or common thread
3. Make first structure based on verite footage
4. Make separate story with all talking
5. Blend the two

WORKING WITH AN EDITOR

1. Assemble scenes and figure out structure yourself
2. Bring in editor once you're sure what the general story is, have them help tell it well.