

COVID19: An Unexpected Plot Twist in Taiwan

By Kimberly Tampus

Whenever one applies to study abroad, you would usually think about travelling, exploring the new culture, going back home during holidays and have fun. Generally, you expect to have an enjoyable time while studying. Not studying and COVID-19. If you think about it, pandemic is the last thing one could've expected while studying abroad.

No one is safe from the virus. Thousands of deaths and positive cases were reported every day. It got to the point that people have problems for the lack of burial grounds. Even animals in zoos or farms were found to be positive from the virus and can transmit the disease. In Denmark, around 17 million of minks were slaughtered to prevent the spread of the virus. COVID-19 unapologetically devastated the whole world continuously until the present time.

Cities were turned into ghost towns. All hospitals were flooded with patients. Restaurants depended on online deliveries. Hundreds of people lost their jobs while frontline workers lost their lives because of their jobs. Economy started to collapse. Seems there's no ending for struggle in all aspects.

In the middle of pandemic, school life kept going. Most field trips and school events were cancelled and classes were held online. The university became the sanctuary of students who cannot go back to their home countries because of the travel restrictions implemented by the Taiwan government. The school provided a lot of financial assistance to all stranded students. Moreover, to further ensure the safety of the students, faculty, and staff, the entire school shutdown their doors to the public.

Last December 31, 2019, cases of pneumonia of unknown cause started to spread in Wuhan, China. No country saw the huge threat that the epidemic imposed except Taiwan. Due to its close distance to China, the entire country immediately implemented preventive measures in response to the outbreak of the disease. Travel restrictions were enforced to discourage people to leave the country for safety. Schools delayed the start of the new semester to prepare the institution based on the instructions of the Taiwan Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

Everything has changed. Each building of the school had a body temperature and disinfectant checkpoint. The cafeteria's long tables were turned into cubicles by putting up some plastic screens. Everyone is required to wear surgical face masks and practice social distancing. I have to say, I was quite impressed to all the collaborative efforts of the government and their people.

Despite of all the negativity brought by the pandemic, I have to admit that I learned a lot from it. One of them is the importance of vigilance. It is the vigilance of Taiwan that made them successfully control the spread of the virus in the country. Taiwan took action immediately upon hearing the news regarding the unusual cases reported from China. The country demonstrated the importance of preventive measures and raising awareness to their people. They created policies that encourage people to use face masks and practice social distancing in order to protect themselves from infection. It was quite remarkable to see that most of people complied to the new rules not only because of fear from getting infected but because they simply care for each other. Truly, they proved that prevention is better than cure.

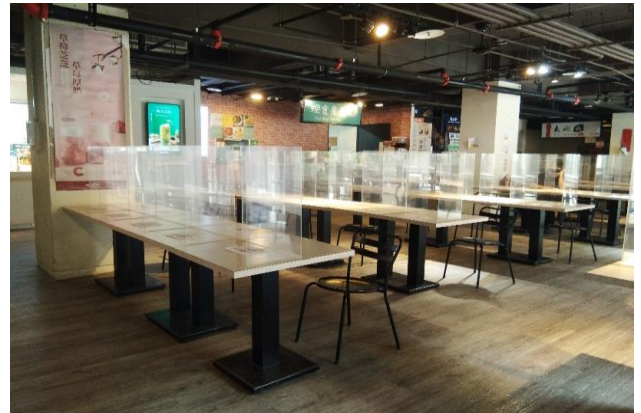
I once overlapped with an infected individual in a public area so, I was required to conduct a self-monitored health management. I was instructed by our department to stay home for two weeks and monitor myself for symptoms. I was quite worried not only because of the possibility of getting infected but also my lab work schedule would be compromised. I may sound crazy, but if you are a student, you cannot help thinking of all the things needed to be done even if you are in a bad state. During my isolation days, my professor, lab mates, family, and friends would keep in touch with me. I received emails, messages, and calls inquiring about my health and offering help in case of emergency. Words of encouragement and kindness filled my days and believe me, there's no single day that I felt lonely. Acts of kindness, no matter how big or small, can absolutely have a great impact on someone's well-being.

I learned to value the practice of self-care habits. School and work life is not the only thing that we should always prioritize but our well-being as well. Sometimes, we care so much for being extremely productive that we tend to turn into self-destructive individuals. Truthfully, COVID19 made my school life more meaningful. The pandemic did force me to break all my plans and filled my days with anxiety and stress. Nevertheless, it helped me to improve my resilience and identify my priorities in life. Furthermore, I discovered life-long friendships, supportive colleagues, benevolent mentors, and altruistic university.

To our dear National Chung Hsing University, thank you for everything.



Benches near the NCHU lake were blocked to prevent people from gathering in this area.



NCHU Cafeteria



Aside from the main gate, all entryways to the university were blocked [left]. All facilities for public use were closed [right].



Body temperature and disinfection station at the entrance of the Agriculture and Natural Resources Building