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## Graduation Simulator: A virtual reality conversation experience for second-year college students living through a pandemic

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# Graduation Simulator



[@graduationsimulator](https://www.instagram.com/graduationsimulator) on Instagram

## Abstract

Many second-year college students have struggled to socially transition back to in-person schooling. After a significant period of enforced isolation, there is a need to aggregate loose connections activated or maintained online. Through conducting UX/ethnographic research on current second-year students who have lost out on major life milestones between the years 2019-2021, synthesizing research from fields of media studies, interpersonal communication, and art/design that incites self-disclosure, and collaborating with a group of student designers, I responded to this issue by creating Graduation Simulator (2022) over a period of 8 months.

Graduation Simulator facilitates emotionally vulnerable discussion through a VR scavenger hunt for friends who did not have a traditional graduation and wish to reconnect.

## Research

Graduation Simulator is backed by a multidisciplinary approach. This ranges from interviews with 15 second-year students, comparative studies of social media usage and perceived isolation, The Interpretive Perspective of Identity, games that incite self-disclosure (The 36 Questions, {THE AND}, Truth or Drink, WNRS), and more.

The decision to partner with the [VARC Lab](#) here at DePaul came from an understanding that face-to-face communication had become increasingly intimate since returning to in-person classes. The action of putting on a headset offered a layer of distance and a chance to focus on the objective of reconnecting. Together, my collaborators and I created a scavenger hunt in VR that doubles both as a chance to reconnect and an opportunity to reclaim a lost-out-on milestone, high school graduation.

## Graduation Simulator (2022)

The full installation features 2 students being brought into separate rooms, putting on graduation robes, playing through the scavenger hunt, and signing a yearbook spread. Below is an abridged playthrough of Graduation Simulator, which was created in Horizon Worlds.

An abridged playthrough can be found [here](#).

## Credits

Director - Dycosmic

3D Modeling - Jericho Zornes

Concept Art: Evan Carter

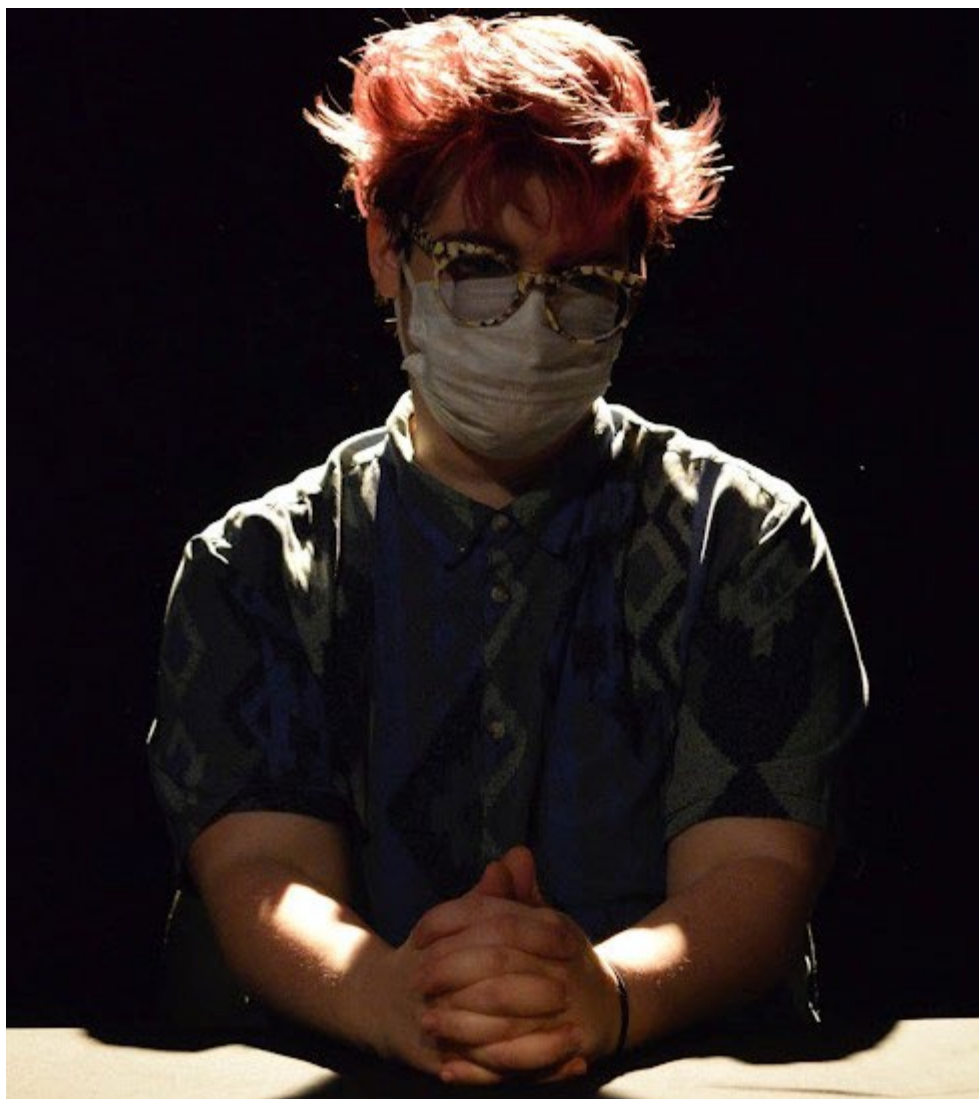
Architecture: @Seraphicious9 (Horizon's Developer)

Sound Design: Nando Cordeiro

Narration: Juan Pablo Ocasio

Level Design: Riley O'Brien

Many thanks to Sam Close, Brian Andrews, and Whitney LaMora for advising.



Dylan Cohen ([Dycosmic](#)) is an immersive curator and digital ethnographer focused on human connection.

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