The Basics of Photography, ASPH 1300

SMU-in-Taos, JTERM 2016

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ASPH 1300, The Basics of Photography

University Curriculum
ASPH 1300 fulfills the UC C&A, Level I requirement.

Course Aims and Rational:
By 1850, only years eleven years after the invention of photography, important photographs were being made in Northern New Mexico. Many of America’s greatest photographers, Timothy O’Sullivan, Edward Curtis, Ansel Adams, Paul Strand and Elliot Porter, have been fascinated and inspired by the unique beauty of the Taos landscape and people. Students will become acquainted with this rich art historical tradition through fieldtrips to galleries and museums, lectures, readings and research projects. Emphasis will be placed upon the student’s own creative response to Taos through the medium of photography. Beginning students will learn basic camera operation while intermediate and advanced students hone their photographic technique and conceptual understanding through more individualized instruction. The course is designed to take full advantage of the land, light and peoples of the Taos/Santa Fe area within the context of past and current photographic art practices.

As students encounter this new environment, they will be asked to apply knowledge acquired in their previous classes and majors to their new surroundings. For instance, their photographs, classroom papers and presentations would ideally relate to and build on their academic interests. For instance, geology major may well bring a particular sophistication to their understanding of the landscape and the construction of its depiction. An anthropology student will be encouraged to examine cultural values, norms, rituals and institutions within the Taos community as they photograph the more social aspects of Taos life through portraiture and documentary work. Classroom discussion and critiques will engage students in their “area of expertise” as well as introduce them to photographers and artists who have addressed similar concerns.

Learning Outcomes:
UC C&A Pillar, Level 1 Student Learning Outcomes:
1. Students will be able to identify and/or employ methods, techniques, or languages of a particular art form, creative endeavor, innovation, or craft(s) and describe how those inform the creation, performance or analysis of creative work.
2. Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of concepts fundamental to creativity through explanation, analysis, performance, or creation.

Additional Learning Outcomes:
1. Students will demonstrate and master basic photographic techniques of camera operation which include the use of aperture and shutter speed, law of equivalent exposure, exposure compensation, depth of field, focusing, focal length of lenses, ISO, White Balance, resolution, pixel dimension, file format. (Assignment #1)
2. Students will be able to demonstrate mastery of compositional strategies for the creation of successful organization of shapes on a flat surface. (Framing Assignment #2)
3. Student will be able to demonstrate sensitivity to and control of a variety of lighting conditions. (Lighting Assignment #3)
4. Students will be able to create successful portraits and by understanding both the technical issues, such as background foreground relationship, as well as the social dimension to the photographic encounter with another human being.
5. Students will gain knowledge of the multiple uses of photography in our culture, with added emphasis on the history of photography as a fine art by examining the variety of ways in which photographs are used. They will be able to identify, and analyze the components of a good photograph both in terms of form and content.
6. Students will demonstrate an understanding of photography as a distinct visual language that communicates ideas and is a tool of inquiry.
7. Students will identify formal elements present in all two-dimensional work, build a vocabulary to describe those elements and evaluate how those elements work to create a successful image.
8. Students will gain an appreciation for and sensitivity to both the visual world and the photographic image and the relationship between the two.
9. Students will become acquainted with the history of the medium, its technology, aesthetic traditions, approaches, genres, and artists.
10. Students will apply those techniques to a creative end, seeking to develop their own particular vision and distinctive voice, rather than relying on cliché and overused subject matter and approaches. (Assignment #4)
11. Students will create images that are successfully expressive, communicative and creative.
12. Students will post images online and share their work with others.
13. Students will become acquainted with the written literature on the medium of photography.
Topics covered include:

- Camera Basics: law of reciprocity, ISO, exposure Modes, ISO, focal length, shutter speed, depth of field, hyperfocal distance, white balance, bracketing, color palette, resolution, pixel dimension, file formats, use of tripod, more.
- Shooting Techniques: framing strategies.
- Lighting Basics: intensity, direction, color.
- Postproduction considerations: Photoshop use of layer adjustments, curves, hue saturation, and selection tools, more. Also inventory considerations, printer settings, printing paper, scale of prints. Portfolio creation.

Field Trips to some of the following:
The High Road to Santa Fe, Chimayo Church, Santa Fe, Photo-Eye Gallery and Bookstore, Garcia Street Bookstore, Verre Gallery, Monroe Gallery, Andrew Smith Gallery, earthships, Ghost Ranch, Abiquiu, Christ of the Desert Monastery, Dar al Islam Mosque, the White Place, Rio Grande Gorge, Wild and Scenic, Italianos Canyon Trail, Barry Norris Studio, St. Francis of Assisi Church, Site Santa Fe, more.

Readings:
Fort Burgwin's library has an excellent collection of monographs, anthologies, theoretical and critical writings devoted to photography in the Southwest. Additionally held on reserve in the Fort’s library.

- “Chapter 4, Landscape in Photography,” The Photograph by Graham Clark, Oxford University Press, 1997, pps 54-73.
- Catalogue from exhibition “True North” at Deutsche Guggenheim, text by Rebecca Solnit and Jennifer Blessing, 2008.

Requirements and Evaluation:

- 5% Shooting Assignment #1: Camera Operation
- 5% Shooting Assignment #2: Time and Space
- 20% Shooting Assignment #2: Framing
- 20% Shooting Assignment #3: Lighting
- 20% Shooting Assignment #4: Personal Vision will also include a 1000-1500 word artist statement.
- 10% Taos Research, presentation to class with written paper. Research on a non-art topic related to student’s major and Taos. Previous topics have included: geological history of the area, alternative architectural (engineering, environmentalism) technology (i.e., earthships, hay bale), water rights, recent demographic trends, Native American mythology.
- 10% Artist Research, presentation to class with written paper. Research on an individual photographic artist with an analysis of style, technique, conceptual basis, etc., often related to above assignment.
- 10% Student's engagement demonstrated by intelligent and lively verbal participation in discussions and critiques, attendance (mandatory), preparedness (meeting deadlines), workspace courtesy and cleanliness.
- Attendance and timeliness (coming to class on time and being prepared) are very important. For every unexcused absence the final grade will drop by half letter grade. Tardiness will be recorded and taken into consideration and may be considered an absence.

Photo assignments will be evaluated for the following:
1. Correct exposure. All images must be properly exposed. This is very important. If I can’t see them, I can’t grade them. Absolutely make sure that you clear up any problem with exposures during your first assignment.

2. Correct white balance.

3. Labeled and sequenced correctly as instructed in assignment sheets.

4. Sized and formatted properly.

5. Submitted on time.

6. Correct illustration of assigned technique. The correct number of images in the assigned categories must be submitted.

7. Creative and appropriate application of the assigned technique in all but the first two assignments.

   Extensive discussion regarding an advised approach to the technique will be given in class.

8. Extreme repetition in subject matter and/or vantage point is discouraged.

9. Application of techniques learned in previous assignments carried forward.

Guidelines for grading images in #2, #3 and #4:

1. A Excellent and consistent demonstration the assigned fundamentals of the discipline both technically and conceptually.

   All of the above criteria are met at a high level. Consistency is usually the hallmark of an A. There is usually good diversity in approach so that each image is a surprise and not similar to other submitted photos. Often photographs are made at different locations and different times of day. The work clearly shows that student was fully engaged in the assignment, searching out shots, composing carefully, and using light well. Each image shows originality and intention. All categories are fulfilled correctly. Correct exposure and white balance are demonstrated in all the images. Work continues to use depth of field and shutter speed creatively.

2. B Better than C, but less than A.

   The work goes further than the minimal demonstration of the assigned fundamental. B’s are usually given for either of two reasons. One: lack of consistency—the group may have some very strong A quality images, but is surrounded by less successful images. Two: the overall quality is less than A, but group shows more effort and thought than C work. All categories are fulfilled correctly and have correct exposure and white balance in all of the images.

3. C Minimal but correct demonstration the assigned fundamentals of the discipline with little demonstration of a creative and appropriate use of technique.

   A grade of C is usually earned in one of two ways. First, all or the vast majority of images are properly exposed and have correct white balanced. The assigned techniques are correctly illustrated and properly labeled. There is usually one of two reasons that work results in a grade of C. One: low energy/lack of involvement. Student seems to be approaching the assignment by doing the bare minimum to fulfill it. The energy level in the shooting is low, as evidenced by a repetitive approach to subject matter, technique, lighting situation and shooting locale. Successful framing strategies are minimally evident. Student does not seem to be engaged with the aesthetic challenges of the assignment, which are fully discussed in lectures. Technical categories are fulfilled, but the images are uninspired and ill considered. The second reason for a C is inconsistency. There may be some very successful images, but some of the remaining images are barely or minimally acceptable in technical and aesthetic qualities. Frequently the entire assignment is shot in one session with similar local and lighting. It may seem apparent that not much time was spent in the shooting.

4. D through F Failure to demonstrate correctly the assigned fundamental of the discipline.

   Some or many of the images are not properly exposed and/or have poor white balanced. Some images appear inappropriately out of focus or suffer from camera motion. The assigned techniques are not illustrated correctly nor submitted in correct number. Images are labeled or sized improperly. Generally the work is weak, inconsistent, and/or very redundant and most often just wrong in terms of the categories.

Daily Schedule/Draft Syllabus:

A detailed daily schedule will be created when the class roster is finalized. The makeup of the class varies greatly summer to summer. Factors taken into consideration in the structure of the class include the number of students enrolled, their individual levels of experience, and gallery exhibition schedule. Classroom time will be devoted to lectures, demonstrations, films, critiques, reading discussions, presentations by students, field trips and final exhibition.

Course Materials:
1. Digital Camera. Most models of the small point and shoot pocket cameras do not allow for manual control of aperture and shutter speed and therefore are not suitable for this class. For this class you will need a camera that you can control the exposure (shutter speed and aperture) manually. There are two camera “types” that will allow you to do.

2. All DSLR (Digital Single Lens Reflex) cameras have that capacity. DSLR’s allow interchangeable lenses. Usually DSLR cameras are purchased with one lens that comes standard on the body of the camera. That single lens is usually 18 to 55mm for the DX camera. Generally I recommend staying with Nikon or Canon brands. DSLR are manufactured in two different sensor sizes. The smaller size is called DX and the larger is FX. Usually only professional photographers get the more pricey FX format. DX is sufficient for use in this class.

3. The other type is usually called a “compact digital camera.” These cameras are smaller than the DSLR, usually larger than point and shoots and don't have interchangeable lenses and are not good for the quick shooting used in sports photography. Advanced compact digital are not good for shooting quickly like in sporting events, but are smaller and easier to carry around in a purse or large pocket. There are no focal length choices available on the compact digital since there is only one non changeable lens on those cameras, though different models of cameras come with different ranges of focal length.

4. If you are in doubt whether a camera model is appropriate, visit the website for the specific camera model and see if it lists, usually under specifications or features, the ability to manually control exposure (shutter speed and aperture).

5. Most cameras suitable for this class will create both jpg and raw files.

6. Generally, the greater the number of megapixels, the better the paper/print enlargements, the greater the cost of the camera and the greater the need for storage of downloaded images.

7. You will also definitely need a tripod for use. Purchase or plan to borrow one. Tripod should raise to at least your eye level. Professional photographer’s tripods are very expensive ($300 plus). I suggest a much more modest priced medium sized $40 one purchased from Target, Best Buy or Frye’s, etc.

8. I recommend a cheap cable release for use with the tripod.

9. Storage card for your camera’s images with a minimum size of 1GB to 16GB. 2 storage devices are better than one. My suggestion is to avoid extremely large storage devices like 8 GB. I suggest 2 storage devices; 1GB to 4GB each with speed generally should be 40x for higher.

10. Card reader is optional.

11. I recommend one extra battery.

12. Software that allows for inventorying files, such as iPhoto is helpful. Software for Power Point or Keynote is needed.

13. B and H Photo and Video is an extremely reliable online source. They are not the dirt cheapest, but they deliver when they say they will and the telephone staff is knowledgeable. Adorama is also very reputable.

14. How to Do Well in this Class:
You should expect to spend anywhere from 2 to 10 hours shooting each assignment and 1 to 2 hour editing and preparing to submit the assignment. Students who do well in this class always devote a good deal of time to actually photographing. Most often they shoot the assignment once, then edit and decide that they need to make more photographs and may even cycle through the photograph/edit process a third time. It might be possible to complete each assignment in about 15 minutes. Doing just the minimum and making no technical mistakes will generally earn a C. Do not miss class, absences can really pull down your grade. Plan to do extra credit. Turn in your assignments on time. Also, there is a good deal of attention to details in this class, such as labeling and sizing which must be done correctly. The way to do well in this class is to work diligently and intelligently on each assignment. Never wait to the last minute. Most of the best students visit me during my office hours for help with their editing. ALWAYS get your assignments turned in on time. If you are having difficulties in this class, see me while they are happening. Do not wait until the end of the semester. Final grades will not be changed so that student may keep a scholarship, graduate, or participate in rush activities.

Additional Notes:
Professor Debora Hunter
You are welcome to stop by my faculty casita anytime between 8am and 10pm. Feel free to call me if you want to schedule an appointment.
Cell: 214-335-5289
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Academic Honesty and Misconduct:
It is possible to plagiarize a visual image or a photograph just as it is words and text. Students should only submit work that is their own, meaning that the photograph is their own concept, framing, shooting and editing. Also students should not allow others to make available to others their own work. Students plagiarizing or aiding in
plagiarizing will be taken to Honor Council and/or receive a grade of failure for either the assignment and/or the class. Please give me no case to suspect plagiarism by shooting in very similar situations, light and framing to other students. If you think there is the possibility of me suspecting plagiarism, please see me before you submit your images.

You are bound by the Honor Code and the SMU Student Code of Conduct. For complete details, see: [http://www.smu.edu/studentlife/PCL_01_ToC.asp](http://www.smu.edu/studentlife/PCL_01_ToC.asp)

**Disability Accommodations:**
Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first contact Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS) at 214-768-1470 or [www.smu.edu/alec/dass.asp](http://www.smu.edu/alec/dass.asp) to verify the disability and to establish eligibility for accommodations. They should then schedule an appointment with the professor to make appropriate arrangements. (See University Policy No. 2.4; an attachment describes the DASS procedures and relocated office.)

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**Religious Observance:**
Religiously observant students wishing to be absent on holidays that require missing class should notify their professors in writing at the beginning of the semester, and should discuss with them, in advance, acceptable ways of making up any work missed because of the absence. (See University Policy No. 1.9.)

**Excused Absences for University Extracurricular Activities:**
Students participating in an officially sanctioned, scheduled University extracurricular activity should be given the opportunity to make up class assignments or other graded assignments missed as a result of their participation. It is the responsibility of the student to make arrangements with the instructor prior to any missed scheduled examination or other missed assignment for making up the work. (University Undergraduate Catalogue)