



PHO 357 – Documentary Photography COURSE SYLLABUS: Fall 2014

Instructor: Kael Alford
Office Location: TBA
Office Hours: By appointment only
Office Phone: 903-886-5208
Office Fax: N/A
University Email Address: kaelphoto@gmail.com

COURSE INFORMATION

Readings will be assigned as handouts or reviews of image collections and readings online or in library holdings.

Course Description:

Students will explore traditional and contemporary approaches to documentary photography through five individual photography assignments, lectures and readings, and a semester long photography project. Students will be encouraged to photograph in unfamiliar environments and required to research their subjects carefully. The capstone of the course is a semester long, final project on a self-defined theme. Students will work with their own DSLR, 35mm cameras unless special arrangements are made with the instructor. *Prerequisite:* Photography 112.

Student Learning Outcomes:

1. Students will demonstrate an understanding and appreciation for the various historical and contemporary practices of documentary approaches to photography.
2. Students will demonstrate the ability to communicate effectively through documentary photography and to evaluate and discuss documentary images.
3. Students will demonstrate a facility for researching and interacting with an unfamiliar environment and developing creative responses through photography.
4. Students will demonstrate critical reflection on the documentary photographic practice in familiar and unfamiliar social contexts and environments.
5. Students will demonstrate basic technical competence in digital photography and printing and will display their work for critique.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students should have basic competency in use of 35mm DSLR cameras set on manual mode before taking this class. Students should bring their own DSLR cameras on the first day of class and to every subsequent class unless otherwise noted. Students are required to supply their own paper for digital photographic printing. This course requires organized and motivated student research and photographic work outside of class time. Students should be prepared to work independently and seek additional help as needed.

Grades will be assigned according to the following scale:

- A Work well above the general class level, evidence of participation in related activities outside of the classroom, thoughtful participation in classroom discussion and critique
- B work above the general class level, participation in classroom discussion and critique
- C average work, minimal requirements met
- D work below class average, lack of participation and/or poor attendance
- F inferior work, work not submitted, failure to attend class

TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

Students are required to have their own 35 mm DSLR camera for use in this course. Very limited university photography equipment is available for checkout. Access to photo editing software such as Adobe Lightroom or Camera Bits Photomechanic on personal Macintosh laptops is advised. University computing resources are also available. There is a cost for printing on University printers of \$1.00 per square foot for printing, plus a cost of \$1.50 per square foot for heavyweight photo matte paper or \$2.00 per square foot for photo satin paper. Prices may vary during the semester.

COMMUNICATION AND SUPPORT

A printing lab assistant will be available on Fridays at the UCD campus from 10am-1pm and printing must be done at this time. Students should schedule all of their printing appointments at the start of the semester during these hours. Post-production work may be done in computer labs at any time. Instructor assistance is available by appointment only.

COURSE AND UNIVERSITY PROCEDURES/POLICIES

Attendance: You may be absent from class twice. On your first absence, you will receive an e-mail from Myranda Staten and it will be copied to the instructor and Lee Whitmarsh and filed. On your second absence you will receive an e-mail from Myranda Staten and it will be copied to the instructor and Lee Whitmarsh and filed. On your third absence, you will receive an F in the course. If you wish to drop the course you will receive a drop/fail. Two tardy arrivals of 30 minutes or more equal an absence.

University Specific Procedures:

ADA Statement

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact:

Office of Student Disability Resources and Services
Texas A&M University-Commerce
Gee Library 132
Phone (903) 886-5150 or (903) 886-5835
Fax (903) 468-8148
StudentDisabilityServices@tamu-commerce.edu
[Student Disability Resources & Services](#)

Student Conduct

All students enrolled at the University shall follow the tenets of common decency and acceptable behavior conducive to a positive learning environment. (See *Code of Student Conduct from Student Guide Handbook*).

COURSE OUTLINE / CALENDAR

Week 1:

Introduction to course, instructor and course expectations; introduction to students and survey of student skill levels.

Lecture: Brief history of documentary photography part 1 – war, the witness and the rise of social documentary, “straight photography”, picturing native peoples, heroic landscapes and environmentalism.

Photo Assignment 1 (in class and take home): Photographing people without people.

Reading assignment: Handout on the self-directed photography project and review of documentary photography collections online.

Week 2:

Critique Photo Assignment 1: People without People and review of basic composition.

Lecture: Brief history of documentary photography part 2 – Legacy of the New Topographics, blurring fact and fiction and the fringes and “freaks”.

Discussion of final project proposals, expected research and schedule/time management, assign group A and group B for final project submissions.

Assignment: Individual project proposals, personal schedules and in-class presentations with 3-5 photos due next week (group A) and week 4 (group B)

Week 3:

Due: Final project proposals and in-class presentations Group A.

Lecture: Photographing people – The documentary portrait with available light and review of metering techniques.

In class exercise: Using window light and posing street portraits, followed by basic Photoshop post-production and printing review with Nathan.

Photo Assignment 2: The window light and street portrait.

Week 4:

Due: Final project proposals and in-class presentations Group B.

Critique Photo Assignment 2: The window light portrait and street portrait.

Lecture: Photographing people in action – interactions, gestures, expression and candid photography of people.

Photo Assignment 3 (In class and take home): Candid human interaction downtown, **due week 6**. ALSO: Final project photo assignment: First installment of final project, 5 – 7 images due next week (week 5).

Week 5:

Critique First Installment of final project, 5-7 images due.

Lecture: The natural and constructed landscape.

Readings: The New Topographics and its legacy. Review online documentary photo websites.

Photo Assignment 4: The natural and constructed landscape assignment (remember to follow the light) note that this is not due until week 8!

Week 6:

Critique Photo Assignment 3: Candid human interaction with guest reviewer, TBA.

Discussion of progress and problem solving related to final projects.

Week 7: *No Class Meeting* Use this week to work final projects.

Please watch email for any changes to class and assignment schedule.

Final Project photo assignment: 5-7 new prints due week 9.

Week 8:

Critique Photo Assignment 4: The natural and constructed landscape with guest reviewer TBA.

Final Project Photo Assignment: Continue work on final projects, next critiques of 5-7 new prints week 9 and weeks 12-13.

Week 9: Critique: Final Projects in Progress, 5-7 prints.

Final Project Photo Assignment: Individual photo assignments based on final project progress will be made in this class. Next 5-7 new prints are due weeks 12 and week 13.

Reading: TBA

Week 10:

Lecture: Honest human emotion – can photography stimulate empathy?

Reading: Excerpt from Susan Sontag: *Regarding the Pain of Others* and excerpt from Susie Linfield's: *The Cruel Radiance*.

Photo Assignment 5: Honest human emotion.

Week 11:

Critique Photo Assignment 5: Honest human emotion.

We will discuss Sontag and Linfield readings in context of current events/media.

Assignment: Write a four-page essay about Sontag and Linfield's positions supported with your own reading of uses of photography in the media. Due Week 14.

Week 12:

Critique final projects in progress group A.

Week 13:

Critique final projects in progress group B.

Week 14:

Due: essay on Sontag and Linfield.

Lecture: Contemporary documentary photography in the worlds of art, journalism and activism.

Brainstorming about the place of your own work in the wider world. In-class exercise: Writing an artist statement about your own work.

Week 15: Final Projects due with 8-12 prints and artist statement. Final Critique.

Note on all photo critique days: Students may bring up to three prints from work in progress on final projects during any assignment critique day for feedback, in addition to their assignment work. Do not miss class simply because you have not finished your work for critique. Absences are too costly to your success in the course.