



EAST TEXAS A&M
UNIVERSITY

**PHO 450: Photo Seminar crosslisted with ART 497: Idea
Development and Portfolio**

COURSE SYLLABUS: Spring 2026

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Instructor: Leigh Merrill, Associate Professor of Art

Office Location: WTFA, 2nd Floor, Room 223

Office Hours: 10:00 – 10:50a.m Tuesday and Thursday (by appointment)

University Email Address: leigh.merrill@tamuc.edu

Preferred Form of Communication: email

Communication Response Time: 24 – 48 hours during weekdays

COURSE INFORMATION

Materials – Textbooks, Readings, Supplementary Readings

There are no required textbooks for this course. Supplementary readings will be given throughout the semester.

Course Description

This course is an advanced photography portfolio-building course in which students will work to deepen their photographic practice. It will foster the development of students' creative body of work and their professional practice as photographers. In addition to individual self-driven projects, students will read and discuss writings on current trends

The syllabus/schedule are subject to change.

in photography. This course will be an intensive semester-long course that addresses contemporary trends in photography.

Student Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of this course students should be able to demonstrate the following:

1. The creation of individual work towards a portfolio / individual interest
2. Participation in the senior capstone exhibition (graduating seniors only)
3. Effective critique by participation in critical evaluation regarding your own work and the work of others
4. An artist statement/project statement

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Minimal Technical Skills Needed

Using d2L learning management system.

Instructional Methods

This course will meet face-to-face one day a week. Our meetings will consist of critique of student projects, discussions and lectures.

This course will meet face-to-face but will utilize TAMUC's d2L Brightspace to share information about the course and for students to submit assignments.

Grades will be posted to d2L.

Assignments, Reading Discussion, Demos: A series of assignments will consider different approaches to ideas and artmaking. Throughout the semester, there will be readings about contemporary trends in art to enrich the course material and foster discussion during class.

Process Journal: Starting in week 8, students will submit a weekly assessment of their work. Each week's process journal will consist of a visual representation of the work created during the week and a brief written self-assessment of the strengths and weakness in the work created.

In-Progress peer review: In addition to the formal critiques, students will participate in more frequent in-progress peer review.

Critiques: Work can be made in any medium. For each critique, students will bring in work made towards their professional goals and interests.

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Student Responsibilities or Tips for Success in the Course

Participation in class is critical to your success in this course. As a studio art course there is an expectation of work outside of class time. This course has weekly deadlines. Regularly logging into D2L will be necessary to keep up with course expectations.

Attendance Policy

Attendance is required and is recorded at all class meetings. Arriving to class late or leaving early may result in an absence. Being more than 10 minutes late on a critique day will result a late grade for the project being critiqued. Please note that working in the print lab while critique is being held in the computer lab will result in both an absence and a late grade. **Note: A total of 4 absences from any class meetings may result in a failing grade ("F") for the course.** Excused absences are listed under Class Attendance (A13.02) in the A&M-Commerce Procedures. Verifiable excuses for absences must be turned in to the instructor.

GRADING

Final grades in this course will be based on the following scale:

A = 90%-100%. B = 80%-89%. C = 70%-79%. D = 60%-69%. F = 59% or Below

Assessments

- 50% Assignments & Reading Discussions**
- 20% Process Journal, In-progress peer reviews**
- 30% Critiques**

TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

LMS

All course sections offered by Texas A&M University-Commerce have a corresponding course shell in the myLeo Online Learning Management System (LMS). Below are technical requirements

LMS Requirements:

<https://community.brightspace.com/s/article/Brightspace-Platform-Requirements>

LMS Browser Support:

https://documentation.brightspace.com/EN/brightspace/requirements/all/browser_support.htm

YouSeeU Virtual Classroom Requirements:

<https://support.youseeu.com/hc/en-us/articles/115007031107-Basic-System-Requirements>

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ACCESS AND NAVIGATION

You will need your campus-wide ID (CWID) and password to log into the course. If you do not know your CWID or have forgotten your password, contact the Center for IT Excellence (CITE) at 903.468.6000 or helpdesk@tamuc.edu.

Note: Personal computer and internet connection problems do not excuse the requirement to complete all course work in a timely and satisfactory manner. Each student needs to have a backup method to deal with these inevitable problems. These methods might include the availability of a backup PC at home or work, the temporary use of a computer at a friend's home, the local library, office service companies, Starbucks, a TAMUC campus open computer lab, etc.

COMMUNICATION AND SUPPORT

If you have any questions or are having difficulties with the course material, please contact your Instructor.

Technical Support

If you are having technical difficulty with any part of Brightspace, please contact Brightspace Technical Support at 1-877-325-7778. Other support options can be found here:

<https://community.brightspace.com/support/s/contactsupport>

Interaction with Instructor Statement

Interaction with Instructor Statement:

Please contact me through email.

Email: leigh.merrill@tamuc.edu

Office Hours: 10:00 – 10:50 Tuesday and Thursday (and by appointment)

COURSE AND UNIVERSITY PROCEDURES/POLICIES

Course Specific Procedures/Policies

Attendance:

Attendance is required and is recorded at all class meetings. **Arriving to class 15 minutes late or leaving early may result in an absence. Being more than 10 minutes late on a critique day will result a late grade for the project being critiqued.** Please note that working in the print lab or finishing work while critique is being held will result in both an absence and a late grade. **Note: A total of 5 absences from any class meetings may result in a failing grade ("F") for the course.** Excused absences are listed under Class Attendance (A13.02) in the A&M-Commerce Procedures. Verifiable excuses for absences must be turned in to the instructor.

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Due Dates: All assignments, discussion, and projects are due on the date and time given by the instructor. Any work that is late will be reduced by one full-letter grade. Assignments will not be accepted if they are more than one week late.

Coursework: All work must be completed during this semester for this course only.

AI usage: In this course, you are expected to develop and express your own ideas about photography through writing and discussion. The use of generative AI tools (such as ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, etc) to generate or draft your written work or discussion posts is not accepted. You may use (and are encouraged to use) spell-check and grammar-check. If you are unsure whether a tool or resource is permitted, ask before using it. Unauthorized use of AI will be considered academic dishonesty.

Syllabus Change Policy

The syllabus is a guide. Circumstances and events, such as student progress, may make it necessary for the instructor to modify the syllabus during the semester. Any changes made to the syllabus will be announced in advance.

University Specific Procedures

Student Conduct

All students enrolled at the University shall follow the tenets of common decency and acceptable behavior conducive to a positive learning environment. The Code of Student Conduct is described in detail in the [Student Guidebook](#).

<http://www.tamuc.edu/Admissions/oneStopShop/undergraduateAdmissions/studentGuidebook.aspx>

Students should also consult the Rules of Netiquette for more information regarding how to interact with students in an online forum:

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/netiquette>

TAMUC Attendance

For more information about the attendance policy please visit the [Attendance](#) webpage and [Procedure 13.99.99.R0.01](#).

<http://www.tamuc.edu/admissions/registrar/generalInformation/attendance.aspx>

<http://www.tamuc.edu/aboutUs/policiesProceduresStandardsStatements/rulesProcedures/13students/academic/13.99.99.R0.01.pdf>

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Academic Integrity

Students at Texas A&M University-Commerce are expected to maintain high standards of integrity and honesty in all of their scholastic work. For more details and the definition of academic dishonesty see the following procedures:

[Undergraduate Academic Dishonesty 13.99.99.R0.03 Undergraduate Student Academic Dishonesty Form](#)

<http://www.tamuc.edu/aboutUs/policiesProceduresStandardsStatements/rulesProcedures/documents/13.99.99.R0.03UndergraduateStudentAcademicDishonestyForm.pdf>

[Graduate Student Academic Dishonesty Form](#)

<http://www.tamuc.edu/academics/graduateschool/faculty/GraduateStudentAcademicDishonestyFormold.pdf>

<http://www.tamuc.edu/aboutUs/policiesProceduresStandardsStatements/rulesProcedures/13students/undergraduates/13.99.99.R0.03UndergraduateAcademicDishonesty.pdf>

Students with Disabilities-- 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

Velma K. Waters Library Rm 162

Phone (903) 886-5150 or (903) 886-5835

Fax (903) 468-8148

Email: studentdisabilityservices@tamuc.edu

Website: [Office of Student Disability Resources and Services](#)

<http://www.tamuc.edu/campusLife/campusServices/studentDisabilityResourcesAndServices/>

Nondiscrimination Notice

Texas A&M University-Commerce will comply in the classroom, and in online courses, with all federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination and related retaliation on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, age, genetic information or veteran status. Further, an environment free from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression will be maintained.

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Campus Concealed Carry Statement

Texas Senate Bill - 11 (Government Code 411.2031, et al.) authorizes the carrying of a concealed handgun in Texas A&M University-Commerce buildings only by persons who have been issued and are in possession of a Texas License to Carry a Handgun. Qualified law enforcement officers or those who are otherwise authorized to carry a concealed handgun in the State of Texas are also permitted to do so. Pursuant to Penal Code (PC) 46.035 and A&M-Commerce Rule 34.06.02.R1, license holders may not carry a concealed handgun in restricted locations. For a list of locations, please refer to the [Carrying Concealed Handguns On Campus](#) document and/or consult your event organizer.

Web url:

<http://www.tamuc.edu/aboutUs/policiesProceduresStandardsStatements/rulesProcedures/34SafetyOfEmployeesAndStudents/34.06.02.R1.pdf>

Pursuant to PC 46.035, the open carrying of handguns is prohibited on all A&M-Commerce campuses. Report violations to the University Police Department at 903-886-5868 or 9-1-1.

A&M-Commerce Supports Students' Mental Health

The Counseling Center at A&M-Commerce, located in the Halladay Building, Room 203, offers counseling services, educational programming, and connection to community resources for students. Students have 24/7 access to the Counseling Center's crisis assessment services by calling 903-886-5145. For more information regarding Counseling Center events and confidential services, please visit www.tamuc.edu/counsel

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COURSE OUTLINE / CALENDAR

The syllabus is a guide. Circumstances and events may make it necessary for the instructor to modify the syllabus during the semester. Any changes made to the syllabus will be announced in class, email, or d2L.

Week 1 – Tuesday January 13

Discussion: Introduction to class projects: Weekly Experiments, Process Journal, Portfolio, Art Scholarships, Juried Student Exhibition, Possible Field Trip Dates

Introduce: Experiment #1 Playlist

Read: Selected chapters from *The Creative Act: A Way of Being*. “Submerge”, “Look For Clues”, “The Source of Creativity”

Week 2 – Tuesday January 20

Due: 5 - 10 minute individual introductions.

Due: Experiment 1

Discussion: Readings and Experiment #1 Playlist

Introduce: Experiment #2 Artificial Intelligence

Class Activity: Describing images.

Demo: Adobe Firefly

Week 3 – Tuesday January 27

Due: Experiment 2

Discussion: Readings and Experiment #2 Artificial Intelligence

Introduce: Experiment #3 The Rules

Class Activity: Juried Exhibition discussion, printing demo

Week 4 – Tuesday February 3

Due: Experiment 3

Discussion: Readings and Experiment #3 The Rules

Introduce: Experiment #4 Color Field

Class Activity: Juried Exhibition discussion, printing demo

Week 5 – Tuesday February 10

Due: Experiment 4

Discussion: Readings and Experiment #4: Color Field

Introduce: Experiment #5

Week 6 – Tuesday February 17

Due: Experiment 5

Discussion: Readings and Experiment #5

Introduce: Portfolio Proposal Assignment

Class Activity: Proposal Brainstorm

Week 7 – Tuesday February 24

Class Activity: Art Scholarship Workshop and Websites

Art Scholarships Due March 1. Submit!

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Week 8 – Tuesday March 3
Due: Portfolio Proposal Presentations
Introduce: Process Journal
Discussion: **Presentation Strategies capstone exhibition.**

Happy Spring Break! March 9 - 13

Week 9 – Tuesday March 17 - **TBD**

Week 10 – Tuesday March 24
Due: Process Journal
Due/Class Activity: Peer Review
Discussion: **Presentation Strategies capstone exhibition.**

Week 11 – Tuesday March 31
Critique

Week 12 – Tuesday April 7
Due: Process Journal
Seniors (graduating in 2026) Exhibition Ready work due for review
Discussion: Reading, PhotoWork
Class Activity: Interviews / Artist Statement Workshop/Review

Week 13 – Tuesday April 14
Due: Process Journal
Due: In-progress draft artist statement.
Discussion: Seven Days in the Art World, Art Fair Reading Discussion
Possible Field Trip: Dallas Art Fair (April 18)

Capstone Exhibition April 20 – May 9

Week 14 – Tuesday April 21
Due/Class Activity: Peer Review

Week 15 – Tuesday April 28
Critique and Artist Statement

Week 16 – Tuesday May 5
Due: Self-assessment

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