



EAST TEXAS A&M
UNIVERSITY

PHO 341, Commercial Photography

COURSE SYLLABUS: Spring 2026

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Instructor: Leigh Merrill, Professor of Art

Office Location: Wathena Fine Art Building, Room 223

Office Hours: 10:00 – 10:50am T&R (and by appointment via zoom)

University Email Address: leigh.merrill@etamu.edu

Preferred Form of Communication: email

Communication Response Time: 24 – 48 hours during weekdays

COURSE INFORMATION

Materials – Textbooks, Readings, Supplementary Readings

There is no mandatory text. Supplementary readings may be assigned throughout the semester

Course Description

This course introduces students to the innovation, evolving technologies, marketing strategies, and business practices employed in the field of professional photography. Students solve real-world client-based needs by applying both traditional design methods and innovative approaches to photography, video and multimedia. Repeatable to 8 semester hours. Prerequisites: PHO 2357 and PHO 210.

Student Learning Outcomes

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

1. Proficiency with strobe equipment.

The syllabus/schedule are subject to change.

2. Knowledge in working in the studio setting
3. Effective use of lighting and composition.
4. Knowledge about marketing strategies and client-based approaches.
5. Effectiveness in critiques by participation in critical evaluation regarding their own work and the work of others.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Minimal Technical Skills Needed

Students should be familiar with ETAMU's d2L Brightspace learning management system.

Instructional Methods

This course will consist of lectures, demonstrations, in-class assignments, and independent outside-of-class assignments to assist the student in achieving the objectives of this course. Each week students will work on a combination of making photographs, post-production, printing photographs, in-class assignments, participating in critiques, participating in discussions of readings, and quizzes.

Student Responsibilities or Tips for Success in the Course

Active class participation is critical to your success in this course. **This course will meet face-to-face but will utilize ETAMU's d2L Brightspace to share information about the course and for students to submit assignments.** Grades will be posted to d2L. Students should regularly log into D2L for this course.

Students are expected to schedule work time outside of class meeting times to work on class projects. It is recommended to schedule at least 3 hours outside of meeting times to complete work.

Students will have access to computer labs with software needed to complete photographic assignments and exercises. Students will need to schedule time to work in the lab outside of class meeting times to access the university's software.

Students will need to provide the following:

- **DSLR or mirrorless camera.** Cameras are available from the 2nd floor check out in the Wathena Fine Art Building on the Commerce campus. Note: *Find the instruction manual and read it / make sure that the camera is in good working order.*
- **SD card.** Class 10 card with a minimum of 64gb capacity. I have had very good luck with SanDisk SD cards.
- **An external hard drive.** This should be mac compatible. If you work with a windows computer outside of class, you should find a hard drive that will work with both OS. Ideally your hard drive will have 1 to 2 TB of space.
- **Printing Costs.** The university charges for the cost of ink.

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- **Printing Paper.** Students will print in large format and will buy paper from the university.
- **Tripod.** This will be helpful to have for some of the assignments. If you do not own one, you can check out a tripod from the Wathena Fine Art 2nd floor check out.
- **Materials/Props for assignments.** Optional. You may choose to purchase or bring materials and props from home for certain assignments.

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

- 30% - Technical Assignments (approximately 6 technical assignments)
- 20% - Project 1 (Still life)
- 20% - Project 2 (Portrait)
- 30% - Project 3 (Open Form)

TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

LMS

All course sections offered by East Texas A&M University 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>

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@etamu.edu.

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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 ETAMU 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@etamu.edu

Office Hours: 10:00 – 10:50 am T&R (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 while critique is being held in the computer lab will result in both an absence and a late grade.

A total of 4 absences from any class meetings will result in a one-letter grade reduction and 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.etamu.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>

ETAMU Attendance

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

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

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

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Academic Integrity

Students at East Texas A&M University 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.etamu.edu/aboutUs/policiesProceduresStandardsStatements/rulesProcedures/documents/13.99.99.R0.03UndergraduateStudentAcademicDishonestyForm.pdf>

[Graduate Student Academic Dishonesty Form](#)

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

<http://www.etamu.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

East Texas A&M University

Velma K. Waters Library Rm 162

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

Fax (903) 468-8148

Email: studentdisabilityservices@etamu.edu

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

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

Nondiscrimination Notice

East Texas A&M University 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

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status. Further, an environment free from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression will be maintained.

Campus Concealed Carry Statement

Texas Senate Bill - 11 (Government Code 411.2031, et al.) authorizes the carrying of a concealed handgun in East Texas A&M University 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.etamu.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.

ETAMU Supports Students' Mental Health

The Counseling Center at ETAMU, 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.etamu.edu/counsel

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COURSE OUTLINE / CALENDAR

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Module I: Product Photography

Week 1

1/13 **Introductions**, Review of Syllabus

In Class: Intro to the Lighting Studio

- set up logins for studio carts
- intro/review of studio equipment
- studio lighting policies and expectations

1/15 **Bring your hard drives**

Demo: Lighting Studio Basics

- Dynalite setup: attaching cables, pocket wizards
- Adjusting power of lights.
- Attaching Soft boxes
- Shooting tethered with Lightroom Classic (LRC)
- Using Histograms as exposure guide

In class: Group Tech Assignment 1 (observed in person, no d2L submission)

Week 2

1/20 **Bring your hard drives.**

Demo: Working with two lights

- Dynalites Review. (cables, soft boxes, pocket wizard, tethered shooting, histograms)
- Introduction to fill cards (white foam board)
- Multiple Lights:
 - One light at full power with no fill (dramatic)
 - One light at full power, opposite at half power (2:1)
 - One light at full power, opposite at quarter power (4:1)

In class: Group Tech Assignment 2 (Group submission to d2L)

1/22 **No in-person meeting. Complete today's material in d2L.**

Quiz: Lighting Studio (lighting studio policies, Dynalite basics)

Online/Video: Review Lightroom post processing

Introduce: Product Photography Project

Week 3

1/27 **Bring your hard drives.**

Demo: Working with advanced materials.

- Dynalite Review

The syllabus/schedule are subject to change.

- Flags
- Scrims

In class: Group Tech Assignment 3

1/29 **In class:** Continued Group Tech Assignment 3

Week 4

2/3. **Juried student exhibition preparation.** Bring the work you plan to submit.
Matting/Framing discussion.

Due on d2L: Pre-production for Product Photography Project

Workday: Product Photography Project

2/5 **TBD Individual Workday**

Week 5

2/10 **Workday:** Product Photography Project

2/12 **Workday:** Product Photography Project

Week 6

2/17 **Critique:** Product Photography Project

2/19 **Roll-over critique:** Product Photography Project

Introduce: Portrait Project

Module 2: Portraits

Week 7

2/24 **Review:** Portrait Project

Before Class: Watch the Godox video

Demo: Godox Lights

- How to set up
- Adjusting the power of the lights
- Connecting the camera to the X3 trigger
- TTL vs manual exposure
- Using conduit for larger backdrops

In class: Group tech Assignment 4

2/26 **Demo:** Godox lights continued.

- Review Godox
- Some common lighting strategies.
- Lighting the background and subject separate
- Hair light

In class: Continued Group Tech Assignment 4

The syllabus/schedule are subject to change.

Week 8

3/3 **Demo:** On Location.

- Fill cards
- Bounce light: walls, ceilings, floors

In class: Group Tech Assignment 5

Due: Pre-production for Portrait Project

3/5 **Workday:** Portrait Project

Spring Break 3/9 – 3/13

Week 9

3/17 **TBD: Individual Workday**

3/19 **Workday:** Portrait Project

Week 10

3/24 **Critique:** Portrait Project

3/26 **Critique:** Portrait Project

Module 3: Open Form

Week 11

3/31 **Introduction:** Open Form Project

Demo: Lighting Studio

- Working with Lightroom presents
- Working with the Boom
- Working with Gobos

In class: Group Tech Assignment 6

4/2 **In class:** Continued Group Tech Assignment 6

Review: Pre-production Open Form Project

Week 12

4/7 **Workday:** Open Form Project

4/9 **Workday:** Open Form Project

Week 13

4/14 **Workday:** Open Form Project

4/16 **Mid-Project Peer Review:** bring in a minimum of 3 photos to review.

Demo: Printing Review

Week 14

4/21 **Workday:** Open Form Project, Printing Lab

4/23 **Workday:** Open Form Project, Printing Lab

Week 15

The syllabus/schedule are subject to change.

4/28 **Critique:** Open Form Project
4/30 **Critique:** Open Form Project

Week 16

5/5 **Self-assessment / Additional critique time if needed**

A FEW RESOURCES

Camera Resources:

B&H Photo Video, <http://www.bhphotovideo.com>

KEH Camera, <https://www.keh.com/> (excellent resource for used equipment)

General Photograph Resource:

<https://www.aclu.org/free-speech/know-your-rights-photographers>