

JOUR3610 :: Introduction to Photojournalism

Course Overview

This is an introductory course in visual communication. “Communication” is the key word here as the skills you will learn are designed to help you be better communicators. This is not an introduction to photography course. Though we will be using photography as a tool, our end goal is not to become “photographers” but “photojournalists” — professionals who tell stories through images. It’s a fine line, but one we will explore and discuss at length over the coming weeks.

A photograph is an immensely powerful thing. Momentous events in history — and our lives — are noted by the photographs of those times. The street side execution of a Viet Cong soldier. A lone student stopping a line of tanks in Beijing. The break-up of the shuttle Columbia. A Cuban boy being taken from his relative’s home. The words conjure these images, the images help to tell the story of these events.

Advances in technology have made some aspects of photojournalism more accessible to the ordinary person. News organizations now encourage “citizen journalists” to cover events and send in their images. The technical side of photography is easier than ever.

But the hard part is still the hard part — where to point the camera, when to push the button. All the acronyms in the world slathered across the packaging of the latest and greatest the camera companies can produce won’t help with those two things.

This can be a class of frustrations — there are a lot of things that can go wrong. And, to be honest, there are a lot of things that will go wrong. What separates the great photojournalists from those “citizen journalists” is their professionalism and perseverance, their desire to tell a story over time and in context. Great photojournalism isn’t about making one great image and moving on, it’s about understanding a community and putting events into context.

Please leave your ego at the door — critiques will be constructive and strong. No one walks into this class with an A — if you knew everything already, you wouldn’t be here. You will be able to — and you should expect to — redo almost every assignment in this class. Learn to learn, that’s why you’re here.

Over the next few months, we will examine the technical side of photojournalism to the extent that it will become second nature. And as that knowledge seeps in, we’ll also explore what makes a great photograph, how photographs resonate with viewers and our roles as visual communicators.

The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

Topics of Discussion

We will cover a wide array of techniques, issues and ideas. This listing is by no means exhaustive, but it's the basic framework we'll work from.

- Exposure — apertures, shutter speeds and sensitivities
- Control
- The types of images used in publications
- Digital imaging
- The effect of lens selection
- Great photographs
- Captioning
- Deadlines
- Teamwork in the newsroom
- Law, ethics and censorship
- Process vs. Essence
- Building a career

Technicalities

Deadlines are sacred in the news business. Therefore, any assignment not turned in by the assigned deadline will not be accepted. For assignments with electronic submissions, please budget your time accordingly.

Grady College is a “professional” school and professionalism is expected in this class. Attendance is mandatory, for as in the real world, work is done by those who show up. Not showing up for class will greatly affect your ability to succeed. Each unexcused absence will result in a one-half letter grade reduction in your final grade. Any student who does not show up for the first class will be dropped. Photojournalism takes commitment — commitment of time, commitment of mind. Nowhere is it written, or implied, that if you come to class and do the minimum amount of work, you will master the material.

Every image must have a caption attached to it. The majority of your assignments will be submitted electronically and those images need to have a full, Associated Press-style caption attached to it that includes contact information for you and your subjects.

Grades will be based on the following rubric:

Captions - Is it to style? Is it accurate? Does it answer the right questions? 15%

Technical Execution - Is it sharp? Is it properly exposed and toned? Does it demonstrate a mastery of the medium? 20%

Composition - Is the visual hierarchy well established? Can a reader differentiate the primary subject from foreground and background items? Does it flow? 20%

Assignment Criteria - Does the image fit the criteria of the assignment? 20%

Content - Will a reader care about this image? Will it stop them, make them think? Does it deal with the historical, sociological, psychological and aesthetic values discussed in class? 25%

The intent of an education is to learn, not to just earn a grade. Because of that, any assignment that is turned in on time can be redone for a different grade. The only part of your grade that is locked in from the first attempt is the caption, though you can still lose points for bad captions on redos. Redos are due two weeks after the graded work is returned to the class. (The final portfolio is exempted from this policy.)

Images that fit the following general guidelines will fall into these grade ranges:

A — Professional quality work. Excellent technical execution — sharp, properly exposed and toned. Excellent composition — visual hierarchy is well established, a reader will be able to differentiate the primary subject from foreground and background items. Content is of value to the target audience and hits on the ideals of historical, sociological, psychological and aesthetic standards discussed in class. Well controlled with excellent moments. Flawless captions.

B — Journeyman photojournalism. Strong technical execution — sharp, well exposed and toned. Good composition that allows the reader to understand the given subject. Competent storytelling image that is clean and controlled. Good moments that advance the story reported. Adequate captions.

C — Entry level photojournalism. Adequate technical execution — sharp, some exposure issues. Problematic composition that struggles to communicate. A “record shot” that accompanies a story but does not offer any insight into the issue or event documented. Problematic captions.

D — Not publishable. Poor technical execution — not sharp, improperly exposed or poor toning. Unclear or unorganized composition. Content is not relevant to the target audience. Incomplete captions.

F — Not acceptable, not publishable. Major technical issues. Unclear subject matter. Inaccurate or misspelled captions. Missed deadline.

Do not ever try to surprise an editor or instructor — if you have a question, ask. If you are unsure, ask. You have multiple ways of contacting me — take advantage of them.

Supplies & Equipment

You will have the opportunity to borrow a digital camera kit for the semester. Each student will be fully responsible for any equipment checked out from the college. We will go over the procedures and requirements in class.

You will be provided with media for the camera and for storing images. It is not advisable to store anything on the lab computers — they are not backed-up and they are not protected. Take everything home with you, every night.

We will use the National Geographic Ultimate Guide to Photography (Second Edition) for our textbook.

As this is a shooting class, you must bring your equipment every week. In-class exercises and shooting assignments will happen. Be prepared.

Assignments

Due dates and assignments are tentative and may move, depending on the needs of the class.

Visual Nouns and Verbs — You're used to talking about parts of speech, now we'll start seeing parts of images. (Due: August 26)

The Well Lit Mug Shot — It's the most basic image a news photographer makes, so you'll learn how to make it work for you. (Due: Sept. 4)

Depth of Field and Lens Selection — Four images of the same scene using the extremes of focal length and aperture possibilities. (Due: Sept. 11)

Environmental Portraits/Personality Portraits — Go beyond a record shot, show us who someone is. (Due: Sept. 18)

Long, Medium and Close-Up — A series of images from one setting. (Due: Sept. 25)

Light — See it, believe it, use it. (Due: Oct. 2)

Campus Scene — Students in their environment doing what students do. (Due: Oct. 9)

The Multimedia Essay (Pt. 1) — Getting to know your subjects and sharing parts of their lives with us. (Oct. 23)

Stop, Pan and Blur — Three action photos that use different shutter speeds to convey different effects. (Due: Nov. 6)

The Multimedia Essay (Pt. 2) — Going back for more depth. (Due: Nov. 20)

Blog Posts — You'll be required to read (daily) and post (weekly) to the class blog and the UGA Photojournalism site.

Quizzes — There may be unannounced quizzes on the readings or lecture notes.

The Portfolio — A final portfolio of 10 images and your multimedia essay. (Due: December 15, 5 p.m. SHARP)

Grading

Class Participation and Assn. 1, 11 & 12

10%

Assn. 2, 3 & 9

10%

Assn. 4 & 7

20%

Assn. 5 & 6

15%

Assn. 8 & 10

20%

Assn. 13

25%

Academic Integrity

All academic work must meet the standards contained in “A Culture of Honesty.” Each student is responsible for informing themselves about these standards before performing any academic work.

The only reason readers continue to support newspapers is because they believe they are credible. All work done for this course must be your own and done this semester. If you are assisted during a shoot, it is advisable to note such help in your captions.

Special Needs Students

The Disability Resource Center provides academic services to eligible students who have a documented physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more life activities. Students with a disability or health-related issue who need a class accommodation should make an appointment to speak with the instructor as soon as possible.