Digital Photography: Course Basics

Course Requirements

Although we are not meeting in a photography "studio", this is still considered to be a studio course. In addition to what we learn by reading and llistening, it requires that you spend time in our "studio" producing work. Our studio will be a combination of the computer lab and some part of "real life" that you find interesting enough to photograph. Spending time on work is the primary requirement, for if you spend time working, you will come to understand in your gut what your head has learned in class.

According to the Registrar, letter grades A through F have the following meanings: Exceptional, Good, Acceptable, Poor, Failure. If you care about your grade, there are at least three things you can do to improve your chances for success.

1. Come to class. It's worth a third of your grade.
2. Turn in assignments, on time, every week. They are worth one third of your grade.
3. Make interesting photographs. The effort and quality you put into your work is worth one third of your grade.

Enthusiasm and a good attitude toward work will be an asset in this course. Extra weight will be given for work produced in the second half of the course, once basic technical issues are solved. And yes, although it does not appear in the above equation, your participation in discussing work, both yours and that of others, will affect your grade. Exceptional students take heed. Talk to me if this, or anything else covered in this course, is not clear.

The first part of the course will have assignments with some structure. During the second half of the semester you will write a proposal for a project that you will be expected to work on for the remainder of the term. These should be photographs that have some personal interest to you. Your final presentation will come from this body of work. Along the way, we will look at your progress weekly. You won't benefit from comment and criticism unless you have something to show and are present to show it.

Despite the fact that this is a digital photography class, the medium remains dependent on finding something interesting to point your camera at. Although I have been a photographer for more than thirty years, making interesting photographs is still the essential problem. Like everyone else, you will have to figure this one out on your own. The best suggestion I can give you is to approach your work with interest, curiosity, enthusiasm, and thoughtfulness. And don't be afraid of mistakes.

Course Site

A course web site is at <woodypackard.com/audi>. I will post as much as I can there, including information about your assignments, additional reading you can do, some notes on subjects we cover in class or don't have time to cover in class. You can also check your current standing by logging in to *Progress* with your last name and a password that you give me in class.

Technical Problems

Although this is not strictly a technical course, photographic results depend on technical proficiency. Basic photographic proficiency is a prerequisite for taking this course. The goal of the course is to build digital proficiency throughout the semester. You must be able to show results each week, so if you're having trouble with this part of the process, we need to talk and find a solution sooner rather than later.

For photographic and software problems, you should feel free to ask me questions in class, or during the week by calling me at my studio– 585 415-3648. I get email at wood@woodypackard.com, so if your question requires a really brief answer this will work. (Email gets lower priority than a phone call and is less useful in solving a problem of any complexity.) For specific issues with the computer lab's equipment, talk to Don Weinhardt or the lab assistant on duty.

Equipment

In this class we'll be creating and managing a lot of digital data, so you will need a way to store and transport it safely, as well as a way to work with it quickly in class and lab. The only way to do this is to have a portable hard drive that you can use to plug in to the lab's computer with your images and catalog. I'm recommending a portable drive that's at least 250gb (bigger is better) in size, preferably with a firewire 400 (or 800 with fw400 adapter) interface.

Since this is a digital photography class, you will also need access to a digital camera. The school's cage has a Nikon and a couple of Canons that you can borrow. If you have your own camera it may also be suitable. Ideally I would like to have everyone using a single-lens reflex camera capable of capturing raw image files. It is critical though, that the ccamera you choose has controls—aperture, shutter speed, focus—that can be adjusted manually.

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Digital Photography: It's Still Photography

Although it is different in many ways from conventional silver-based photography, digital photography is just another method of capturing images with light. As another form of photography, most of the skills that make a good conventional photographer apply in the realm of digital photography too.

There are several things that do set digital photography apart though. It is these differences that I hope to spend most of our class effort on. These differences, which cross both aesthetic and practical boundaries, become apparent in the way photographers create, organize, and use digital images. The benefits and hazzrds of working digitally are available to both scientists and artists, printmakers and journalists, and to both amateurs and professionals.

Feedback

If there is a single most important benefit to digital photography, it is the instant feedback you get from the camera. If you enjow photography because of the mystery and suspense of seeing an image develop in a tray, this may not seem like an advantage. But if you see your craft as arranging and managing the subject that's in front of the lens as a way of controling the final image, this instant feedback is crucial. In no way does instant feedback diminish the need for pre-visualization, but it does contribute to both flexibility and variation. Instant feedback is available at every step of a well managed digital workflow, from capture in the camera, processing of raw images, to printing in a color managed environment.

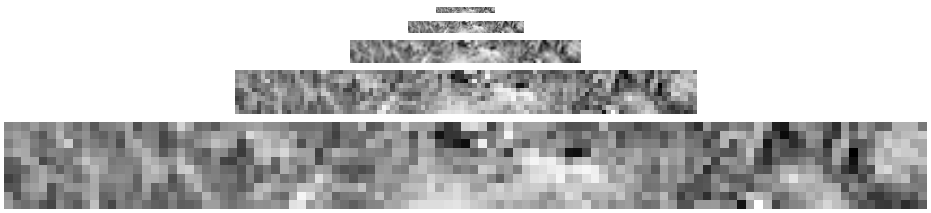
Organization

If you are just starting your career, this may seem like an unnecessary thing to cover in a photography class. In the days of film, there was a constant debate over the virtues of two opposing schools of thought regarding the organization of film archives. One choice was to file by date, chronologically. The other was to impose a topic-based structure, placing images of the same kind of subject together. Each has its advantages, along with some serious disadvantages.

Providing that some basic housekeeping systems are in order, digital imaging and tools allow for both kinds of organization to exist at the same time. And in a way that was never possible with a film archive, originals can be copied and stored in a different location for safe keeping.

Use

Feedback and organization are all well and good, but it is in the use of these images that digital imaging has changed the lay of the land. Digital tools not only allow for control over the creation of images, they provide the means for using images in a wide range of media, from prints to the electronic screen, and distribution as one-of-a-kind image installations to worldwide distribution over the web. They can be combined with words, printed in on-demand books, and incorporated into motion graphics. While imagination is the limit, the use of these images depends on *workflow fluency* that preserves and organizes this information.



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