

Photojournalism

*Instructor: Ross F. Collins, Ph.D.
Spring Semester 2012*

COMM 242: Advanced News Photography (3 credits)

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Required text: Langford, Fox and Smith, *Langford's Basic Photography*, 9th edition. Recommended: Kelby, *The Adobe Photoshop CS5 Book for Digital Photographers*. Also recommended: Class web site resources page, www.ndsu.edu/communication/collins. Choose Classes link, and Comm 241 Resources.

Bulletin Description

Exploration of photography in all phases of news. Introduction to techniques of photojournalism, including composition, lighting, and computerized editing of news photos. Prereq: COMM 200.

Course objectives

- To understand the development of photojournalism and its importance in a visually oriented world.
- To understand the requirements of professional-level photojournalism.
- To learn these requirements through a series of creative exercises designed to produce photographs of near professional-quality standards.
- To critically evaluate these and other photographs based on accepted professional standards.
- To gain a minimum level of technical skill using equipment essential to requirements of contemporary photojournalism.

Required equipment

A Digital Single Lens Reflex (DSLR), fully-adjustable camera, or equivalent. All students majoring in a mass communication-related field should own and know how to use a DSLR. This is the industry standard.

Not acceptable: Cell phone cameras and most compact "point-and-shoot" cameras. Professional photojournalists do not use this equipment, which is too limited for most photojournalism. (These cameras normally have no flexibility to accept interchangeable lens, adjust f-stops/shutter speeds, and may have only a small built-in electronic flash.)

Note: Because DSLRs are expensive, the instructor will accept rental cameras from ITS, or some hybrid cameras.

Attendance

This is a small, seminar-style class. That means we adopt an informal approach, and that you have lots of opportunities for individual attention. It also means your absence will be noticed. However, on principle the instructor does not grade on attendance. Nevertheless, in-class lecture information not available in the text may be part of exams, and in-class assignments cannot be made up (see below under Grading).

Grading

Grading will be based on a standard point-count. Tentative highest possible point totals for this course:

Midterm exam, 150 pts.

Final exam, 150 pts.

Photo assignments and projects: 250 pts.

Photoshop exercises, quizzes, in-class work: 100 pts.

Total: 650 pts.

The total number may change slightly, depending on the eventual number of exercises completed during the semester. Standard grade percentages:

90-100=A

80-89.9=B

70-79.9=C

60-69.9=D

Below 60=F

Note: bylined publication in the *Spectrum* of any photo taken for a class project will earn 5 extra credit points (25 pt maximum); publication in the *Forum* will earn 10 extra credit points; publication anywhere else will earn 5 extra credit points. Submit tearsheet for proof.

Out-of-class assignments handed in late will be accepted, but grades will suffer according to the length of tardiness. In-class assignments cannot be made up. Students who miss a class in which such an assignment is completed will receive an F on that assignment. However, the instructor realizes students occasionally have unavoidable conflicts, so will offer two free "skip days." In-class assignments missed on those days will be dropped from final grade computation. Think of this as your "bank account" of skip days.

Official University Notices

Disabilities: If you need special accommodations for learning or have special needs, please let the instructor know as soon as possible.

Academic dishonesty/plagiarism: The academic community is operated on the basis of honesty, integrity, and fair play. NDSU Policy 335: Code of Academic Responsibility and Conduct applies to cases in which cheating, plagiarism, or other academic misconduct have occurred in an instructional context. Students found guilty of academic misconduct are subject to penalties, up to and possibly including suspension and/

or expulsion. Student academic misconduct records are maintained by the Office of Registration and Records. Informational resources about academic honesty for students and instructional staff members can be found at www.ndsu.edu/academichonesty.

Recommended reading: The best way to learn is to study great photojournalists and their work, including Alfred Eisenstadt, Jacob Riis, Robert Capa, W. Eugene Smith, Weegee, Dorothea Lange, Lewis Hine, and the National Press Photographers Association yearbooks. You can find most of this at the NDSU library.

Tentative 2012 Schedule

Note: Other readings will be assigned as appropriate in addition to those indicated in the textbook.

Week One (Jan. 9-13): Introduction. Camera choices. What is photojournalism? The ten principles. Introduce photo assignments, as described below. Read Langford, et al., Ch. 1, "What Is Photography?"

Week Two (Jan. 16-20; Monday is Martin Luther King Jr. Day, no classes): The camera and the digital darkroom using Bridge and Photoshop. Show and tell: bring your camera. Consider class project. Read Langford Ch. 3, "Lenses: Controlling the Image," and Ch. 6, "Digital Cameras."

Week Three (Jan. 23-27): Continue Photoshop. Exposure: lenses, f-stops and shutter speeds. Use of flash. Photoshop exercises one and two. Read Langford Ch. 5, "Using Different Focal Length Lenses, Camera Kits" Ch. 7, "Lighting: Principles and Equipment," and Ch. 10, "Exposure Measurement." Critique assignment one in class. **Assignment one due.**

Week Four (Jan. 30-Feb. 3): The nature of light. Photoshop exercise three. Critique assignment one in class. Read Langford Ch. 2, "Light: How Images Are Formed," Ch. 14, "The Digital Image: Post-Production," and Appendix F, "Digital Notebook."

Week Five (Feb. 6-10): Lighting cont. Writing captions/cutlines. Editing and critiquing photographs. Photoshop exercise four. **Assignment two due.**

Week Six (Feb. 13-17): Composition. Photojournalism and the law. Photoshop exercise five. Critique assignment two in class. Read Langford Ch. 8, "Organizing the Picture."

Week Seven (Feb. 20-24; Monday is Presidents' Day, no classes): Continue composition. Special problem: news. Photoshop exercise six. Review for midterm. **Assignment three due.**

Week Eight (Feb. 27-March 2): Color theory for photojournalists. Special problem: travel photography. Critique assignment three in class. Begin Assignment Four, documentary. This assignment will be continued throughout the semester, with interim due dates to be announced. **Midterm exam** is Friday, March 2.

Week Nine (March 5-9): History of photography. Read Langford Ch. 4, "Cameras Using Film," Ch. 13, "Black and White Printing Techniques," and Appendix G, "Photography Timeline."

Week Ten (March 19-23; March 12-16 is Spring Break, no classes): Photojournalism ethics. Photoshop exercise seven.

Week Eleven (March 26-30): Special problem: portraits and studio photography. Photoshop exercise eight.

Week Twelve (April 2-6; Easter holiday is Friday, April 6 and Monday, April 9, no classes): The art of seeing.

Week Thirteen (April 9-13): Special problem: sports.

Week Fourteen (April 16-20): Great photojournalists.

Week Fifteen (April 23-27): Preparing a portfolio. Read Langford Ch. 15, "Finishing and presenting work."

Week Sixteen (April 30-May 4): Present final documentary portfolios. Last class day: Friday, May 4.

Final exam period: 1 p.m. Thursday, May 10.



COMM 242, Advanced News Photography (Photojournalism)

Tentative Assignments for Spring Semester 2012

Note: Photos should be new work. I can't accept photos you took last summer, or photos pulled from your album. I'm counting on your honesty here; if something in an image makes clear that it was taken before this semester (like a football game), I can't give you credit.

Submit your work (no more than number of images required, please), by deadline saved as jpgs, and attached to email to me, ross.collins@ndsu.edu. Write your cutlines in the email message.

Assignment One (50 pts): Become aware of your camera's functions and photojournalism principles.

a. Dramatic angles. Shoot a few dozen images of people or scenes around campus from unusual angles. You might shoot down from the top of a stair. Or shoot up lying on your back. Or shoot someone framed by something else. Or really close in on something. Or shoot a seldom-seen view of something. Use your creativity, as long as: 1) it's not the common viewpoint; 2) at least half your photos have people in them. Prepare for critique and grading **three unusual angles**. I suppose I don't need to tell you not to try anything dumb like lying on the railroad tracks or shooting down the campus smokestack? Hey, it's been done. Cutlines are not necessary for this assignment.

b. Meeting folks. Shoot a few dozen images of people doing things on campus, preferably outside, but in well-lit buildings (window light recommended) if it's too cold. Take **candid** (unposed) pictures of people you do not know. After taking their picture, approach at least two or three of these subjects. Explain that you are doing a class photojournalism assignment, and ask for their names, including proper spelling. Right down names on a notepad, numbered in sequence so you can later match your names to photos (you may wish to also describe surroundings to help you later match the name to the image). Prepare for critique and grading **two images** which you believe best show life on campus.

Formal cutlines are not necessary for this assignment, but you do need first and last names of people in photos, and a brief description of what they are doing.

Assignment Two (50 pts): Become aware of light.

Find photos relying on several common qualities of light. Include **at least four different examples** from these options:

- strong natural light, dramatic shadows and highlights. May be sunlight, strong window light.
 - flash on camera, pointed directly at subject. If you don't have a flash, try setting up a spotlight or lamp.
 - flash off camera, bounced off a ceiling or wall. If your flash won't bounce, try a white hankie or Kleenex to diffuse the light.
 - diffused light, cloudy day, classroom, filtered through window.
 - colored light: incandescent, fluorescent, candle. **NO FLASH**—turn off flash, if automatic, and turn off your digital camera's automatic color balance, if necessary, to better see the effect.
 - light from below ("ghoul lighting") shining up at a subject.
- Include people in at least half your photos.

Cutlines: Formal cutlines are necessary for this assignment, and from now on. If people are easily identifiable, they must be identified with both first and last names. If I catch you making up a name, you'll earn no credit and likely get screamed at.

Assignment Three (50 pts): Become aware of composition.

Identify basic elements of photo composition, and compose them in a way you believe produces a more dynamic photograph. Try to emphasize a single element you think dominates more than any other. Shoot a few frames you know to be considered “composition mistakes,” to compare differences. At least half your photos must include people. **Submit three examples** for critique and grading, including cutlines describing the compositional element emphasized, and including one “compositional mistake.”

Assignment Four (100 pts): Class documentary project:

The life of a campus: North Dakota State University 2012 (tentative title).

We will devote the rest of the semester to preparing a significant documentary project. Based on class discussion, students will develop themes they think best reflect students and university life. From those themes students will choose areas to document photographically. Throughout the semester students will critique each other’s photos, and make final choices for the documentary, based on strongest images that best reflect campus life.

Most photos will include people; IDs must be included. All photos must include complete cutlines.

All photos need not be taken on campus, but all most include some clearly identifiable facet of campus life.

This is not a public relations project; photographers should work to portray an honest depiction of a campus, good and bad.

Photographers may wish to write short articles to accompany photos, if they feel it is necessary to help explain the story.

Photographers must avoid potentially libelous photos, or photos depicting illegal behavior in which a subject is clearly identifiable.

As a class we will chose the best photos. The instructor cannot guarantee all students will see photos included in the final documentary. Class grade is not based on whether a student’s photo(s) are selected for the final documentary.

Final choices as decided by the class will be printed and displayed on campus at the end of the semester. These photos, and possibly others, will also become part of a permanent web gallery.