Photography: Exploring Society Through the Camera's Lens

Course Details

Course Designator & Number: FLOR 3004

Number of Credits: 3

Language of Instruction: English

Contact Hours: 45

Instructor: Massimo Agus

Course Description

From its beginnings, photography has been used as a tool for the exploration of society, and photographers have taken that as one of their tasks. At first, some photographers used the camera to record far-off societies that their contemporaries would otherwise never see and, later, aspects of their own society their contemporaries had no wish to see.

This course will explore digital photography as a tool to view different aspects of Italian society (and ourselves within that society) through various photographic exercises and assignments.

At the end of the course the students will produce a portfolio of the work done. Lectures will cover the History of Photography, with a special attention to photo-reportage, Italian photographers, technical aspects related to photography production.

The course introduces technical processes of digital photography, from camera operation and the essential techniques of image capture with camera, image management with imaging related software.

Classroom discussions and assigned readings will help students develop the critical skills used to understand how photographs function aesthetically and conceptually as how they are used in contemporary society and culture.

The course includes presentations and discussions on contemporary practice in the medium, visits to current exhibitions and to the MNAF Alinari National Museum of Photography, and classroom visits by photographers to provide an informed context for the primary course objective and the insights gained through the experience of producing one's own photographic work.

Course Objectives

- Provide an overview of the History of Photography.
- Understand Italian society through photography and how the skills of making, knowing, and critiquing can enhance students' ability to engage the society they live in.
- Acquire a deeper understanding of digital photography technique, and apply digital photography to a visual project.
- Exercise critical vision and learn to develop a visual story through shooting and editing pictures.
- Attention is paid to the way photography practices are connected to the student's life and experiences and the culture at large.

Learning Outcomes

General learning outcomes:

At the end of the course students should be able to identify, define, and solve problems;

- to locate and critically evaluate information as this pertains to the subject matter, historical precedents, and other
- cultural phenomena and ideas related to one's photo project;
- to develop digital photographic skills and to understand the world through a photographer's eyes and to know how this is distinct from other disciplines;
- master a body of knowledge and a mode of inquiry;
- understand diverse cultures within and across societies;
- to communicate more effectively;
- to understand the role of creativity, innovation, and expression across disciplines;
- to acquire critical and creative skills that help you to be more socially effective as a citizen and able to pursue your own creative investigations and analysis outside of the classroom.

Course specific outcomes:

This course will provide students with a clear grasp of the photography, photo-reportage and visual communication, as well as introduce the historical and technical tools needed to edit and evaluate pictures and critically select social issues suitable for a photo story.

At the end of the course, students should have shown to know:

- how to 'read' photography: select and edit pictures
- how to critically evaluate and communicate social issues through images
- how to express and formulate ideas with visual language
- how to develop a photo-reportage about social issues through research and shooting
- how to understand the role of visual communication, photographers creativity, media innovation, and expression across different media

Methodology

This course has been designed to take full advantage of the city so that a student can learn through first-hand experience and practice. A strong emphasis is placed on class discussions and active participation is encouraged. The Italian society will be explored through a series of assignments designed to explore the city of Florence and to give options for technical control as well as visual experimentation.

The course is organized around a number of components that introduce specific information or experience and also determine class location, i.e. computer lab or "field".

- Lectures: classroom presentation of course information
- Demonstrations: classroom demonstrations of technique.
- Lab: creative work during class lab or location.
- Critique: feedback on projects through individual and class discussion of course work.
- Slide/video presentation: photography history, current issues and practices.
- Texts and readings: technique, theory and context.
- Assignments: introduce strategies to find solutions for course projects.
- Conferences: individual and group feedback on student projects.
- Exhibits, lectures: opportunities to see finished work in an exhibition context, and meet with photographers to discuss their work, and ideas.

Course Prerequisites

Prerequisites for the course are as follows: each student is recommended to have a SLR digital camera with manually adjustable aperture and shutter speed.

Required Reading / Materials

A course packet of required reading material will be made available during the course through library, on-line sources and handouts. Details to be given during class.

Grading

Your grades will depend on the timely completion of all projects, presentations, assignments and readings. Class attendance, participation, research. The grading of the work in this course is based upon the following considerations: quality of the resolution of the ideas in your work; quantity of work; technical quality of work; attendance and class participation.

Grading Rubric

Letter Grade	Score or Percentage	Description
A	93–100	Achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.
A-	90–92	Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
B+	87–89	Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
B	83–86	Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
B-	80–82	Achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.
C+	77–79	Achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.
C	73–76	Achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.
C-	70–72	Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to fully meet the course requirements.
D+	67–69	Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to fully meet the course requirements.
D	60–66	Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to fully meet the course requirements.
F	0–59	Represents failure (or no credit) and signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an I.

Summary of How Grades Are Weighted

Assignments	Percentage of Grade
Participation	11%
Response paper #1	5%
Second assignment	9%
Third assignment	9%
Response paper #2	5%
Fourth assignment	9%
Fifth assignment	9%
Response paper #3	5%
Sixth assignment	9%
Response paper #4	5%
Seventh assignment	9%
Final exam and presentation	15%
Overall grade	100%

Class Schedule

Week 1

- Introduction to the course
- Course requirements and course objectives, text, materials, grade codes.
- Introduction to the digital camera
- SLR digital cameras: how they function, exposure and digital tools. - Control of student's cameras.
- The digital workflow, from camera to output and related software.
- Bring Camera to class!
- Field trip shooting outside the classroom

- Assignment #1: Your first view of Florence
- Shoot at least 16 images for next class (Due for next class)

Week 2

- Critique and work evaluation for the assignment #1.
- Introduction to the lenses.
- How to see, the Photographic Language (John Szarkowski)
- Introduction of History of Photography: the invention of photography and its development until the 20 century.
- Read: John Szarkowski's The photographer's Eye. RESPONSE PAPER #1 (400 words) DUE for next class.

Week 3

- Presentation of the Assignment #2: Urban Landscape: Your neighborhood in Florence
- Due for next week (February 11), at least 15 selected pictures required and a research paper about the issue, (300 words)
- DUE for February 11.
- Field trip shooting in the streets of Florence
- Read: Neighborhood in Florence

Week 4

- Critique and work evaluation of assignment #2.
- Field trip shooting in the streets of Florence. Bring your camera
- Presentation of the Assignment #3: Street photography: Aspects of tourism in the center of Florence.
- Due for next class (February 18), at least 15 selected pictures required and a presentation paper
- Field trip shooting in the streets of Florence
- Read: Street photography, From S.Jacobs Encyclopedia of 20th Century Photography. RESPONSE PAPER #2 (400 words)

Week 5

- Critique and work evaluation of assignment #3.
- Presentation of assignment #4: A photo essay on a specific issue: The role and the culture of food in Italy.
- Due for next week, fifteen selected pictures required presented in a ppt or pdf presentation, and a research paper about the issue (400 words)

Week 6

- Field trip shooting in the streets of Florence. Bring your camera
- Composition, rules and tips.
- Computer basics (Mac). Adobe Bridge
- Downloading image files to the computer. File size, resolution. Digital File formats, RAW, tiff, jpeg. Saving and storing files, backing upyour files. Introduction to Camera Raw. Workflow and editing.
- Editing in class the pictures from assignment 3- Bring your computer

Week 7

- Critique and work evaluation of assignment #4.
- Presentation of Assignment #5: The Artisans of San Frediano (portraits and reportage)
- Due for March 18, at least fifteen selected pictures required presented in a ppt or pdf presentation, and a research paper about the issue (400 words)

Week 8

- Visit to the MNAF Alinari National Museum of Photography
- Introduction of History of Photography: Photography in the first half of the Twentieth Century
- Video Viewing: The Genius of Photography - episode 1
- Editing in class the pictures from assignment #5

Week 9

- Critique and work evaluation for the assignment #5.
- Introduction of History of Photography: Photography in the second half of the Twentieth Century
- Video Viewing: The Genius of Photography - episode 2
- A research paper (#3) about the topic covered in the video, (500 words) due

Week 10

- Presentation of Assignment #6: A photo diary of your trip to Taormina.
- Due on April 15, fifteen selected pictures required and a paper with your reflections on the task.
- Presentation of the Assignment #7: A photo essay on an issue individually chosen by the student (for example a soccer game, a protest demonstration of students, a concert, the problem of waste, etc.)
- Due next week, at least fifteen selected pictures required, presented in a ppt or pdf presentation with a research paper about the issue chosen and your work.
- Reading: Documents and pictures, from Steven Edwards, Photography: A Very Short Introduction. RESPONSE PAPER #4 (400 words) DUE

Week 11

- Critique and work evaluation for the assignment #6.
- Meeting with the photographer Simone Donati to discuss his work on the Italian society

Week 12

- Critique and work evaluation for the assignment #7.
- Presentation of professor Agus' work.
- Editing the pictures from the assignment. How to present your work: Portfolio, video, CD, internet.

Week 13

- Final Critique
- The student must submit all assignments in a presentation as a portfolio, and explain his or her work.

Policies

Attendance Policy

Regular attendance and punctuality are mandatory in order to earn full marks. The final grade will take into consideration preparation required for class (i.e. readings) and participation in class discussions. If you miss any meetings without an excused absence from the on-site director, your final grade will be dropped accordingly (check the Academic Handbook for the attendance policy in place at the Florence Program). In the case of absences, it is the student's responsibility to find out what information was given in class including any announcements made.

Missed assignments: a valid doctor's certificate dated on the day of the absence or other evidence of medical need is required to make up for any missed assignment (paper due, presentation due, project due, test, quiz, midterm, final, and all other graded activities). Failure to provide such evidence will automatically result in an "F"/"0" grade for the assignment.

No exceptions allowed.

University of Minnesota Policies & Procedures

Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own can result in disciplinary action. The University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty as follows:

Scholastic Dishonesty

Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis.

Within this course, a student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to and including an "F" or "N" for the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, ask.

Student Conduct

The University of Minnesota has specific policies concerning student conduct. This information can be found on the Learning Abroad Center website.