

# DOCUMENTARY

481.1

Fall 2013 MW 11:00-12:50 CA60

“There were two things I wanted to do.  
I wanted to show the things that had to be corrected.  
I wanted to show the things that had to be appreciated.”

– LEWIS HINE

It is a tremendous privilege to be able to share people’s lives and tell their stories. With this privilege comes a responsibility for fairness, accuracy, commitment and hard work. In photojournalism, one can choose to serve self or to serve humankind by illuminating the human condition. My hope is that you will choose the latter.

Welcome to Documentary Photojournalism. In this course we will seek to strengthen your foundation of technical and journalistic skills, and help guide you into leveraging the power of photojournalism to engage and affect your community.

Many photographs simply state fact as the photographer recorded it. Within this class we will create photographs – not just photographs but *idea photographs* – that tell stories, photographs that educate and reach into the social conscience. Not every documentary picture story uncovers social problems, however. Many documentary stories celebrate things that are right within a society or reveal unknown cultural and societal gems.

Effective documentary photography is impossible without a commitment on the part of the photographer to become involved and spend enough time to get beyond the surface. Genuine life moments are KEY elements of documentary storytelling. The “quick-hit” approach, projecting an incomplete and stereotypical understanding of a given subject, is sadly prevalent in today’s media. The antidote is time and an unselfish commitment to truth – and this is what it will take to succeed in this class.

## LONG-TERM PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAY / DOCUMENTARY STORYTELLING

The heart and soul of this class will be the photographic essay and narrative story. Each student will complete an in-depth photographic essay or short documentary that fits within the this topic. This project will involve: Research, Access, Photographic Storytelling and Presentation.

You must focus on the photographic storytelling, but you may also present your project as a documentary short film. Ask yourself: “What is the best media to tell the story?” The key is INTENT. We’ll talk more about this in class.

→ Topic and theme: Actions and Reactions. On July 9, 2013 the editorial board of *The New York Times* published an article titled: “The Decline of North Carolina.” This article is the opinion of the publication but also an interesting look into change occurring in our state due to recent legislative actions. My question to you: What are the reactions, the effects, the impacts of this legislation? Your topic for the longterm project is to humanize these effects. This isn’t about imagery of politics. This isn’t about video from the Moral Monday movement. This is about people and the struggles or successes that may arise from the palpable change in our state.

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♦ OFFICE HOURS:  
Tuesday - 2:00 - 4:00

♦ Please try and meet with me during office hours, but if you cannot I will be happy to schedule an appointment.

♦ Required Text:  
[One mind-blowing photography book of your choice.](#)

♦ GRADE BREAKDOWN:  
Your final grade will be determined out of a 1000 point scale:

Final Doc Project - 400  
Weekly shoots - 400  
(worth 50 points each)  
Proposal & Roadmap - 100  
Beyond the Box Assign - 100

♦ This syllabus is flexible.  
Be prepared for change.

♦ ATTENDANCE is vital to the success of this class. There will be demonstrations that cannot be redone.

BE ON TIME.

♦ IMPORTANT DATES:  
LAST DAY TO ADD - 08/26  
LABOR DAY - 09/02  
LAST DAY TO DROP - 10/14  
T-DAY BREAK - 11/27-12/2



Read [The New York Times op-ed](#).

In the article you will see some distinct themes, let's discuss.

From this discussion, our theme will become more tangible. Ask yourself: Who is affected? In what ways? What are the extremes? Often times the real stories live on the edges.

More advice: Passion. What do you care about? What makes your heart skip a beat, your blood boil, your mind race? Go to these places ... in you ... fearlessly ... and then, and only then, will you find a project that you are meant to do.

This is a hard and tortuous path my friends. It takes heart and commitment. A little bit of crazy and artist's desire. Do you have it? Are you willing to do what *has* to be done to create the best work you can? If so, you are in the right place.

Weekly shoots: You will be turning in weekly shoots worth 50 points each. You will turn in a catalog of your entire shoot that must total at least 500 frames each week. You will present every frame in class in the order you made the images. We will critique, not the single image, but your approach, style, visual variety and how well you worked each situation. If video is the best medium through which to tell your story, then you will submit roughly edited scenes each week.

**BEYOND THE BOX** | Early in the semester as you are finding your long-term stories/projects, I will give you creative, conceptual assignments. Take risks!

*Note:* Waiting to the last minute does not count as taking a risk. I know that trick; I've tried it myself.

## Expectations

I expect you to take risks. True growth occurs when we learn from the risks we take. **Do not mistake complacency for risk-taking.** Risk-taking is the relentless pushing of the boundaries, forcing yourself out of your comfort zone and exceeding expectations.

I am here as your guide. My goal is to create an environment in which your potential can explode. However, even though I may open the doors, it is YOU who must walk through. Take ownership of your learning.

As your teacher in this capstone course, I do have some base journalistic expectations. Here they are:

- 1) I expect your work to be technically advanced. By this point in your photojournalism training, your technical skills should be nearly intuitive. I expect images to be in focus (with rare exception), exposed well and toned correctly.
- 2) I expect images to communicate and connect.
- 3) I expect you to be striving to make images that contain one, or preferably all, of the key elements of a successful photograph: **MOMENT, LIGHT, COMPOSITION.**
- 4) I expect you to think creatively and independently when approaching any assignment/project, and I expect images to reflect this creative and independent thinking.
- 5) I expect professionalism in all areas including presentation, ethics and caption writing.

## Grade Determination

I will do my best to be fair and accurate, but to do this there must be some very specific guidelines and boundaries. Here they are: 1) Assignments and/or shoots are due at the very minute class begins! 2) Any assignment not turned in will, obviously, receive zero points.

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Although this is a subjective world (how do you define quality?), there still must be a final say, and that is where I come in. I am the editor. The critical elements that must be included in any assignment: Are you pushing yourself? And does this communicate to the viewer?

## PhotoNight

PhotoNight is a monthly speaker series that is held usually on the last Tuesday of every month. Presentations are from 7:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m. Attendance at PhotoNight is considered part of the class and is mandatory and will be recorded. Attendance will count according to the guidelines above.

## Required Equipment and Supplies

You will need a digital 35mm SLR camera with manual controls and interchangeable lenses and most likely, a strobe. Best case scenario would be a HD/SLR camera, allowing you to use video. Although you can check out through the school, you **MUST** start acquiring your own gear if you plan to survive out there. And having the opportunity to take advantage of lower-interest student loans may be a wise financial decision. An option you won't have after graduation. If you rent from the school, realize you are responsible for any lost, damaged, or stolen equipment, and your access to gear will be limited.

You will definitely need buy your own CF cards - as large as possible. (Do not trust the checkout cards, never!) Also you need two harddrives for your personal photography archive, video and FCP project. One is for backup. I recommend 1 TB drives, 7200 rpm, and Firewire 800. *Harddrive failure will not be accepted as an excuse for not completing any project.*

## Excuses

Photography is problem solving. You will be faced with many challenges in the field – in this class and beyond. It will be up to you in each moment to make it a learning opportunity. Nothing worth anything is easy. Be prepared and realize the one thing you can control is your attitude.

## Attendance Policy

Here's the deal folks, the field of journalism is going to require more of your mind, body and spirit than you can even fathom at this point. The rewards are great, but the demands are high. It is critical that you attend every class. You **CANNOT** miss a class in order to shoot an assignment. You must be in class to present your work for critique. Turning in an assignment on the server alone does not count as a turn-in. Part of your completion of the assignment is the critique. You will be allowed 2 un-excused absences; after that 2 percentage points will be deducted from your **FINAL GRADE**. If your semester average is 91% and you miss 3 classes, your final average would be 89%. Etcetera. Use your 2 wisely (save them for any unfortunate illnesses, not to watch Arrested Development - although I would admire your taste.). The only exception to this will be a serious medical condition.

## How do you succeed in this class?

- Be on time ... be prepared to learn, participate and contribute
- Listen and respect what I and your fellow students say
- Manage your resources - your money and your time. It is not easy but not impossible
- Be honest. Admit your errors. No excuses
- Be positive
- Bury your pride. Now is the time to learn, and most learning occurs in difficult times.
- And perhaps most importantly, help each other

## Honor Code

Students will operate within the requirements of the honor code. All work must be your own, must be done specifically for this class, and should be done with the high level of honesty and integrity that this University demands.

"The only thing to do is to get it right.  
The only way to get it right is to keep asking yourself if it is."

– KEN LIGHT