

# Basic Photojournalism

JRNL 313

Spring 2010

Classes:                   Tues/Thurs 11:00 – 12:15 Comm 1250  
                                Lab Wed 12:50 Comm 0009E

Instructor:               Phil Greer  
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  or by appointment  
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## **COURSE DESCRIPTION AND CLASS STRUCTURE**

Basic Photojournalism is designed primarily as a workshop class. We will discuss your assignments in group and individual critiques. We will cover a variety of approaches to photo assignments, photo stories and photo essays. Lectures, student presentations, guest speakers and reading assignments will provide background, and hopefully inspiration. The goal of this class is to explore and develop your shooting style, to build a portfolio that will include spot news, general news, sports, features and pictorial photos, and to complete at least one photo story you will be proud to include in your portfolio. All projects must be completed. Full captions must accompany every project in its final form, including picture story. The picture story will require an additional ten inch story about your subject. Students will show updates and completed work in class. During the last two weeks of the semester, you will sign up with me for an interview session. There will be no exams or quizzes in this course; you will be required at midterm and at the end of the semester to turn in a three page paper on some aspect of photojournalism.

## **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

To successfully complete major photographic projects

To add at least one high quality photo story to your portfolio

To prepare you for an internship or the job market

To learn to generate ideas, conduct research and write proposals for photographic projects

To begin to develop a personal style and photographic philosophy

Most important, to strengthen your passion for taking pictures

## **DEADLINES**

Deadlines are absolute. Assignments must be handed in by Thursday at 4:30 in the Journalism School Office. You will be entering a profession where this is a requirement for continued employment. If we don't instill the need for timely completion of work now, you will not be successful in the workplace. Students not

turning in their assignment on time will receive a zero on that assignment. Now is the time to learn to properly manage your time.

## **ATTENDANCE**

Regular and timely attendance is crucial in this class. Class attendance is required and I will take attendance at every session. If you don't show up for work, you will get fired – if you don't show up for class, your grade will be lowered. If you need an excused absence, notify me by email before the class you are going to miss. You will be responsible for all material covered in your absence, and your assignments will still be due at their scheduled times.

## **CLASS MATERIALS**

You will need adequate flash cards to complete the shooting of your assignments. It should be appropriate for your subject and presentation. You will need CDs for your photo assignments and photo stories and other selected outtakes. I will review your flash cards, story and shooting technique each week.

## **SUBMISSION OF ASSIGNMENTS**

**WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS:** Specific weekly expectations are listed in the course schedule and will be clarified in class. The following must be included in your envelope in order to receive a grade:

1. Your flash card burned to a CD
2. Printouts of your assignments
3. Captions and any additional information I need to know about your assignments

**COMPLETED PHOTO STORIES:** The following must be included in your envelope in order to receive a grade:

1. Your flash card burned to a CD

2. Printouts of your best photos
3. Accurate and extended captions including all pertinent information for each image
4. Hard copy of the story line
5. CD with folders containing the scanned photos, the written story file and captions

Use a large manila envelope. Place your name on the envelope. You may store all your projects on the same CD.

## **CLASSROOM PARTICIPATION**

Good ideas can get lost without the ability to sell them to skeptical editors. This class is an opportunity for you to shoot and edit your photos, and it is also an opportunity for you to develop the skills to articulate your ideas.

## **GRADING**

Grading each week over the semester will be based on accumulated points. Each project will be graded on your photo and caption. In the case of the photo story, your grade will be based on your photos, captions and ten inch story. Each weekly grade will be based on 100 points. The final grade for Basic Photojournalism will be 50% comprised of preliminary weekly grades and term papers, and 50% based on evaluation of the final photo story and final portfolio.

A	90-100%
B	80-89
C	70-79
D	60-69
F	59 and below, and I'll see you next semester

## **ACADEMIC HONESTY**

All work turned in for this class must be your own. Failure to comply with this will result in an F for your final grade. It is expected that you shoot new work for this class. Any act of academic dishonesty will result in expulsion from this class and referral to proper university authorities.

## **GUIDELINES**

1. Do not procrastinate. Start now.
2. Do some homework about your topic or subject. The better you understand the topic, subject or story, the more apt you will be to shoot meaningful pictures.
3. Go early and stay late. In the case of photo story, do not try to shoot the entire story in one hour on one day; make several trips to document your subject. Review what you have photographed and go back and rework the story.
4. All assignments should be shot like a photo story. Look for introductory or opening photographs, pictures that help set the scene and give readers location and supply important information.
5. Don't just shoot. Ask yourself, "Am I shooting pictures that reveal what my subject acts like and feels like, or am I just exercising mindless documentation?" There is a difference between what your subject does and what he feels about what he is doing.
6. Work your subject by using a variety of angles and distances. Don't be afraid to bend your knees, crawl on your belly, shoot vertical and horizontal images, or look for unusual or interesting perspectives.
7. Look for detail pictures that will help the reader understand more about your subject. These details are more than just graphic elements to offer visual variety. They are important and valuable pieces that give great interest to the whole.

8. Be sure to shoot a good portrait of your subject. A portrait gives the reader a chance to look the subject in the eye and study a face.
9. Get story caption information to go with your photos. Be a word reporter and ask questions.
10. Shoot enough photographs. Do not try to cover an assignment on one roll of film. I know it doesn't seem like it, but film is cheaper than your time.
11. Don't shoot just an event such as a parade or an auto race. Pick a personality/subject and show me who it is and what it is about.
12. Try to write a headline or topic sentence in your head. This will help you identify the theme and help you focus your shooting.

## **THE SHOOT**

THINK BEFORE YOU SHOOT. Photojournalism is very much a thinking person's art form. A lot of preparation takes place long before the shutter button is pressed. A photojournalist needs to have good ideas first and foremost. Good ideas take research. Yes, this means you will have to go on the internet, or crack a few books, magazines or newspapers, to find out more about a subject you are interested in photographing. The worst thing you can do is go into an assignment ignorant of the subject or of the subject matter you are photographing. You wouldn't go into a test without studying up for it, would you? OK, bad example. Or maybe not. Most of the time, if you go into a shoot unprepared, you will fall flat on your face and come out with weak pictures. This does not mean you have to do a term paper every time you go out to shoot something. Good ideas come from amazingly simple sources. Sometimes it is just a matter of talking to the reporter about the story, talking to the subject when you arrive, reading local newspapers, or watching television news programs. All of these can clue you in to issues and events in your community. Check with teachers in various departments at your school. There are always projects going on that you could be covering. There are thousands of good stories out there to do, but you have to go out and find them. They don't drop into your lap. Great photojournalists take advantage of luck that comes their way, but they don't rely on it for their success.

ONCE YOU ARE THERE. Take a light meter reading immediately, and get an idea of what your exposure is like. While doing this, look for a good vantage point to shoot from. Observe what is going on, and begin to anticipate moments. Talk to your subject. This will put him more at ease. A little time in the beginning with the camera down and taking an interest in your subject can pay off in better pictures that reflect your subject's trust and your interest in him as a person, not just another photo on your flash card or roll of film.

Mix it up. Shoot an overall of the situation. Then move in closer for a medium view. Then move closer still for a closeup. Then closer still for a super closeup. Change lenses if you have them. Shoot from unusual angles. Shoot vertical and horizontal frames. Be aware of what is going on around the fringe of your assignment.

WORK the situation. Take several frames of one scene, especially if you know it is a strong image. Why wait until the event is over and find that the one great photo in a story is out of focus? Cover yourself.

## **PICTURE STORY LAYOUT**

Your picture story should be a showcase of what you have learned in class. Make sure that all your photographs are the best that you can make –focused and properly cropped. I will be grading on your ability to develop a theme, and technical quality. Good luck.

1. Choose a dominant photo. The dominant photo is usually the picture with the most impact, the best single image, or the one picture that best reflects the pulse of the story. This image should be displayed at least twice the size of any other photo.
2. Arrange your photos so they work together to tell a story. Look at how pictures play off each other before you set the layout or design in stone (layouts should not drive the design of a picture story – PHOTOS should dictate the layout).
3. This is old fashioned: grab your pencil and do thumbnail sketches (miniature layouts) to determine size and picture relationship.

4. Edit out repetitious images. Repetition bores the viewer and wastes precious space. Don't repeat yourself. Arrange your pictures so your message or theme is clear.
5. Use a combination of vertical and horizontal images. Variety of shapes will help make the package more interesting.
6. Build your layout with consistent inner margins. This is called clustering. When clustering photos together with consistent inner margins, you push the majority of white or black space to the outside of the photo package.
7. Use a good portrait of your subject.
8. Choose one or two good detail shots to give added information and offer visual variety.
9. VERY IMPORTANT. Make sure you include your name and accurate caption and story information. Don't tell me that this is obvious.

## **PHOTO CRITIQUE FORM**

This is an outline of how I assess your work.

### **TECHNICAL**

\_\_\_\_\_ Erratic exposure. Be more careful with your metering.

\_\_\_\_\_ Improper use of flash. In most cases, I prefer that you not use flash. Your subject reacts to flash, creating unnatural looking photographs. If using the flash in necessary, it is best to remove the flash from your camera.

\_\_\_\_\_ Focusing problems.

\_\_\_\_\_ Generally overexposed.

\_\_\_\_\_ Generally underexposed.



## SHOOTING

\_\_\_\_\_ Use depth of field to clean up busy backgrounds.

\_\_\_\_\_ Need more variety and angles.

\_\_\_\_\_ Shooting is too loose.

\_\_\_\_\_ Shooting is too tight.

\_\_\_\_\_ No faces. Too many pictures of backs and sides of people.

\_\_\_\_\_ Improper use of wide angle lens. Watch tilt, distance and distortion.

\_\_\_\_\_ Machine gun shooting. Too many frames from the same position. Change angle, lenses, environments, timing and lighting. Look for moments.

\_\_\_\_\_ Weak composition. Failure to utilize arrangement guidelines such as framing, leading lines, depth of subject, dominance.

\_\_\_\_\_ Did not work the subject of photograph. Once you find a good subject, work it with a variety of lenses and angles. Watch for moments. Don't just take snapshots.

\_\_\_\_\_ No moments. Pictures lack a point of view or reason for being. You are not sure what you are looking for or doing. Watch, identify what is interesting, and then anticipate the peak of the action or the emotion.

\_\_\_\_\_ Poor editing. You picked the wrong frame.

## PICTURE STORIES

\_\_\_\_\_ No theme or story line is clear. A group of seemingly unrelated pictures that fail to convey a story.

\_\_\_\_\_ Not enough time invested. Good pictures usually require time and patience.

\_\_\_\_\_ Not enough visual variety. Need to change focal lengths, angles and environment. Remember to shoot wide shots, tight shots, detail shots, portraits, verticals and horizontals.

\_\_\_\_\_ Pictures lack feeling and emotions. Too many pictures of people showing what they are doing instead of how they feel about it. Example: here is Bob eating, working, etc. Boy, Bob is boring! What does Bob feel about his flowers? What is Bob's life like? Is he happy, sad, lonely? Don't just show me what Bob does, show me who Bob is.

\_\_\_\_\_ Pictures were shot at the same time of day. Go early. Stay late. Strive to show me revealing, behind-the-scenes, candid images that will surprise or involve me.

\_\_\_\_\_ No one key or representative picture that could be used as a theme or dominant picture. You need that one killer or foundation image that captures the essence of the story.

# Schedule

Week #1	T	Orientation and introduction
	Th	Camera mechanics

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Week #2	T	Camera mechanics
	Th	Exposure

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Week #3	T	Exposure
	Th	Image refinement

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Thursday - technique example I due

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Week #4	T	Seeing photos
	Th	The photo assignment

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Thursday - technique example II due

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Week #5	T	Portraits
	Th	Lighting

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Week #6	T	Digital imaging
	Th	<b>MID-TERM PAPER DUE</b>

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Week #7	T	Features
	Th	More on portraits

Thursday - portrait due

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Week #8		SPRING BREAK MARCH 8 – 12
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Week #9	T	Spot news
	Th	Sports

Thursday - feature due

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Week #10	T	The picture story
	Th	Exposure beyond the meter

Thursday - enviro due, story proposal due

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Week #11	T	& More on stories
	Th	General news

Thursday - sports due

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Week #12	T	More on image refinement
	Th	Digital camera

Thursday - night feature due

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Week #13	T	Artificial light
	Th	Color

Thursday - news due

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Week #14	T	Retrospective
	Th	The Law

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Week #15	T	Ethics
	Th	Picture editing

MAKE APPOINTMENT FOR INTERVIEW  
Thursday – **PICTURE STORY DUE**

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Week #16	T	The Portfolio
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MAKE APPOINTMENT FOR INTERVIEW

Thursday - **PORTFOLIO DUE**

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Week #17

Interview sessions

May 10 - 14