

Documentary Photography

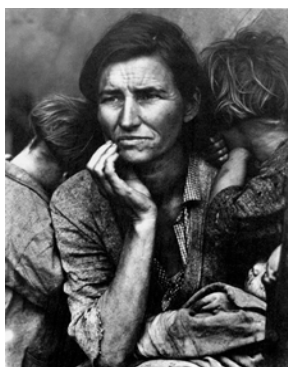
Course Syllabus

(Arts 229)

Fall, 2011
MWF 2:10 – 4:00 p.m.

Gregory Spaid, Instructor

Office Phone: 740 427 5976
Home Phone: 740 427 4522



COURSE THEMES

The central theme of this course is documentary photography, both as it has been practiced by others and as you will practice it in your own work. Another theme is the geographic location of Knox County, Ohio, a beautifully rolling rural landscape dotted with small towns and over 1200 small family farms. And yet another important theme is the art of telling stories with images and words.

COURSE GOALS

I have many goals for you in this course. Here is a list of several of those:

- to give you the opportunity to practice documentary photography and to produce projects you will be proud of and will in some way contribute to the community,
- to expand your understanding of the history of documentary photography,
- to increase your ability to work independently,
- to expand your general photographic knowledge and skill,
- to exercise your abilities as a storyteller,
- to expand your understanding of life in Knox County and Central Ohio,
- to create an atmosphere in the class which is conducive to being productive and cooperative,
- to conduct this course in a way that draws on your broad experience as students at a liberal arts college,
- to find fresh and creative approaches to doing documentary work,
- to work hard and have fun.

COURSE LOGISTICS

A general subject of the photography you will do in this course is Knox County, Ohio. To insure that all students in the course deal with the fullness and variety of what Knox County has to offer, I am imposing a simple rule: **the photography for this course must be done beyond the Kenyon campus.** This rule is designed to get you off Kenyon's campus and into the wider community in which we live. I am aware that this rule may present logistical problems for some of you who do not have easy access to transportation. So, now is that time to decide whether or not you can meet this requirement of the course. I should say that I feel you could get enough access to your subjects with strong legs and a bicycle or by taking advantage of the Kenyon/Mt. Vernon shuttle. Give some thought right now to how you will be able to get out into the county.

SENSITIVITY AND RESPONSIBILITY TO YOUR SUBJECT

Almost every successful documentary photographer I know feels a special responsibility to the people he or she is photographing. That responsibility is to treat your subjects fairly, honestly and with sensitivity to the circumstances of their lives. As students in this class, you will have an obligation to respect the special nature of your relationship with your subjects and to conduct yourself in a way that is worthy of respect. This does not mean you have to agree with or even like your subjects, but you must treat them with consideration. That is the minimum you can offer in exchange for asking them to open up their lives to you and your camera. And one more thing. As you work on assignments for this course you will be seen as a representative of Kenyon College by the people you meet. This could be an advantage to you in some circumstances and a disadvantage in others. Whichever it is, you need to remember that you are responsible to more than yourself. You will, in some small but important way, influence the way the people of Knox County think about Kenyon and the people who live, learn and work here.

SHORT ASSIGNMENTS AND EXTENDED PROJECTS

Throughout the course I will ask you to answer several **short assignments** designed to expose you to various aspects of documentary practice, such as the photo essay.

Twice in the course you will work on an **extended project** of documentary photography that you will design. There are almost limitless possibilities for the subject of your project, so many, in fact, that you should begin immediately to give some thought to what you may want to do. One of the challenges of working in the tradition of documentary photography is finding an approach that will present your work in fresh and creative ways. You may want to present a small exhibition (perhaps in a location other than the Kenyon campus). You may want to make a book with photographs and text, or an extended slide presentation with running narrative, or a website. As well as thinking about a subject for your project, you should also begin to think about the form it will take.

YOUR ORAL REPORT

One time during this semester you will be responsible for presenting a short talk to the class on an important documentary project or documentarian. This report can focus on documentary work from photography or other disciplines. If the work is visual, you should make digital slides to illustrate your talk. If the documentary work you are reporting on is not visual, you should prepare to read important passages from the original work. You will research your talk and write an outline to be passed out to the class when you give your talk.

GRADING

I feel I should clearly state that grading art is a highly subjective matter. To a great extent my grade is simply my opinion, but it is informed by many years of teaching and dealing with the issues of this course in my own creative work.

I wish I did not have to grade your work. There is something very artificial about grading art. Yet grading is a requirement of this college. Because I must grade you, I intend to do it carefully and often, to give you a good idea of where you stand in the course as we go. I will also do my best to keep the grading rigorous. I think the significant difference between an average effort and an extraordinary effort needs to be recognized by a significant difference in the grades received. For this course it will help you and me to think of grades this way:

- A a truly exceptional piece of work which seems to require nothing more to improve it or complete it,
- B a very successful piece of work which deserves praise, yet lacks something,
- C an average piece of work or average effort,
- D work which is complete, yet seems rushed, or careless, or thoughtless, or does not respond to the requirements of the assignment,
- F a failure, usually because it is significantly unfinished or missing entirely.

Grades for the course will be weighted:

short assignment grades, 1/10th each	4/10's
first extended project	3/10's
second extended project	3/10's

LATE WORK

All late work will be lowered one letter grade (example: A to B). Work is late if it is turned in after the critique of that work begins or after a project is due.

RE-EVALUATION POLICY

Work that is completed on time can be reworked and resubmitted one additional time for evaluation at any time before the end of the course. If you decide to rework a project, then the two grades will be averaged together to establish the new project grade. This policy is designed to encourage you to think of your work as fluid and evolving. It enables you to benefit from experience and from criticism, and to take risks, since nothing is absolutely finished until the last day of class.

AUDIT AND PASS/D/FAIL GRADING

This course cannot be taken for audit credit or for a pass/D/fail grade.

ATTENDANCE

Art classes are workshops, and everyone must be in class to work and to contribute to the progress of the class. I consider three unexcused absences excessive. After three, I will notify you that another unexcused absence will result in the lowering of your final grade by one grade

point (A to A-, for instance) for every additional unexcused absence. This could have very serious consequences on the final grade of anyone who persists in being absent.

EQUIPMENT REQUIRED

You will need a functional film camera. This does not need to be an expensive one. Your camera should have manual functions or a manual mode. You may also need a simple digital camera and some form of sound recording. Other equipment that would be helpful to you in this course, but is not required, includes a tripod, a hand-held light meter, an on-camera flash, and a medium or large format camera.

FURNISHED EQUIPMENT

A fully equipped darkroom in the Art Barn is available for your use, roughly from 6 a.m. until 2 a.m. each day – except when other classes are meeting. Please plan your work around those hours. There are also large format view cameras, light meters, and tripods that you will be free to check out and use.

STORAGE AND LOCKS

You will have a large flat storage drawer in the photography classroom for your use in storing your materials. You will need to get a lock for your drawer.

CHEMICAL MIXING

A lab assistant is hired to keep adequate chemicals mixed and available to you for the entire semester. If chemicals are not mixed when you need them, you should call the lab assistant. His or her name will be posted in the darkrooms.

HOUSEKEEPING

Keeping the photography studio and darkrooms clean and neat is **very important**. No one wants to clean up someone else's mess before they can start to work. It is also important to keep things straight and clean for reasons of health and safety. Chemical spills should be wiped up immediately. Broken equipment should be reported. Please remember, this is a communal darkroom and must be kept in good repair for the benefit of everyone. Neatness and organization is simply essential in a well-run photography facility.

USE OF ELECTRONIC DEVICES IN CLASS

Studio art classes are workshops designed to give you time to concentrate on your work and to benefit from the instructor's guidance and comments. During class, you are **not** permitted to use cell phones, iPods, laptops, or other devices that could interrupt your concentration and attention or the concentration and attention of others in the class.

OFFICE HOURS

Please come by to see me in my office, which is Bexley Hall 103. My office hours are MWF from 12:30 p.m. to 2:00 p.m., and by appointment.

CONTACTING THE INSTRUCTOR

By far, the best way to contact me is to come to my office during my office hours. Calling on the phone (740 427 5976) is also a good way to reach me. E-mail is fine, but often I read my email only once each day, so you may not get an immediate reply.

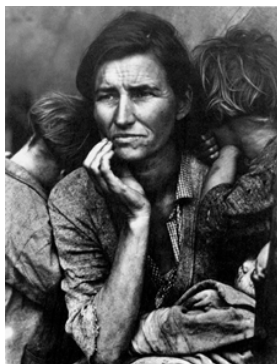
ACADEMIC ACCOMODATION

If you have a disability and feel that you may have need for some type of academic accommodation in order to participate fully in this class, please feel free to discuss your concerns with me in private and also contact Erin Salva, Coordinator of Disability Services at 427 5453 or via email at salvae@kenyon.edu.

IMPORTANT RESOURCES FOR THE COURSE

The Internet will be an important resource for viewing documentary work. For most assignments I will give you an Internet “viewing assignment” that will relate to the theme of the assignment. These “viewing assignments” will connect you to important documentary work throughout the world.

An important local resource to help you in this class is the primary newspaper of Knox County Ohio, *The Mount Vernon News*, www.mountvernonnews.com/ It will be an immediate source of ideas for your projects in this course and will keep you informed about what is happening in the county. A second local course of information about Knox County is the website of the Knox County Convention & Visitors Bureau, www.visitknoxohio.org/



Migrant Mother@ (Florence Thompson with her daughters: Norma, in her arms; Katherine, left; and Ruby) Nipomo, California, March 1936 by Dorothea Lange



Florence Thompson and her daughters Norma Rydlewski (in front), Katherine McIntosh, and Ruby Sprangue, at Norma=s house Modesto, California, June 1979" by Bill Ganzel

OPTIONAL TEXTS (both available in the Kenyon Bookstore)

Beyond Basic Photography by Henry Horenstein

Doing Documentary Work by Robert Coles

REQUIRED MATERIALS

The supplies for this course will cost you approximately \$400 if you shop of discounted prices. Otherwise, it would cost even more.

Reporter's notebook or other portable notebook

B & W Film of your choice, approximately 30 rolls (experiment with various types)

B & W, FB, Paper, 8 x 10" and 11 x 14" (the bookstore will be stocking Ilford

Multigrade FB and Ilford Warmtone FB, but feel free to experiment with other brands)

B & W, RC Paper, 8 x 10" for contact prints (the bookstore stocks Ilford Multigrade RC)

Variable Contrast Printing Filters (the bookstore has 6" Ilford Multigrade filters)

Three-Ring Binder for storing negatives and contact prints

Negative Storage Sheets for 3-ring binder for your negatives

Spotting Brush, number 000 or smaller

Portfolio Case or Portfolio Box for 11 x 14" prints (the bookstore carries Itoya Porfolio and Century Box)

Drymount Tissue for 11 x 14" prints (optional)

Archival Linen Tape (optional)

Archival Mat Board, smooth white, 2- or 4-ply, 16 x 20" or larger (the bookstore carries Westminster board from Light Impressions)

Mat Knife or Utility Knife

Replacement Blades for mat or utility knife

Metal Ruler, 18" or longer

Pad Lock, for your storage drawer

SOME SOURCES OF MATERIALS AND SERVICES

Photography Suppliers in Ohio:

Midwest Photo Exchange, 3313 N. High--614 261 1264

Cord Camera, 1132 W. Fifth, Columbus--614 299 7338

Columbus Camera Group, 55 E. Blake, Columbus—614 267 0686

Kenyon Bookstore, Gambier--427 5440

Elsewhere:

Freestyle, Los Angeles--1 800 292 6137

B&H Photo, New York City --1 800 606 6969

Adorama, New York City--1 800 216 7400

Calumet, Chicago--1 800 CALUMET

Documentary Photography Course Calendar

Fall, 2011

F Aug. 26 Introduction / First Assignment / Portrait Role Playing

M 29 Documentary Examples / Film and Film Development Review /
Presenting Text with Photographs

W 31 Printing and Photo Paper Review / Flattening and Spotting / Model
Releases

F Sept. 2 **Assignment #1 Due: 10 Strangers** / New Assignment

(Fredericktown Tomato Festival, Sept. 7 - 10)

M Sept. 5 Advanced B&W Workshop: The Zone System

W 7 Advanced B&W Workshop: Printing

F 9 Advanced B&W Workshop: Field Trip (reflectors and flash)

M Sept. 12 Oral Reports / Documentary Examples

W 14 Work in Class

F 16 Independent Fieldwork

(Mohican Bluegrass Festival, Sept. 15 - 17)

(Great Mohican Indian Pow Wow, Glenmont, OH, Sept 16 - 18)

(Mohican Blue Grass Festival, Sept. 16 - 17, location ?)

(O Winston Links photography show opening, Sept.17, B&O Railroad Depot, Mt. Vernon)

(Centerburg Oldtime Farming Festival, Sept 17 - 18)

M Sept. 19 **Assignment #2 Due: Photo Essay** / New Assignment

W 21 NO CLASS (Greg is at a aadigital storytelling workshop)

R 22 REQUIRED EVENT: Lecture by Jeff Brouws, 7:00 p.m.

F 23 Independent Fieldwork

M 26 Work in Class

W 28 **Assignment #3 Due: Typologies** / New Assignment

F 30 View Camera Workshop

(Utica Homecoming Fall Festival, Sept. 28 - Oct. 1)

(Heart of Ohio Tour, Oct. 1 - 2)

M Oct. 3 View Camera Workshop

W 5 View Camera Workshop

F 7 NO CLASS (October Reading Days)

M Oct. 10 Oral Reports / Documentary Examples

W 12 Work in Class

F 14 **Assignment #4 Due:** / Project Assignment

M Oct. 17 Oral Reports / Documentary Examples

W 19 Conferences

F 21 Conferences

M Oct. 24 Oral Reports / Documentary Examples

W 26 **Due: Stage I Project I**

F 28 Independent Fieldwork

M Oct. 31 Oral Reports / Documentary Examples

W Nov. 2 **Due: Project Stage II**

F 4 Independent Fieldwork

M	Nov.	7	Work in Class
W		9	Work in Class
F		11	Due: Project Final
M	Nov.	14	Digital Story Telling Workshop
W		16	Digital Story Telling Workshop
F		18	Digital Story Telling Workshop
Nov. 21 - 27 THANKSGIVING VACATION			
M		28	Work in Class
W	Dec.	30	Due: Family Ancestry Project Review
F		2	Independent Fieldwork
M	Dec.	5	Work in Class
W		7	Work in Class
F		9	Due: Family Ancestry Project / Last Class / Clean Up

This quote from Francis Bacon hung on Dorothea Lange's darkroom door from the time she was 28 until her death at age 70:

*"The contemplation of things as they are
Without error or confusion
Without substitution or imposture
Is in itself a nobler thing
Than a whole harvest of invention."*