

ELISE KIRK TEACHING PORTFOLIO

Teaching Philosophy

Course Descriptions

Syllabus: Introduction to Photography, Digital Practice and Personal Vision

Sample Assignment

Sample Midterm Feedback Form

When a very small child sees the dog, points and says, 'dog,' the parents go nuts with enthusiasm and think the kid is a genius.

The message is clear; in our culture the purpose of vision is to name and to classify. That's where the 'money' is.

What about the way light describes the dog's fur in the sun, in the shade; at night, with ghostlike moves in the hall? What of the shape of movement of the tail when happy or frightened, the tilt of the head, the messages that can be received through tiny body gestures that cannot be verbalized? How about the way the dog animates a room with its movements. And on and on. No rewards for any of this. The naming is what counts. Intelligence is measured in reading and math scores. When was the last scholarship given to someone for being receptive and observant?

How about a school system where the children spend six hours a day on art, poetry, music, dance, photography, painting, and so on. Twice a week the English teacher comes in with a cart to teach spelling and grammar for 40 minutes. The math teacher would do the same on alternate days. Then when there is a budget squeeze, people would plead and have bake sales to save the English program because the art program is unassailable.

-Philp Perkis. From *Teaching Photography: Notes Assembled*. CB Press 2005.

Teaching Philosophy

Elise Kirk Teaching Philosophy

I endeavor to teach the same way I learn, through project-based inquiry, and two factors are integral to that practice. One, that assignments be student-driven, and two, that those projects engage a process of discovery, placing more importance on questions than on answers. The intent of this approach is to foster in my students not only a new technical skillset, but also an alternative language for exploring and communicating meanings.

I am not a tech nerd. I've struggled through many dry lessons on bites and pixels and RAM and resolution. Yet I confidently and enjoyably use the powers of the digital camera and Photoshop to control the content, tone, and intent of my photography, and that is because I learned those tools as ways to problem-solve issues in my own work-- passion projects that I felt hell-bent on improving. It is this simultaneous and obsessive pursuit of personal work that allows new skills to absorb. That is why in my classroom, Open Lab Time is as vital as Technical Lectures. As the student hits a wall in her own image-editing, I am there as a guide to help locate a customized solution, like a new word learned in context; one with long term practicability. These skill-sets, applied meaningfully and often, eventually become fluency. What we do with our new language affects how we communicate with the world beyond the classroom, as lifelong learners.

I studied Documentary Film in college, and went on to have a decade-long career in non-fiction television production. The 'real job' born of a film degree blessed me with unimagined experiences traveling the globe, interpreting meanings into consumable visual and narrative packages. The problem I increasingly found though – the fatal flaw that forced my eventual return to graduate school and personal work – was the lack of room for discovery. On Assignment, greenlights were often attached to specifically proposed foregone conclusions, and the process of making was actually one of back-filling sound bites and b-roll and opinions that neatly led us there. The learning was lost in the telling.

As a filmmaker and photographer, I am a speaker and teacher of visual languages. For many students, these languages come much more naturally than the written or spoken word, and allow unprecedented access to exploring and communicating new meanings in the world around them. My basic classes may teach Proper Exposure and Photoshop layer masks – the grammar and punctuation. But my advanced classes invite students to use their new languages to develop self-proposed lines of inquiry, be it history of a place, personal identity, memory, gender representation, or effects of a new immigration law on a local community, etc. In this context, the student is the dominant seeker, and their colleagues and I are secondary and tertiary sets of eyes. With the perspective of distance, I help the student identify themes in her work, and think about editing, sequencing, and subsequent making to shape a perspective that can be communicated more widely. Not one that is foregone, but one that is arrived at through the process of making, more akin to conversation than lecture. Once put into practice, the process can be repeated again and again, beyond the classroom, as students become perpetual visual communicators, fully engaged in the world.

Course Descriptions

Introduction to Photography: Digital Practice and Personal Vision (WINTERSESSION)

January 8-February 6 (5 Weeks)

Class Meets Every Thursdays and Friday, 1pm – 6pm, plus two Wednesdays:

Wed 1/14 1pm – 6pm Field Trip

Wed 1/28 Individual Student Meetings to be scheduled between 1pm - 6pm

3 Credit Hours, Elective, Undergraduate.

No Prerequisites, but students should have their own Digital SLR camera and a portable hard drive, as well as proficiency with Macintosh computers.

\$100 Lab Fees.

Advancements in Digital Technologies allow unprecedented control of the photographic image, from tone to content, capture to print, technical precision to personal vision. This beginning-level course will introduce students to the digital camera and post-production workflows in Adobe Camera Raw and Photoshop, while also exploring a breadth of photographers working in a variety of genres, from portraiture to landscape, straight documentary to digital compositing. Class time will be divided equally between critiques of student work, discussions of historical and contemporary artists, technical instruction, and open lab time with the digital workstations. Processes of discovery and intent will be encouraged. By the end of the course students will have a working familiarity with their antecedents, will be comfortable with the digital camera and workflow, and will have a portfolio of work that demonstrates technical skill and the beginning of a personal style. No Prerequisites, but students should have proficiency with Macintosh computers and provide their own Digital camera and hard drive.

Intermediate Photography: Digital Control and Personal Vision

3 Credit Hours, Elective, Undergraduate.

Prerequisite: Introduction to Photography (Digital).

Students should have their own Digital SLR camera and a portable hard drive.

\$100 Lab Fees.

This intermediate level course continues the skills gained in Intro to Photography, while focusing on developing the student's personal approach to photography and unique visual style. Advanced technical instruction includes compositing and sophisticated channel selections and masking and color-accurate printmaking. Emphasis is placed on developing a preferred method of working (documentary, portraiture, diaristic, conceptual, to name a few), and students will be introduced to contemporary photographers working in each genre. Individualized assignments will cater to students interests in the first part of the semester, while the second semester will be devoted to developing and executing a self-assigned continuous (6-week) project. Class time will be divided equally between critiques of student work, discussions of contemporary artists, technical instruction and open lab time with the digital workstations. By the end of the class students will be comfortable making exhibition quality prints, and will have a

consistent portfolio that demonstrates unique vision and personal style. Prerequisite: Into to Photography, Digital.

Advanced: Photography and the Long Term Inquiry

3 Credit Hours, Elective, Undergraduate.

Prerequisite: Intermediate Photography (Digital or Analog), or equivalency demonstrated through a portfolio of work.

Students should have their own camera.

\$100 Lab Fees.

What is the point of photography? What is there new to say about or do with photography? Is photography dead? This class turns these ubiquitous questions on their head, and instead of investigating photography uses photography as a visual language to investigate the world. This advanced-level class is offered for those who are already proficient in their tools, and ready to use them to embark on a self-assigned course of inquiry. Examples may include history of a place or a personal history, personal identity or gender politics, effects of land usage on community, to name a few. Students will use photography (or investigation of photographic archives) to pursue their topic of interest, bringing new work to class each week for discussion. Emphasis will be placed on editing and sequencing as methods of shaping a clear perspective on the topic explored. Class time will be split between discussions of assigned readings (from historical and contemporary reviews such as Aperture) critiques of student work, and examinations of other long-term photo projects by artists such as Jeff Rich, Jen Davis, Adama Delphine Fawundu, to name a few. By the end of the class students will have a complete body of work that demonstrates perspective on the chosen topic, and the skills and confidence to begin and complete new projects independently going forward.

Sample Syllabus

Introduction to Photography: Digital Practice and Personal Vision (WINTER, 3 Credits)

Elise Kirk
ekirk@risd.edu

Design Center Room 310

Thursdays/Fridays, January 8-February 6
Plus Two Wednesdays, January 14 & 28

1:00-6:00pm

Advancements in Digital Technologies allow unprecedented control of the photographic image, from tone to content, capture to print, technical precision to personal vision. This beginning-level course will introduce students to the digital camera and post-production workflows in Adobe Camera Raw and Photoshop, while also exploring a breadth of photographers working in a variety of genres, from portraiture to landscape, straight documentary to digital compositing. Class time will be divided equally between critiques of student work, discussions of historical and contemporary artists, technical instruction, and open lab time with the digital workstations. Processes of discovery and intent will be encouraged. By the end of the course students will have a working familiarity with their antecedents, will be comfortable with the digital camera and workflow, and will have a portfolio of work that demonstrates technical skill and the beginning of a personal style. No Prerequisites, but students should have proficiency with Macintosh computers and provide their own Digital camera and hard drive.

GOALS:

- *To gain confidence with the Digital Camera and Digital Post-production workflows, including Adobe Camera Raw, Photoshop, and Epson Printers
- *To increase awareness of contemporary photography's precedents and genres
- *To begin development of a personal photographic vision

OBJECTIVES:

- *Technical proficiency of the camera and post-production workflows. 30%
- *Evidence of personal vision across a final portfolio of work (15 images) 30%
- *Criticality about their own work and that of their peers, as demonstrated through participation in group critique. – 40%

ASSESSMENTS:

- *Quizzes on technical functions of camera and editing programs - 15%
- *Final Portfolio of Work (15 prints) that demonstrates technical proficiency and personal vision – 45%

*Class Attendance and Participation – 20%

*Completion of Weekly Assignments for Discussion in Crit – 20%

Assignments will be given and completed on a weekly basis for discussion in Crit the following week. This work will be edited and refined throughout the semester in fulfillment of the Final Portfolio.

GUIDE TO ASSESSING CRITIQUE PARTICIPATION & PHOTOGRAPHIC WORKS:

Critique Discussion

Basic Competency: Students come prepared with completed assignments to present for peer discussion, and engage in a thoughtful dialogue about the work. The conversation is constructive and respectful.

Advanced Competency: Students presenting work do so with mindfulness of their own personal intent or approach, which may be nascent and difficult to articulate. Students critiquing work are generous in offering their own reads of the work, from craft to content and personal associations. Presenters are able to compare these reads to their own aims, and progress their work accordingly.

Portfolio of Work

Basic Competency: Students complete the technical exercises as assigned, indicating mastery of the camera and post-production tools. For the final Portfolio, students develop a framework, carry it out, and demonstrate cohesive style and cumulative intended effect across a body of work.

Advanced Competency: Students use the technical exercises to not only master their tools, but to begin to explore a content area of interest and develop a personal visual style. For the Final Portfolio (Self-Assigned Project), students are able to not only develop and execute a framework, but to use class discussions and initial shoots and edits to refine the initial framework to greater end result. The initial project is not necessarily carried out as proposed, but is an ongoing conversation in which the student learns to read her own work and respond to the suggestions it offers.

MATERIALS:

Digital Camera with Manual Controls

Portable Hard Drive (a second back-up Hard Drive is *highly* recommended)

Roll or Box of Printing Paper

TEXTS:

Required: *Digital Photography: A Basic Manual*, Henry Horenstein

Recommended: *Adobe CC For Photographers*, Martin Evening

Additional Readings will be available via Digication

WEEK 1: Introduction to the Camera, Digital File Organization, Intuitive Seeing

THURS JAN 8

INTRODUCTION TO CLASS

TECHNICAL DEMONSTRATION:

Navigating the Camera

PHOTO SLIDESHOW LECTURE:

Exposure Triangle. ISO, Aperture and Shutter Speed. Depth of Field and Freezing/Blurring Action.

OPEN LAB TIME:

Making proper exposures, controlling for Depth of Field and Motion.

FRIDAY JAN 9

PHOTO SLIDESHOW LECTURE:

Looking at Light

TECHNICAL LECTURE:

File Management: Adobe Bridge and Preview of Camera Raw. RAW v JPG.

OPEN LAB TIME:

Building personal organizational systems for growing photo libraries.

OUTCOMES:

- Navigation of the camera's manual settings.
- Control of exposure, using ISO, Shutter Speed, and Aperture
- Intentional stylistic application of shutter speed and depth of field.
- A RAW file shooting practice, and an understanding of its benefits of control.
- Organizational system for storing and editing a growing library of images.
- Comfort with the camera as an intuitive tool of discovery.
- Beginning of 'seeing photographically'.

ASSIGNMENT:

- Shoot 10 Images Correctly Exposed in-camera. Upload to Digication:
 - 2 which stop action
 - 2 which demonstrate movement
 - 2 long exposures (30 seconds minimum, night shots)
 - 2 with shallow depth of field
 - 2 with great depth of field.
- Free Shoot one 'Roll of Film' (24-36 Digital Exposures). Think of this as a visual notebook, in exploration of ideas that may arise for your ongoing personal project. See handout for optional prompts, or shoot everything of interest. Make 4x6 prints at CVS, Adorama, or another quick printing service.

READINGS:

Digital Photography: A Basic Manual Chapters 1-4
Perkis, Philip. From: *Television*. (Seeing the Dog).

WEEK 2: Adobe Camera Raw, Introduction to Prints and Photographing People

WED JAN 14

CRITIQUE OF STUDENT WORK:

Digital Slideshow of 10 correct exposures. 24-36 Prints Free Shoot.

TECHNICAL LECTURE:

Adobe Camera Raw and Global Corrections

OPEN LAB TIME:

Applying global adjustments to personal images.

THURS JAN 15

PHOTO SLIDESHOW LECTURE:

Photographing People, from candid to formal portraiture. Including: August Sander, Diane Arbus, Gary Winogrand, Tina Barney, Jen Davis

TECHNICAL LECTURE:

Introduction to Epson Printers and ImagePrint Software. Controlling Tonality.

OPEN LAB TIME:

Making and evaluating a test print.

FRIDAY JAN 16

FIELD TRIP:

1:00pm – RISD Museum: Photographic Prints at the Minskoff Center for Prints, Drawings and Photographs

3:30pm – RISD Library: Photo Books in Special Collections and Circulation

OUTCOMES:

- Use of Adobe Camera Raw to make global image corrections.
- Familiarity with Epson Printers and ability to make test prints.
- Visualization of the control gained by self-printing.
- Acquaintance with technically sound prints
- Awareness of photographers working in a variety of ways using people as their subject.
- Exploration towards a preferred method, from decisive moment to staged tableau.
- Experience with available RISD Resources (Museum and Library) for exploring photographic works

ASSIGNMENT:

- Photograph People. Experiment with approaches ranging from candid to formal portraiture. Upload 10 selects to Digication.
- Check out a photo book from the library that illustrates a unified photographic series of interest, and be prepared to present the work to class next week.
- Free Shoot another 'Roll of Film' as you think about possible parameters for the self-assigned project. Bring in a proposal ready for discussion next week, along with 2-3 sample images (printed on the Epson).

READINGS:

Digital Photography: A Basic Manual Chapters 7-8
Photography Book of your Choice.

WEEK 3: Adobe Photoshop and Photographing Place

THURS JAN 22

CRITIQUE OF STUDENT WORK:

Digital Presentation of People Pictures, 10 Each

STUDENT PRESENTATIONS:

Photo Book Share and Proposals for the Final Project

TECHNICAL LECTURE:

Photoshop and Local Corrections. Layers, Simple Selections, Masks.

OPEN LAB TIME:

Evaluating last week's test prints and making local adjustments to improve.

FRI JAN 23

PHOTO SLIDESHOW LECTURE:

Photographing Place. Including: FSA Photographers, Walker Evans, Stephen Shore, Robert Adams, Frank Gohlke, Thomas Gardiner, Thomas Demand...

TECHNICAL LECTURE:

Preparing images for printing. Resizing, Resolution and Sharpening.

OPEN LAB TIME:

Preparing and making improved prints.

OUTCOMES:

- Use of Adobe Photoshop for local image corrections and print preparation.
- Awareness of Photographers working in a variety of ways using the landscape as their subject.
- Enthusiasm for Photographers utilizing approaches of personal interest.
- Beginning frameworks for using the camera to explore with intent.

ASSIGNMENT:

- Shoot a Landscape (in the broadest sense: can include Social Landscape, Geological Landscape, an interior Domestic Scene, or a fantastical place). Spaces can be created or found, manipulated or untouched. Upload 5-10 digital selects to Digication.
- Work on your personal project, and make 10-15 Prints (on the Epson Printers) of your work in progress.

READINGS:

Essay: Robert Adams, *Why People Photograph*

Essay: Frank Gohlke, *Thoughts on Landscape: Photography and Place AND Stories in the Dirt, Stories in the Air*

WEEK 4: Advanced Post-Production and Personal Intent

WED JAN 28

TBD:

Open Lab Time and Guest Artist Talk *OR* Individual Meetings on Self-Assigned Projects

THURS JAN 29

CRITIQUE OF STUDENT WORK:

Digital Critique of Landscape Images.

Print Critique of the Self-Assigned Project, with special attention given to evolving the project in its next stage.

FRI JAN 30

PHOTO SLIDESHOW LECTURE:

Compositing. Including: Historical Analog Methods, Gregory Crewdson, Kelli Connell, Ben Gest, Matthew Clowney...

TECHNICAL LECTURE:

More Advanced Selections and Masks, Color Correcting, Loose-Ends

OPEN LAB TIME:

Printing for Final Portfolio

OUTCOMES:

- More sophisticated mask-making and color correcting in Photoshop.
- Familiarity with photographers who incorporate Digital Manipulation in their practice.
- Ability to read and respond to personal photographic images in pursuit of a larger body of work.

ASSIGNMENT:

- Shoot 2-3 images on a tripod in preparation for compositing
- Continue work on the personal project. Upload Completed Series (10-15 images) to Digication.
- Complete your Final Portfolio: 15 Technically Sound Prints (up to 5 can be from other class assignments, but at least 10 should be from your personal project)

WEEK 5: Compositing and Cumulative Body of Work

THURS JAN 5

TECHNICAL LECTURE:

Compositing

OPEN LAB TIME:

Working on composites, finishing portfolios

FRIDAY JAN 6

FINAL CRITIQUE OF STUDENT WORK:

15 Prints, at least 10 of which must be from the Self-Assigned Project.

OUTCOMES:

- Simple composites and special effects in Photoshop.
- Resolution of any lingering questions in Photoshop.
- Technical and Stylistic Control of Printmaking.
- Demonstration of personal vision and technical proficiency across a sustained body of work.

RESOURCES

Stores:

B&H: <http://www.bhphotovideo.com>

Adorama: <http://www.adorama.com>

KEH: <https://www.keh.com>

Reviews:

Digital Photography Review: <http://www.dpreview.com>

Publications/Blogs:

Aperture: <http://www.aperture.org/blog/>

Lenscratch: <http://lenscratch.com>

FlakPhoto: <http://flakphoto.com>

Onward Forward: <http://www.onwardforward.com>

Tutorials:

Lynda.com (Free Access with RISD ID) <http://www.lynda.com>

Software:

Carbon Copy Cloner: <https://bombich.com>

Prints:

CVS Photo <http://www.cvsphoto.com/Prints>

Adorama Pix: <http://www.adoramapix.com/app/products/prints>

ATTENDANCE

3 Absences constitute a failing grade

2 Absences in a row constitute dismissal from the Course

3 Late Arrivals (10 minutes or later) constitute one Absence

Sample Assignment

Introduction to Photography

Self-Assigned Personal Project: From Intuitive Discovery to Declared Intent

The purpose of the Self-Assigned Project is to allow the student to engage fully in a content area of personal interest, while learning to define and tweak parameters of a project and carry it through to completion. The project provides opportunity to develop a personal photographic vision and style, which should be evident in the cohesiveness of the completed body of work (10-15 images).

Parameters for the project are self-assigned and specific, should lend themselves to cumulative effect, and can range from geography to subject to mood. Think of the project as an inquiry, a line of questioning, an investigation, or an exploration -- Not an answer or conclusion.

Some examples may include:

- Photographs made within a clearly defined 3-block radius of a town, in an exploration of local identity
- Photographs of lawn art over a wide geography, investigating collective differences or similarities of identities (religious, political, community)
- Candid Portraits of people that suggest interiority, in a cumulative exploration of state of mind
- Photographs experimenting with visual translations of anxiety, as described through light, color, composition, or subject matter

The Self-Assigned Project will be ongoing throughout the course, transitioning from an intuitive process of discovery to one with declared intent. Milestones are as follows:

WEEK 1

Free Shoot at least one 'roll' of film (24-36 exposures). Consider this a photographic sketchbook, in exploration of ideas that may arise in the work. Carry the camera with you everywhere you go, keep it on your bedside table. Shoot everything that interests you, without asking why. Make 4x6 prints at CVS, Adorama, or another one-hour printing service.

Outcome: Comfort with the camera as an intuitive tool for exploring visual ideas; Experience with the process of discovery.

WEEK 2

Discussion of Visual Notes. Come to class with your prints of photographs made intuitively over a week's time. Be prepared to identify and discuss themes or approaches emerging in the work for potential further development.

Outcome: Experience looking at and reading photographic imagery; Ability to constructively and respectfully provide and receive peer feedback, and to work through imprecise thoughts in pursuit of greater clarity (10%)

WEEK 3

Project Proposal Due. A statement of your parameters, and the cumulative effect you hope they might achieve. These will be revisited and refined as your project gets off the ground, but let us know what you are starting with.

Outcome: Ability to articulate a deliberate conceptual framework and visualize the steps to carry it through (5%)

WEEK 4

10-15 Photographs that reflect the stated parameters. Be prepared to receive feedback on and discuss whether the intended cumulative effect is evident in the work. Refine the project parameters accordingly, and re-shoot.

Outcome: Demonstration of photographic vision in response to the self-assigned framework. Constructive and respectful response to others' work in the context of the stated framework, and identification of where there is parity in intention and outcome, and where there may be room for improvement. (35%)

WEEK 5

A final edit of 10-15 photographs (including images from the original edit and follow-up shoots).

Outcome: Demonstration of cohesiveness and intended cumulative effect across a body of work, and flexibility in getting there. (50%)

ASSESSMENT:

Basic Competency: Students develop a framework, carry it out, and demonstrate cohesive style and cumulative intended effect across a body of work.

Advanced Competency: Students are able to not only develop and execute a framework, but to use class discussions and initial shoots and edits to refine the initial framework to greater end result. The initial project is not necessarily carried out as proposed, but is an ongoing conversation in which the student learns to read her own work and respond to the suggestions it offers.

Sample Midterm Feedback Form

Introduction to Photography: Midterm Feedback Form

COURSE GOALS:

- *To gain confidence with the Digital Camera and Digital Post-production workflows, including Adobe Camera Raw, Photoshop, and Epson Printers
- *To increase awareness of contemporary photography's precedents and genres
- *To begin development of a personal photographic vision

How would you rate your comfort / proficiency in the following areas, on a Scale of 1-5:

<p>5 – Very Proficient. Can fluidly apply the tools or knowledge base to the production of personal work.</p> <p>(Though with room for continued growth in the area through advanced/specialized study).</p>	<p>1 – Uncomfortable. Do not feel adept at using the tools or knowledge base in the production of personal work.</p>
---	---

CAMERA

1) Making a proper exposure with the manual settings of the camera, while deliberately controlling for depth of field, freezing or blurring of action, and level of noise.	5	4	3	2	1
2) Controlling auxiliary functions on the camera: White Balance, Menu Settings, JPG/RAW, etc.	5	4	3	2	1

POST-PROCESSING TOOLS

3) Organizing a catalog of images for optimum workflow. Have a system for managing a growing collection of digital negatives, working files, and final print files.	5	4	3	2	1
4) Ability to make global adjustments in Adobe Camera Raw such as tonal corrections, sharpening, noise and lens corrections.	5	4	3	2	1
5) Ability to make local corrections in Adobe Photoshop using Layer Masks, Selection Tools and Curves Adjustments.	5	4	3	2	1

PRINTING

6) Ability to prepare a file for output to the printers, including flattening and sharpening.	5	4	3	2	1
7) Ability to make a print with Epson Printers that matches your intentions for color/tonal range.	5	4	3	2	1

CONTEXT

8) An understanding of other photographers working in ways similar to your own, and a readiness to address comparisons made with your work.	5	4	3	2	1
---	----------	----------	----------	----------	----------

CRITICALITY

9) An ability to discuss intention in your work, and an understanding of how it may differ from or mirror readings of your work by an audience.	5	4	3	2	1
10) An ability to offer readings of other people's photographs, and contribute to a thoughtful dialogue about intention, process, and outcome.	5	4	3	2	1

COMMENTS:

For questions rated 1 or 2 (lacking proficiency), please use the area below to detail those areas in need of improvement, and any feedback for covering the material in a more effective manner.