COMM 242: Advanced News Photography
Instructor’s office: 321 Minard, North Dakota State University, Fargo. Office hours: 9:30-11 Tuesdays and Thursdays, and by appointment. Tel: 231-7295; e-mail: ross.collins@ndsu.nodak.edu. Web site: www.ndsu.edu/communication/collins.

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Also recommended: Class web site resources page, www.ndsu.edu/communication/collins. Choose Classes link, and Comm 260 Resources.

Course objectives
• To understand the development of photojournalism and its importance in a visually-oriented world.
• To understand the requirements of professional-level photojournalism.
• To learn these requirements through a series of creative exercises designed to produce photographs of near professional-quality standards.
• To critically evaluate these and other photographs based on accepted professional standards.
• To gain a minimum level of technical skill using equipment essential to requirements of contemporary photojournalism.

Required equipment
A 35-mm Single Lens Reflex, fully-adjustable digital camera with normal standard lens, or film equivalent. This is minimum requirement; strongly recommended is a second lens of 135 or 200 mm, or a zoom lens in the range of 35 mm to 135 mm, and a detachable electronic flash. Most professionals now use digital cameras, but because professional-standard digital equipment is still costly ($500, more for SLR), some of us will rely on traditional film cameras and negative scanners or CD burning services. You can learn the basics either way.

Not acceptable: Most “point-and-shoot” cameras, 35 mm or other format, digital or film. Professional photojournalists do not use this equipment, which is too limited for most photojournalism. (These cameras normally have no ability to accept interchangeable lens, adjust f-stops/shutter speeds, and may have only a small built-in electronic flash.)

Also required:
Because this class will rely on digital darkroom techniques as practiced by 98 percent of today’s photojournalists, no darkroom equipment or chemicals will be required. However, some of us will be shooting standard color print film, and processing that film. Students using film can expect to buy at least ten 24-exposure color print films, and pay for processing (only negatives and proof card or CD are required) throughout the semester. Total cost: around $100. You’ll need a CD or flash drive to store photos.

Attendance
This is a small, seminar-style class. That means we adopt an informal approach, and that you have lots of opportunities for individual attention. It also means your absence will be noticed. However, on principle the instructor does not grade attendance. Nevertheless, in-class lecture information not available in the text may be part of exams, and in-class assignments cannot be made up (see below under Grading).

Grading
Grading will be based on a standard point-count. Tentative highest possible point totals for this course:
Midterm, 100 pts.
Final, 150 pts.
Photo assignments and projects: 350 pts
Photoshop and other assignments: 100 pts.
Final portfolio: 100 pts.
Total: 800 pts.

The total number may change slightly, depending on the eventual number of assignments completed during the semester. Standard grade percentages:
90-100=A
80-89=B
70-79=C
60-69=D
Below 60=F
Note: bylined publication in the Spectrum of any photo taken for a class project will earn 5 extra credit points; publication in the Forum will earn 10 extra credit points; publication anywhere else will earn 5 extra credit points. Submit tearsheet for proof.

Out-of-class assignments handed in late will be accepted, but grades will suffer according to the length of tardiness. In-class assignments cannot be made up. Students who miss a class in which such an assignment is completed will receive an F on that assignment. However, the instructor realizes students occasionally have unavoidable conflicts, so will offer two free “skip days.” In-class assignments missed on those days will be dropped from final grade computation. Think of this as your “bank account” of skip days.

Official University Notices
Disabilities: If you need special accommodations for learning or have special needs, please let the instructor know as soon as possible.

Academic dishonesty/plagiarism: Work in this course must adhere to the NDSU Code of Academic Responsibility and Conduct. This addresses cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, or facilitating dishonesty. Instructors have the right to respond to a student’s dishonesty by failing the student for the particular assignment or test, or even the entire course, or recommend the student drop the course.

Recommended reading: The best way to learn is to study great photojournalists and their work, including Alfred Eisenstadt, Jacob Riis, Robert Capa, W. Eugene Smith, Weegee, Dorthea Lange, Lewis Hine, and the National Press Photographers Association yearbooks.

Tentative 2007 Schedule

Week One (Jan. 8-12): Introduction: what is photojournalism? The ten principles. Assignment one. Read Kobré Ch. 1.


Week Four (Jan. 29-Feb. 2): The nature of light. Photoshop exercise three. Read Kobré Ch. 10. Assignment two due.


Week Eight (Feb. 26-March 2): Color theory. Midterm exam is Friday, March 2. Assignment four due.

Week Nine (March 5-9): History of photography. Special problems: travel photography. Read Kobré Ch. 7.

Week Ten (March 19-23; March 12-16 is spring break, no classes): Continue history of photography. Photoshop exercise seven. Assignment five due.

Week Eleven (March 26-30): Special problem: photographing people. Photoshop exercise eight. Read Kobré Ch. 5.

Week Twelve (April 2-6; Friday and Monday, Easter break, no classes): The art of seeing. Assignment six due.


Week Fourteen (April 16-20): Preparing a portfolio. Read Kobré Ch. 15. Assignment seven due.


Week Sixteen (April 30-May 4): Present portfolios. Last class day: Friday, May 4.

Final exam: 8 a.m. Tuesday, May 8.
Photojournalism
Tentative assignments for Spring Semester 2007

**Processing and deadlines**

You need to arrange your own image processing. If you are using a film camera, Monarch Photo on 25th Street South (near Boppa’s Bagels) can provide a professional job, but some photojournalists swear by Wal-Mart’s quick service. Prints may be scanned on university cluster scanners, but many students find the CD service offered by finishers to be the easiest. Shoot color negative film (Kodak Gold 100 often seems to be on sale). Of course, if you use a digital camera, merely download as convenient. For each assignment you need to submit two or more digitalized photos by due date for class critique. (You can submit by email attachment, jpgs only, please, no larger than about 500 pixels by 500 pixels, to ross.collins@ndsu.edu.)

Obviously, this means you must plan ahead so you have time to scan those negatives if necessary and choose, crop and correct in Photoshop. Professional photojournalists know the value of timeliness: photos submitted after a publication’s deadline are useless. To reflect this professional standard, the instructor cannot accept excuses for late assignments blamed on processing delays. Plan ahead, please!

*Note:* These should all be new work. I can’t accept photos you took last summer, or photos pulled from your album. I’m counting on your honesty here; if something in an image makes clear that it was taken before this semester (like a football game, Fargo fall foliage, your Christmas Holiday tree), I can’t give you credit.

**Assignment One**

a. Dramatic angles. Get used to your camera by shooting a couple dozen frames of people or scenes around campus from unusual angles. You might shoot down from the top of a stair. Or shoot up lying on your back. Or shoot someone framed by something else. Or really close in on something. Or shoot a seldom-seen view of something. Use your creativity, as long as: 1) it’s not the common viewpoint; 2) at least half your photos have people in them. Prepare for critique at least two photos taken from unusual angles. I suppose I don’t need to tell you not to try anything dumb like lying on the railroad tracks or shooting down the campus smokestack? Hey, it’s been done. I’ve read about it in the obituaries.

b. Meeting folks. Shoot a couple dozen frames of people doing things on campus, preferably outside, but in well-lit buildings (window light recommended; the Minard coffee bar is ideal) if it’s too cold. Take candid (unposed) pictures of people you do not know. After taking their picture, approach at least two or three of these subjects. Explain that you are doing a class photojournalism assignment, and ask for their names, including proper spelling. Right down names on a notepad, numbered in sequence so you can later match your names to photos (you may wish to also describe surroundings to help you later match the name to the image). Prepare for critique at least two which you believe best show life on campus, and include cutlines with idents.

Submit four photos total.

**Assignment Two**

Light fantastic. Interesting photos relying on several common qualities of light. (Well, without light, we couldn’t make photos at all!) Include at least three different examples from these options:

- strong natural light, dramatic shadows and highlights. May be sunlight, strong window light.
- flash on camera, pointed directly at subject. If you don’t have a flash, try setting up a spotlight or lamp.
- flash off camera, bounced off a ceiling or wall. If your flash won’t bounce, try a white hankie or Kleenex to diffuse the harsh electronic light.
- diffused light, cloudy day, classroom, filtered through window.
- colored light: incandescent, fluorescent, candle.

Include people in at least half your photos. Prepare at least three examples; include written cutlines describing the light.

**Assignment Three**

Compose yourself. Identify elements of photo composition, and compose them in a way you believe produces a more dynamic photograph. Try to emphasize a single element you think dominates more than any other. Shoot a few
frames you know to be considered “composition mistakes,” to compare differences. At least half your photos must include people. Prepare at least four examples, including cutlines describing the compositional element emphasized, or the “compositional mistake.”

**Assignment Four**

Special topic, news and features. Choose a newsy event to cover: a speech, a press conference, a meeting, a protest, a concert, bad weather, an accident, etc. Shoot at least 25 exposures, trying to emphasize unusual angles, getting in close, interesting lighting, etc. Photos must contain people, and include idents, unless people are part of crowds or too far away for easy identification. Submit at least three photos with cutlines for critique.

*Note:* two of these photos must *not* include direct flash on camera, but may include bounced flash using cardboard, the walls, or the ceiling. Or natural lighting, of course. Color correct lighting in Photoshop, if necessary.

**Assignment Five**

Special topic, travel photography. Take an opportunity over spring break to offer a “sense of place” through a photo story. Prepare at least three photos, including:

• one long or medium photo to establish the scene.
• one photo of a significant detail.
• one informal portrait of a person doing something.
• other photo you think helps tell the story, emphasizing people.

All photos must include cutlines, although you don’t have to get idents for this travel feature. By the way, snaps of your friends at the beach or in the bar don’t constitute a “sense of place” for this assignment.

If you’re not going anywhere, use your home town or even Fargo as a travel project.

**Assignment Six**

Special topic, personality portraits. At least 25 frames emphasizing personality portraits: people doing things that help to tell a story of their character. You may rely on friends or relatives as subjects, but they *cannot* 1) just stand or sit there looking directly into the camera (formal mugshot); 2) be talking on the telephone, sitting at an office desk, shaking someone’s hand, typing at a computer or reading a book, unless you can find a radically new and different approach. Avoid photojournalism clichés! Submit at least two photos; all photos must be of people, no more than one, two or three together, with idents. Try to avoid flash on camera. Try bounce flash, or natural lighting. Color correct lighting in Photoshop, if necessary.

**Assignment Seven**

Special topic: sports. Choose any sport you like, and shoot at least 25 dynamic action shots emphasizing the excitement of the sport. Recommended are daytime outdoor sports, as these offer most forgiving light needed to stop fast action. Try to get as close as you can to the action; some sports are difficult to photograph without telephoto lenses. Board games (a chess tournament, for instance) probably don’t count for this assignment, but if you can convince me with great photos, okay. Indoor sports action photos may be taken with flash on camera, although I discourage it. Try high-speed film and available light instead.