

School of Journalism -- University of Southern California

Tuesday/Thursday 11-12:30 p.m. ASC G38

Visual journalism: Developing your passion for visual story telling.

Mission and outcome.

Analyze and explore the phenomenal increase of photographic storytelling in today's media. Learn how to convey information quickly while developing your ability to spot visual potential in news and feature reporting. Learn the key skills today's visual storytellers must possess in a world of converging media. Sense, select and perceive visual messages both in the professional and everyday world.

At the end of the semester, students will have developed visual storytelling projects, using words and pictures to produce pieces with the potential to change societal attitudes. They will have given a voice to people and told stories that haven't been told before. Topics may include class, race, culture, the environment, social, economic and political themes. Students will understand the meaning and ethics of images that they make, use and see.

Students will be encouraged to concentrate on the type of assignments they want to specialize in as professionals.

The course gives students skills in picture display, presentation and instills ethical behavior in the professional media world.

This class is designed for print and broadcast journalism and public relations majors.

Instructor: Rick Meyer, Photojournalist

Prerequisites: NONE

Recommended reading

Visual Communication. "Images with Messages" by Paul Martin Lester.
Visual Journalism. "A Guide For New Media Professionals" by Christopher R. Harris, Paul Martin Lester.
Visual Intelligence. "Perception, Image, Manipulation and Visual Communication" by Ann Marie Barry.
Photojournalism. "The Professional's Approach" by Ken Kobre.

Various handouts provided throughout the semester.

Additional reading

You should be aware of local and national news, and read a newspaper of record every day, such as the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times or the Orange County Register. National Public Radio and various news Web sites provide important news as well.

Topics

The goal of the class is to provide you with an advanced understanding of visual thinking and storytelling. We will explore routine reporting assignments and find the visual imagery that helps tell the story quickly and fairly.

Students will research issues and ideas both in person and using sophisticated search methods on the Web. Several projects will be completed using various story-telling media. This could include print, video and Web-based media.

Attendance

Good attendance is mandatory if you expect to pass the class. Tests and assignments cannot be made up except in the most serious medical situations.

You may not make up quizzes. All assignments must be turned in on time. If there are religious holidays you observe or unusual situations that require you to miss class, please let me know about them as far in advance as possible, preferably at the beginning of the semester.

Current events

Please read local newspapers and news magazines. Almost every week there will be some type of exercise or quiz about current events as they relate of visual thinking.

Portfolio

At the end of the semester, I will review your portfolio. This could be your class work or your real working portfolio.

Grading

I look at several factors when grading. I estimate your experience and then measure your improvement. Not all grading can be from tests. As visual thinkers, I look for your technical ability, your ability to "see" images, the creative insights you have for visual story telling. The amount of effort you expend on your class work will have a direct positive relationship to your grade.

65% Weekly assignments and final project

25% Quizzes and final exam

10% Class participation

A = Excellent. Professional quality product. Flawless technique. Relevant and insightful work.

B = Good. Competent use of storytelling ability and images. Good technique.

C = Acceptable. Average visual messages.

D = Poor. Unsatisfactory and flaw-filled. This work is not publishable.

F = Unacceptable. Thoroughly unprofessional. A total failure to execute the assignment.

All assignments will be critiqued in class.

Please note that successful visual thinking is not about perfection; it is about problem solving, being proactive and investing your time wisely. Your out-of-class time usually includes 8 hours of homework and assignments per week. I will hold you to professional standards because I know you are capable of them.

Visual Journalism Project. Organization of photographic coverage, the implementation of that coverage, editing the results and ultimately the layout of the finished product. The project will show how words, graphics and especially pictures work together in concert to inform the public.

Midterm Exam. Comprehensive exam of class presentations, demonstrations, assignments and projects from weeks 1-7.

Final Exam. Comprehensive exam of class presentations, demonstrations, assignments and projects from weeks 8-15.

Minimum equipment and supplies.

Digital camera (3 mega pixel or bigger) with manually adjustable shutter speeds and apertures. Check out cameras are available

USB thumb drive or blank CD-ROMs for turning in assignments and storing stories and images.

Courtesy

Please keep cell phones and pagers set to “vibrate” or “off” during class. Please leave the classroom to handle emergency business without disturbing others.

Make sure the computer lab and classroom are clean before you leave. Respect your colleagues and friends by keeping your community workspace neat. Sorry, but no food or drinks are allowed in the computer lab/classroom.

Internships

The value of professional internships as part of the overall educational experience of our students has long been recognized by the School of Journalism. Accordingly, while internships are not required for successful completion of this course, any student enrolled in this course who undertakes and completes an approved, non-paid internship during this semester shall earn academic extra credit herein of an amount equal to one percent of the total available semester points for this course.

Deadlines

Deadlines are not a goal: A late assignment WILL affect your final grade.

Even if you can't come, someone else can deliver your assignment by deadline.

PLAN AHEAD. If you are reporting or photographing at the last minute and something goes wrong, you won't have time to solve the problem. Report and shoot your assignments early in the week so you can redo the assignment if your story falls through, access isn't what you expected, subjects aren't cooperating, or you are having technical problems.

If you observe a religious holiday when class meets or if you become ill on the day of class, make arrangements to turn your materials in on time. See "Grading" above.

Critiques

All assignments will be critiqued in class. Students will be expected to evaluate and comment on each other's work. Your comments should constructively point out the good and the bad, without being overly critical.

IMPORTANT STATEMENTS USC SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY

The following is the School of Journalism's policy on academic integrity as published in the University Catalog.

Since it's founding, the USC School of Journalism has maintained a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found guilty of plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on examinations, or purchasing papers or other assignments will immediately receive a failing grade in the course and will be dismissed as a major from the School of Journalism. There are no exceptions to the school's policy.

PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is defined as taking ideas or writings from another and passing them off as one's own; in journalism, this includes appropriating the reporting of another without clear attribution. The following is the Annenberg School of Journalism's policy on academic integrity as published in the University catalog: "Since its founding, the USC School of Journalism has maintained a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found guilty of plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on examinations, or purchasing papers or other assignments will receive a failing grade in the course and will be dismissed as a major from the School of Journalism. There are no exceptions to this policy."

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is 213-740-0776.

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Bio for Rick Meyer, Photojournalist

Currently a part-time faculty member at USC's School of Journalism. Rick teaches Photojournalism, Advanced Photojournalism, Visual Journalism and Photo Editing. He was also a faculty member at UCLA Extension where he taught photojournalism for 10 semesters. A Los Angeles Times' staff photographer from 1974 – 2001, Rick frequently worked on the Photo Assignment Desk where he directed photo coverage, edited photographers' work, and presented the finished product to the editors. Rick also covered local, national and international assignments for the newspaper.

While at the Times, Rick was included in two group Pulitzer Prizes for his contributions to the Northridge earthquake and Los Angeles riots coverage. Rick was also an individual Pulitzer Prize nominee for spot news.

While at USC, in 2005, Rick was selected for a top teaching award. He was honored for enriching the academic experience for students, both on and off campus.

Education

Pepperdine University, M.B.A
Pepperdine University, B.A., Journalism
Los Angeles Valley College, A.A., Photojournalism

Professional Affiliations

Press Photographers Association of Greater Los Angeles, Past President.
National Press Photographers Association.

Week 1, January 14

Orientation, student & instructor expectations.

The class schedule. (assigned reading handout)

Student profiles.

New roles for Journalists. (assigned reading handout)

You are a visual reporter. Your tools: Pen, camera, video, sound and computer skills.

Characteristics of visual journalism. (assigned reading handout)

New media reality check. (assigned reading handout)

January 17

Internet: How to gather information and images. (assigned reading handout)

Careers in the interactive multimedia world. (assigned reading handout)

How photographic storytelling is used in today's media. (assigned reading handout)

What is photojournalism? Editing exercise. (assigned reading handout and exercise)

Assignment: Good and Bad Photojournalism Analysis

Week 2, January 22

Visual journalists: cool, detached professional or sensitive, involved citizen? (assigned reading handout)

Visual cues within photographs. (assigned reading handout)

Visual messages. Why we remember. (assigned reading handout)

Personal, historical, technical, ethical, cultural, and critical.

January 24

Photojournalism ethics. (assigned reading handout and exercise)

Picture story research. (assigned reading handout)

Creative problem solving. (assigned reading handout)

What makes a photo story? Photo story exercise. (assigned reading handout)

Assignment: Find, interview and photograph a person previously unknown to you. Due in two weeks.

Assignment: Five-topic method. Due next week.

Week 3, January 29

Critique: Good and Bad Photojournalism Analysis

First Edit: Person previously unknown to you. (assigned reading handout)

PhotoMechanic (assigned reading handout and exercise)

Are you visually literate? (assigned reading handout)

Five ethical concerns. (assigned reading handout and exercise)

Who are visual truth tellers? (assigned reading handout)

January 31

Visual messages within photographs. (assigned reading handout)

To sense, to select, to perceive.

Organizing a visual story. (assigned reading handout and exercise)

Digital darkroom. Photoshop, PhotoMechanic, InDesign. (assigned reading handout)

Where are your ethics? (assigned reading handout)

Principles of telling the truth, objectivity and newsworthiness.

Assignment: Homelessness in Los Angeles. Story research due in two weeks.

Week 4, February 5

Critique: Person previously unknown to you.

Pulitzer Prize images: Photos that make a difference. (AV presentation)

Working around pictorial stereotypes. (assigned reading handout)

Bad photographers or bad assignments? (assigned reading handout and exercise)

February 7

The five different visuals in any story. (assigned reading handout)

Overall scene-setter, head and shoulders portrait, close-up detail, medium distance interaction, ending picture.

Ethics, truth, and honesty in photo reporting. (assigned reading handout)

Why publications lie with photos. (assigned reading handout)

Week 5, February 12

Critique: Homelessness story research.

Faking images in photojournalism. (AV presentation)

Professional Photoshop tricks. (assigned reading handout and exercise)

Cutlines: What the reader needs. (assigned reading handout)

Who, what, when, where, why.

February 14

Caption checklist. (assigned reading handout)

Outline writing tip sheet. (assigned reading handout and exercise)

Cutlines: A quick reference. (assigned reading handout)

What the reader wants: Small details, quote, taste, smell, and touch.

Six perspectives for analyzing images. (assigned reading handout)

Advanced InDesign. (assigned reading handout)

Assignment: Homelessness in Los Angeles. Locate subjects and start shooting.

Week 6, February 19

Critique: Homeless shoot.

If a picture is worth a thousand words, what volumes could you write? (assigned reading handout)

You found the story, now find the photos. (assigned reading handout and exercise)

Text for your picture story. (assigned reading handout)

Good feature-type lead, emphasis on subject, clear description of subject and surroundings, plenty of quotes, background facts, good ending paragraph

Playing God in the newsroom. (assigned reading handout)

February 21

What are photos that present a viewpoint? (assigned reading handout)

New media concerns. (assigned reading handout and exercise)

Manipulation of subjects or images. How can you be sure?

Images to avoid. (assigned reading handout)

Assignment: Homelessness in Los Angeles. Second homeless shoot.

Week 7 February 26

Critique: Homeless shoot.

Picture stories on the WWW.

Flash w/sound.

Ways to add energy to your work. (assigned reading handout)

Assignment: Find two photo stories on the WWW. One of the stories must have to do with homelessness.

February 28

Midterm exam.

Journalists' compass. <http://jcompass.temple.edu/> (assigned reading handout)

Week 8, March 4

Photos of bloody body bags or the underlying social forces. What images will you choose? (assigned reading handout)

Blood on the eggs test. (assigned reading handout)

The clash between words and pictures. (assigned reading handout)

What is the meaning of the digital revolution?

How fast is that revolution moving?

Internships and apprenticeships. (assigned reading handout)

March 6

Assignment: Find two photo stories on the WWW. One of the stories must have to do with homelessness. Class presentations.

Assignment: Homelessness in Los Angeles. Shoot continues.

Week 9, March 11

Critique: Web homeless stories.

www.visualedge.org Merging words and pictures together. (AV presentation)

Ethical dilemma: What happens when the story changes? (assigned reading handout)

Respect the image. (assigned reading handout and exercise)

Visual motion. (assigned reading handout)

Rules for successful picture layout. (assigned reading handout)

March 13

Reaching your audience. (assigned reading handout)

The grid system. (assigned reading handout and exercise)

Assignment: Homelessness in Los Angeles. Continue shooting.

Spring Break, Week of March 16

Week 10, March 25

Today's front pages <http://www.newseum.org/todaysfrontpages/>

Images that come from the heart go to the heart. (assigned reading handout)

Writing photo assignments. Can the photog understand what you want? (assigned reading handout)

Who are the visual storytellers? (assigned reading handout)

Assignment: Reading between the lines. CNS daybook. (assigned reading handout)

March 27

Critique: Reading between the lines.

How to pitch your story. (assigned reading handout)

Using pictures within their ethical context. Using pictures within their visual context. (assigned reading handout)

Ethical visual context worksheet. (assigned reading handout)

Assignment: Homelessness in Los Angeles. Shoot continues.

Week 11 April 1

Guest Speaker: Bringing together words, images and the web.

Creative assignment process. (assigned reading handout)

Formula shooting. Life Magazine to People Magazine: It worked for Life will it work for you? (assigned reading handout)

Shock advertising and images. Benetton case study. (assigned reading handout)

Benetton images.

Benetton advertising campaign. (assigned reading handout)

April 3

Infographics. Los Angeles Times and the Gulf War. (AV presentation)

Designing the infographic. (assigned reading handout)

Transmitting positive and negative images. What will you choose? (assigned reading handout)

How photographs stereotype people from diverse cultural groups.

Assignment: Homelessness in Los Angeles.

Week 12, April 8

Guest Speaker: Telling stories outside the box.

Critique: Homeless shoot.

How Flash interactive can work for you. (assigned reading handout and exercise)

Digital survival tips for shooters. (assigned reading handout)

How to write a great budget item. LA Times daily budget. (assigned reading handout)

Cultural and critical thinking in visual journalism. James Nachtwey case study.

April 10

Video. War Photographer.

Sound advice. (assigned reading handout)

Audio. How much does sound add? (assigned reading handout)

Questions for audio. (assigned reading handout and exercise)

James Nachtwey case study. (assigned reading handout)

How to capture the viewer's attention. (assigned reading handout)

Writing your lead to match the art. (assigned reading handout and exercise)

The competition: What are other students doing? (assigned reading handout)

Assignment: Nachtwey silent auction for MoveOn.org
Nachtwey Fisher Galley exhibit.

Assignment: Homelessness in Los Angeles. Pulling the word and images together.

Week 13, April 15

Critique: Homeless shoot.

Reporter's guide to photojournalism. (assigned reading handout)

New ideas for reporters. (assigned reading handout)

Getting started with your career. (assigned reading handout)

12 step plan for getting a job as a visual journalist.

April 17

Critique: Nachtwey assignment.

Photojournalism quotes. (assigned reading handout)

What do you do when the art is boring? (assigned reading handout and exercise)

Job search. What to expect on your first visual journalism interview. (assigned reading handout)

Picture editing without a picture editor. (assigned reading handout)

Unforgettable images with ethical problems. (assigned reading handout)

Working together: The word people vs. the picture people. (assigned reading handout)

Assignment: Homelessness in Los Angeles. Pulling the word, images and design together.

Week 14, April 22

Instructor evaluations.

Future of visual journalism. (assigned reading handout)

Networked interactive multimedia. (assigned reading handout)

Job search. What to expect in your first interview. (assigned reading handout)

April 24

Tips for a successful project. (assigned reading handout)

Assignment: Homelessness in Los Angeles. Pulling the word, images and design together.

Final Portfolio/Photo Essay production.

Week 15, April 29

Assignment: Homelessness in Los Angeles. Pulling the word, images and design together.

Final Portfolio/Photo Essay Critique.

May 1

Final Portfolio/Photo Essay Critique.

Final Exam.

Syllabus is subject to change.