



ART 215 - Photography: Portfolio of Perugia

Course Syllabus

Spring Semester 2026

Instructor: Alessandro Zaccaro

Credits: 3

Contact Hours: 45

Prerequisites: none

Class Meeting Days & Time: *Section A:* Mondays & Wednesdays, 2:15 - 3:45pm
Section B: Mondays & Wednesdays, 4-5:30pm

Office Hours: by appointment after a class

Email:

Course Type: Course with Service Learning component

Course Fee: USD\$50

Course Description

This course will introduce students to the fundamentals of photography. No previous photographic experience is required. The focus will be to capture and record the students' experience in Italy through weekly photo walks around Perugia, an ancient Umbrian hilltop town, as well as to create a portfolio of these images. The class will explore the cultural phenomenon of photography and the role it plays in society. Students will learn basic concepts, processes, and techniques, including camera usage; exposure controls; manipulating and printing digital photographic images; and print presentation. At the end of the semester, all the photographs will be displayed at the Umbra Art Show.

"The question is not how to take a good picture, but how not to miss one." - Harold Feinstein

Learning Outcomes and Assessment Measures

Below are the course's learning outcomes, followed by the methods that will be used to assess students' achievement for each learning outcome. By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- *Demonstrate* a thorough and functional knowledge of the essential mechanisms of a camera. (Quiz, Assignments, Critiques)
- *Create* photographs with interesting and effective compositions, lighting, and points of view. (Critiques and Assignments)
- *Apply* appropriate edits to digital images. (Assignments)
- *Understand* the visual language of photography, and how it can be used to express and communicate ideas. (Quiz, Community Engagement activities, Written and Oral Report)

Course Materials

Readings

A course reader, including all the indicated readings, will be available. The course's Moodle site is the primary location for readings and assignments. Additional handouts may be distributed in class and/or made available on Moodle.

Textbook

Jeff Curto, *Basic Photography*, jeffcurto.com, 2014 (digital version available on Moodle)

Assessment

Attendance	10%
Photographic assignments (3 x 20% each)	60%
Midterm Exam	10%
Final Presentation	15%
Community Engagement Final Presentation	5%

Grading

Students are reminded that it is their responsibility to note the dates of exams and other assignments. No alternative exam dates will be offered and professors are not required to give partial credit for any late work (they do so at their discretion: the Institute's default policy is no extensions and a zero for any work turned in late). Students who book travel when they have an exam or other assessment will have to change their plans or accept a zero. Letter grades for student work are based on the following percentage scale:

Letter Grade Range	Numerical Score Equivalent	Student Performance
A	93% - 100%	Exceptional
A-	90% - 92%	Excellent
B+	87% - 89%	Superior
B	83% - 86%	
B-	80% - 82%	
C+	77% - 79%	Satisfactory
C	73% - 76%	
C-	70% - 72%	
D+	67% - 69%	Low Pass
D	63% - 66%	
D-	60% - 62%	
F	59% or less	Fail (no credit)

Please note: decimal and centesimal numerals between 1-4 are rounded down while 5-9 are rounded up: e.g., expect 89.4 to be 89.0 while 89.5 to round up to 90.

Course Requirements

Grades are based on the following criteria.

Attendance (10%)

Attendance is an essential part of this course. You are allowed 2 unexcused absences per course without penalty, per Institute policy. If you attend all the other meetings, you will receive 10% for this part of your grade. There are no make-ups offered for attendance.

Photographic Assignments (3x20% each = 60%)

Students will have three photographic assignments due during the semester. Each assignment will consist of taking a certain number of photographs, from which they will choose the best images and then edit and optimize them.

Assignment 1: Architecture/street / food photography

- Three edited and optimized photographs.

Assignment 2: Photos from the Service learning project

- Three edited and optimized photographs.
- You will help the artisans' association named ARTICITY promote their innovative, MADE IN ITALY creations as well as their philosophy of artistic craftsmanship for online and print material by photographing their newest products using either the city of Perugia or their workshop as a creative backdrop. Students will be divided into groups. Things to keep in mind: composition, point of view, motion, depth of field, and exposure compensation...and *LIGHTING*! Pay special attention to the

background and how it can infer meaning and interest into the product that you are photographing. Please see *Moodle* for more information.

Assignment 3: Subject matter is open.

- Three edited and optimized photographs.

Midterm Exam and Final Presentation (10% + 15%)

The mid-term will consist of multiple choice and essay questions of variable length. The questions will be drawn from mandatory textbooks, readings, in-class presentations, and discussions. For the final exam students will prepare and carry out a presentation of the best photos taken during the semester. A full prompt will be provided on Moodle.

End of Semester Community Engagement Presentation (5%)

During Special Academic Events Week, the class will present a 15-minute summary of the project experience to the Umbra community during the Community Engagement Presentations on **Thursday, April 23** (the final week of the program). Students will receive the guidelines and presentation order after the mid-semester break. Participation in this event is MANDATORY and an integral part of the community engagement grade.

Attendance Policy

Attendance is expected and mandatory for classroom times and co-curricular activities. The first two absences per course due to illness will be considered excused “sick days” and do not require medical documentation. To receive additional excused absences due to illness, students are required to see a local physician or request a letter from an Institute-approved doctor documenting they should be excused from class for illness.

Unexcused absences will adversely affect a student’s academic performance and will result in a reduction of the student’s final course grade by 2% per absence up to a maximum of 10%. Excessive unexcused absences may result in a failing grade or disciplinary action. It is the student’s responsibility to be aware of the number of absences or late arrivals for each course, and to ask the instructor when in doubt.

If students miss class, they are responsible for obtaining class notes from other students and/or for meeting the professor during office hours. Any work missed in class because of an excused absence may be made up within one week of the return to the class. Any work missed that was a quiz or other test must be made up outside of class time and will, in the interest of intellectual honesty, be a slightly different test than the one given in class.

Presence during mandatory field trips is especially important. Missing a mandatory field trip for a course, unless for a very serious reason that is communicated to Umbra staff in a timely manner, will lower the students’ grade by half a letter grade (i.e., a final grade of a B+ would be lowered to a B).

Legitimate reasons for an excused absence or tardiness include death in the immediate family, religious observances, illness or injury, local inclement weather, and medical appointments that cannot be rescheduled.

Absences relating to illness may be excused by the Director, but only if a medical certification is provided.

Students who request an approved absence to observe a religious holiday must submit a formal request to the Institute’s Director within one week after the add/drop period when course schedules, including any field trips, are finalized. No exceptions will be made after this deadline.

Except in the case of medical emergencies, absences are not accepted when tests are scheduled; tests cannot be made up. Furthermore, scheduled times and dates indicated for exams, quizzes, oral presentations, and any other graded assignments cannot be changed for any reason. Even if more sections of the same class are activated, students may only take exams during the scheduled times and dates for the section they are enrolled in.

Tardiness Policy

Students are expected to attend all classes punctually. Any student arriving up to 15 minutes late or leaving up to 15 minutes earlier than the scheduled class end time will be marked as tardy. Each incident of tardiness (late arrivals to or early departures from class) is 0.5% off the final grade. However, should a student arrive more than 15 minutes late or depart more than 15 minutes before the conclusion of the class, it will be recorded as an absence.

Students are also expected to remain in class during the time of instruction except for a reasonable amount of time to use the restroom. Students who leave class and do not return during the class session will receive an unexcused absence or late penalty.

Academic Integrity

All forms of cheating (i.e., copying during exam either from a fellow student or making unauthorized use of notes) and plagiarism (i.e., presenting the ideas or words of another person for academic evaluation without acknowledging the source) will be handled according to the Institute Academic Policy, which can be found in the Umbra Institute Academic Policies and Conduct Guidelines.

Classroom Policy

Students are expected to follow the policy of the Institute and demonstrate the appropriate respect for the historical premises that the school occupies. Please note that cell phones must be turned off before the beginning of each class.

Laptop/Smartphone Policy

An ever-increasing body of research shows that open laptops and telephones in the classroom create distraction (both visual and auditory) for those using them and those around them. You can type faster than you can write, and as a result you end up processing less when you're simply typing notes. For this reason, students are asked to keep computers and phones away and use a regular notebook or tablet of some sort with a pen. There are three exceptions: 1) if you have an accommodation; 2) if we have an in-class tutorial about online research tools, 3) if you use a tablet to take notes, but one that is not connected to the internet, or 4) if you make an office hours appointment with me to discuss the use of a computer.

Communication Outside of Class

I prefer talking face-to-face about assignments and other questions as I know that method of communication is richer and can address things I can't 'read' in an email. That said, when you have questions, first check the Moodle site and the syllabus, as many are answered there. I check and respond to emails during the week between 10am and 4pm. It might take me 72 hours to respond to an email so it's often best to come see me before or after class. I'm also happy to make an office hours appointment.

1-ON-1: I would love to be able to work extensively with each student on a 1-on-1 basis, but the amount of class time does not permit that. That said, we'll have some 1-on-1 time during class and also during the 1-on-1 professor meetings.

TRIGGER WARNING: Photographs capture part of our reality, but are they reality or an editorial? Some of the photographs we see may be upsetting: please understand that I don't endorse the messages of photos we see: I am using them in class so you can see how certain photos create messages through powerful use of juxtaposition, lighting, viewpoint, and composition.

TRIGGER WARNING: Fine Arts classes involve shared viewing, discussion, and critique of your work. It's not done privately and it's a great opportunity to learn from each other. With that being said, it's important to be respectful. Always expect an "I like this because..." and a "If I could, I might do to make it better." This is how we learn in Fine Arts Class. It's an inherently collaborative, rather than individual, learning approach.

Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

WEEK 1

Meeting 1 (Jan 19th): Introduction to the course
Introduction of the community engagement project & partner by Umbra staff

Meeting 2 (Jan 21st): *History of photography - From Beginnings to the 19th Century*

Readings for the week:

Jeff Curto, *Basic Photography*, jeffcurto.com, 2014 pp. 5-11

WEEK 2

Meeting 1 (Jan 26th): *History of photography - 20th Century Photography*

Meeting 2 (Jan 28th): *History of photography - Contemporary Photography*

WEEK 3

Meeting 1 (Feb 2nd): *Introduction of the community partner and to the service learning project with the Community Engagement Team*

Meeting 2 (Feb 4th): *The pillars of photography: Exposure triangle, Aperture, Iso and Shutter speed. Depth of Field and Focus + Composition in photography*

Readings for the week:

Jeff Curto, *Basic Photography*, jeffcurto.com, 2014 pp. 12-18

WEEK 4

Meeting 1 (Feb 9th): Visual storytelling, watching and analyzing two movies
Netflix "Chef's table - Pizza - E4 Frano Pepe" 45'
Netflix "Street Food: Asia Bangkok, Thailandia" 30'

Meeting 2 (Feb 11th): *Service Learning Project: Initial visit and shooting to the Artisan Workshops (TBD)*

WEEK 5

Meeting 1 (Feb 16th): *Use of light: Natural vs. Artificial light*

Readings for the week:

Jeff Curto, *Basic Photography*, jeffcurto.com, 2014 pp. 37-43

Meeting 2 (Feb 18th): Photo Walk

WEEK 6

Meeting 1(Feb. 23rd): *Midterm Exam*

Meeting 2 (Feb. 25th): *Service Learning Project: Initial visit and shooting to the Artisan Workshops (TBD)*

Semester Break

WEEK 7

Meeting 1 (Mar 9th): *Photo Walk*

Meeting 2 (Mar 11th): *Service Learning Project: Initial visit and shooting to the Artisan Workshops (TBD)*

WEEK 8

Meeting 1 (Mar 16th): *Food Photography principles, rules, setting*

Meeting 2 (Mar 18th): *Workshop on Food Photography - Cooking class making Pasta Gricia*

WEEK 9

Meeting 1 (Mar 23th): *Types of Photography*

Meeting 2 (Mar 25th): *Photo Walk*

WEEK 10

Meeting 1 (Mar 30th): *Editing, post-production*

Meeting 2 (Apr 1st): *Individual photo-presentation activities - Working on Articity presentation*

WEEK 11

EASTER MONDAY - VACATION (Apr 6th)

Meeting 2 (Apr 8th): *The power of artificial intelligence for photography part: Artificial Intelligence in Photoshop*

WEEK 12

Meeting 1 (Apr 13th): *Working on presentations*

Meeting 2 (Apr 15th): *Working at Activity Presentation*

WEEK 13

Monday, Meeting 1 (Apr 20th): Final presentation with Articity representatives

Tuesday, Apr 22nd: *Individual final Presentation*

Thursday, Apr 23rd: *End of the Semester Community Engagement Presentations - Special Academic Events (time and place to be announced)*

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Service Learning Project
Syllabus Appendix
Spring 2026

What is service learning?

Service learning is a type of experiential education integrated into a course in which:

- students engage in an organized activity or project aimed to address a community need that is identified in collaboration with the community partner;
- students critically reflect on the link between the experience in the community, course content, and the learning goals; and
- there is reciprocal learning both by the students and by the community partners.

You will need a certain degree of flexibility, creativity, and self-initiative to realize a service learning project. Organization and open communication in-class with me and your team members will be key to your success.

Service Learning Project Overview

Community Partner

The association ARTICITY – Artisan Workshops of the Historic Center” was founded in 2009 by Maria Antonietta Taticchi (the president of the association) and the other members to promote all types of craftsmanship.

The association supports and encourages crafts in Umbria, and especially, in Perugia’s historic center, which has an exceptional historical and artistic value. Its objective is to develop, protect and promote the tradition, the manual skills and the products of craftsmen. Artisan businesses are the result of a centuries-old artistic and productive tradition, rooted in the territories to which they belong; for this reason they can’t be replicated elsewhere. At the same time, they are also bearers of universal values

Website: <https://www.articity.it/en/>

Project Description and Goals

You will help the association promote their innovative, MADE IN ITALY creations as well as their philosophy of artistic craftsmanship for online and print material by photographing their newest products using either the city of Perugia as a creative backdrop. Students will be assigned to one of these two groups.

Organization, Expectations, and Roles

For ASSIGNMENT 3, you will photograph ARTICITY artisans and their products during two photo sessions (please check the schedule of topics, readings and assignments). This will enable you to photograph different items in various places and at different times of the day (lighting).

In-Class Presentation for Community Partner

Photographs will be presented to Maria Antonietta Taticchi, President of ARTICITY. You will explain your ideas, goals, and inspiration for the photographs you chose during the class critique and grading.

Community Engagement Final Presentation

During Special Academic Events Week, the class will present a 15-minute summary of the project experience to the Umbra community during the Community Engagement Presentations on **Thursday, April 23rd**. Students will receive the guidelines and presentation order after the mid-semester break.

Grading Rubric

The service learning project is worth a total of 25% of the final course grade.

- Photographs from third assignment 20%
- Community Engagement Presentation 5%