

History of Photography

ARTH 350 sec 001 • Fall 2019

MW 1:30 – 2:45 pm • Art and Design 2026

Dr. Vanessa M. Schulman

Email: vschulma@gmu.edu

Office Hours: Wed. 10:00 – noon; Thurs. 2:00 – 4:00; or by appointment

Office: Robinson-B 340

Course Information:

3 cr. hrs. Development of photography from origins in France in the 19th century to the present.

Description:

This survey examines the technical, aesthetic, and political histories of photography from pre-photographic technologies to the present. Considering photography's complex role as a reproductive medium, this course will address its relationship with other visual arts, its deployment in scientific, factual, and social inquiry, and the ways in which its technological limitations and developments drove photographers' aesthetic experimentation. Understanding photography's role as not merely an art but also a tool for shaping knowledge, this course will also explore the collection, organization, and display of photographic materials in historical context.

Mason Core:

This course satisfies the Arts requirement in Mason Core. Students who successfully complete a course in the Arts category must meet the following learning outcomes:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between artistic process and a work's underlying concept, and where appropriate, contexts associated with the work.
2. Identify and analyze the formal elements of a particular art form using vocabulary and critique appropriate to that form.
3. Analyze cultural productions using standards appropriate to the form, as well as the work's cultural significance and context.
4. Analyze and interpret the content of material culture through its social, historical, and personal contexts.

Course Readings:

All *required* readings will be made available as PDFs or links on the Blackboard site.

The following *optional* textbook is available for students who would like additional background: Robert Hirsch, *Seizing the Light: A Social and Aesthetic History of Photography*, 3rd ed. (Routledge, 2017).

Class Communication:

I will send messages to your Mason email only, so be sure you check that account or have your mail forwarded to an account that you check regularly. Please allow 48 hours for a response to email.

Evaluation of Student Work:

I use a 100-point scale for grading, as well as the following measurements of student performance:

A+ (98-100)	A (93-97)	A- (90-92)	Clearly stands out as excellent performance
B+ (87-89)	B (83-86)	B- (80-82)	Level of work is good to very good
C+ (77-79)	C (73-76)	C- (70-72)	Level of work is satisfactory to average
D (60-69)			Work is below average and marginally acceptable
F (below 60)			Quality and/or quantity of work is unacceptable

The grade for this course will be weighted in the following way:

Participation	10%
In-class Activities (4)	20%
Photo Blogs (7)	35%
Midterm Exam	15%
Final Exam	20%

Course Requirements:

Participation: Students start with an 80/100 for participation; this will be raised when students participate in a thoughtful, relevant way. You may use electronics for note-taking, but please try to restrain yourself from texting, Instagramming, streaming video, etc. If I have to ask you to put away your device more than twice during the semester, you may receive a failing grade for participation.

In-class Activities: For certain days listed on the course calendar, you will work with members of a group to complete a task and turn in documentation of it at the end of class. All members of a group will receive the same grade. Grading of in-class activities is based on good faith effort, not “skill.” You do not need any experience as a photographer to get an A for these assignments!

Photo Blogs: Throughout the semester we will read primary texts and look at hundreds of photographs. For each blog post, you will write about a reading and apply it to one photograph we have seen. Blogs will be posted using Blackboard and are due at 11:59 pm on the due date. Late blogs will be penalized 5 points for each day, including weekend days. Full instructions are online.

Midterm and Final Exams: A midterm will be given in class on Wed. Oct 16. The format of the test will include term definitions, reading questions, image IDs, and a comparison. The final exam is scheduled for Wed. Dec. 11 at 1:30 pm. The final will be a similar format to the midterm but will also include a cumulative essay. There will be several essay options to pick from.

Exams may be missed without penalty in cases of: religious observance, academic, or athletic obligations, with at least one week’s advance notification; or serious illness or emergency, with notification as soon as possible. Generally you will be expected to make up the missed test within one week. All cases will require documentation in writing. Any other reasons for missing an exam (overslept, missed bus, etc.) will incur a -20 point penalty on a make-up test.

A Note on Attendance:

Attendance is strongly encouraged. You are an adult and juggle many responsibilities in your life, and I understand that sometimes class conflicts with those responsibilities. That said, studies show that repeated absenteeism correlates with poor exam performance and lower overall GPA. I take attendance only with the goal of reaching out to students who may be struggling. If you need to miss class on a day when there is an in-class activity, please contact me ahead of time and be prepared to show documentation. Otherwise, you do not need to notify me when you miss class.

Academic Honesty:

I have a **zero tolerance** policy for academic dishonesty, whether intentional or not. Students who violate standards of academic honesty will earn a **zero** for the assignment and may risk failing the course or being subject to disciplinary action at the University level.

The George Mason Honor Code reads as follows: “Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, and/or lie in matters related to academic work.” More information about the Honor Code, including definitions of cheating, lying, and plagiarism, can be found at the Office of Academic Integrity website at oai.gmu.edu.

Support Resources for Students

Accommodation: Students who require accommodations to fully participate in class are entitled to request appropriate accommodations through Disability Services. Students should first register with Disability Services and then bring me the provided letter to receive the necessary accommodations. To start the registration process, visit ds.gmu.edu, or call (703) 993-2474.

Help with Writing: If you have struggled with writing in the past, or if English is not your first language, you may want to seek help from the Writing Center. They offer one-on-one tutoring and workshops throughout the semester. writingcenter.gmu.edu

Emotional and Mental Support: College life is complicated. Students may find it helpful to talk with a professional. Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) can help address both personal and academic concerns. Services are free and confidential. caps.gmu.edu

LGBTQ Resources: LGBTQ Resources “works to promote the academic success, health and well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer students and their allies.” lgbtq.gmu.edu

Diversity: The Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Multicultural Education provides support for an inclusive campus, including first-generation and undocumented students. odime.gmu.edu

Course Calendar

It is the students' responsibility to keep track of all due dates, readings, and assignments.

The instructor reserves the right to make changes to this course calendar when appropriate, pledging to notify students of any changes in a timely manner.

Week 1

Required reading: Malcolm Daniel, [“William Henry Fox Talbot and the Invention of Photography”](#)

Optional textbook reading:

Mon. 8/26 Introduction to Course

Wed. 8/28 Lecture: Pre-photography and Early Technologies

Week 2

Required readings: Dominique François Arago, “Report” (1839)

Malcolm Daniel, [“The Daguerrean Age in France”](#)

Optional textbook reading:

Mon. 9/2 NO CLASS: Labor Day Holiday

Wed. 9/4 Lecture: The Daguerreotype and Arago’s “Report”
Instructions/discussion of photo blog assignments

Due: Photo blog 1

Week 3

Required readings: Larry J. Schaaf, [“Tempestuous Teacups and Enigmatic Leaves”](#)

Meg O’Hearn, [“Fake News: The Drowning of Hippolyte Bayard”](#)

Optional textbook reading:

Mon. 9/9 In-class activity: Solargrams (weather permitting)
Discussion of “Leaf” and “Drowned Man”

Wed. 9/11 Lecture: Formats Beyond Daguerreotypes

Week 4

Required reading: Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Stereoscope and Stereograph" (1859)

Optional textbook reading:

Mon. 9/16 Lecture: Creating Narratives

Wed. 9/18 Lecture: Surveying the World

Due: Photo blog 2

Week 5

Required reading: "Brady's Photographs: Pictures of the Dead at Antietam" (1862)

Optional textbook reading:

Mon. 9/23 Lecture: Capturing Current Events

Wed. 9/25 Visit to Special Collections, meet in Fenwick Library, Room 2400

Week 6

Required reading: Lewis Hine, "Social Photography" (1908)

Optional textbook reading:

Mon. 9/30 Lecture: Art with a Social Conscience

Wed. 10/2 In-class activity: Formal and Contextual Analysis

Due: Photo blog 3

Week 7

Required readings: Mia Fineman, ["Kodak and the Rise of Amateur Photography"](#)

Lisa Hostetler, ["Pictorialism in America"](#)

Optional textbook reading:

Mon. 10/7 Lecture: From the Amateur Revolution to the Moving Image

Wed. 10/9 Lecture: Pictorialism

Week 8

Mon. 10/14 No class. Class meets Tuesday due to Columbus Day/Indigenous Day closure.

Tues. 10/15 *Optional class meeting:* Midterm Exam Review

Wed. 10/16 **Midterm in class**

Week 9

Required reading: Edward Weston, "Seeing Photographically" (1943)

Optional textbook reading:

Mon. 10/21 Lecture: Straight and *f.64*

Wed. 10/23 In-class Activity: *f.64* exercise

Due: Photo blog 4

Week 10

Required readings: Metropolitan Museum of Art, ["Photography at the Bauhaus"](#)

Metropolitan Museum of Art, ["Photography and Surrealism"](#)

Optional textbook reading:

Mon. 10/28 Lecture: Interwar Modernism I

Wed. 10/30 Lecture: Interwar Modernism II

Week 11

Required reading: Henri Cartier-Bresson, “Images à la sauvette (The Decisive Moment)” (1952)

Optional textbook reading:

Mon. 11/4 Lecture: Interwar Documentary Photography

Wed. 11/6 Lecture: Globalization after World War II

Due: Photo blog 5

Week 12

Required reading: Jack Kerouac, introduction to *The Americans* (1958)

Optional textbook reading:

Mon. 11/11 Lecture: Postwar Street Photography and New Topographics

Wed. 11/13 Lecture: Documentary, 1970s-2000s

Week 13

Required reading: Roland Barthes, “The Rhetoric of the Image” (1977)

Optional textbook reading:

Mon. 11/18 Lecture: Photography and the Art World

Wed. 11/20 In-class Activity: Captions and Curating

Due: Photo blog 6

Week 14

Required readings: Elena Martinique, [“When Staged Photography Becomes Art”](#)

Gregory Crewdson and Anna Holtzman, Interview (2006)

Optional textbook reading:

Mon. 11/25 Lecture: Twenty-First Century Photography: Setting the Stage

Wed. 11/27 NO CLASS: Thanksgiving Break

Week 15

Required reading: Rebecca Robertson, [“Expired Photo Materials Find New Life in Contemporary Photography”](#)

Optional textbook reading:

Mon. 12/2 Lecture: Twenty-First Century Photography: Back to the Future

Wed. 12/4 Finish Twenty-First Century Photography, Final Exam Review, Course Evaluations

Due: Photo blog 7

Finals

Wed. 12/11 **Final Exam, 1:30 – 4:15 pm**