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JRNL 494.03: Pollner Seminar - Documentary Photography and Building a Business

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DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY AND BUILDING A BUSINESS (JRNL 494)

Pollner Seminar with Daniella Zalczman

Mondays + Wednesdays, 12:30 p.m. – 1:50 p.m. in 210 Don Anderson Hall

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OFFICE HOURS: 10am - 12pm M/W in my office (or by appointment for other times / virtual meetings)

CLASS DESCRIPTION:

This class will explore the process behind long-term documentary photography work (and will more or less follow the format of a magazine assignment), and in parallel cover the challenges of managing a business as a freelance photojournalist. This is not, at its core, a class about the technical side of photography: I trust that you all are of a generation that grew up with cameras readily accessible and I leave it to you to develop your visual style, voice, and aesthetic. The practical skills we will cover will include how to seek out and hone story ideas, writing solid pitches, building relationships with the communities and individuals you hope to document, working to the highest ethical standards, developing intimacy in your images, sequencing and editing stories, and figuring out how to get that work out into the world.

OUTCOMES:

You should walk away from this course with a completed body of work (just kidding, long form documentary projects are never complete), and an in-depth understanding of what's needed to survive as an independent visual journalist, as well as concrete tools to help you hit the ground running should you choose to pursue photojournalism as a career. You should be equipped to send a refined story pitch to a photo editor, write a compelling grant application, organize your archive and secondary files sustainably, and track business and financial information efficiently. I am an open book — please come to me any time with questions about how the industry works and what it takes to succeed on your own: I'm always happy to be fully transparent about my own experiences, about money, about challenges, anything. Please do not ask me questions about lighting, I know nothing.

PANDEMIC PROTOCOL:

Masks are required indoors at all times. N95s are preferred, surgical masks are the bare minimum. No gaiters or bandanas, please. Masks must be worn properly (i.e. covering your nose and mouth simultaneously). Please refrain from eating and drinking while you're in class to keep us all as safe as possible. If you are not feeling well, please stay home and we'll figure out a hybrid in person / virtual solution.

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT:

If things go according to plan, this class should be fun. Please don't kill the vibe by violating the University of Montana's Student Code of Conduct. I expect both academic and journalistic honesty from each of you (or you should probably consider a different line of work). Academic misconduct is subject to academic penalty and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the [Student Conduct Code](#).

- Do not plagiarize, make up facts, or engage in the willful spread of misinformation. It is our job as journalists to uncover and communicate the truth in all its nuanced complexities — intentionally misleading your audience (or professors) is unethical and harmful. I am all for questioning the rules that we are expected to obey within the context of journalistic work, but in order to have those conversations I expect total transparency from you about your process. If I ask hard or

uncomfortable questions about your work, I expect honesty.

- Do not recycle work from past classes or assignments, or submit the same work for multiple classes without the explicit permission of all professors involved.

DEADLINES:

Like the ethical code, deadlines also matter equally in an academic and journalistic context. **Please submit your assignments by 10am the day they are due.** You will be penalized by a full letter grade for late assignments. If you require an extension, you must request one more than two full working (i.e. not weekend) days before the original deadline. Life is complicated and shit happens, but you will have advanced warning for all of your assignments and deadlines so know that I am going to be significantly more understanding if you are proactive about needing help or more time. Bad communication and late work will deeply impact your grades.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE:

Please do not use your laptop in class unless we are specifically setting aside time to review edits / work on sequencing or other exercises in smaller groups. Cell phones should never be out during class. Class participation is a significant part of your grade — hopefully we'll have some fun, some challenging, and some complicated conversations about photojournalism and all of your voices and perspectives are important. I expect you all to treat each other (and me) with respect and kindness: jerks do not make it far in this industry. I hope this goes without saying, but I expect you to attend class and show up on time. More than three unexcused absences will result in me deducting a full letter grade from your final assessment.

GRADES:

A+	97 - 100	A	93 - 96	A-	90 - 92		
B+	87 - 90	B	83 - 86	B-	80 - 82		
C+	77 - 80	C	73 - 76	C-	70 - 72		
D+	67 - 70	D	63 - 66	D-	60 - 62	F	59 and below

Your final grade will be based on your final presentation for your Long-Term Project (50% of your grade), and the other 50% will be based on assignments and class participation.

When it comes to the LTP, I am not looking for visual perfection. What I do care about is a critical and nuanced eye for storytelling, deep and sustained engagement with the people you're photographing, and a desire to think past the traditional structures of visual storytelling.

ACCESSIBILITY:

The University of Montana is committed to making sure that courses are accessible to all students. Please come to me if you have specific requests for modifications, and Disability Services for Students can help us find solutions.

USEFUL RESOURCES + READING:

The Photo Bill of Rights – photobillofrights.com

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie "[The Danger of a Single Story](#)"

Ligaiya Romero's [Decolonizing Documentary & Journalism Reading List](#)

Photo Shelter's [The Photographer's Guide to Inclusive Photography](#)

SCHEDULE (SUBJECT TO CHANGE):

January 19 – INTRODUCTIONS

COME TO CLASS WITH: one photo story that is meaningful to you, and be prepared to share why you think it's an important, effective, or otherwise significant piece of documentary photography. Good places to browse include the New York Times Lens Blog archive, the TIME Lightbox archive, the New Yorker's Photo Booth, and PDN.

DZ Career Overview

HOMEWORK: Come up with three potential ideas for your long-term project. Write a brief pitch for each, roughly 4-5 sentences apiece.

January 24 – BRAINSTORMING + WRITING A STORY PITCH

HOMEWORK: Hone in on one pitch and flesh it out with all the components we discussed in class (300 words minimum) + write a coverage plan. Who are your sources? Where are you doing initial research? Who do you plan to reach out to? How are you going to find potential participants? What is your visual strategy? What is your timeline?

January 26 – PHOTOJOURNALISM ETHICS

Discussion of the tenets of responsible and ethical visual journalism. How do we treat our stories and the people who give us access to their lives with dignity and respect? What rules are made to be questioned and bent, which are inviolable? We'll review some classic instances of photojournalistic misconduct, as well as more recent conversations that are less black and white.

HOMEWORK: Get out in the field! Cold call, walk around, meet someone new, talk to experts, figure out your first points of contact and start building relationships.

January 31 — MECHANICS + BEING IN THE FIELD

Digital file management, safety in the field, captioning, file names. So boring, SO IMPORTANT.

February 2 — CRIT 1

February 7 – VIRTUAL CLASS

Guest Speaker: Mallory Benedict, Culture & History Photo Editor, National Geographic Magazine

February 9 — THE ART OF THE PHOTO STORY

We'll take a look at some traditional and less traditional ways that documentary photographers have crafted photo essays — what strategies will work best for you and your visual approach?

February 14 – PITCHING VS. GRANT WRITING

February 16 — CRIT 2

February 21 – NO CLASS, PRESIDENT’S DAY

February 23 – THE MONEY

How do you budget for assignments and grant applications? What are standard expenses for contract editorial work vs. commercial work? How do you deal with contracts + budget negotiation?

February 28 – SEQUENCING + EDITING

What are the components of a complete photo story + how do we start breaking down your project into the final components you’ll need? Do you have establishing real estate shots, details, portraits, are you moving your body and changing up your focal length? How can we think about what you’ve made so far + what else you need to include?

March 2 – CRIT 3

March 7 – VIRTUAL CLASS

Guest Speaker TBD

March 9 – GETTING YOUR FOOT IN THE DOOR

March 14 – EDITING + SEQUENCING WORK SESSION

You should have a fair bit of your project under your belt at this point — a sense of the primary sources, the environments you’ll be working in, and of course... photos. We’ll spend most of today working on how to cut down your takes into cohesive edits and what it might look like to start thinking about sequencing.

March 16 – CRIT 4

March 21 – NO CLASS, SPRING BREAK

March 23 – NO CLASS, SPRING BREAK

March 28 – PORTFOLIOS + WEBSITES + SOCIAL MEDIA

What goes into a compelling portfolio, and how do you get it out in the world? What are the most important components of a professional website + social media presence? How do you make all of this tech work for you, and not the other way around?

March 30 – MANAGING A BUSINESS AS A FREELANCER

We’ll discuss the logistics of freelance — how do you get started, how do you make your business sustainable, what resources are available to you?

April 4

Guest Speaker TBD

April 6 – CRIT 5

April 11 – SIDE HUSTLES AND OTHER REVENUE STREAMS

April 13 – WHAT'S MISSING? WORK SESSION

April 18 – VIRTUAL CLASS

Guest Speaker TBD

April 20 – CRIT 6

April 25 – TAKING THE WORK FURTHER

Once you've made the work, what's next? We'll talk about what comes after the editorial life of a body of work, from community engagement strategies to exhibitions to publishing photo books.

April 27 – FINAL PRESENTATION WORK SESSION

May 2 – COHORT 1 FINAL PRESENTATIONS

May 4 – COHORT 2 FINAL PRESENTATIONS

The mission of The University of Montana School of Journalism is to provide students with a professional education in journalism; to teach them to think critically, act ethically, and communicate effectively; to help them understand the challenges and changes in the news media; and to inspire them to use their talents to improve journalism and enhance a diverse and democratic society.