SPAN 8803: Photography — Introduction and Workshop

Spring 2027 | Mondays & Wednesdays | January 11–April 26, 2027

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Course Description

This course approaches photography as an artistic practice, a technological medium, and a form of cultural representation that can be examined through historical and theoretical inquiry. Combining critical analysis with hands-on workshops, students will investigate how photographic images produce meaning, shape ways of seeing, and participate in the construction of social and cultural identities. The course traces major developments in photographic technologies and practices, from nineteenth-century processes to contemporary digital and immersive imaging, while placing particular emphasis on photographers and visual traditions from Ibero-America. Students will analyze photographic works in relation to their aesthetic strategies and contexts of production and explore these questions through their own photographic practice and research.

We will study various photographic genres and subgenres, including portraiture, landscape, war photography, action photography, street photography, and macrophotography, among others, as well as their principal practitioners.

The course consists of two main components: a Critical Module and a Practical Module (Workshop).

Critical Module

Students will become familiar with the theoretical foundations of photography and the aesthetic approaches developed by different photographers. We will examine the technological innovations that have made photography increasingly accessible to broader audiences.

We will also explore photography's applications across different social contexts, from photojournalism and commercial industries to personal and private uses.

Students will develop a theoretical and critical vocabulary for evaluating photographic works through detailed analyses of their content, composition, and visual forms.

Students will also engage with a small selection of theoretical readings addressing photographic representation, the relationship between photography and reality, and the cultural and social implications of photographic practices. These readings will provide conceptual frameworks for analyzing photographic works and examining how technical and aesthetic choices shape meaning. Students are expected to incorporate relevant theoretical perspectives into class discussions and their final projects.

Practical Module (Workshop)

The practical component will consist of workshops designed to teach students how to operate a camera manually rather than relying exclusively on automatic settings.

Students will explore lighting techniques appropriate to different photographic genres and learn to select lenses according to their subjects and artistic intentions.

Approximately twelve photographic exercises will allow students to apply the concepts and techniques discussed throughout the semester, including landscape photography, portraiture, action photography, macrophotography, and other genres.

Learning Outcomes

1. Evaluate photographic works using appropriate critical frameworks and terminology.
2. Discuss the relationship between photography and its historical and cultural contexts of production, considering technological developments, social movements, and prevailing cultural trends.
3. Analyze photographic works belonging to the visual archives of Ibero-American countries.
4. Produce photographs in various genres and subgenres through deliberate choices involving composition, lighting, and manual exposure.
5. Prepare summaries and critical responses to scholarly readings.
6. Lead discussions about photographic works and the contributions of photographers from different Ibero-American countries.
7. Conduct academic research on photography and photographic practices.
8. Communicate effectively in academic Spanish, both in writing and in oral presentations.

Course Format

This is an in-person course, although occasional remote sessions may be scheduled depending on circumstances or instructional needs. If remote instruction becomes necessary, activities will generally be conducted asynchronously through Canvas and other designated digital platforms.

Course Materials

Photographic Equipment. Students must have access to a device capable of taking photographs using manual exposure controls. This includes most contemporary digital cameras and many smartphones. Students using smartphones may need to purchase or install an application that provides access to manual camera settings.

Readings and Audiovisual Materials. The course requires students to read selected articles and engage with audiovisual materials. All assigned readings and media will be made available digitally through Canvas.

Theoretical Readings

The following readings complement the course materials and will be discussed during the corresponding units. No separate written reading responses are required.

- January 20 — Walter Benjamin, “A Little History of Photography” (1931): photography, technology, and representation.
- February 22–24 — Joan Fontcuberta and Mónica Alonso Riveiro, “Imágenes desquiciadas. Una conversación sobre (post)fotografía, tiempo y memoria” (2020): digital photography and post-photography.
- March 29–31 — Sergio Luna-Lozano, “La realidad fotoficcionada. Propuesta de análisis metodológico del trabajo artístico de Joan Fontcuberta y estudio de caso de la obra Prosopagnosia” (2023): manipulated photography and photographic truth.

Grading

Course Component	Percentage
Assignments, Readings, and Quizzes	20%
Class Participation	20%
Photographic Exercises	30%
Photographer Expertise Presentation	10%
Final Project	20%
Total	100%

Academic Integrity

Presenting another person's work or ideas as one's own constitutes plagiarism. Students must adhere to the academic integrity policies established in the Georgia Tech Student Handbook. Violations of these policies will be reported to the appropriate academic authorities and handled according to Georgia Tech's established procedures.

Class Participation (20%)

Active participation is essential to this course. Students are responsible for completing assigned readings, viewing audiovisual materials, reviewing their notes, and preparing for class discussions and activities. The course includes frequent practical photography exercises. Students are expected to arrive prepared to discuss both their own photographs and those produced by their classmates. Participation will be evaluated based on students' contributions in Spanish throughout the semester, including discussions, workshops, and other academic activities.

- Frequency of participation: How regularly the student contributes to discussions and activities.
- Use of Spanish: The extent to which the student communicates in Spanish during class.
- Communicative competence: The student's ability to express and understand ideas effectively, including grammatical accuracy and comprehension.
- Respectful engagement: The student's attitude toward the course, classmates, and instructor.

Assignments, Readings, and Quizzes (20%)

Students will generally be assigned one or more readings before each class meeting. They are expected to complete these readings in advance and arrive prepared to discuss them. Occasionally, students will complete short written assignments related to the readings. Assignments will be distributed and submitted through Canvas. Brief quizzes may be administered to assess reading comprehension or students' understanding of concepts and techniques introduced in class.

Photographic Exercises (30%)

Throughout the semester, students will complete approximately twelve photographic exercises, averaging roughly one exercise per week. These exercises will involve producing photographs in different genres, including:

- Landscape photography
- Portraiture and self-portraiture

- Macrophotography and detail photography
- Event photography
- Action photography
- Street photography
- Architectural and real estate photography
- Conceptual photography
- Manipulated, impossible, or “magical” photography

Photographs produced for each exercise must be submitted and discussed in class. Each exercise will be graded on a 100-point scale. The average grade across all exercises will constitute 30% of the final course grade.

Technical and Creative Requirements

Students are expected to avoid relying entirely on automatic camera settings and to make deliberate technical and compositional decisions.

Manual Exposure

Students must manually control at least one component of the exposure triangle: aperture (f-stop), shutter speed, or ISO sensitivity. One or two settings may remain automatic, but at least one must be selected manually.

Lighting

Students must make deliberate choices regarding the light sources used in their photographs, whether natural or artificial.

Composition

Students must consciously plan framing, including principal subjects, background elements, and overall organization. Cropping during postproduction may be employed as part of composition.

Lens Selection and Field of View

Students must consider the field of view and focal length appropriate to their intentions, including wide-angle, standard, and telephoto perspectives.

Technical and Visual Analysis

Students must be able to explain the technical and aesthetic decisions involved in producing their photographs.

Photographer Expertise Presentation (10%)

Each student will research the work of an Ibero-American photographer from Latin America, Spain, or Portugal and present their findings to the class. Photographers will be selected early in the semester, and each student will be assigned a specific presentation date. The instructor will announce when each photographer will be discussed, allowing sufficient preparation time.

- The photographic technologies and equipment used by the photographer.
- The historical, social, and cultural contexts in which their work was produced.
- The principal themes and subjects explored in their photography.
- A critical analysis of several representative photographs.

Final Project (20%)

Option 1: Research-Based Photographic Essay or Portfolio

Students will prepare an original photographic essay or portfolio consisting of at least 12 photographs produced during the semester, accompanied by a written critical essay of at least 3,000 words. The written component must develop a coherent argument or conceptual framework connecting the photographic project to broader aesthetic, cultural, historical, or theoretical questions. Students must engage with at least three scholarly sources, including at least one relevant theoretical reading. The essay should explain the project's conceptual motivations, discuss technical and aesthetic decisions, and examine how the photographs contribute to the investigation of the selected topic.

Option 2: Research Essay

Students may write an academic research essay examining a photographer, photographic genre, or theoretical or historical problem relevant to the course. The essay must be at least 4,000 words, excluding the bibliography, and engage with at least five scholarly sources, including relevant theoretical scholarship. Students must develop a clearly articulated argument supported by sustained visual analysis and appropriate academic research. Students may not select the same photographer they researched for their Photographer Expertise Presentation.

For either option, final projects must integrate photographic analysis with scholarly research and critical reflection, moving beyond description to develop an argument informed by relevant theoretical concepts. Final projects will be presented during the regularly scheduled final weeks of the semester.

Written Assignments and Formatting Requirements

All written assignments and essays must be typed, double-spaced, in a 12-point font with one-inch margins. Spanish accents and special characters must be typed rather than handwritten. Students must use their own words when preparing assignments and essays.

Course Schedule — Spring 2027

Meeting days: Monday and Wednesday | January 11–April 26, 2027

Week 1 — January 11 & 13

Introduction to Photography: Origins and Technological Developments

- Course introductions; syllabus, course structure, assignments, and expectations.
- Photography as an artistic language and technical practice; origins of photography.
- Contributions of Niépce, Daguerre, and Talbot; camera obscura and early chemical processes.
- Photographic negative, Eastman, and photography as remediation of earlier graphic arts.

Workshop: Principles and uses of the pinhole camera; introduction to photographic equipment.

Week 2 — January 18 & 20

Analog and Digital Photography: Understanding the Camera

- Monday, January 18: NO CLASS — Martin Luther King Jr. Day.
- Wednesday, January 20: Analog and digital photography; camera obscura (continued); photographic work of Abelardo Morell.
- Exposure triangle: aperture, shutter speed, ISO; field of view, focal length, and RAW formats.

Workshop: Introduction to manual camera controls; practical exposure exercises.

Week 3 — January 25 & 27

Landscape Photography

- Landscape and national identity in Romantic ideology and aesthetics.
- Photographic landscapes of Ibero-America; early work of Marc Ferrez (Brazil, 1843–1923).
- Landscape composition and exposure techniques.

Workshop: Landscape photography, natural light, and depth of field.

Photographic assignment: Exercise 1: Landscape Photography.

Week 4 — February 1 & 3

Portrait Photography

- History and evolution of photographic portraiture; types of portraits.
- Portraiture, identity, iconic portraits, and Ibero-American examples.
- Photographer Expertise Presentation.

Workshop: Studio portraiture, lighting, framing, posing, and subject-background relationships.

Photographic assignment: Exercise 2: Photographic Portrait.

Week 5 — February 8 & 10

Urban and Street Photography

- City as photographic subject; iconography of Ibero-American cities.
- Street photography and its aesthetic traditions.
- Photographer Expertise Presentation.

Workshop: Urban photography, public spaces, everyday life, composition, and lighting.

Photographic assignment: Exercise 3: Urban or Street Photography.

Week 6 — February 15 & 17

Photography, War, and Photojournalism

- Photography and armed conflicts; Mexican Revolution (1910), Cuban Revolution (1959), and Spanish Civil War.
- Photography, public opinion, and photojournalism.
- Photographer Expertise Presentation.

Workshop: Event and action photography; capturing movement and shutter-speed techniques.

Photographic assignment: Exercises 4 and 5: Event Photography and Action Photography.

Week 7 — February 22 & 24

Digital Photography and Post-Photography

- Digital photography and post-photographic practices.
- Work of Joan Fontcuberta; manipulation and changing status of photographic images.
- Photographer Expertise Presentation.

Workshop: Selected digital photographic techniques and introduction to image processing.

Photographic assignment: Exercise 6: Open Assignment.

Week 8 — March 1 & 3

Macrophotography and Detail Photography

- Macrophotography and close-up photography; aesthetics of detail.
- Magnification, scale, and photographic representation.
- Photographer Expertise Presentation.

Workshop: Macrophotography, focusing, close-range depth of field, and lighting small subjects.

Photographic assignment: Exercise 7: Macrophotography or Detail Photography.

Week 9 — March 8 & 10

SPRING BREAK — NO CLASSES

- March 8–12, 2027: Spring Break.

Week 10 — March 15 & 17

Architecture, Real Estate, and Immersive Photography

- Photography and architecture; representations of Ibero-American monuments.
- Architectural photography and representation of space.
- Photographer Expertise Presentation.

Workshop: Architectural and real estate photography; perspective, composition, 360-degree cameras, and immersive photography.

Photographic assignment: Exercise 8: Architectural Photography.

Week 11 — March 22 & 24

Photography and Society

- Representation of social groups, race, ethnicity, and class in photography.
- Ibero-American societies; gender analysis and marginalized communities.
- Photographer Expertise Presentation.

Workshop: Conceptual photography; developing projects addressing social themes.

Photographic assignment: Exercise 9: Conceptual Photography (Social Theme).

Week 12 — March 29 & 31

Manipulated Photography and Photographic Imagination

- Manipulated photography; illusion and the impossible.
- Magical realism and photographic representation.
- Photographer Expertise Presentation.

Workshop: Creating manipulated images, combining photographic elements, distortion, and illusion.

Photographic assignment: Exercise 10: Manipulated, "Magical," or Impossible Photography.

Week 13 — April 5 & 7

The Photographic Essay

- Photographic essay as artistic and narrative form.
- Narratives, arguments, and reportage through photographic sequences; Ibero-American examples.
- Photographer Expertise Presentation.

Workshop: Photographic narratives; image selection, sequencing, and combining text and photographs.

Photographic assignment: Exercise 11: Open Assignment.

Week 14 — April 12 & 14

Final Project Development and Workshop

- Final project guidance and consultation; coherent portfolios.
- Research strategies for photographic essays.
- Photographer Expertise Presentation.

Workshop: Review of student projects; individual/group feedback and presentation preparation.

Photographic assignment: Exercise 12: Open Assignment.

Week 15 — April 19 & 21

Final Project Presentations

- Student presentations of photographic essays, portfolios, and research projects.
- Group discussion and critical feedback.

Week 16 — April 26

Final Project Presentations and Course Conclusions

- Remaining final project presentations.
- Final discussion: photography as an evolving artistic, technological, and cultural practice.
- Monday, April 26: LAST DAY OF CLASSES.

Important Dates

Date	Event

January 11, 2027	First day of class
January 18, 2027	Martin Luther King Jr. Day — No class
March 8–12, 2027	Spring Break — No classes
April 19 & 21, 2027	Final project presentations
April 26, 2027	Final presentations and last day of class

NOTE: This syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor to accommodate instructional and/or student needs.