

Forensic Photography

Course Number CRIJ 4323.001
Meeting Time Tuesdays 5:00 PM - 7:45 PM
Meeting Location Forensic Simulation Complex (FS) 10

Instructor Information

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Office hours Thursdays 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM and by appointment

Course Description

This course introduces the fundamental principles and techniques of forensic photography. Students will learn how to document crime scenes, evidence, and injuries through photographic methods that ensure accuracy, clarity, and admissibility in court. Topics include camera operation, lighting, composition, evidence marking, and digital image management.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Explain the purpose, principles, and legal considerations of photography in forensic documentation, including the admissibility and integrity of photographic evidence.
2. Apply camera controls, exposure, focus, composition, lighting, and other photographic principles to intentionally produce accurate and technically appropriate images.
3. Document crime scenes and physical evidence using systematic forensic photographic methods, including appropriate sequencing, perspective, scale, and photographic logs.
4. Apply appropriate photographic techniques to document a variety of evidence types and challenging forensic conditions.
5. Evaluate and refine forensic photographs by identifying technical and documentation problems, explaining photographic decisions, and adapting techniques to improve the resulting photographic record.

Textbook

There is no required textbook for this course. Readings, videos, and other reference materials will be provided through Canvas as needed.

How This Course Works

Forensic photography is learned by doing. This course emphasizes practice, experimentation, feedback, and reflection rather than traditional points-based grading. Class meetings will follow a **Learn → Practice → Evaluate → Refine** structure. You will learn and practice new techniques, review photographs with your peers and instructor, and have opportunities to troubleshoot and reshoot as your skills develop.

In this course, not every photograph you take is an assignment. Most photographs will be for practice and will not be submitted for a grade. Practice photographs are opportunities to experiment, make mistakes, and learn what works before deciding that you are ready to demonstrate mastery.

Mastery-Based Grading

Rather than earning points on individual photographs, you will work throughout the semester to demonstrate a series of photographic skills through three Photography Portfolios:

Portfolio #1: Photography Foundations (8 Core Skills; 5 Advanced Skills)

This portfolio includes skills that focus on controlling the camera and making intentional photographic decisions.

Portfolio #2: Crime Scene Photography (7 Core Skills; 2 Advanced Skills)

This portfolio includes skills that focus on systematically documenting crime scenes and physical evidence using appropriate forensic photography practices.

Portfolio #3: Evidence Photography (5 Core Skills; 6 Advanced Skills)

This portfolio includes skills that focus on applying specialized photographic techniques to different types of evidence and challenging forensic conditions.

Each portfolio includes **Core** and **Advanced** skills. Core skills represent the essential competencies every student should develop. Advanced skills allow you to demonstrate greater breadth and sophistication in your photographic abilities.

Individual skills are evaluated as either **Mastered** or **R&R: Revise & Reshoot**. If a skill has not yet been mastered, you will have opportunities to practice, apply feedback, and submit new evidence of your mastery.

Course Assessments

Photography Portfolios

Throughout the semester, you will build three Photography Portfolios demonstrating your mastery of Core and Advanced photographic skills. For each skill submitted for mastery, you will provide:

- **Photographic Evidence:** Your selected photograph(s) demonstrates the skill. The number of photographs required varies by skill.
- **Skill Evidence Sheet:** A brief technical and reflective explanation describing how you created the photograph(s), the camera settings and techniques used, and what the reviewer should notice in the photograph as evidence of your mastery.
- **Portfolio Reflection:** A short video reflection completed once per portfolio discussing your practice, challenges, growth, and photographic decision-making.

Each skill will be evaluated as:

MASTERED

Your photographs and supporting documentation provide sufficient evidence that you can successfully demonstrate the skill. This skill will be marked as completed and will count toward your final grade.

REVISE & RESHOOT (R&R)

Your submission does not yet provide sufficient evidence of mastery. You should review the feedback provided, continue practicing, and submit new evidence during the R&R window. This skill is not considered complete and will not count toward your final grade.

R&R Decisions

Receiving an R&R is not a penalty. It simply means that you have not yet demonstrated mastery of that skill. If a submitted skill is evaluated as R&R, you may use the feedback provided to practice, make adjustments, and submit new photographic evidence of mastery. You may R&R a skill multiple times during the designated revision period. However, all R&R submissions must be completed by the deadline posted in the Course Schedule.

R&R opportunities are designed to encourage continued learning. In most cases, this means creating new photographic evidence to demonstrate mastery of the skill, not simply editing or fixing the original image. Students are encouraged to use class practice time and FSC Practice Hours before resubmitting.

Capstone Project

The Capstone Project is a hands-on final assessment in which you will independently photograph a simulated crime scene containing a variety of evidence and photographic challenges. You will be responsible for determining what photographs are needed, how they should be taken, and how to create a complete and accurate photographic record using the principles developed throughout the course. The final submission will include your selected photographs, completed photography log, and a reflection on your photographic decisions and performance.

The Capstone Project is a one-day practical assessment that will take place the last week of classes. At the scene, you may review your photographs, adjust your approach, and retake photographs as needed. Once you leave the scene, however, your photographic record is closed and no additional photographs or retakes may be made.

Capstone Assessment

The Capstone Project will be evaluated across several criteria, with each criterion assessed as either:

SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION

Demonstrates a good-faith and substantially complete effort to document the scene using appropriate forensic photography principles.

MASTERY

Demonstrates consistent technical quality, systematic documentation, appropriate photographic decision-making, and independent application of course principles.

To successfully complete the Capstone Project, students must earn Successful Completion or higher on all assessment criteria. Students who earn Mastery on at least half of the assessment criteria will earn **Capstone Distinction**.

Capstone Qualification

To participate in the Capstone Project, you must have demonstrated mastery of all Core skills in Portfolios #1 and #2 by the deadline posted in the Course Schedule. Students will receive an email during Thanksgiving Break confirming whether they are eligible to participate in the Capstone Project.

Overall Course Grade Calculation

Your final grade in this course is determined by the photographic skills you successfully demonstrate across the three Photography Portfolios and your performance on the Capstone Project. Grades are not calculated using points or percentages.

Letter Grade Requirements

A	Master all 20 Core skills AND at least 2 Advanced skills from each Portfolio AND earn Capstone Distinction
B	Master all 20 Core skills AND at least 1 Advanced skill from each Portfolio AND successfully complete the Capstone Project
C	Master at least 18 Core skills
D	Master between 10 and 18 Core skills
F	Master fewer than 10 Core skills

How to Earn the Grade You Want

This grading system is designed to give you greater control over your learning and your final course grade. Rather than starting the semester with 100 points and losing points for mistakes, you will build your grade by demonstrating what you can do.

All students will work toward mastery of the Core skills, which represent the essential competencies of forensic photography. Beyond the Core, you decide how far you want to challenge yourself. Students seeking a higher grade will take on additional Advanced skills and the Capstone Project, requiring greater practice, independence, and demonstrated mastery.

This means that mistakes during the learning process do not have to hurt your grade. You will have time to practice, receive feedback, revise and reshoot, and decide when your work is ready to demonstrate mastery. The more you choose to practice, challenge yourself, and demonstrate your skills, the greater your potential final grade.

My Course Policies

Attendance & Participation

Forensic photography is a hands-on course, and regular attendance is essential to your success. Class time will be used for demonstrations, guided practice, peer feedback, and access to photographic setups that may not be available outside of class. If you miss class, you are responsible for reviewing missed content and arranging additional practice as needed.

Practice Outside of Class

Mastery often requires practice and multiple attempts. Students are encouraged to use designated FSC Practice Hours to continue practicing skills, complete R&R photographs, or work with course equipment outside of class. Available practice times will be posted in Canvas.

Camera & Equipment Expectations

Cameras and specialized photography equipment will be provided for use during class and designated practice times. You are expected to handle all equipment responsibly and return it in the same condition in which it was received. Students may use approved personal cameras when appropriate, but all submitted photographs must meet course requirements.

Digital Image Integrity & Editing

Forensic photographs must accurately represent what was photographed. Unless specifically instructed otherwise, portfolio and Capstone photographs should accurately preserve the original photographic record and should not include filters, AI enhancement, object removal, or other alterations that change the content or appearance of the image. Additional guidance on appropriate forensic image processing will be discussed in class.

Deadlines & Late Work

Portfolio and R&R deadlines identify when evidence of mastery must be submitted for consideration toward your final grade. Because you will have multiple opportunities to practice and demonstrate skills throughout the semester, final mastery deadlines are firm. Specific deadlines and R&R windows are provided in the Course Schedule. If there are special circumstances that require alternative deadlines, please reach out to me to discuss your situation one-on-one.

Course Schedule

Module	Class Date	Topic(s)	Assessment Deadlines <i>(Submissions due on Tuesdays by 11:59PM)</i>
1	Aug. 25	Introduction to Photography & the DSLR	
2	Sept. 1	Exposure, Focus & Camera Control	
3	Sept. 8	Flash & Applying Camera Controls	
4	Sept. 15	Introduction to Crime Scene Photography	Portfolio 1 Due
5	Sept. 22	Forensic Photographic Sequences	<i>Portfolio 1 R&R Window Opens</i>
6	Sept. 29	R&R Time / Flex Week	
7	Oct. 6	Evidence Photography: Trace & Reflective Evidence	Portfolio 2 Due
8	Oct. 13	Evidence Photography: Bloodstains & Injuries	<i>Portfolio 2 R&R Window Opens</i>
9	Oct. 20	Evidence Photography: Lighting Strategies	
10	Oct. 27	Evidence Photography: Impressions & Specialized Practice	
11	Nov. 3	Capstone Preparation	Portfolio 3 Due
12	Nov. 10	R&R Time / Practice for Capstone	<i>Portfolio 3 R&R Window Opens</i>
13	Nov. 17	R&R Time / Practice for Capstone	Portfolio 1 & 2 R&R Deadline
—	Nov. 24	NO CLASS – Thanksgiving Break	<i>Capstone eligibility announced via email</i>
14	Dec. 1	Capstone Project	
15	Dec. 8	NO CLASS – Finals Week	Capstone Project Due Portfolio #3 R&R Deadline

Practice & Flex Weeks provide additional time for skill development, R&R, and portfolio preparation. Specific activities will be determined based on class progress and instructional needs.