Photography practicum: learning the basics of managing a fine art photography studio

**ABSTRACT**

The photography practicum provides Art and Design student researchers with the practical experience of managing a fine art photography studio. Students learn how to operate, manage, and maintain industry standard fine art archival inkjet printers as well as a fifteen station traditional black and white darkroom. This project provides essential expertise and knowledge that students, as lab monitors, both share with other students and incorporate into their own fine art practice and professional activities. Student researchers learn how to mix, store, and dispose of photographic chemistry, provide daily assistance to undergraduate and graduate photography students, and generate ideas for improvements to the lab. Students also contribute to the ongoing revision of the Photography Lab Manual, which specifies best practices and operating procedures for future photography lab monitors. The practical knowledge gained from this experience is highly valuable to colleges, universities, community colleges, artist co-ops, and professional photography labs that seek to employ individuals to manage and teach both digital and analog photography practices. This research was funded with an Undergraduate Research Fellowship.

**GOALS**

- Contribute to the Photography Lab Manual
- Maintain fine art archival inkjet printers
- Maintain traditional analog darkroom
- Assist graduate and undergraduate photography students from all academic backgrounds and disciplines

**EXPERTISE GAINED:**

- Acquired knowledge and responsible use practices regarding photographic chemicals used in an analog black and white lab
- Learned how to maintain and advise fellow students regarding the use of different models of enlarger for the production of analog prints
- Acquired skills regarding Epson 4800 Stylus Pro and Epson Surecolor P7000 Archival Inkjet Printers
- Learned how to maintain the ULF 28 UV Contact Exposure Unit for the production of alternative process fine art imagery such as Cyanotype and Van Dyke Brown prints
- Became adept at instructing and aiding fellow students in professional fine art image presentation practices
- Gained confidence and independence regarding photographic media and practices through instructing fellow MSU students in highly technical photographic processes

**SUMMARY**

During this photography practicum I gained hands-on experience and expertise in maintaining a traditional analog darkroom and with industry standard fine art printers. I also learned how to professionally guide my fellow undergraduates and graduates by demonstrating safe lab practices. I became an expert resource for other students when they needed assistance. I facilitated fine art photographic image production for more than fifty students enrolled in photography classes. I mixed and maintained photographic chemistry and maintained industry standard archival inkjet printers so that all class periods were utilized effectively. I also assisted in maintaining an environmentally sensitive lab through the responsible use and disposal of photographic chemistry. I also contributed to the future of the photography studio by editing and revising the Photography Lab Manual so future lab monitors can continue to streamline the position and assist the department.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The knowledge that I gained through this undergraduate fellowship has helped me learn how to work in a fine arts-based professional environment. The teaching and technical expertise I have gained has made me more competitive regarding postgraduate job applications. Crucially, my contribution to the life of the Department of Art and Design will help further the department’s enrollment and retention goals. Through this undergraduate research fellowship I have enlarged the scope of my own future endeavors while furthering the mission of the University.