

WHY WE REQUIRE A DSLR FOR OUR PHOTO 143 CLASS

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There is no way around it; a DSLR (Digital Single Lens Reflex) can represent a significant expense for a student. Worse, it can become a barrier to taking the class. Here is an example of what we are talking about. Entry level DSLRs (Canon XT, Nikon D40) can run \$300.00-\$500.00 for a body and kit lens. And prices go up rapidly from there. Entry level DSLRs from Sony, Olympus, and Pentax are similarly priced though sometimes one can find a used one in good condition for a little less.

So let me put this requirement in some context and show why it is important as well as to enumerate what some of the options exist for the student wanting to take that class.

FOUNDATIONAL CLASS

Photo 143 is a foundational class in our program. That means several things:

1. It is an entry point into the full program
2. It is a prerequisite for more advanced courses. That is, once you have credit for Photo 143, you can enroll in more advanced classes.

The Photo 143 class is nearly identical to the Photo 100 (Beginning Black and White Photography) except that instead of working in the wet film-based darkroom, students will complete assignments using the digital darkroom, i.e. a computer. Plus, a digital camera has more functionality than most normal film based cameras. Additionally, the “natural” output for a digital camera is a color image. All of those considerations put a larger burden on the student, their time for projects and dealing with the extra information, and their equipment than exists in the Photo 100 class.

With much of the professional world firmly entrenched in the arena of digital photography, our advanced courses expect a certain competence in basic issues and do not have the time to go back and, for some students, try to help them catch up because they did not get what they needed in the basic level classes.

What does that have to do with the need for a DSLR? Well, a lot actually. Only a DSLR (or a high end rangefinder like a Leica which is REALLY expensive) allows

for interchangeable lenses and a full system of accessories. What you learn with a DSLR (or SLR in the film world) will lay the groundwork for handling other professional formats and camera types.

As importantly, even though some consumer level cameras, especially the “DSLR-Type” offerings, offer all of the manual controls of a true DSLR, any camera with smaller than APS/DX sized sensors (which includes all “point and Shoot cameras as well as SLR-Type cameras) have a severe limitation. We will explain the reasoning in class but the bottom line is that their smaller sensors use lenses with shorter focal lengths. And those short focal length lenses have inherently far greater depth of field than lenses designed for larger sensors. That means that some assignments teaching the purposeful use of shallow depth of field (where the subject is in sharp focus and the rest of the shot is not) cannot be done.

And, because the shorter focal length lenses do not have the same range of apertures, there are some shots that simply cannot be done or done well with those cameras.

Since the ability to purposefully use those functions is foundational for progress in the program, that is it will be required for advanced classes, we have to require cameras that can do it for the basic classes.

BUT I JUST WANT TO BE A BETTER PHOTOGRAPHER!

We have a lot of students who just want to improve their photo skills and do not want or expect to become professional or to take those advanced classes. So shouldn't we make exceptions to the DSLR rule?

Well, we don't make exceptions in the film-based world and neither can we make them here. The problem is that regardless of intent when they sign up for the first class, once completing it, the registration system will allow students to sign up for ANY follow-on class should they then decide to do so. We have no way to track or control that issue.

What we do have is an alternative class. If you truly just want to learn more about photography and how to take better photos but no interest in or need for the rest of the program then you can take the Photo 105 Introduction to Photography course where the camera type requirement does not exist. It is a non-lab class where you will be expected to shoot and produce assignment photos/photo files on your own. This class is not foundational and does not meet a prerequisite for any follow on classes.

I REALLY WANT THE 143 CLASS, BUT CANNOT AFFORD THE CAMERA REQUIREMENT

There are some options that might help you with this if you really want to take the 143 class and learn not only about digital photography but also entry level knowledge about the editing tools such as PhotoShop™.

1. If you are on Financial Aid, because it is a requirement for the class, if approved they will buy the required camera and lens for you.
2. Some local camera stores will rent an entry level DSLR kit for the semester for around \$150.00 to \$200.00. This will let you take the class and then decide, if you wish to go on, what will be the best approach for you.

CONCLUSION

We understand this can be a hardship; but the brutal truth is photography is neither a cheap hobby nor a cheap course of study. By the time you are finished, if you go on through the program this will have seemed like a small economic hurdle. Photography as both avocation and vocation is unfortunately an equipment intensive field and the equipment can be quite expensive. But there is no way to produce the work without it.

The good news is that there are alternatives for you, both in the courses you can take and also in the local availability of rental equipment to get you through the semester.

Please feel free to discuss those options with your instructor. We'll be happy to try to steer you in the right direction for your needs.