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Final Reflection

While I have not finished my research paper, I can reflect on my work and the previous assignments we delivered this semester. Fortunately, I enjoy writing academic essays, so a lack of inspiration and creativity was not a problem for the class. Likewise, the exercises and brainstorming exercises during class were constructive when finishing assignments. The handouts we had to prepare before the workshops made it easier for me to know what I wanted to write about, clarify the direction of my papers, and give me a general idea of how I wanted the final essay to look.

Similarly, working with my peers was very helpful. This course is the first writing class I have taken where we are encouraged to work together, even when the assignment is done individually, and I enjoyed it. My peers were always supportive, encouraging, and willing to pay attention to the rest of the class’s work. It is a shame that I could not spend more courses with them and missed the conference for the research paper. Nevertheless, the feedback I got for the early stages of my research paper, photo essay, and previous assignments was constructive.

I learned that you never know how someone else might look at a photograph or what they might make of it. It was surprising to hear what other students had to say about a picture. They offered insights I would have never thought about, making the class very engaging. I wish there were an assignment to get to know us better. Sharing personal details is not always easy, but this class was very social and friendly.

As for how I approached draft writing, it was very similar for every assignment. First, I filled in the handouts for the following class. Then, I wrote down my peers’ feedback and created an outline for the essay. These outlines usually have the titles of one or two paragraphs. This process helps me calculate the number of words the article will take and visualize how much time I will spend on a topic. Afterward, I wrote the first draft and edited it on Grammarly (which I highly recommend). Ideally, I wait a few days to work on the essay again and finally submit it. Unfortunately, I could not go to the Writing Center for a consultation, but I usually do when I have the final draft of a paper.

One aspect I need to improve is incorporating citations into my research paper. I missed the workshop where the professor taught us how to use the MLA format for photography-related papers, so attending would have been very helpful. It was an aspect I learned when writing the photo essay. However, after taking this class, I am comfortable incorporating and analyzing different photographs for a research paper. The readings and the group exercises during the course were the most helpful to develop this skill. I did not know how much information one could retrieve from a single photograph. My favorite reading assignment was “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black and White Photograph” by Ryan Jerving.

As for my big takeaway about family photography and stories, we must learn to look at them to get the whole story. I remember the first photograph we analyzed this semester. We looked at an Instagram post of the royal family after Prince Harry and Meghan’s son’s baptism. I did not think much of the picture at first. I was unaware of how the camera position, cropping, clothing, or other aspects of the photograph give further information about the photograph’s subjects. However, after discussing the picture with the rest of the class and learning more about how to look at photos, I realized there is a whole new world for those who know how to look at them. My favorite example is Masashita Fukase’s “Family” work. I noticed several details and got a different interpretation of his album due to all the work and practice we had done in class. I am not saying that a photograph does not hold the same value if you cannot fully appreciate it, but rather that there is much to discover if you have such skill.

Finally, I learned something unexpected from this course, and I would have loved to know if it happened to my peers, too. I found myself paying more attention to how I take everyday pictures, such as a tree during the fall or a selfie with my friends. This activity is outside the scope of the class, but it would be fascinating to see how we take picture changes throughout the semester. We could take the same pictures on the first and last day of class and compare them. This idea is for a future semester, but thank you for such an exciting and fun class. I explored and learned about something I had never studied before. If I ever visit the church where my grandparents got married, I promise to take some photographs and share them. Also, thank you for your patience and understanding while I was gone. I hope you have a great winter break, Professor Martinez!