



CIEE Monteverde, Costa Rica

Course title:	Nature Photography, Social Media, and Environmental Engagement
Course code:	(GI) JOUR 3005 MOCR
Programs offering course:	January in Monteverde
Open Campus Track:	Communications, Journalism, and New Media
Language of instruction:	English
U.S. semester credits:	3.00
Contact hours:	45.00
Term:	January 2024

Course Description

Photographing nature is an ever more powerful tool for conservation education and engagement. Whether recorded by smartphone, point and shoot camera, GoPro, DSLR or drone, recorded still and moving images are increasingly relevant to how people learn and experience their natural environment. In this course, students approach photographing nature technically, with an eye to bringing the wonder of nature to the public through still and moving images. Students use their SLR or digital cameras to record natural images, transform the images with software, and place their images on social media for public engagement. Students will use photography to expand their understanding of nature while bringing exciting revelations to others. This course emphasizes the integration of image with compelling narrative that is a mix of personal observation, scientific information and wonder.

While there are no prerequisites for this course, students would benefit from prior experience outdoors, courses on whole organisms, and experience with photography.

Learning Objectives

By completing this course, students will:

- Analyze still and moving images of nature for composition, technique and emotional impact
- Sharpen observation skills in outdoor settings
- Enhance knowledge of the natural world, including tropical ecosystems
- Increase technical and artistic proficiency in capturing still and moving images of nature
- Employ a variety of digital equipment used in nature and outdoor photography, from smartphone to drones
- Master field techniques used to photograph wildlife, plants, landscapes and outdoor activities
- Use current software to enhance the compositional and emotional impact of images
- Produce a visual portfolio of photographs of plants, animals, landscapes and outdoor activities
- Present (visually and orally) a compilation of still and moving images with narrative
- Combine visual images, narrative and social media to educate the general public on the characters, workings and conservation of the natural world

Course Prerequisites

None

Methods of Instruction

This course is an interactive mix of lectures, demonstrations, online research, image editing, and extensive time out in nature capturing images. The course requires at least a smartphone with high quality camera capable of both still and moving images. Any additional photographic equipment supplied by the student will further enhance the experience. Quality of equipment provided by students will not impact their grade. Guest photographers will share their best practices for nature photography and local excursions will offer a wide number of species and ecosystems to capture.

Assessment and Final Grade

1.	Field Techniques Notebook	10%
2.	Still Image Portfolio	20%

3.	Moving Image Portfolio	20%
4.	Image Editing Portfolio	10%
5.	Social Media Posts	20%
6.	Participation	20%
	TOTAL	100%

Course Requirements

Field Techniques Notebook

Students are required to keep a notebook, electronic or pen/paper, to record field techniques they learn. Students will submit their notebooks weekly for evaluation by the instructor. Students will be graded on how well they captured the techniques in writing.

Still Image Portfolio

Students will submit a portfolio of at least 20 still images from nature that include: parts of organisms, whole organisms, species interactions, ecosystems, landscapes, and people in nature. Each image will have a caption or short description designed to inform and engage the general public.

Moving Image Portfolio

Students will submit a portfolio of at least 6 short videos (1-3 minutes each) from nature that include: parts of organisms, whole organisms, species interactions, ecosystems, landscapes, and people in nature. Each image will include an audio narrative to inform and engage the general public.

Image Editing Portfolio

Students will provide before and after versions of four still images and one video that shows enhancements through use of photography editing and video editing software. Alongside each pair, students will write which software, filters, settings and other technical information used for image enhancement. Students will be graded on their choices of tools and the visual impact of the enhancements.

Social Media Posts

Students will share at least 20 social media posts based on their work during the course. These posts should use an array of social media (TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) to show and tell a story that engages their friends and followers. Students will be graded on the quality of their posts visually and narratively. Number of Likes, Shares or Reposts will not be part of the grade.

Participation

Participation is defined as meaningful contribution in the classroom, using the resources and materials presented to students as part of the course. Meaningful contribution requires students to prepare in advance of each class and regularly engage with the resources, discussions, reflective assignments, and all other learning activities. Students are required to demonstrate engagement with course materials, for example, through insightful, constructive comments and by using subject-appropriate terminology in: peer-to-peer feedback (after viewing the presentations of others), interaction with guest speakers, where available, and submissions related to other outside-of-class activities. Students should ensure that submitted commentary balances opinions, general impressions, and specific and thoughtful criticisms or contributions.

Attendance

To encourage engaged learning, regular class attendance is required throughout the program. This includes any required co-curricular class excursion or event, as well as internship, service-learning, or other required field placement.

An excused absence in a CIEE course will only be considered if approved by a CIEE Center Director/Academic Director (not the Instructor), and:

- it is a self-certified absence for illness (only once per course, requires formal request before or within 24 hours, cannot miss assessment worth more than 5% of final course grade)
- a doctor’s note from a local medical professional is provided
- evidence of a family emergency is provided
- it is a pre-approved observance of religious holiday

Unexcused absences include personal travel and/or travel delays, as well as missing more than 25% of a single class period (including tardiness and early departure). Assessments missed due to unexcused absences will be marked as zero. Students with over 10% unexcused absences will be contacted by CIEE staff. Students with over 20% unexcused absences will be contacted by CIEE staff, receive a formal warning letter (shared with their home institution) and lose 10% of the final course point total (e.g., a final A grade of 93% will be lowered to a B grade of 83%).

For more detail, please consult your CIEE Academic Manual.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is essential to a positive and inclusive teaching and learning environment. All students are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness, respect, and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own can result in grade penalties or disciplinary action. See the CIEE Student Academic Manual for further information on academic integrity.

N.B. Course schedule and co-curriculars are subject to change. The final duration and distribution of content and assignments will be determined and presented to students at the onset of the course.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1

Class: 1.0 Intro/History and What Makes a Good Nature Photo/Video

Students trace the history of nature photography and its connection to nature appreciation and conservation. They work in groups with supplied images and internet resources to discover, assess and critique images of nature they find arresting or compelling. Students share their top five images with other groups and explain what speaks to them and why. Finally, students discuss how much of a great nature photography is technical finesse or artistic vision.

Readings:

Wolfe and Hill – Introduction

Watch:

Join a Wildlife Photographer on the Hunt for a Perfect Shot. 2017. National Geographic at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ClpanvK2bII>

Witness – Defining Conservation Photography. 2018. SeaLegacy at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2AivE6RpjO0>

Class: 2.0 Composition

In this session, students assess and apply best practices for image composition in nature photography. They begin with suggestions for isolating their subjects in different contexts, including eliminating clutter before and after the image is captured. Students view select images and work in groups to improve their composition, including both planning the shot and using software to fix issues afterward. Students take a hike through the cloudforest to learn some of its species and important stories.

Readings:

Wolfe and Hill – Chapter 1 Isolating the Subject, Chapter 2 Composing the Picture

Watch:

Reeder, K. 2016. 10 Wildlife Photography Composition Tips at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7h9pzzrDcUc>

Danson, N. 2021. Why Doesn't My Photo Look Good? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f4ttm6iVcz4>

Due: Still Images Portfolio 1 (check in)

Class: 3.0 Scale and Perspective

In this session, students explore scale, depth and perspective. They begin with composition by considering how large the subject should be. They then define focal length and investigate its relationship to sensor size and proximity to objects. Students learn the basic physics of telephoto and wide-angle lenses and how they change what the camera records. Finally, they determine how changing the camera angle can improve composition. Students also climb to great views of the San Luis Valley to begin capturing landscapes.

Readings:

Wolfe and Hill – Chapter 3 Defining Your Perspective

Watch:

Nolten, P. 2021. Adding Scale and Perspective to Photos at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0tvevfKpYiY>

Danson, N. 2020. Improve Your Landscape Photography by Adding Scale at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FcKT6SQ984g>

Due: Field Techniques Notebook (check in)

Week 2

Class: 4.0 The Power and Limitations of Color

Students explore how color can change the visual and emotional impact of images. Students investigate how color can change naturally with light and composition, how color can be manipulated with lenses, and how color can be edited in software. They break color down into different components of hue, saturation, and others. Students play with different color palettes of complementary, harmonious and pastel. Finally, students show examples of how color can be distracting by converting color photographs to black and white. Students take their own images and those from the internet to edit their colors and see how it changes the images visually and emotionally.

Readings:

Wolfe and Hill – Chapter 3 Defining Your Perspective

Watch:

Popys, J. 2021. Colour Theory Photographers Should Know at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CToisr1SkQ>

Vibrant Colors in Nature Photography. 2020. Visual Wilderness at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ox1R4gv-dY>

How to Color Landscape Photos in Photoshop. 2017. PHLEARN at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIqX3z46ah0>

Class: 5.0 Design in Nature Photography

Students consider the power of line in nature photography. They play with horizon placement: how it effects depth and what happens when the horizontal is off center. They also consider aerial photos with no horizon. Students use receding lines and diagonal lines to create depth and visual interest. They also investigate different patterns, textures. Students synthesize these into making composite diagrams. Students try their best to capture Monteverde's stunning sunsets. Students meet with local nature photographers to discuss their design best practices.

Readings:

Wolfe and Hill – Chapter 5 The Elements of Design

Watch:

Saligram, S. 2020. What Makes an Image Work, Especially in Nature Photography? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51NIBqiCyOs>

Due: Still Images Portfolio (check in), Field Techniques Notebook (check in)

Class: 6.0 The Importance and Qualities of Light

Students track changes in light quality with time of day. They explore color temperature. Students compare the impacts of direct and overcast sunlight both in and out of forest. They try to capture direction of light in the forest understory. Students then use front, side and backlighting to change image quality and visual story. Students experiment with reflected light, artificial light and spotlighting. Students take their knowledge to the field to play with light in nature. They then take to their computers to alter light digitally with software.

Readings:

Wolfe and Hill – Chapter 6 Reading the Light

Watch:

8 Natural Lighting Tips from National Geographic Photographer Bob Holmes. 2019. Advancing Your Photography at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fbEb6-dtsEI>

Danson, N. 2021. Simple Tips for Photographing in Harsh Light. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LV78APFBWjk>

Class: 7.0 Macro and Micro Photography

Students zero in on macrophotography, beginning with a critique of macro photos supplied by the instructor and found online. They discuss how macrophotography can be used to promote understanding and empathy for nature. They then apply techniques learned earlier to macrophotography, including composition, lighting and color. Students take to the field to capture their own still macro images of assigned topics, including parts of organisms, as well as entire organisms that are generally too small to notice. Finally, students take to the lab, to photograph microscopic organisms.

Readings:

Wolfe and Hill – Chapter 7 Creative Options

Watch:

Fisher, N. 2018. An Introduction to Macrophotography at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJG62Zs9vGE>

Due:

Still Photo Portfolio (check in)

Class: 8.0 Building the Narrative

Students critique captions and short observations that accompany still images of nature. They examine magazines, blogs, Instagram and other social media posts to assess what information is most engaging and compelling. Students take their own images and use the CIEE Center library and online resources to find information to share that enhances their photos, draws attention to their subjects and shares a conservation messages. Students meet with a local science writer on what information grabs the public's attention most.

Readings:

Wolfe and Hill – Chapter 9 An Editor's View

Watch:

Telling a Story in Nature Photography. 2021. Deep Green Photography at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x6vmPwxLEkc>

Due:

Field Techniques Notebook (check in)

Week 3

Class: 9.0 Documenting Climate Change through Images and Narrative

For this cocurricular, students will go from the beach to the Continental Divide (at 1750m) to document elevational changes in flora, fauna and land use. They will capture still and moving images along the way that help illustrate how climate impacts nature. Once back in Monteverde, students will use library and internet resources to narrate their findings, bringing the impact of climate change on tropical biodiversity into clearer focus for a general audience.

Readings:

Wolfe and Hill – Chapter 8 In the Field

Watch:

Climate Change Impacts All of Us, But There is Hope. 2016. National Geographic at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QwLyscT3NgI>

Due:

Still Photo Portfolio

Class: 10.0 Video Stories of Nature and Conservation

This day's focus will be capturing compelling video images of nature. Students will talk with a local nature videographer with a popular YouTube channel on what equipment, techniques and narratives work best to get most views and likes. Students walk through the forest, capturing video but also think of ideas for short stories that can be told through video. They create simple storyboards and then go out and shoot them.

Readings:

Wolfe and Hill – Chapter 10 Top Tips

Watch:

Norman, T.A. 2019. How to Film Epic Nature at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TMnviG0jzik>

Due:

Field Techniques Notebook

Class: 11.0 Aerial Nature Photography

Students explore how the use of drones for still and moving images has completely changed nature photography. They learn the theory and practice of aerial photography with drones. Students work closely with drones: seeing how they work and considering what to keep in mind while controlling one. They distinguish the difference between a drone pilot and a photographer, and how to take advantage of the camera's functions to produce incredible images. Next, students practice some cinematographic techniques and camera movements to apply to video with aerial shots.

Readings:

Thomas, A. 2021. How to Use Drones to Do Stunning Aerial Photography. Digital Photography School at <https://digital-photography-school.com/how-to-use-drones-to-do-stunning-aerial-photography/>

Watch:

Danson, N. 2017. Instantly Improve Your Drone Landscape Photography at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PntG8KEVjR8>

Due:

Moving Image Portfolio

Students take their raw video and use video editing software to enhance it and tell a compelling story. This post-production session will survey a host of popular video editing software, including freeware. This online video editing session will provide a guide to video editing fundamentals, its jargon, process, resources, and career options in the context of nature video editing. Students will create a composite video drawing on several species, interactions and ecosystems to tell a short (< 5 minute) conservation story suitable for social media.

Readings:

May, T. 2021. Video Editing for Beginners – the Ultimate Guide. Creative Bloq at <https://www.creativebloq.com/news/video-editing-for-beginners-ultimate>

Watch:

Maté Grab, C. 2018. How to Get the Cinematic Look in Premier Pro Tutorial at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQJfFLJufYw>

Due: Image Editing Portfolio

Class: 13.0 Posting Content on Social Media, Exhibits, and Wrap Up

This final session covers several topics and allows students to curate and present their best works from the course. It begins with students sharing best practices for posting still and moving images on social media. They also speak with local photographers on the same topic. They critique posts of professionals and discuss strategies for building subscribers and branding. Students also present their favorite and most impactful images, including videos. They critique each others work and share strategies for building on their successes. Students also discuss how what they have learned in the course enhances their career and personal enjoyment of nature.

Watch:

James, L. 2020. How to Develop a Social Media Strategy Step by Step at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PKUn7wU5sIc>

Denney, M. 2020. Make Money with Landscape Photography – Things I Wish I Knew Sooner at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MGxgby547B4>

Due:

Social Media Posts

Course Materials

Readings

Hall, B. and R. Hoddinott. 2021. 52 Assignments: Nature Photography. Ammonite Press.

Wolfe, A. and M. Hill. 2013. The New Art of Photographing Nature: An Updated Guide to Composing Stunning Images of Animals, Nature, and Landscapes. Amphoto Books

Additional readings will be assigned by the instructor.

Online Resources

Heim, M. 2019. Use Your Photography to Support and Enhance Conservation. Audobon Magazine at <https://www.audubon.org/news/use-your-photography-support-and-advance-conservation>

How to Boost a Post on Social Media. 2021. Impact Marketing Group at <https://www.impactgroupmarketing.com/blog/articleid/567/how-to-boost-a-post-on-social-media>

May, T. 2021. Video Editing for Beginners – the Ultimate Guide. Creative Bloq at <https://www.creativebloq.com/news/video-editing-for-beginners-ultimate>

Tannir, L. 2021. How to Be a Conservation Photographer at <https://lana-tannir.com/how-to-be-a-conservation-photographer/>

Thomas, A. 2021. How to Use Drones to Do Stunning Aerial Photography. Digital Photography School
at <https://digital-photography-school.com/how-to-use-drones-to-do-stunning-aerial-photography/>