VCPH-2991: PROFESSIONAL BUSINESS PRACTICES AND PORTFOLIO PREP FOR PHOTOGRAPHERS

Cuyahoga Community College

Viewing: VCPH-2991 : Professional Business Practices and Portfolio Prep for Photographers

Board of Trustees:
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Spring 2026

Subject Code
VCPH - VC-Photography

Course Number:
2991

Title:
Professional Business Practices and Portfolio Prep for Photographers

Catalog Description:
This course will introduce students to the business and marketing practices common to photography. Emphasis will be placed on developing professional objectives based on careful consideration of their personal goals and the financial, legal, organizational, interpersonal and ethical practices particular to photography.

Credit Hour(s):
4

Lecture Hour(s):
3

Lab Hour(s):
2

Requisites

Prerequisite and Corequisite
VCPH-2550 Commercial Studio Techniques II, or concurrent enrollment and VCPH-2450 Digital Imaging II.

Outcomes

Course Outcome(s):
Design and develop marketing materials that present a high level of execution and application of photographic techniques.

Objective(s):
1. Edit and sequence a printed portfolio for maximum visual impact for the purpose of securing freelance or full-time employment as a photographer, retoucher, stylist or in photographer's studio.
2. Create a professional looking web presence that is easily findable via web search algorithms.

Course Outcome(s):
Create a personal business brand identity.

Objective(s):
1. Craft a Mission Statement
2. Design and produce a visually compelling business card
3. Build a comprehensive resume that translates varied work experience to your desired field
4. Configure a realistic Action Plan for entering the professional photography field
5. Research and compile an Equipment Wish List

Course Outcome(s):

Generate realistic and comprehensive business paperwork.

Objective(s):

1. Configure estimates that accurately address all factors of a job.
2. Produce quotes that accurately quantify a job.
3. Develop and monitor budgets throughout a job.
4. Generate invoices reflective of previously submitted quote and direction changes during production.

Course Outcome(s):

Learn and employ ethical business practices relevant to the photography industry.

Objective(s):

1. Explain the principles and practices of maintaining professional relationships with clients, suppliers, support personnel, colleagues and competitors.
2. Gain understanding of relevant skills, a creative sensibility and a high level of professionalism for a graduate of this class to enter the workplace.
3. Discuss the responsibilities of a small business, freelancer, sub-contractor, sole proprietor, LLC to local, state, and federal tax authorities, with an emphasis on proper maintenance of records.
4. Utilize professional business communications and protocols with prospective clients, employers and guest speakers.

Course Outcome(s):

Complete an end-of-semester portfolio review process.

Objective(s):

1. Successfully present a portfolio and/or web site in an interview situation consistent with professional standards.
2. Utilize professional business communications and protocols with prospective clients, employers and guest speakers.

Course Outcome(s):

Differentiate and assume a variety of roles in a photographic and creative team.

Objective(s):

1. Describe the roles and hierarchy within a studio team.
2. Describe the environment particular to external stake holders.

Methods of Evaluation:

1. Portfolio
2. Creation of a entry level professional Web Site
3. Creation of a professional level social media presence
4. Production of professional level Estimates, Statements of Terms and Invoices
5. Presentation of Identity system
6. Participation in Portfolio Review with industry professionals

Course Content Outline:

1. Materials needed for the purpose of securing freelance or full-time employment

a. Web site

b. A custom binder for your printed portfolio

i. Editing and sequencing portfolios for maximum visual impact

ii. Photographic portfolio cases, books and boxes, printing techniques and resources, portfolio suppliers, distributors, and online ordering

a. A business card, résumé, realistic Action Plan and Equipment Wish List and Budget for working as a freelance assistant or photographer or establishing one's own commercial photography business.

b. Realistic and comprehensive quotes, estimates, budgets and invoices

c. A set of leave behind/mailers

2. Apply knowledge of the photography industry to work as a successful member of a photographic team

3. Gain understanding of relevant skills, a creative sensibility and a high level of professionalism for a graduate of this class to enter the workplace

4. Professional Resources

a. Photographic equipment rental facilities, modeling agencies and prop rental agencies.

b. Business insurance, permits, releases, permissions, rights to reproduction.

c. Standard contracts and other legal documents

d. As a photographer, retoucher, stylist or photographer's studio assistant that emphasizes the student's strengths or area of specialization.

5. Team Roles

a. Photographic team

i. Studio assistant

ii. Digi-tech

iii. Digital retoucher

iv. Freelance assistant

v. Freelance photographer

vi. Describe one's responsibilities to other members of the creative photographic team

b. Broader Creative Team

i. Art Director

ii. Creative Director

iii. Copy Writer, Account Executive

iv. Sales Representative

v. Graphic Designer

vi. DigiTech

vii. Head Photographer

6. Marketing

a. Photography markets and how the business models differ for each

i. Commercial

ii. Editorial

1. Local Magazines

2. Being a Stringer for Wire Services/Out of Town News Sources

3. Trade publications

iii. Weddings, Seniors, Newborns

iv. Events

b. Identifying prospective employers and clients

c. Is marketing an expense or an investment?

d. Networking

i. Traditional

ii. Social Media

e. What is the value in being a generalist? Photographic diversification vs. specialization

f. Leave behind samples and mailers

g. Effective email and telephone etiquette

7. Apply knowledge of the photography industry to work as a successful member of a photographic team

8. Define the roles of the various members of the photographic team

9. Describe systems for the proper archiving and retrieving of all materials related to a job or project

10. Ethical business practices relevant to the photography industry

11. ethical principles and practices of maintaining professional relationships with clients, suppliers, support personnel, colleagues and competitors

12. Responsibilities of a small business (freelancer, sub-contractor, sole proprietor, LLC) to local, state, and federal tax authorities, with an emphasis on proper maintenance of records
13. Systems for the proper archiving and retrieving of all materials related to a job or project
14. Introductory and follow-up correspondence
15. Using references and letters of recommendation
16. Interview strategies and practices including conduct and appropriate dress
17. The photographic portfolio as an ongoing project
18. How to achieve a breakeven analysis of a business

a. What are the variable costs & fixed costs of doing business?
b. Products and Services

19. Mission Statement

a. Why you should have one
b. What it should say

20. Branding

a. Identity package

i. Logo or icon
ii. Stationary and matching forms (invoices, estimates, etc.)
iii. Business card
iv. Stickers

b. What are the values of creating an identifiable brand?
c. What does a brand represent?
d. How to find out who your competitors are

i. Research market(s) within your perceived customer base
ii. Identify other photographers in your area and how they are marketing their businesses

21. Estimating and Pricing

a. Create a new job questionnaire form
b. Role play job scenarios for students to estimate
c. The psychology of pricing
d. Discuss the approach to estimating giving examples of jobs
e. Breakdown the real and variable costs used to achieve a profitable estimate
f. National Press Photographers Association cost of doing business calculator: https://nppa.org/calculator (https://nppa.org/calculator/)

22. Contracts

a. Understanding the importance of a contract
b. Understanding Terms & Conditions
c. Usage rights for advertising vs editorial vs personal
d. Limitations of a contract

23. Copyrighting Your Work

1. Copyright.gov

b. Trademarks
c. Intellectual Property rights of others
d. Model releases

24. Negotiating Price

a. When to stand fast on price, when to negotiate it to land the project and how to recognize the difference
b. How to get compensation when you lower your price

1. Preparation for a shoot
    a. Checklists
    b. Avoiding Single Point Failure
    c. Packing and Stacking
    d. *Premeditatio Malorum*
    e. The MacGyver Principle
    f. Creative problem solving on location
2. Credit and Finance

a. Finding the best credit card using Bank Rate.com (https://www.bankrate.com/)
b. The use of lines of credit
c. Accepting credit cards
d. Cash flow
e. Discounts for repeat customers
f. Separation of business and personal expenses
27. Choice Of Business Type
a. Sole Proprietor
b. LLC and how to set one up: https://www.ohiosos.gov/businesses/information-on-starting-and-maintaining-a-business/starting-a-business/
c. Partnership
d. S Corp
28. Insurance
a. Liability, equipment, property
b. Group vs individual
c. Riders for specific shoots
d. Professional Photographers of America (PPofA) benefits https://www.ppa.com/benefits (https://www.ppa.com/benefits/)
e. Lemonade https://www.lemonade.com/
29. Taxes
a. Filing estimated quarterly taxes
b. Forms needed
c. How to figure out the amount to send?
d. How and when do you send in the payments?
e. Sales Tax – State (& City in Ohio)
f. Who pays it and who doesn't?
1. TurboTax
2. QuickBooks https://quickbooks.intuit.com/
30. Considerations for retirement for the self-employed

Religious Accommodation

Before reviewing the course schedule, students should carefully review the following religious accommodation policy and other required instructional policies:

Religious Accommodation:

Students seeking an accommodation for absences permitted under Ohio's Testing Your Faith Act must provide the instructor with written notice of the specific dates for which the student requires an accommodation and must do so not later than fourteen (14) days after the first day of instruction. Please submit requests for accommodations at this link: https://portal2.tri-c.edu/ReligiousAccommodation/ Religious Accommodation Form. Students with questions about their religious accommodations under Ohio's Testing Your Faith Act may contact the College's Office of General Counsel and Legal Services by phone at 216.987.4856 or via email at legal@tri-c.edu.

Other Required Instructional Policies:

https://www.tri-c.edu/student-resources/curriculum/documents/syllabus-part-b.pdf

Weekly Schedule

	Topics
Week 1	Introduction: expectations, assignments, books and video conferences, guest speaker and site visits Description of Photo specialties/ non-shooting specialties Strategic planning for photographers Question and answer session to discuss what you, as a photographer entering the workplace, want to know about the business
Week 2	Introduction to Monthly Budgets, Resumes/CV's, Action Plans, Wish Lists, Portfolios, Web Sites, Business Cards and a Social Media Presence
Week 3	Evolution of a job. A discussion of the proposal, bidding, quoting and closing processes for two different types of commercial photography jobs.

Week 4	Written correspondence, e-mail etiquette and point of contact follow ups Introduction to interviewing, cold contacting, and social media conduct Printing demo
Week 5	Financial literacy Money Management Basic Accounting Banking Business Checking Credit Cards and Lines of Credit
Week 6	Introduction to the portfolio and web site construction
Week 7	Invoices, Estimates, and Contracts
Week 8	Savings and Retirement When and how to borrow money Taxes Sole Proprietor and LLC Software Managing accounts receivable
Week 9	Printing demo Work in Progress review of Web Site
Week 10	Constructing a portfolio, web site Maintaining a professional social media presence
Week 11	Business ethics, competition, loyalty, discretion, & proprietary information.
Week 12	Introduction to interviewing Portfolio work in progress review
Week 13	Review of Portfolio and Web Site with Photo department alumnus Post-production and printing session
Week 14	Post-production and printing workday
Week 15	Portfolio review and networking session with industry professionals Course and Student Self Evaluations distributed
Week 16	Exit Interviews, Evaluations returned

The Course Schedule is subject to change due to pedagogical needs, instructor discretion, parts of term, and unexpected events.

Required/Recommended Readings

Readings may be selected from the following supplemental materials:

1. Harrington, John. *Best Business Practices for Photographers.*
2. Fletcher, Margaret. *Constructing the Persuasive Portfolio: The Only Primer You'll Ever Need.*

Additional Resources for the Instructor

1. Lab facilities: access to digital post-production and printing facilities, lighting and grip equipment can be signed out with permission, access to internet
2. A variety of instructor provided handouts covering technical, creative, and business principles and practices
3. Organizations

a. The American Institute of Graphic Artists http://www.aiga.org/
b. Professional Photographers of America https://www.ppa.com
c. American Society of Media Photographers http://asmp.org/
d. Photography industry trade publication https://www.pdnonline.com/
e. Society for Photographic Education https://www.spenational.org/
f. WPPI (Annual Wedding Photography Conference) https://wppiexpo.com/about/
g. American Illustration + American Photography http://www.ai-ap.com/

4. DIY Web Site Builders

a. Squarespace www.squarespace.com (http://www.squarespace.com)
b. Wix www.wix.com (http://www.wix.com)
c. Format www.format.com (http://www.format.com)
d. Behance www.behance.com (http://www.behance.com)
e. Photoshelter www.photoshelter.com (http://www.photoshelter.com)

f. Wonderful Machine www.wondefulmachine.com (http://www.wondefulmachine.com) find a photographer web site

5. Portfolios Books

a. Etsy https://www.etsy.com/market/custom_photo_portfolio_book (https://www.etsy.com/market/custom_photo_portfolio_book/)

b. Brewer-Cantellmo http://www.brewer-cantelmo.com/portfolio (http://www.brewer-cantelmo.com/portfolio/)

6. Online Portfolios

a. Format https://www.format.com/

b. Namecheap https://www.namecheap.com/ (domain names)

c. Smug Mug www.smugmug.com (http://www.smugmug.com)

7. Business Cards and Promotional Materials

a. Moo www.moo.com (http://www.moo.com)

b. Jak Prints www.jakprints.com (http://www.jakprints.com)

c. Hot Cards https://hotcards.com/

d. Overnight Prints www.overnightprints.com (http://www.overnightprints.com)

e. Tappy https://tappycard.com/

f. Dot Cards https://dotcards.net/

g.

8. Overview of apps and business software available to photographers

a. Accounting
   i. Zoho Books https://www.zoho.com/us/books/
   ii. Xero https://www.xero.com/us/

b. Mobile Money
   i. Venmo www.venmo.com (http://www.venmo.com)
   ii. Paypal www.paypal.com (http://www.paypal.com)
   iii. Zelle https://www.zellepay.com/
   iv. Wave https://www.wave.com/en/

c. Taxes
   i. Quick Books https://quickbooks.intuit.com/
   ii. Turbo Tax https://turbotax.intuit.com/

d. Communications
   i. Zoom https://zoom.us/
   ii. WebEx www.webex.com (http://www.webex.com)
   iii. Grammarly www.grammarly.com (http://www.grammarly.com)

e. Estimating, Invoicing, Scheduling and Project Tracking
   i. Blinkbid www.blinkbid.com (http://www.blinkbid.com)
   ii. Trello www.trello.com (http://www.trello.com)
   iii. Monday www.monday.com (http://www.monday.com)
   iv. Google Meet https://meet.google.com/
   v. Slack.com https://slack.com/

f. Credit
   i. Bank Rate.com https://www.bankrate.com/
   ii. Credit Karma https://www.creditkarma.com/?source=intuit

g. File Exchange and Collaboration
   i. Google Drive https://drive.google.com/
   ii. Dropbox www.dropbox.com (http://www.dropbox.com)
   iii. Web Cargo https://ipg.webcargo.net/

h. Cloud Storage and Backup
   i. Backblaze www.backblaze.com (http://www.backblaze.com)
   ii. Box www.box.com (http://www.box.com)

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