



FNAR 115: Digital Photography in Rome

John Felice Rome Center

Fall 2026

Mondays | 9:00-12:00pm

Professor **Federica Valabrega**

Email: fvalabrega@luc.edu

Office Hours: by appointment

Instructor: Federica Valabrega is an Italian photojournalist based in between Rome and New York. Her photographs have been published in a number of U.S. based publications such as, The New York Times, TIME Magazine, the Washington Post, the Wall Street Journal, Bloomberg News, Philadelphia Enquirer, LA Times, Npr.org, as well as in a number of European ones such as, Vanity Fair Italy, Vogue Italy, M Le Magazine du Monde, Le Monde de religions, Dummy Magazine, Haaretz, Biber Magazine, La Repubblica, L'Espresso, La Stampa, Il Corriere della Sera and Panorama. Valabrega is also the photobook author of "Daughters of the King," a documentary photography project on the lives of Orthodox Jewish women from among five countries in the world. Selected images from the book were exhibited in Rome at the Ermanno Tedeschi Gallery in 2013 as her first solo show. The same images were also brought by Tedeschi at the MIA (Milano Image Fair) in 2014 where she won the "BNL photography prize." Later, Valabrega's images were selected for the Documentary photography exhibit at the "Visa Pour l'Image" Photo Festival in Perpignan, France in 2014 and at the Para Photo in Turin, Italy that same year, and at the International Photography Festival in Tel Aviv in 2016.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

In this introductory class, students will explore the visual language of digital photography exploring Rome. The technical component of the class consists of mastering manual digital camera operation and exposure concentrating on the dynamics of composition using color and natural light. A variety of subjects will be covered between street photography, and portraits and all in between so that students can become comfortable in more than one genre. There will also be individual and group photography critiques, and photographic field trips. Students also learn to use Adobe imaging software and to organize and enhance their images in post-production. Students will gain an understanding of the aesthetic possibilities of photography through weekly assignments and power point presentations on both historic and contemporary photographers. Students will be expected to complete a final portfolio by the end of the semester that may or may not be exhibited around the school premises.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES: An understanding of the basic concepts of photography: how cameras, lenses, and digital imaging work; photographic composition; lighting conditions and lighting techniques; editing and presenting photographs; building a portfolio of images; individual and group analytical photography critiques.

This is a course is digital photography on location and digital imaging and composed of 14 sessions (each being 2,45 hours long), divided in two main parts:

- *Theoretical and technical:* the basic principles of photography, visualizing the photo, lighting techniques and digital workflow. How to develop your idea, understanding what an interesting subject for you is and crafting your photographic style.

- *Practical:* including fieldworks where you will be applying what you’ve learned in the theory lessons. This part will also include a variety of skills to be able to edit, and retouch selected images for a final project/exhibition.

REQUIRED MATERIAL:

- Digital single lens reflex (DSLR) or mirrorless camera with manual adjustments of f-stop and shutter speed.
- SD memory card(s) 8GB+
- A card reader and/or USB connection for camera to download images
- External Hard Disk or Thumb Drive (20 to 50GB).
- A laptop computer with photography editing software from Adobe: Lightroom Classic, Photoshop and Adobe Illustrator is recommended (the school provides those programs).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS, ASSIGNMENTS, SCHEDULE: In this class there will be individual weekly photographic assignments; a Camera Skill quiz; a Mid-term Exam where students will show their first images; a FINAL organized portfolio of your images to make-up for a photographic project (which will serve as the Final Exam).

Assignment	Guidelines	Weight
Manual Functions Quiz	Camera Skill Quiz	5%
Weekly assignments	Includes technical proficiency both in camera and with editing software, such as Lightroom, Photoshop and Adobe Illustrator. Students should show teacher a digital contact sheets of all new images made for review and be prepared to back up their choice of imageries based on the concepts learnt in class for each assignment.	30%

Mid-term Exam	An in-class critique of 7-10 images taken outside of class according to the standards of light & composition we learnt the first weeks of the class.	15%
Final Presentation	<p>Students are expected to be shooting an average of 20 images per week to produce at least 10 new images to show per critique.</p> <p>The final presentation consists of editing the work over the course of the semester in digital & printed form and should reflect an understanding of what makes a “good” photo from class lesson and suggestions from the teacher and your peers from in-class critiques.</p> <p>Also, students will be asked to write an Artist Statement to attest to their photographic practice and to accompany their final photo essays.</p>	20%
Proficiency & Participation	Students will also be required to come to class prepared and on time and participate to the visual conversation ongoing.	30%

FINAL EXAMINATION: There will be no written Final Exam. The Semester Project serves as the Final. On the last day of class (Monday, December 7) there will be an extensive individual and group critique of the semester’s assignments and the Semester Project. Students will present, and attendance is mandatory.

TEXTBOOK:

NONE

REQUIRED RESERVED READING:

The New York Times or The Washington Post.

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

In accordance with the Rome Center mission to promote a higher level of academic rigor, and in compliance with full-time student visa status, all courses adhere to the following attendance policy.

Prompt attendance, preparation and active participation in course discussions are expected from every student and synonymous with academic success. Attendance is mandatory at every class meeting for each course. Lateness or leaving class early will impact the course grade at the

professor's discretion. All absences, including medical absences, will be treated the same, unless they are documented long-term conditions or emergencies. Such situations will be evaluated case-by-case by the Academic Affairs office. For once-a-week classes such as this course:

- After 1 absence, a 2% final grade reduction will be applied for each missed class.
- Missing 3 classes or more will result in an automatic failure (F).

GRADING POLICY: Each individual assignment will count as one grade and the Final Semester Project counts as two grades. A written Mid-Term Exam will count as two grades.

All grades will be averaged for the final course grade. Late or incomplete assignments will be penalized by one grade (an A becomes a B, etc.). One week before the class ends, students wishing to improve their grade may have an opportunity to do so by taking on an additional assignment. The additional assignment can only improve the grade; it will not be used to compute the final grade if by including it the final grade would decrease.

Grading 94-100: A 90-93: A-

87-89: B+

84-86: B

80-83: B-

77-79: C+

74-76: C

70-73: C-

67-69: D+

60-66: D

59 or lower: F

A/A- = Excellent command of the photographic language, image structure sophisticated, project organization is high, software application is advanced. B+ = Very good command of the photographic language showing very few errors, image structure is advanced. B = Good command of the photographic language, competent use of image structure, evidence of development and complexity, work will generally be above average. B- = Satisfactory command of the photographic language, image structure will be simple, medium number of errors. C+ = Some evidence of ability to control the photographic language, image structure is simple, frequent but not serious errors. C/C- = Some evidence of the ability to control the photographic language, high frequency of errors. D = Little evidence of the ability to control or apply the photographic language, failure to execute a photographic project, frequent errors. F = No evidence of the ability to apply the photographic language and failure to make a photographic project.

STATEMENT ON CHEATING & PLAGIARISM: A student whose actions are deemed by the school to be out of sympathy with the ideals, objectives or the spirit of good conduct as fostered by

the school and academic community, may be subject to discipline, including dismissal, by the school. Cheating is a dishonest action out of sympathy with the ideals, objectives and spirit of the university. Cheating reflects negatively on one's personal integrity. Cheating is unjust to those students who have studied. A student who commits an act of academic dishonesty will receive a failing grade on the work in which the dishonesty occurred. In addition, acts of academic dishonesty, irrespective of the weight of the assignment, may result in the student receiving a failing grade in the course. Instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to the dean, who has the final decision on the outcome of the student's grade and status.

Use of Chat GPT and AI is strictly prohibited in this course.

Class Etiquette:

Computer and device use: During class, you are expected to use your laptop for class-related tasks only. As a courtesy to your colleagues and instructor, please mute your phones and tablets before entering the classroom.

STUDENT ACCOMODATIONS:

Accessibility Accommodations: Students registered with the Student Accessibility Center (SAC) requiring academic accommodations should contact the Academic Affairs office at the John Felice Rome Center during the first week of classes.

Statement on Title IX: The Rome Center follows Loyola's [Comprehensive Policy and Procedures for Addressing Discrimination, Sexual Misconduct, Retaliation](#) and will comply with those as indicated and instructed.

SCHEDULE:

Week 1 (August 31) - First day of class: Introduction. Overview of syllabus, requirements, class expectations, and review of students' camera equipment and needs. Set-up ONE Drive and show students the class workflow within Sakai. Grade and attendance policies discussion.

Week 2 (September 7)– *The basic principles of photography I*: basic camera controls set-ups (ISO; shutter speed; f-stop and white balance) - please review your camera manual prior to class. Small intro to what makes a "good" image different from an "average" one. Discussion why it's not appropriate to use AI in this class. Getting inspired by looking at professional photographers' work. *Weekly Photo assignment on how to photograph with natural vs. artificial began today.*

Week 3 (September 14) - Talking about the prior week assignments. *The basic principles of photography II*. The basics of natural & artificial lighting, composition, framing the subject,

geometrical design elements, rule of thirds and depth of field. *Framing images in great light exercise at home.*

Week 4 (September 21)– Talking about the prior week assignments. *The basic principles of photography III:* Portraiture as a great way to connect with the subject of our stories. *The digital workflow I.* Data capture, file management, basic non-destructive corrections in Lightroom, working with RAW files, what's a histogram: how to create your own photography catalogue (contact sheet) and how to manage a proper workflow. *Portraiture assignment at home.*

Week 5 – (September 28) – Reviewing portraits. *The digital workflow II:* what is an Artist Statement and how do we write about our own images. *The basic principles of photography IV:* What makes a collection of images a photo essay and how to sequence them if you choose to do so. In class editing and sequencing of images a short format in preparation of Mid-Term Critique.

Week 6 (October 5)- *The basic principles of photography V:* Learn how to write a good first Artist Statement paragraph to describe your photographic style in class. *At home assignment: prepare your Midterm with the first paragraph for your Artist Statement.*

Week 2 (September 7)– *The basic principles of photography I:* basic camera controls set-ups (ISO; shutter speed; f-stop and white balance) - please review your camera manual prior to class. Small intro to what makes a “good” image different from an “average” one. Discussion why it's not appropriate to use AI in this class. Getting inspired by looking at professional photographers' work. *Weekly Photo assignment on how to photograph with natural vs. artificial began today.*

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Week 7 (October 12) – Mid-Term Critique: Analysis and screening of students’ photo stories and first paragraphs. *Choose A Photographer to profile for after the break.*

Week 8 (October 19) – NO CLASSES

Week 9 (October 26) – Presentation of the Photographer of choice. *The digital workflow III.* In class editing, retouching, and resizing of images taken at home the prior weeks and preparing them for print. What is the right amount of manipulation to keep your images intact. *Fieldwork assignment on portraiture all together outside of class on location.*

Week 10 (November 2) - *The digital workflow IV.* Laser ink-jet printing in class. *The basic principles of photography VI*: Learn how to start writing a full-body Artist Statement to accompany your photo essays. *Write your first draft of the Artist Statement at home.*

Week 11 (November 9) - Review all the Artist Statements written at home. Revise previous images for approval for the final photo essays and work on titling the final project and further correcting your Artist Statement. *Work on second draft of Artist Statement if needed.*

Week 12 (November 16) - *The basic principles of photography VII.* What are the possible outcomes for student who want to enter a career in photography nowadays. Reviewing past & present photographers working in the field. *Fieldwork all together to exhibit hall to curate final exhibit.*

Session 13 (November 22) - *The digital workflow V*: Adobe Illustrator to build your own FINAL PDF or STORY BOARD. *Assignment at home: work on your final projects in Adobe Illustrator.*

Week 14 (November 30) - *The basic principles of photography VIII*: How to reach out to different outlets, present your work to the public and be published. Continue working on your final projects on Adobe Illustrator in class.

Week 15 (December 7) -Session Completion of the final project. Presentation and review of students’ photographic projects and their Artist Statements. Critically evaluate the work presented by fellow students. *Walk to final exhibit to show peers.*

