

2007 Technology Fellows Final Report

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Department: PHOTOGRAPHY

Title of Project:: UPDATING AND PUBLISHING THE “DIGITAL TAKE-HOME PROFESSOR” TUTORIALS

Collaborators

Peter Thompson is a Rockefeller Fellow in film with graduate degrees in comparative literature and computer graphics. He knows Avid, Finalcut Pro and Quicktime codecs. He is an Adobe Certified Expert in Photoshop. Tom Shirley has a graduate degree in fine arts, was the founding director of the Photography Department’s Digital Imaging Lab, and is the coordinator of the Department’s digital imaging curriculum. He knows both PDF and web publishing. He is an Adobe Certified Expert in Photoshop. The division of labor on the project was as follows: Thompson made the tutorials. Shirley packaged the completed tutorials for streaming on the web.

Project description

Let’s back up one step and state that Tom and I have decided that digital imaging is the hardest photographic subject to teach. Why? Because digital imaging demands that students have the attributes of classical musicians: that is to say, the ability to follow the complicated set of instructions contained within the score, to analyze those instructions in order to understand the theory driving them, to rehearse small procedures systematically and obsessively until they have been digested by mind and body, to then create their own interpretations, and to understand that learning and interpreting a piece is not a one-time victory, but rather, a hard-won, continual process of practice and apprenticeship. Not everyone possesses those attributes; but most can gain them.

Based on this understanding, Tom and I became aware in 2001 of the need to develop a multivalent approach to teach digital imaging: one that would utilize written texts but not be based exclusively on them; one that would promote the acquisition of rote skills in order to support the acquisition of higher-order skills; one that would be self-directed; one that would be experienced in real-time and at any time; one that would support learning in the classroom as well as beyond its four walls.

In short—a competency-based, student-centered approach.

As one answer to this set of pedagogical problems and experiences, in 2002 we created the first version of advanced digital imaging tutorials that follow the digital imaging workflow from scanning to printing. This version was comprised of seventeen Quicktime movie tutorials with thirty-two accompanying PDF tutorials. These Digital Imaging Take-Home Professor Tutorials” combined introductory lectures with desktop demonstrations of the digital imaging processes using Adobe Photoshop version 7. Lectures and demonstrations were supported by the inclusion of practice files (the identical graphic files used in the tutorials), and by PDF text documents that precisely delineated the processes demonstrated in the screencasts. We wrote, designed and produced these tutorials in our studios. Later—as now—we were happy to receive the renewed

support of 2004 and 2005 Technology Fellowships from Columbia College Chicago to expand and update the tutorials.

Meanwhile, Photoshop has continued to upgrade. Updating these tutorials is what we again applied to do in 2007.

After having applied, however, we received several emails on behalf of two institutions in India and Italy that utilize Photoshop 7 and will continue to do so for reasons of monetary constraint. They therefore asked us to keep Version 1 of the “Digital imaging Take-Home Professor” tutorials available for their students in its present form. We found their requests compelling; and Version 1 *does* include many techniques that are *still* valid in Photoshop CS3.

So, we honored their requests and created a separate and entirely new series of tutorials with a focus on the Camera Raw digital format. Why Camera Raw? Because in the Photography Department we increasingly encounter students who have never owned an analog camera. They own digital DSLRs, and quite good ones, too: cameras with the ability to expose using the highest quality digital imaging format: Camera Raw.

But it is the rare student who knows how to capture or develop images in Camera Raw.

To address what seems like a geometrically increasing lack, we made the new Version 2 of the “Digital Imaging Take-Home Professor Tutorials”. These twenty-three new screencasts follow the steps of the Camera Raw digital workflow. They instruct students on all aspects of navigating and sorting images using Adobe Bridge, developing images using Adobe Camera Raw Converter, and finalizing them using Adobe Photoshop CS3. Many of these screencasts have filmed introductions that were made in Italy in places of historical and artistic interest that humorously tie into the particular digital imaging topic at hand.

These screencast tutorials have a combined duration of 182 minutes and collectively illustrate an accompanying 38-page downloadable PDF manual written by Thompson that precisely delineates the complete Camera Raw digital workflow. The manual is the first link in the table of contents. (Note the presence of a second manual written for students who still have Photoshop CS2—necessary because a significant number of students still have CS2 in their studios and CS2 handles Camera Raw quite differently than CS3).

Equipment, software or other resources needed for project

Unlike previous updates, we decided to move from the “delights” of creating on the PC platform to that of being Mac based. For the face-to-face preliminary lectures on each topic in Italy, Thompson used a studio headphone microphone to allow the voice to follow natural head and arm movements without being tied to a single point of focus with a Mac book computer and its on-board webcam to create lectures that were then converted to Quicktime movies. For the screencast demonstrations, he used Snapz Pro software with the headphone microphone. We found that the iLife Movie application could not handle the complexity of the project. Graphics for each of the twenty-three tutorials were created in Photoshop and saved as PICT files that are native for import into desktop video editing software. Graphics files, preliminary lectures and screencasts were then imported into Final Cut Studio 2 and integrated into single project files. Those integrated audio and video files were then rendered and compressed for streaming on the web. We used an external harddrive devoted to the files of this project.

How project is shared

The first set of tutorials were evaluated in 2002 by selected digital imaging students and by all digital imaging faculty within the Photography Department. This series was then published to CD for our students within a control group in order to measure the effectiveness of technical learning as well as the benefits of the liberated time within the classroom to deal with the theoretical, social and economic contexts of technology.

Based on their feedback, the series was then streamed on the web and a letter to Photography Department faculty was sent by the chair advising them of this new resource. The reception from students and faculty (including international ones) has been *extremely* positive. We believe that such a student-centered 24x7 approach is especially useful within our own undergraduate open-admissions institution in which 55-62% of entering freshmen are annually recommended for remediation, and also within other institutions with traditionally underserved student populations.

Based on our rather ample past experience, we do not need the feedback of control groups for the new series. We directly publish the new Version 2 tutorials on the web to accompany the Version 1 tutorials. As in the past, a letter to Photography Department faculty will be sent by the chair at the start of the spring semester advising them of this resource. Both sets of tutorials are streamed from Thompson's website: www.chicagomediaworks.com. Click on "Photoshop tutorials".