

PHOTOGRAPHY FAQ

THE PHOTOGRAPHY PROGRAM AT MSU is one of the few comprehensive four-year photography degree programs in a sizable geographical area of the north central and northwest United States. It is also one of the few remaining programs that continue to teach analog wet darkroom practices fully, as well as being fully digital. On top of that, we offer a full semester of historic 19th century processes, and two survey courses completely devoted to photography history. MSU has become a “top 100” research university as well; extensive research expectations of its faculty means that we are actively exhibiting in shows and publications, therefore remaining contemporary. This is of great benefit to our students.

What kind of degree do you offer?

We currently offer a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Film & Photography, but a BFA may be in our future.

Why should I pursue a 4 year BA degree and not a 2 year AA degree—wouldn't that be enough to work in the field successfully?

Technically, to work in the field of photography doesn't require any degree, if you can receive adequate training in some fashion. The purpose of a 4 year *liberal arts* education is to develop your mind and broaden your exposure to *more* than just a single area of technical knowledge. We encourage you to take classes throughout the university, a minor in another area, or even a second major as there is plenty of wiggle room to do so in the 120 credits required for an undergraduate degree.

Does the program have a fine art or a commercial emphasis?

The program is primarily a fine arts program. Our strengths are in fine art and theory, though all of our classes can *apply* to commercial use. We feel our most important purpose is to train students to become visually “literate” in an increasingly mediated culture. If you are resistant to a more conceptual practice of photography, you may struggle in the program.

How many students are there in the program and what is the average size class?

There are about 60 freshmen who apply for the gate every year. No more than 36 of those students are selected to continue on in the program. There are approximately 110 sophomores, juniors, and seniors at any one time. We limit studio classes to 16 students so there is always a high teacher/student ratio.

How many professors are there?

There are 3 full time tenure track faculty and 4 adjuncts.

What are the facilities like?

In Photography there are two large 20-station gang labs and 18 individual darkrooms attached to a large finishing room equipped with lockers, film and print dryers, dry mount presses, and matting equipment. There are also two digital labs equipped with Mac computers, large format printers, and film and flatbed scanners. There is also a 2500 sq. ft. studio space devoted just to photography.

What equipment is available for checkout?

Our Equipment Checkout is staffed with a full-time and part-time manager and student workers. There are approximately 2000 pieces of equipment that are maintained and checked out to students continually, including view cameras, medium format cameras, 35mm digital and analog cameras, a variety of lenses, lighting equipment, other types of cameras such as pinholes and Rolleiflexes, and, of course, all enlarger equipment, contact printing frames, and film developing equipment.

What expenses are there outside of tuition?

Expenses vary per class, so this is a hard question to answer. All freshmen are assessed a lab fee of \$100 per semester. All photo majors, once accepted, pay a standard fee of around \$320 per semester for increased access to and purchase of equipment and digital labs. Additionally, there may be an ink share fee each semester which helps to cover part of the ink costs our program incurs. You might also calculate about \$250-500 per class on books, photo paper, film, matting supplies, etc. as a rough estimate.

What equipment will I need to buy for my first year?

When entering the program as a freshman, you will need a 35mm SLR *film* camera that can be fully manual. It can be bare bones.

What equipment will I need to buy once accepted into the program?

In your sophomore year, upon acceptance into the program, a MAC laptop computer is required. Specifications will be handed out after the portfolio review, but if you are in the market for a computer now, buy MAC. Otherwise, most equipment can be checked out from our program.

Will I need to purchase my own digital camera?

Not necessarily, but nowadays almost all students end up owning their own. We recommend you buy a digital SLR camera that matches your film SLR camera so your lenses will fit both and save you money. If money were no object, we would suggest buying a speedlight attachment as well.

Is it all digital or also film?

We do both. The foundations year is almost completely analog/film based. Digital is introduced in the sophomore year. After sophomore year, with the menu plan of junior classes in place, it is your choice whether to emphasize analog, digital, or both.

Do I have to take digital classes?

Absolutely. Aside from the fact that all color is done digitally nowadays, in order to be current in the field this is no longer merely optional.

Do I have to take traditional/analog classes?

Absolutely. The freshman year is fully analog/black and white. Sophomore year requires one digital semester and one black and white semester. After that, with the menu plan it is possible to be fully digital, fully analog, or both.

Are scholarships available?

There are university-wide scholarships that you should ask admissions about upon your admittance, but there are no photography-specific scholarships your first two years of college.

How long will it take for me to graduate?

There is a sequential nature to the photography program with some classes only offered in fall or spring. This enables us to offer more class options—a good thing! Therefore, it usually takes a full 4 years to complete the degree. If you take off a semester at the freshman or sophomore year, you will delay graduation a full year.

What is the “gate” for the photo program?

The photography program is in heavy demand; therefore in order to preserve the integrity of student education there is a portfolio review with a GPA component. The portfolio is the cohesive project created during the spring in PHOT 213. You are admitted to MSU as a pre-photo student, and admission does not mean that you have automatically been accepted into the major. In order to be eligible for the gate a student will also need to take and pass US and WRIT 101W core before spring semester portfolio review.

Why is there a gate—this seems unfair?

The gate is necessary for our program due to high demand and limited capacity of both faculty and facilities. The enrollment control results in smaller class sizes, more faculty contact, better use of the facilities, all of benefit to your education.

How is the gate decided?

All faculty on portfolio review day give each project a numerical score. This is averaged in with your GPA. There is also a score given to work ethic. Thus, it is important that you maintain good working practices in your photo classes and a good GPA your first year. The scores are tallied and the top scoring students are accepted into the program. Additionally, a small wait list will be kept for the semester immediately following, should any accepted students drop the program and spots open up.

Now I’m worried—what do I do if I don’t pass the gate?

There is always the option to apply again the following year. The gate, however, is not something to panic about if you are a good student who manages time well. Generally we find that students “self edit”—they don’t spend the required amount of time their freshman year devoted to their coursework, don’t maintain an acceptable GPA, or don’t spend enough time on their portfolios.

What kind of GPA do you need after the gate?

There is no GPA requirement in photography beyond University requirements, which is that any class below a C- does not count towards your major nor core, and only counts as elective credits toward your 120 required credits for the BA.

What should I minor in outside of my photography major?

Your advisor will have suggestions for you, but some that might dovetail nicely with photography are business, English, anthropology, and philosophy, for instance.

Is there a minor option if I don’t want to major in photography?

Yes. The photo minor takes similar freshman and sophomore classes except for FILM 112 Aesthetics of Film Production. The total credits required are less—28 versus 66 for the major. Due to the sequential nature of some of the classes, though, the minor takes about 2 ½ years to complete.

Can I double major?

It is very possible to double major, because the photography degree only takes up 66 credits of your 120 credit requirement for a 4-year degree.

How do you expect SFP's photography major to grow/change in the future?

We wish we had a crystal ball to predict this! Every two years our program undergoes a catalog "update" where we take a hard look at what we offer and what we might offer. This way the photo program stays active and contemporary.

How much interaction is there between photography and film?

The answer to this question is, "Lots." There is a growing need for photographers to know both still and moving media. As of 2011 the curricula in both Photography and Film have become integrated with a common first year and the ability to take either film or photo classes at any time if prerequisites are met.

I see you have internships; are they required?

Internships are not required, but strongly encouraged. You get real world experience and great connections in the field. Faculty do not find internships for you, but it seems every semester the local community is asking for our students more and more.

How much homework is there?

A credit usually represents 3 hours total of combined inside/outside class time, and thus a 15 credit load may require 45 hours of time per week.

Are summer photo courses offered?

There is always PHOT 113RA offered in the first summer session, and usually a film course and a junior photo offering, but generally summer is the time to fulfill other requirements for your degree, if desired.

Is there an overseas program?

There are overseas programs that MSU offers yearly that come highly recommended. All credits earned overseas usually plug into the SFP degree. We recommend study abroad either junior or senior year.

I've studied photography in high school/community college/college... do my credits transfer?

The university transcript evaluation team makes most of these decisions, and then you will need to meet with an advisor in the photography option to apply your former classes on a class-by-class basis. You may still be required, or recommended, to take PHOT 113RA fall semester and PHOT 213 spring semester to apply for portfolio review like everyone else, since the review is quite competitive. The added benefit is continual access to the lab because the lab is only open to students registered in photo.

I'm a transfer student wanting to get into your program; am I automatically accepted if I've taken the equivalent of your two pre-gate classes PHOT 113RA Understanding Photography and PHOT 213 Intermediate Black and White Photo?

Not necessarily. As mentioned above, we still encourage all transfer students to take PHOT 113RA in the fall and PHOT 213 in the spring and apply for portfolio review like everyone else, since the review is quite competitive. However, there are certain photography programs that students come from that are extensive enough so that a student *may* be accepted in at the junior level. This is decided on a case by case basis by all faculty.

I have 2 years of college under my belt already; how quickly can I move through the Photo program?

This depends on whether you have taken photo or not. If not, expect to spend a full 4 years at MSU. Expect a *minimum* of 2 full years even if you have taken photo and transfer in as a junior. There is no “fast track” to graduation—which we think is a good thing.

What kind of jobs can I get with my photography degree?

The job possibilities are numerous. Here are some options our students have chosen: gallery manager, wedding photographer, fine art photographer, photographer's assistant, camera store employee, teacher/professor, workshop assistant, lab manager, photo magazine editor, and the list goes on.

Does the faculty do job placement?

No, the faculty does not do job placement. That said, there is nothing better than forming a good relationship with your faculty so you can procure great letters of recommendation. This is not to discount faculty connections throughout the country as well that may be of benefit to your future work.

How many students find work in the field once they graduate?

Photography requires hard work in the beginning to establish oneself—it is not a “get rich quick” profession! If you are willing to put in the hours, you will have success. About 50% of our students stay in the field over the next decade, but more than that stay in related visual fields as well. That said, photography is never a wasted degree as long as it teaches visual/cultural literacy.

Why would I choose Montana State University's photography program over others?

The Photography Option at MSU has chosen to keep the black and white traditional darkroom alive unlike many programs across the U.S. At the same time, our digital program is strong and thorough, as is our alternative process program. Therefore, it is one of the few “full meal deals” left in the country. The facilities are quite good. We have an intimate yet large photography student body. We cross-pollinate with film. And we have a “program within a program” of theatre with our Black Box theatre, acting opportunities, and Shakespeare in the Parks. Bozeman is a trendy college town nestled in the beautiful Rocky Mountains, 90 miles from Yellowstone Park, 36 miles from Big Sky, and 16 miles from the Bridger Bowl ski area. Thus outdoor activities and photographic splendor abound. And did we mention skiing?

How do I know your program is the right one for me?

It is best to come for a visit. Submit a housing application and make arrangements to visit through the Office of Admissions (1-888-MSU-CATS) or by emailing admissions@montana.edu. We look forward to meeting you in person. Our web address is: <http://sfp.montana.edu/docs/photog.html>