

PHMD 560 – Special Topics: View Camera, Fall 2012  
Writing Prompt No. 5

We have plans of implementing a view camera course into the foundational Photo Media curriculum. Had you taken this class as a sophomore (directly after PHMD 202), how would it have benefited your education as a photographer? Would you be a different photographer today? Would the skills you've learned and the mindset you've developed have carried forward into Video, Lighting Studio, Seminar, Portfolio, etc? What about the view camera would be challenging as a sophomore.

"If i had taken a view camera course when i was a sophomore it would have definitely benefited me as a photographer. The skills i have learned would have, and have already started to affect my course as a photographer and i plan to use a 4x5 camera for much of my portfolio work. Although the view camera is a daunting process at first, in reality the view camera is the most simplified camera; essentially a "box" with a lens. It would force beginning students to really slow down and think before they act on an image. However as a sophomore there would be a rather large learning curve. There is a potential for much ware of the cameras as well as much traffic through the lab. I believe taking it as a Junior is ideal. After photo comm. i was comfortable handling printing issues and was able to put all of my focus on ideas,content, and familiarizing myself with the 4x5 as opposed to butting heads with the printer the whole time."

"I think requiring View Camera class right after freshmen year will be very beneficial. Since one of the key components to using view camera is the fact that you have to slow down and really focus (no pun intended) on every part of the photo taking process, those skills would have followed me throughout the rest of my sophomore year (and throughout my life). I believe having those skills sooner would have led me to make better work in all my photo classes."

"View Camera has taught me so many things as a photographer, and had I learned those as a sophomore, my photographs and choices would be different today. Through the use of a view camera a student not only learns all of the technical aspects and composing with a camera, but also essential darkroom techniques, and scanning. Had I been exposed to the view camera earlier in my college career, and also seen that it is widely used in contemporary photography, then yes I would've definitely used the view camera, or medium format over digital. The only downside that I see the view camera being taught as a sophomore level course would be the cost of film, but also if I was a sophomore, I don't believe I would've attempted color developing resulting in lower costs."

"I think this class would be a great class to place at a sophomore level. This would set a precedence for mastery in the technical process of creating an image as well as being a catalyst for learning many other related skills (developing, dark room etiquette, scanning, digital darkroom process, printing). My sophomore year was spent learning how to 'think' about the image and more time was spent conceptualizing rather than making. Introducing this class to sophomores could be a double-edged-sword as it will be an overwhelming challenge to some, but I think it is necessary to find out who has the required skill-set. Taken this class as a sophomore would have undoubtedly opened some doors for my creativity and allowed me to take on the challenges I wish to take on now."

"I think that a view camera course would be a great addition to the foundational Photo Media curriculum. I think that it really places an emphasis on the technical aspects of a camera and of making images, instead on focusing mainly on the conceptual part of photography like our early classes did. This

would provide a good foundation of technical knowledge for a beginning student. I also think that it makes me slow down and really think about the composition of a photograph, which I think is an important and difficult thing to grasp as an early student. All of this would have helped me as I progressed as a student and I know it has already helped me in some of my other classes. I do think it would be a very challenging class as a sophomore because it is very time consuming and requires a very good understanding of the workings of the camera to make a good photograph. I definitely had trouble at the beginning understanding the camera functions, so I'm sure other students could have the same technical issues that I had."

"I feel as though I have grown a lot just this semester as a photographer, and I feel much more well rounded. I definitely think that the skills would be positively utilized in all the following required courses for the Photo Media major. I wish, however, that a basic film photography class would be the #1 requirement, then maybe basic digital photography, and then moving onto things like view camera photography. I think starting out with the view camera as my first film class is kind of backwards, and I would have liked to work in a darkroom first and foremost! As a sophomore, it would be challenging to really just think critically about what you are photographing and not just trying to get a good grade. That is the biggest thing I have taken from the view camera class, and it would be helpful to have had that mind set earlier in my photo education."

"I'm not sure that taking this class as a sophomore would have been super beneficial, but none the less, it would have been just as fun. I think that it is important for sophomores to learn basic things, and if they taught those along with using a view camera then maybe it would be worth it. I think that maybe the skill would have carried into other classes, but in the other classes I think they are more case specific. For example with the lighting class, I may remember some things that I had to do while using the view camera, but I think that over all that class is more in the case as if you were in a studio or had some other source of lighting. When using the view camera I think that is better to think about using natural light and to learn what to do when there is not that much light (leaving the shutter open for minutes at a time).

I think that the challenges presented as a sophomore with view camera may be the same with a junior. I think that both classes of people would find view camera difficult at first, but then once they get used to it, it would get easier. There are just little things that you have to teach yourself, as there are with anything, that I don't really think you can prepare for unless you take a regular 35mm film class before this 4x5 class."

"I believe that taking View Camera as a Sophomore would have been very challenging, but beneficial to the development of my photography. After taking this class I feel much more confident as a photographer not just because of the techniques I have learned through the class, but because of the mindset I have developed. The View Camera class really encourages a thoughtful approach to each image, which is something I lacked in earlier digital photography classes. Sophomores would most likely struggle more with the technical aspects of View Camera more than the current class, but it could potentially be a very positive challenge for them. It is hard to explain the changes I have seen in my photography over the last semester, but I feel that I have made more progress in this one class in the course of a semester than I have in almost all my time at KU. Maybe it is because the class is so difficult that I felt compelled to make higher quality work. Overall, I believe the addition of View Camera to the Sophomore schedule would help students develop the techniques and thought processes to make better work sooner."

“This summer, abroad and at home, I found myself wanting to create view camera images, but was too unsure about the fundamentals to warrant purchasing a field camera. Looking back, there are a number of portraits I took or would have taken, that would have benefitted from the view camera aesthetic and process, and I regret not having the view camera at my full disposal. The earlier I had the skills and the approach fostered by the view camera, the better off I would be overall as a photographer, especially when it came to creating intentional and thoughtful compositions. Patience in working with a subject, knowing to thoughtfully manipulate the lighting conditions, and the patience to create a solid composition would have and will influence my work in Video and Lighting Studio. View camera will ultimately strengthen my entire portfolio. As a sophomore, my major hurdle in photography was learning color balance and printing best practices. Combining black and white view camera work with this workflow could be challenging, because it could make it that much harder for students to understand the specifics and importance of color temperature and white balance. However, as we’ve seen, black and white prints can also be out of balance, creating hued prints that can even better illustrate white balance.”

“I absolutely wish I had taken this class earlier. I think this course showed me a lot about what I like and don't like about photography. This camera is unlike anything I had ever worked with before and the amount of effort that goes into one single image is incredible. I think that if I had been exposed to this process sooner, it would have really changed the way I make an image and the way I think about making them. Majority of sophomores will probably be challenged by this course. That's a good thing though. When you're uncomfortable, you grow.”

“Had I taken this class sophomore year I believe I would be making more deliberate photos today. In this class I've learned how to plan my time around developing, sharing JOBOs, camera, etc. and has made me work where I would typically procrastinate until the last minute. Breaking out of this procrastination has helped me in my other photomedia courses and I'm sure it will help with future drawing classes, etc. Learning how to use the JOBO and the Flextight scanner will also benefit the rest of my time in the school.

I would imagine that time management and thinking of thoughtful images would be possible challenges for sophomores. The only negative aspects of making this course required is the cost associated with the film and the unavoidable wear on the lab equipment.”

“This one is hard to say. Having this class earlier in my educational career probably would have accelerated my thought process on how I go about my work. I do feel like taking a class like this and using the view camera will definitely tell you if you want to be a photographer or not. If you get to frustrated with it then you may not want to continue. If you really enjoy it then you know that photography is something to stick with.”

“If I had taken View Camera as a sophomore, it would have helped me to think about my projects and my individual photographs more. With digital photography, I get so used to just snapping photos of everything and then deciding which ones I like after. With view camera I have to think about exactly what I want in my photo before I snap the picture.”

“I think taking a view camera course as a sophomore would have benefited my education as a photographer for sure! I think I would have jumped into more serious work earlier than my senior year which would have been nice. I think the fundamentals that were taught in the view camera class are so key for anything that relates to creating an image, so I believe that it could carry into other photography and video courses. One downside I see in taking the class early into the PHMD program would be that

the assignments might not be taken as seriously. Looking back at my ideas and projects I had when I was a sophomore, I realize now that they weren't that awesome haha. I believe it takes a couple years of college to really start making work that has more depth to it. I really enjoyed taking view camera as a senior because I could utilize the medium for work I might not have thought of as a sophomore."

"I would have definitely used the 4x5 for other classes too, which would have in turn strengthened my understanding of the camera. I would've loved to have had an opportunity in a following semester to continue the project I'm doing for the final now. I would have definitely fumbled less through the other classes and learned to take my time on shoots. It also might make a difference that I had many different teachers through the program, some who had caused way more stress than was probably necessary. I feel like without that I would have had a better experience with the program as it is now. But regardless, I love the idea of making 4x5 part of the curriculum and earlier on too. I think it would allow students to come up with concepts that can be carried on through the later classes. For my project specifically, I would have loved to have studio lighting after this class so that I can learn more about the kind of lighting I need to do the double exposures without creating some of the problems I've had. I also think having the class so early in the program would help prevent students from relying on the convenience of digital when shooting, they'd have a harder time preventing some of the mistakes because they can rush through with digital."

"This is a question I don't feel that I am able to answer since it's been SOOOOO long since I was just starting as a photographer. I would think that having just taken the regular film class, this would/could be easier for a student than someone like me who hasn't done film for 10 years. I know though that perhaps the fact that we scan negatives instead of printing in the dark room would be a relief for some and frustrating for others. I prefer the scanning. Hope you get some better feedback from other students on this question."

"I feel as though this is not a question of if it should be taught, but how quickly can you begin implementing it into the curriculum as early on as possible. View camera and film photography in general is still the highest quality of photography in existence as far as I am concerned. In a digital world where quality is quickly being turned into quantity and availableness I feel as though kids coming into the program have no idea that digital photography falls VERY short in terms of quality. With so many professionals, high art photographers and even studio photographers still using film processes today, it isn't a question of if they should learn these techniques, its a question of how soon can you begin teaching them. I wish I had more time to experience view camera and film photography than I have had."

"Absolutely. It gives me great insight into the process by which they create photographs and you can really see that kind of aesthetic when going back and viewing their work. You can see the care and framing in their work and I believe that I can appreciate it more having used a view camera myself."

"I'm not necessarily positive having taken view camera immediately after 202 would have changed my style dramatically ( though it has changed for sure). Before, I was interested in using a razor thin depth of field and I think the view camera process has made me more conscience of details and that perhaps a lot of information is not a bad thing. I only had one class in between 202 and view camera but perhaps if there had been more in between, it would have made more of a difference. But I think that view camera should be a requirement. Though the change hasn't been radical for me, I've appreciated the patience I've learned and the process is interesting (from the in-camera techniques to the methodic film cleaning)."