

Digital photography courses now offered at OCC's Orchard Ridge campus

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

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in college, and so on.

"We didn't have computers back then," said Nick Valenti, who teaches digital photography at Oakland Community College. "Digital was talked about but not taken seriously because the quality wasn't there. I went to conferences and took special training."

Valenti earned two degrees in photography in the 1980s from Wayne State University, and OCC has taught photography since the 1960s. But Valenti had to write the digital courses at the two-year college's Orchard Ridge Campus in Farmington Hills.

Campus President George Keith said that in recent years there has been a "growing dialogue between graphics, commercial art and the art disciplines. We are evolving toward a multi-media program." Even journalism, because of the Internet and online technology, is part of the linkage, he said.

"Digital imaging," said Valenti, "is the electronic capture, storage and outputting of images."

This newspaper has a mixed system. We scan existing negatives on photos and store them digitally. Then we compose pages on a computer screen. No longer do we cut and paste paper copies of stories, headlines, photos and ads onto paper forms.

But we still print out press releases to reduce photos to dots. Look closely at any black and white picture in this paper, and you will see that there are no true gray tones. What you're seeing is very tiny dots - large where the tone is dark and small where the tone is light. The many shades of gray are an optical illusion.

Real colors

In fully digital graphics, however, you are seeing a checkerboard or grid with tiny squares called pixels, 72 to the inch. Each pixel has its own color, Valenti explained. Gray and pink really are gray and pink, not small dots of black and small dots of red.

The advantage of digital photography is that its reproduction is truer, and the graphic artist can use a computer to blend - or even manipulate - several photos, text, backgrounds and drawings into a single graphic. Speed is another blessing of the new technology. Photographers (and their subjects) can review their work immediately on a computer or in the camera - there is no film to process.

Digital imaging's use in the

movies is becoming legendary. Corporate annual and internal reports often are digitally produced. "Even student term papers aren't written on the old Smith Corona any more," Valenti said.

"Look at the growth in Web pages on the Internet. You'd have to digitize to use pictures on your Web page."

In the same way Valenti had to refrain to move from photography to digital imaging, many OCC students are workers who are retraining. "They're coming from GM, Ford and Ameritech - the Yellow Pages are laid out electronically now," he said.

Sections fill up

Several years ago, OCC started with non-credit digital courses which required just seven lab in D Building has 24 stations for credit courses. Keith said sections fill up quickly during registration.

"At first there were only two sections. The classes were filling, and we had a waiting list of 100 to get in," Valenti said. Even when classes are being taught, some work stations are left open so students from other sections can work.

At OCC, photography is taught on the Royal Oak and Orchard Ridge campuses. Valenti teaches the digital classes at Orchard Ridge. Other photography instructors are Mike Cyrol, who has an "outstanding faculty" award and two degrees from Eastern Michigan; and Rob Kamgas, who also has an "outstand-

ing faculty" award and degrees from the Center for Creative Studies and the University of Michigan.

At OCC, getting an associate's degree in photography involves more than picture taking and printing. The catalog lists courses in black-and-white, color, history of photography, studio work (including fashion and architecture), special projects and Valenti's three courses in digital photography.

There also are requirements for basic drawing, design, mass media along with electives in starting a small business and art history.

As usual, OCC put together an advisory committee before embarking on the program. It included people from Meteor Photo, the Center for Creative Studies, Wayne State, two high school educators, and former and current students.

Valenti recalled it was tough to get tips because advisers said, "Yes, you should be there, but we're not there yet."

The result for society, said Keith, the president, will be "more pictorial elements in communication. This is much more sophisticated than a drawing board."

You can visit the photography department through the college's Web site: <http://www.occ.cc.mi.us/or-art> or contact Nick Valenti directly by e-mail at nvalenti@occ.cc.mi.us or even use the old-fashioned telephone to call him at (248) 616-3441.

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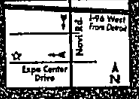
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