

**Searching for Creativity: Using Scavenger Hunts in an Agricultural Communications
Photography Course**

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Introduction/Need for Idea or Research

Creativity has been identified as an important skill for agricultural communications (ACOM) graduates (Corder & Irlbeck, 2016; Irlbeck & Akers, 2009), however, ACOM faculty members estimate less than half (46.7%) of courses teach creativity-focused competencies (Clem, 2013). Hancock, Gibson, Irlbeck, and Meyers (2018) found ACOM students clearly place value on creative capacity within the classroom and benefit from creative assignments and instructor delivery. Creativity is also an important component within photography (Peterson, 2015). Way (2006) suggests a good photography curriculum encourages the “innate creativity of the students, builds their interpretative and technical skills, and enhances their understanding of the power of photography to communicate their perspectives to the world” (Part 2, p. 2). Creativity in photography, as described by Peterson (2015), is a combination of inventiveness, imagination, inspiration, and perception. Assignments and traveling to unfamiliar places can also encourage creativity within a photography course (Horner, 2016). Within ACOM, courses can be changed to increase critical thinking and creativity (Irlbeck & Akers, 2009).

Texas Tech University’s undergraduate ACOM program offers a field-based digital photography course during the two-week summer intersession semester. The purpose of the field-based course is to use travel and hands-on experiences to teach ACOM students photography fundamentals. Students spend the last week of the course on a central New Mexico ranch shooting ranch activities, western landscapes, and night photography. To encourage students’ creativity through photography, the 14 students in the 2018 intersession course were taken on a day trip to Santa Fe where they were given a photo scavenger hunt assignment. The innovative idea was the use of a photo scavenger hunt in a location that is new and unfamiliar to the students.

How It Works

After arriving in Santa Fe, students were divided into pairs and each given a list of 10, one-word scavenger hunt categories to photograph during a four-hour time period. Students were challenged with finding unique and creative photo subjects to represent each of the 10 categories. The list of categories was intentionally broad but included some classic elements of photography and the city’s culture including: history, color, religion, architecture, art, landscape, people, patterns, tourism, and shadows. The scavenger hunt had three rules: (1) all students were required to photograph all 10 categories, (2) everyone had to remain within walking distance of the starting point, which was located near the Santa Fe Plaza, and (3) the concepts of quality exposure and composition had to be evident in each image. Students were free to roam around the area and interpret each category in their own way. At the end of the activity, students were asked to submit images that best represented each category in the scavenger hunt. The pair that submitted the most creative set of images was given extra credit. To determine how the photography scavenger hunt influenced students’ creativity during the Santa Fe day trip, students were asked to submit written narratives to describe their experiences during the activity. The narratives also served as a quiz grade in the course.

Results to Date/Implications

Overall, students in the course said they enjoyed the scavenger hunt and found it to be an educational experience. Most notably, students said the scavenger hunt activity provided purpose and direction to their photography efforts while in Santa Fe. One student said, “This scavenger hunt was very helpful as it challenged my creativity and allowed me to practice my settings.” Several students discussed how the activity helped them capture otherwise normal subjects in new and unique ways. Additionally, discussion about subject matter was often linked to the experience of exploring a new city. The uniqueness of Santa Fe was also noted as being inspiring to students’ creativity. One student said, “It kept me focused and helped me not to get overwhelmed in this great city.” Other students said the activity “forced” them to photograph subjects they normally would not have sought out: “I believe it was helpful and kept me from taking the same kind of images the whole time. I had to think outside of the box to get some of the images, and I believe it helped me develop my photography skills.” One student said the activity’s deadline made them feel like a real photojournalist on location, while another student said the activity helped them develop a photographic style.

Students also said they benefited from doing the activity in pairs; being able to navigate the new location with a classmate made the activity more enjoyable and less intimidating than having to do it on their own. One student said working in pairs also influenced their creativity as they worked together to find subjects for each category. The only drawback noted about the activity came from one student who said the experience in a new place was too overwhelming, which adversely affected their experience

Future Plans/Advice to Others

The photography scavenger hunt provided a focused, purpose-driven activity for students while they photographed a new city and continued to experiment with their cameras. Students were also able to collect additional images for their final photography portfolio and other image assignments in the course. The ACOM digital photography course will continue to use the scavenger hunt activity as a method of encouraging creativity and purpose when capturing images during the course’s intersession format. The instructor’s familiarity with the Santa Fe area was beneficial when planning the scavenger hunt list, but not essential. As such, scavenger hunt categories should remain broad to allow students to explore their own interpretations of each category. Although taking students to a new location was beneficial to the overall learning experience of the students in this case, the scavenger hunt activity could also be implemented on campus or the area surrounding a university to encourage students to see a familiar place in a new light. The instructor plans to use this activity as a way to spark creativity within the traditional, classroom-based format of the same undergraduate ACOM photography course.

Costs/Resources Needed

The field-based intersession course uses a field trip fee that is collected through tuition to fund travel expenses related to the course, including transportation in university vans. Each student should possess a digital SLR camera and have a basic understanding of the camera’s operations and exposure settings at the time of the scavenger hunt. While photo software was not a critical part of the activity, Adobe Lightroom was used by students in the course to store, organize, and publish their digital images.

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