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Why am I enrolled in the Imaging and Photographic Technology program?

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Sometime ago I was asked by a student to explain why I thought he was enrolled in the Imaging and Photographic Technology program. It seems that over the years, as the courses got more difficult, he himself had forgotten the reason. As I pondered the answer to his question it occurred to me that others may also have similar feelings so I decided to make this answer an open letter to anyone who wants to know what the IPT program is all about.

After starting my reply with an initial list of platitudes and pleasantries I continued with: ... But this still does not answer the basic question of WHY you are going to school here. I believe that to some extent the answer to this lies in your original intention to study in a field related to PHOTOGRAPHY. I think that when you were choosing a photography program you primarily chose a course of study where your chances for contributing to the field would be greater than you felt they would be in the advertising or photojournalism area, where you would not be intimately connected to the medical and health sciences field, where you would not be mostly processing the photographs made by others with little connection to actual image making, or where imaging was not something that was only done on computers, etc. In addition you felt the need to also be challenged with some mathematics and science coursework.

Actually, what you are studying today may be related to any one of the photographic fields mentioned above. The Imaging and Photo Tech program (originally named Technical Photography) is also providing you with a superior technical base. This education should be useful for application to a wider range of career options than the "specialty education" connected with programs mentioned earlier. Further, because of the areas of emphasis that you can select with the upper-level concentration electives and the diversity of the required courses you should not only be able to consider yourself at least basically competitive in those specialty areas as well as being a competent photographer but also to be able to look for career opportunities in such fields as color technology and management, corporate resource regarding hardware, software and design related to the web, as an applications technologist or engineer in various imaging related activities, graphic arts, or business and communications, or engineering, etc. One thing you may not become and that is an artist ... but you may practice this in your spare time!

One of the most important aspects of the program is that courses from other disciplines are an integral part of the Photo Technology program requirements. Another is the fact that the founding faculty went out on a limb and established the only required two work
block cooperative education program in the School. As the reputation of the Tech program grew over the years as one that provided a top notch technical base to its students and industry learned about the availability of Imaging and Photographic Technology students as viable assistants in many of the associated disciplines coop opportunities for Tech students multiplied. Students are cooping at places like NASA, Kodak, DuPont, Polaroid, Sinar, Harley Davidson, MTV, Fortune and Time magazines, Milton Roy, Estee Lauder, Iris Graphics, Xitex, Sinar Bron, Schneider Optical, Itek, and, yes, MotoPhoto too!.

Again, the Tech program is NOT a specialty program. It is still connected to traditional PHOTOGRAPHY but it attempts to give you a background that will be adaptable to a variety of career options within the discipline defined in its broadest terms. This is done by a deliberate emphasis on technically oriented courses at the expense of the creative and artistic aspects of the field. The idea is that if you are not knowledgeable about the technology your career and employment options will be more limited than if you are not fully knowledgeable about design and art. This is obviously somewhat contrary to the philosophies permeating other programs of study but the neat thing about this School is that such seemingly disparate programs can coexist because we are all connected by the Discipline of Photography and Imaging.

Recently the number of Tech grads going on to graduate schools has increased significantly and they look to pursue MS or PhD degrees in optics, chemistry, color science, physics and various other types of engineering specialties.

So far the plan as designed in the late 1970's seems to be working quite well for grads of the program. Very few graduates are connected with the artistic aspects of the field (although some are) but most, instead, are employed in industrial, corporate and government photography, imaging, color science, graphic arts, business and computer oriented positions. They work typically 9-5, recently on the average have been able to secure average starting salaries of $45,000, they qualify for standard vacation periods and generally receive a benefits package.

Well, let me just also say that this program is very close to my heart and one that I feel very much in tune with. I hope that I have answered some of your questions but I know it is impossible to touch on all the points in this brief space. So, if you would like to know more about it call me at (716)475-2592, fax @-5804, or e-mail at andpph@rit.edu.

cheers,
andy

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