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Master's Project Defense Document

Capturing Gold

*Capturing Gold* was born from a dream. It originates from an athlete's desire to win a gold medal and a photographer's desire to capture the gold-medal-winning moment.

For me, *Capturing Gold* allowed me to lead the student photography team. It allowed me to create a project demonstrating my capabilities and to aid in launching my professional career.

I came to Syracuse University to advance my visual storytelling skills while learning how to teach and inspire others in the field. I started the program with prior experience working as a student university photographer at Bowling Green State University while taking on several leadership roles, including creating the Epsilon-Eta chapter of Kappa Sigma Fraternity, and hosting an Alternative Breaks service trip to Ann Arbor, Michigan.

During my time in graduate school, I learned the importance of preparing and photographing situations in front of you knowing how to capture those moments with intentionality, and how to develop a love for the light.

Bowling Green taught me how to survive, but Syracuse taught me how to thrive.

Twelve photographers and five public relations writers covered over 85 medaled events across 12 sports, with over 2,500 athletes from 50 countries and 600 universities. It was through a first-ever partnership between the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University and the Lake Placid 2023 FISU Winter World University Games.

After I returned to Syracuse University from my internship with Clarkson Creative/NCAA Photos in the fall of 2022, Professor Seth Gitner approached me with an idea. Through a connection with Jon Lundin, who works with the Empire State Winter Games, Professor Seth Gitner and I set out to create a next-level experience for a group of Newhouse students.

I identified the important components needed to create a successful project when planning for the project. Our team leadership, Professor Jon Glass, Professor Gitner, and I, worked to coordinate the various parts of the trip.

We started by developing a workflow by combining the knowledge students had gained from their courses and introducing new software. The software addressed the assignment-specific challenges. We adopted a workflow strategy similar to one I used at my internship at Clarkson Creative/NCAA Photos. It combined Camera Bits PhotoMechanic for ingesting images and Adobe Lightroom for image processing.

I used multiple resources to develop the *Capturing Gold Photo Processing Guide*, including a *Quick Guide to Getty Images' Caption and IPTC Fields* with the original *LP2023 Photo Imagery Guidelines* sheet provided to the team leadership. The ultimate goal of the workflow is to create an accurate and efficient system allowing us to deliver images quickly.

In teaching the workflow, Professor Gitner and I created an essential guide for students to use as a resource to help throughout the Games. The workflow had to be simple to learn and not burdensome. Leading up to the games, our goal was to teach the workflow through a Sports Photography Workshop inspiring students to create strong imagery while meeting the client's needs.

After arriving at Lake Placid, we taught the workflow to the students in our Sports Photography Workshop and then kicked off the Games. We provided students with a list of "Best of" galleries from photographers and wire services with experience covering the Winter Olympics. Some included the works of Al Bello, Andy Scott, Eric Seals, Patrick Smith, Alexander Hassenstein, Dustin Satloff, and more.

As a result of teaching the workshop, most students turned out images throughout the games that followed the workflow specifications. The team leadership provided daily oversight for the students by giving them tips and advice to elevate their work. We reviewed the tagging

images in the camera, setting white balance before and after an event, and cleaning up imagery.

Our goal was to find as many ways as possible to feature the students' work allowing them to share in the project's success. To do so, we created multiple galleries featuring the student's work, and the best images from every sport on the *Capturing Gold* website. Along with the galleries, a highlight piece showed every student's contributions to the project. We printed photos for a gallery exhibition displayed on the fourth floor of Newhouse 2. I created a personal portfolio showing the work, contributed to the coverage and illustrated the scale of events covered. Lastly, I wrote a case study detailing my experience covering the games from the beginning to the end.

Reflecting on the project and given our circumstances, our team faced adversity with a positive attitude and made the effort successful. There are some things we didn't do particularly well, but knowledge we gained from working on this project and with a larger group of students, we can create an even more successful plan on the next run.

One of the highlights of our strengths was building a strong team culture. The students took plenty of time to bond and learn more about each other. The strong bond created kept the group motivated and largely avoided burnout. The strong team environment also created a place for students to learn and adapt. It provided the perfect opportunity for the group to adopt the new workflow system that was equal parts familiar and new. New experiences were abundant. We experienced a variety of sports and assignments, including behind-the-scenes coverage of the opening ceremony, features in downtown Lake Placid, and the peak action of extreme Winter Sports. We delivered quality work with speed through our 952-plus hours of coverage of 88-plus preliminary and medaled events. We delivered more than 5,191 images to FISU that hold permanence in the archives. Our students' work was published in more than 50 publications worldwide.

With all of these strengths come substantial challenges. We primarily had staffing difficulties for various areas throughout the games. Every student was in the field with a full

docket of events to cover. Among them, there wasn't time for accountability. We didn't realize it until it was too late. The only element in our control at the time was the file naming system, which allowed the students to identify if mistakes were made. Because our nights ran late and our resources were thin, we didn't devote more training or after-event critiques. If those challenges weren't enough, 17 of 20 students and both faculty had to return to SU and classes after the first week. The remaining team members wanted to help fill the gaps, but we quickly burned out and needed a day off.

In our efforts to provide images to FISU through Dropbox, we uploaded our best shots to PixieSet for reporting media to use. However, not all delegations were made aware of the images available to the public, and there was no link on the Lake Placid 2023 website or in the press releases. Despite the bond we shared with the Lake Placid 2023 staff, there could've been a stronger collaboration between the two groups. Communication issues meant we weren't aware of a few critical moments and our content was never part of the main Lake Placid 2023 website.

To better prepare for the Games in the future, we could provide students with relevant experience and resources before the event. For example, a sports photography class could empower students to photograph various events from high school to clubs and even professional-level events. We could host the Sports Photography Workshop well before the games to give students time to build their skills and ask event-related questions. The experience would be essential to adopt the workflow strategy and to use it as intended. Additionally, we can recruit students to try different jobs, such as on-site or remote live editing, or reviewing other students' work at the Main Press Center.

My advice to future master's candidates is to approach your project uniquely and creatively. You want to speak to your strengths as a creator. It can be a way to link the past to your future while using the present as the vehicle to get you where you want to be. Taking part in this program and this project allowed me to try different kinds of photography and helped me to realize the type of work I want to do and the type of work I don't want to do.

Additionally, do not look to experiences only given in the classroom to gain knowledge. Being out in the field allows you to take what you've learned and apply it while learning new lessons. Much of what I learned in the classroom, I didn't use until I was in the field. One way I did apply my experiences was when I was an instructional assistant. I learned the importance of giving attention to each student in the classroom to help them succeed while understanding the importance of having a clear set of submission guidelines. It translated from our classroom to the field where I effectively catered to each student to provide them with the tools to do the job correctly.

The last piece of advice I can give is to work with confidence. Know that no matter what the obstacles are, believe that you can do it. Everything you do within your passion, do it with excellence. Collaboration can bring you closer to your dream. Don't hesitate to ask others for help when you need it. The question is never "If" you can do something, it's "How?" If you don't love the beginning, you won't love the middle, or the end of it either. Confidence in the field is the number one way to be recognized for your skills. It is a pathway to new connections and may eventually get you hired.