

Fundamentals of the Conservation of Photographs



FUNDAMENTALS OF THE CONSERVATION OF PHOTOGRAPHS

TEACHING NOTE

INTRODUCTION

The GCI's course Fundamentals of the Conservation of Photographs was designed for professionals who care for photograph collections in museums, libraries and archives in central, southern and eastern Europe. Spanning a three year-period (2008 – 2010), the course consisted of three summer schools combined with a series of distance learning and mentoring activities. Its principle objectives were to:

- provide theoretical knowledge and practical skill in the preservation of photographs;
- establish the foundation for an enduring regional network of professionals in photograph conservation; and
- develop teaching materials and related resources that can be disseminated widely.

The eighteen participants in the Fundamentals course were conservators, archivists, and curators at mid-career level. Their varied backgrounds ensured that a range of perspectives and experiences were represented in the course; this diversity added greatly to the group dynamic.

Background information about the course, as well as a list of instructors and participants, can be found on the main [project page](#).

COURSE PEDAGOGY

The development of skilled and confident practitioners requires a learning process that allows theoretical knowledge and practical experience to be built over time. This type of learning is difficult



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to acquire through courses and workshops that span only a few weeks. The Fundamentals of the Conservation of Photographs course was therefore designed to facilitate a cumulative building of knowledge and expertise, allowing subjects to be both explored in the classroom and applied in workplace settings over a three-year period. Participants had each committed to taking part in the entire three years of the course.

The course was built upon a structure of three annual summer schools during which instruction was delivered through a combination of classroom lectures, hands-on practical exercises, and group discussions. In the period between the first and second summer schools, participants were assigned exercises that gave them the opportunity to apply their new knowledge and skills to their own collections. Instructors reviewed these exercises and provided more general advice to participants via a course website, thereby reinforcing what had been learned during the summer school.

Instructors (who were different for each year of the course) were leaders in the field of photograph conservation and brought valuable viewpoints and experience with them. The course's [team teaching](#) approach created a dynamic and interactive learning environment. A high degree of interaction amongst instructors gave participants exposure to a wide range of professional perspectives on different aspects of the preservation of photographs. Through team teaching, instructors modeled how collaboration and communication (and in some cases, debate) advances understanding and provides a basis for sound decision-making. Continuous interactions on the part of participants, during both the summer schools and the distance learning portion of the course, allowed them to make valuable contributions to their own learning, as well as to the formation of their own professional network.

Course instruction was in English. Because of the complexity of the material and the intensity of the course itself, participants were required to have a high level of English fluency.

COURSE MATERIALS

The teaching materials presented here were developed by instructors over the three years of the Fundamentals of the Conservation of Photographs course and were made available to the participants through a course web site, along with additional reading material (not included here due to copyright restrictions). Materials available on this site include technical notes, reading lists, handouts, assignments, and presentations, as well as calendars and session outlines for each of the three summer



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schools. Course calendars describe, by session, the various topics taught during each summer school, while the session outlines document how instructors chose to structure and teach their particular topics. Considered together, the course calendars and session outlines give a detailed description of the curriculum – both topics and teaching methods – for the entire three-year course.

USE OF THE MATERIALS

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