



Professor Ting  
Huang critiquing  
images with a class.

# Say Cheese

TCC makes sure that graduates are camera-ready  
with programs in photography. BY SALLY VERRANDO

In pitch darkness, after maneuvering around black walls that twist and turn, a visitor emerges into a room bathed in amber light—not the expected red glow like in the movies. It's an expansive darkroom in the photography department of Tarrant County College's Northeast Campus in Hurst. Photo paper is sensitive to all light except colors of red and amber, says Professor Ting Huang, department chair. Here, as in the program's other classrooms, is state-of-the-art equipment for this unique community college curriculum.

With about 100 new photography students enrolled every semester, is there a market in the 21st century for teaching old-school darkroom techniques?

"We believe that students who start out in the darkroom have a more foundational understanding of photography," Huang says. "They have a very easy time transitioning to digital photography."

Dr. Hwiman Chung, dean of communication, arts and entertainment at the Northeast Campus, agrees. "TCC is very unique," he says. "I guarantee there are only a handful of universities and community colleges that still have darkrooms. Through darkroom training, we can teach students the basic fundamentals to visual communications."

Huang says about 15 years ago, with the advancement of digital photography, many schools gutted their darkrooms. "But once you remodel," she says, "it's really hard to get it back because it's expensive."

With the resurgence of film, old is new for younger generations. In a recent survey, students were asked about what they'd like to learn in the future.

"The majority of them said large format film photography. I was very surprised," she says. The bulky cameras can weigh 5 to 15 pounds and are used for portraits and landscape architecture.

In the TCC system, the Northeast Campus exclusively offers the photography curriculum as a certificate program. A scholarship is awarded to a chosen returning student every semester. The school offers five or six sections of photography that can satisfy elective requirements for an Associate of Arts degree or be taken as Continuing Education.

Huang says she combines Continuing Education and credit students in the same class so they can learn from each other. Her oldest CE student is 79 years old.

Students are taught all aspects of film and digital photography, including how to present their work professionally. They learn

Inspecting negatives  
on a light table.



to make mats for frames and handbound hardcover photo books. Hallways showcase works of students, instructors and visiting artists.

Since it is the 21st century, Huang says using artificial intelligence is becoming more accepted in conceptualizing, collaging and retouching photos in Photoshop. But when it comes to technical craftsmanship, she says there are no shortcuts. Plagiarism is still a concern.

Huang and her instructors are formulating a drone photography course. The school has six drones and is considering the best applications for the technology through Continuing Education.

Dr. Jan Clayton, interim president of TCC's Northeast Campus, says she's proud of the photography faculty. "As professionals, they could be active in a career, but they want to teach. I've never seen a more active faculty thinking of ways for students to engage outside of the classroom."

Photographers' starting salaries can range from \$30,000-\$34,000 annually for magazines and newspapers and begin at \$54,000 for social media work.

"The current average photographer hourly rate is \$150 an hour," Huang says. "For students, I recommend they charge \$100 for the first hour and \$75 for each additional hour." Photographers with film and darkroom skills can command higher rates than those trained solely in digital.

After finishing the program, many of her students open their own photography businesses or work for local newspapers and other publications.

Lightcast, a company specializing in labor market analysis, found that TCC students' incomes contribute \$2.1 billion to the Tarrant County economy, according to the school's website.

Huang sits in the same office where her predecessor sat when she was a photography student in the same program. After earning her bachelor's degree in music composition and piano, she enrolled at TCC. She then decided to get her master's in photography.

"It's one of those programs," she says, "that when I was a student, I felt very welcome to be here and very fine-arts oriented. A lot of my portfolio that got me into graduate school was from Photo I and Photo II that I took here."

TCC hired her as an adjunct instructor in 2014, two months after she graduated from the San Francisco Art Institute. By 2017, she was the department chair of photography, dance, radio, TV and the Fort Worth film collaborative program.

"I want to make sure that this is the same welcoming space that we've always offered," Huang says. At the same time, she wants it to be highly regarded and on par with industry standards. "I might be biased," she says, "but I really feel like we have the best facility." 🌐