

THE UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE OF

PHOTOGRAPHY

A new photography class invited students to look inward, reflect deeply, and connect with others.

Erin LaBelle, Instructor in Photography and Graphic Arts, taught the digital course during the college's spring M Term, an academic session for students who complete the ESL program mid-semester. The class blended technical instruction with personal exploration, offering a fresh way to observe and express their faith — all through the lens of a smartphone.

For Sr. Hoa Nguyen, LHC, the experience was transformative. "Photography not only helped me develop my awareness of life around me in a positive way, but it also deepened my spiritual life," she said.

The importance of documenting her congregation's milestones and everyday moments for future generations was a key takeaway for Sr. Hoa. She also hopes to teach photography to children and fellow sisters as a form of creative expression and tool for connection.

Erin emphasized photography as a form of mindfulness and self-care. Students experienced photo walks in nature, a simple tool that can help individuals stay grounded and spiritually centered. They also discovered the possibilities photography holds for outreach: by documenting ministry efforts, they can bring their mission to people who might never experience it firsthand.

Throughout the course, students explored a wide range of techniques and assignments, learning to use the camera



Photo by Sr. Hoa Nguyen, LHC

Students get creative during an off-campus photo adventure.



for both well-being and service. They photographed school events, took an art walk in downtown Dubuque, and made portraits of themselves and one another.

"The class brought fine art, photojournalism and art therapy together, giving students the tools and experiences to communicate visually, whether giving voice to themselves, an organization or their religious communities," Erin said.

She noted photography is particularly valuable for students learning English. "Images transcend language barriers and evoke memory," she explained. Sr. Hoa agreed.

"As a student who just completed the ESL program, photography played a practical role in helping me communicate, interact with the world and build a deeper relationship with God," she added.

Her classmate, Bro. Long Nguyen, CSA, echoed the impact.

"Photography helped me discover my value and role as a photographer," he said. "This class changed the way I see the world around me."

For these students, the class was more than a creative outlet — they learned a new way of seeing and being in the world.