San Diego City College Professor Dave Eichinger talks with MAC-On-Campus about the photography program's affordable cost, broad curriculum, and new 30,000-square-foot building.

For more information about San Diego City College, and to see photos of the campus, visit the school's profile in the Prospectus.

MAC-On-Campus: What is distinctive about your program?

Dave Eichinger: I think what sets us apart is the combination of so many attributes: many levels and options of darkroom courses, fine art courses, commercial courses, and specialty courses, all in our new 30,000-square-foot building. Plus we're in San Diego, so we have the best weather and climate in the U.S.! Since California has the largest and lowest-cost community college system in the country, our students can earn our 42-unit certificate for about $1,600, including tuition and fees (for CA residents).
MOC: **What kinds of students does the program attract?**

**Dave Eichinger:** We have many students who are just starting out or taking a class for fun, but our core group is on a career path, either in a fine art direction or shooting commercially. We are near downtown San Diego, so we have urban and suburban students of all socio-economic levels. We also draw from areas like La Jolla and Rancho Santa Fe where "average" homes start at a million dollars. Since we’re a community college, most of our students are in the 18-30 age range, but we have plenty of people who are beginning a second career or are former military starting their first civilian career.

MOC: **What kind of campus does your school have, and what is student life like?**

**Dave Eichinger:** We are celebrating our centennial this year and we are growing rapidly. We have six new, large buildings on campus, including Photography. We are located about one mile from the coast. Some students live nearby and surf before classes. Others don’t mind the drive of a half-hour or so because they feel our program is worth the commute, even though there are colleges closer to their home that offer photo classes.

MOC: **Does the program have required courses or final requirements?**

**Dave Eichinger:** All students begin taking Photo 100, an entry-level darkroom class. This familiarizes everyone with our traditional roots, gives them time to understand shutter speeds and f-stops, and forces them to not rely on instant gratification (digital) so they can grasp all the fundamental technical aspects before adding the digital world into the formula. Portfolios are required in all lecture/lab courses.

MOC: **Do your students do internships?**

**Dave Eichinger:** We encourage all our advanced students to assist after two to three years of courses, and some do internships with local photographers. Others want to move to LA or NYC to find out what those areas have to offer. San Diego doesn’t have the most photography jobs of all the US cities, but it’s a tough place to beat if you call San Diego home.

MOC: **Do you hold special events for photography students?**

**Dave Eichinger:** Throughout the year we have Photo Club trips to the Getty Museum and galleries in LA, and various fun evening events here on campus. We often team up with the Museum of Photographic Arts (MOPA), ASMP, Adobe, and others to offer special programs or workshops, too. Our Nature and Landscape class goes to Yosemite, Death Valley, and other locations several times each year. And I coordinate an annual tour to Europe. This summer it’s the EuroFoto Photography & Chocolate Tour. We’ll fly to Paris, then on to Belgium, Germany, Austria, and finally, the Swiss Alps.

MOC: **Do your students get opportunities to show their work?**

**Dave Eichinger:** Yes, we have an annual end-of-the-year juried student exhibition. We typically are able to reward their efforts with over $4,000 in cash and prizes. You can see last year’s show online. We also had a fall student show that was organized by our Photo Club. Many students, on their own, fill the walls of local galleries or exhibition spaces throughout town.

MOC: **What areas do graduates of your program go on to work in as professionals?**
Dave Eichinger: Most become freelance, primarily wedding and portrait photographers. Others sell their fine art work or shoot for commercial clients. Some do a mix of fine art and commercial work. And others are compelled to complete a graduate degree and become professors of photography. Our program is so diverse that we try to open as many doors in as many different directions as possible.

MOC: **Could you name a few distinguished graduates?**

Dave Eichinger:

Walter Wilson
Bryce Johnson
Rebecca Joelson
Ashley DuChene
Stephanie Fong
Krisnoff Padua
Nicky Ollerton

MOC: **Does the program have any important new developments on the horizon?**

Dave Eichinger: After only three years, we're still settling into our brand new 30,000-square-foot home. We're constantly writing new courses to offer anything and everything that students want to learn. And we try to offer new field experiences each year, also. This year we are planning a trip to visit Carmel-Monterey-area photographers like John Sexton, Huntington Witherill, and others. And the EuroFoto destinations change each year. Last year we switched things up completely and visited Cuba. 2015 may be Spain and Italy.

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