

# The Last Picture Show

UW's J-school drops photojournalism courses.

BY GEORGE VUKELICH

**M**ichael (Mickey) Kienitz is a partner in DLM Imaging of Madison, which sells imaging equipment nationwide. He is also a professional photojournalist whose photos have appeared in such publications as *Life*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Rolling Stone*, *Esquire*, *the Christian Science Monitor* and *the New York Times*. Kienitz was hired by the UW-Madison School of Journalism in 1989 to teach an advanced course in photojournalism, then was asked to teach an introductory course as well. In 1991, he began teaching Adobe Photoshop, an electronic imaging computer program. Now, because of budget constraints, the J-school has dropped all photojournal-



ism courses. Despite the J-school's position that dropping photojournalism might be "temporary," Kienitz is disturbed by what he feels is the school's lack of appreciation for photo images and the power that images have.

"Go back to the Hindenburg disaster. Although the radio announcer was great and dramatic, it's the picture that tells us what a true disaster that was.

"When we talk about My Lai, do we remember the stories written about that massacre? Or do we remember the pictures of the babies and their mothers laying in a heap with all that blood? We remember that guy standing in front of those Chinese tanks.

"Just the other day, in Russia, tanks

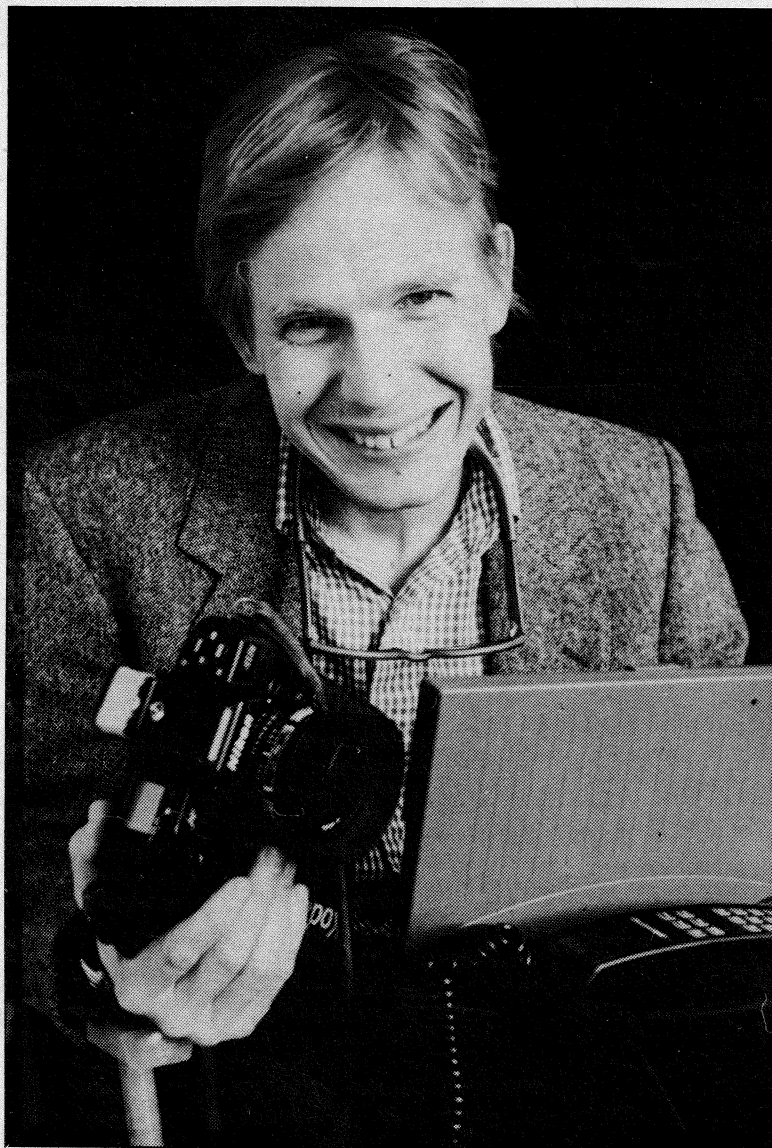
were racing up to the demonstrators. In Mogadishu, people were dragging and kicking a dead American. We won't forget those images either. That's because images are more powerful than words. Words are impressions of events described by a writer, whereas good photojournalism stands on its own.

"So, what does dropping photojournalism classes mean? Well, for a lot of students, it means they're not going to get a job because there are a lot of editors, who, when they hire a writer, want a writer who's capable of doing photography. That's why a number of papers in the state have written letters to the School of Journalism asking for an explanation.

"I don't know of any Big Ten schools that have cut photojournalism, and I'd like to know about them if they exist. I'm only sure the University of Wisconsin is setting a god-awful precedent by doing this.

"The J-school is still teaching digital imaging but only as it applies to magazine layout. Digital imaging is not being taught from a photographic perspective.

"Eventually—in the next 10 years—traditional photography with film and chemicals will be entirely replaced by electronic image capture, but until



Kienitz: Images are more powerful than words.

BRENT NICASTRO

then, a hybrid system utilizing film and scanning into the computer is probably the best.

"When my students heard that photojournalism was being dropped,

they complained to me and I told them to talk to the other teachers and professors in the department. One student asked a professor why photojournalism was being dropped and the professor's answer was: 'Photojournalism is fluff.'

"There are ways for the J-school to get money to support photojournalism. From Kodak, for one. But we don't have to look that far. We could look to alumni. I even considered teaching the course for nothing, but then I thought, well, should the university really become my favorite charity? When I see that the university has a million dollars to put AstroTurf on the football field and yet they have to eliminate photojournalism, then you have to ask the question: What are the priorities of this institution?

"Sure, football generates revenue. Sure, football is very popular. Sure, football is seen around the state. But, in the end, isn't the mission of the university to educate the students?

"Will the J-school be turning out students who are less than qualified? Well, more and more we're being dominated by images in our

society, and we ought to be able to teach a course where students can interpret a good image from a bad image. That's just going by the boards now at this J-school." ■