

MUAE 3950 AND MUJS 5900 – COMMERCIAL SONGWRITING

MUAE 3950 / MUJS 5900

Spring 2026

Meeting Time: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 9:30am–10:50pm

Location: Music Building, Room 287 (and other locations as needed)

Credit Hours: 3

Instructor: Ally Hocking Howe

Email: ALLY.HOWE@UNT.EDU

Office Hours: Wednesdays 11am-1pm in MU 2012

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is grounded in the idea that songwriting is a skill that can be nurtured and refined through analysis (and subsequent application) of inspiration songs. While common forms, harmonic progressions, melodic approaches, and lyric conventions can be identified through analysis, songwriting equally thrives on contradiction, subversion, and personal voice. The central aim of this course is to develop songs that make clear aesthetic and emotional statements through the integration of music, lyrics, performance, and production.

Creative work will be supported by analysis of songs by influential singer-songwriters and contemporary artists, with an emphasis on diversity of background, genre, and approach. Students will engage in regular workshops, creating, recording, and presenting original songs while offering and receiving constructive feedback.

Songwriting in this course is understood not only as composition and lyric writing, but also as arrangement and production for the recorded medium. Most assignments will involve creating demos of original songs using a DAW of the student's choice.

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the semester, students will be able to:

- Describe approaches to songwriting through links to inspiration songs and analysis of lyrics, harmony, melody, rhythm, form, and orchestration.
- Identify and evaluate songs that conform to, deviate from, or reject standard song forms.
- Apply musical and writing skills toward the creation of original song demos.
- Collaborate with peers in songwriting, performance, and production contexts without fixed hierarchies.
- Articulate constructive feedback on peers' work and incorporate feedback into their own creative practice.

SONGWRITING AND COLLABORATION STRUCTURE

Songwriting exercises are primarily individual; however, **at least one song must be co-written** with another student enrolled in the course. There is no maximum number of co-written submissions, provided groups do not exceed **three writers**, all of whom must be enrolled in the class.

Students may alternatively form bands or production groups in which individual songs are brought in by different members and arranged or produced collaboratively.

For each original song, students will submit:

- A **work-in-progress** version for workshop feedback, citing inspiration songs
- A **final version** presented to the class

Each songwriting and production cycle typically spans approximately **two weeks**.

SONG REQUIREMENTS

A final version of a song must include:

- Lyrics*
- Melody**
- Rhythmic accompaniment or beat
- Chord progressions or other forms of implied harmony
- Duration between **2:00 and 5:00 minutes** (unless otherwise approved by the instructor)

* A maximum of **one instrumental song** may be submitted over the course of the semester.

** Rap, spoken words and other rhythm-based vocal approaches are welcome.

A work-in-progress submission must include all essential elements of the song, though arrangements and performances may be incomplete or rough.

TYPICAL SUBMISSION MATERIALS

For each finished song, students will submit:

- A high-quality demo (.mp3) produced in a DAW of the student's choice (final demos only)
- **A lyric sheet with chords (think Ultimate Guitar), iRealPro chart (with lyrics written in the text section), or lead sheet**
- A one to two paragraph written reflection on Canvas addressing the creative and collaborative process

For co-written songs, reflections must clearly describe each contributor's role.

Graduate students only: A lead sheet with lyrics, using notation software and submitted as a PDF.

ASSIGNMENTS

- Project portfolio – first submission (can be a mind map, Spotify or Tidal playlist with annotations, notes app screenshot, etc.)
- 3 songwriting exercises: Cover song, Lyric re-write and Melody re-write
- 4-5 original songs. You will submit each song 3 times throughout the semester (scratch version, demo, final demo)
- Project portfolio - final submission (showing the evolution of your songs over the semester and your entire creative process)

COURSE FORMAT

This course is **Canvas-driven**. Canvas will be used for:

- Assignment instructions and submissions
- Workshop feedback posts
- Readings, listening assignments, and announcements

Students are responsible for monitoring Canvas announcements regularly.

CLASSROOM POLICIES

- Electronic devices may only be used for class-related activities.
- Instruction begins promptly at **9:30am**. Please arrive prepared to begin on time.
- Phones must be silenced and put away during instruction.
- No food is permitted in the classroom. Drinks must remain on the floor (liquids below expensive tech).
- Students are expected to engage actively, ask questions, and participate respectfully in discussion.
- At the end of each class, students must return workstations to their original condition and restart computers.

GRADING

Assessment in this course emphasizes **qualitative evaluation** rather than traditional point-based grading. Most assignments will be graded on a **credit / no-credit** basis. Assignments that do not initially meet the required standard may be revised and resubmitted, provided they were submitted on time. Late work will not be eligible for revision.

In this course, your grade will be based on the amount of work you complete and the extent to which you participate in creating learning opportunities for our whole community. In short, if you would like the highest grade possible in this course, come to class every day having done the assigned work, participate actively, and turn in all assignments completed and on time. Your final grade is largely determined through attendance:

- For a C, come to at least 70% of classes (no more than 9 absences)
- For a B, come to at least 80% of classes (no more than 6 absences)
- For an A, come to at least 90% of classes (no more than 3 absences), and complete all assignments

ATTENDANCE EXPECTATIONS - CLASSROOM

Attendance will be taken within the first 5 minutes of class starting. Due to the hands-on and cumulative nature of this course, **regular attendance is essential**. This course cannot be successfully completed through last-minute or catch-up work.

Absences related to caring for your physical or mental health are always excused, provided the instructor is notified. If a health concern, documented disability, or family emergency results in more than **four missed class sessions**, students should contact **Prof Howe** to discuss possible amendments to their grading contract.

Attendance records can be viewed in Canvas under **Grades → Roll Call Attendance**.

ATTENDANCE EXPECTATIONS – COMMERCIAL MUSIC MAJORS ONLY

Overview:

To foster a professional culture, students are required to attend area events and maintain up-to-date academic plans. Completion of these responsibilities accounts for **one full letter grade** across all MUCO and MUAE coursework.

Mandatory attendance events:

Attendance is tracked via a **QR Code**. Students are responsible for monitoring the Commercial Music Microsoft Teams channel for the most current schedule updates.

Event	Date	Time	Location
CM Showcase	Tue, Jan 27	9:00 PM	The Syndicate
CM Showcase	Mon, Mar 30	8:00 PM	Lab West
Zebras	Tue, Apr 21	8:00 PM	Lab West
CM Departmental	bi-weekly (odd weeks)	12:30–1:20 PM	MEIT (MU1001)

Academic Planning

Following an announcement by CM faculty/TA, students must update their academic plans every semester. Instructions and deadlines will be provided once available via Teams and during Departmental meetings.

Excused Absences

Standard UNT excused absence policies (e.g., medical emergency with documentation, official university travel) apply. All documentation must be submitted to the **Commercial Music TA Gilbert deWitte** within 24 hours of absence.

PREFERRED NAMES AND PRONOUNS

This course affirms all gender identities and expressions. Students are encouraged to share their preferred name and pronouns with the instructor in person or via email. Corrections are always welcome.

RETURN OF STUDENT WORK

Students will receive ongoing verbal and written feedback throughout the semester. Final portfolios and presentations will receive feedback in accordance with university policy.

UNIVERSITY SYLLABUS REQUIREMENTS

In accordance with UNT policy, undergraduate lecture course syllabi must be uploaded to the **Faculty Information System (FIS)** by the 7th class day. Graduate course syllabi are also required to be uploaded to FIS.

For full syllabus policy details, see UNT Policy 06-049.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students caught cheating or plagiarizing will receive a "0" for that particular assignment or exam [or specify alternative sanction, such as course failure]. Additionally, the incident will be reported to the Dean of Students (Office of Academic Integrity), who may impose further penalty. According to the UNT catalog, the term "cheating" includes, but is not limited to: a. use of any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, or examinations; b. dependence upon the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments; c. the acquisition, without permission, of tests or other academic material belonging to a faculty or staff member of the university; d. dual submission of a paper or project, or resubmission of a paper or project to a different class without express permission from the instructor(s); or e. any other act designed to give a student an unfair advantage. The term "plagiarism" includes, but is not limited to: a. the knowing or negligent use by paraphrase or direct quotation of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment; and b. the knowing or negligent unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic materials.

See: [ACADEMIC INTEGRITY](#)

LINK: [HTTPS://POLICY.UNT.EDU/POLICY/06-003](https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003)

STUDENT BEHAVIOUR

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The university's

expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classrooms, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc.

See: [STUDENT CODE OF CONDUCT](#)

Link: [HTTPS://DEANOFSTUDENTS.UNT.EDU/CONDUCT](https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct)

ACCESS TO INFORMATION – EAGLE CONNECT

Your access point for business and academic services at UNT occurs at [MY.UNT.EDU](#). All official communication from the university will be delivered to your Eagle Connect account. For more information, please visit the website that explains Eagle Connect.

See: [EAGLE CONNECT](#)

LINK: [EAGLECONNECT.UNT.EDU/](https://eagleconnect.unt.edu/)

ODA STATEMENT

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with an accommodation letter. You can now request your Letters of Accommodation ONLINE and ODA will mail your Letters of Accommodation to your instructors. You may wish to begin a private discussion with your professors regarding your specific needs in a course. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester. For additional information see the Office of Disability Access.

See: [ODA](#)

LINK: [DISABILITY.UNT.EDU](https://disability.unt.edu). (Phone: (940) 565-4323)

HEALTH AND SAFETY INFORMATION

Students can access information about health and safety at:

[HTTPS://MUSIC.UNT.EDU/STUDENT-HEALTH-AND-WELLNESS](https://music.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness)

REGISTRATION INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

See: [SPRING ACADEMIC CALENDAR INFORMATION](#)

Link: [HTTPS://REGISTRAR.UNT.EDU/REGISTRATION/SPRING-ACADEMIC-CALENDAR.HTML](https://registrar.unt.edu/registration/spring-academic-calendar.html)

SEMESTER CALENDAR, SPRING 2026

See: [SPRING SEMESTER CALENDAR](#)

Link: [HTTPS://REGISTRAR.UNT.EDU/SITES/DEFAULT/FILES/SPRING-2026-ACADEMIC-CALENDAR.PDF](https://registrar.unt.edu/sites/default/files/spring-2026-academic-calendar.pdf)

FINAL EXAM SCHEDULE, SPRING 2026

See above

FINANCIAL AID AND SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PROGRESS

Undergraduates

A student must maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) to continue to receive financial aid. Students must maintain a minimum 2.0 cumulative GPA in addition to successfully completing a required number of credit hours based on total hours registered. Students cannot exceed attempted credit hours above 150% of their required degree plan. If a student does not maintain the required standards, the student may lose their financial aid eligibility.

Students holding music scholarships must maintain a minimum 2.5 overall cumulative GPA and 3.0 cumulative GPA in music courses.

If at any point you consider dropping this or any other course, please be advised that the decision to do so may have the potential to affect your current and future financial aid eligibility. It is recommended that you to schedule a meeting with an academic advisor in your college or visit the Student Financial Aid and Scholarships office to discuss dropping a course before doing so.

See: [FINANCIAL AID](#)

LINK: [HTTP://FINANCIALAID.UNT.EDU/SAP](http://FINANCIALAID.UNT.EDU/SAP)

Graduates

A student must maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) to continue to receive financial aid. Students must maintain a minimum 3.0 cumulative GPA in addition to successfully completing a required number of credit hours based on total registered hours per term. Music scholarships require a 3.5 cumulative GPA. Students cannot exceed maximum timeframes established based on the published length of the graduate program. If a student does not maintain the required standards, the student may lose their financial aid eligibility.

If at any point you consider dropping this or any other course, please be advised that the decision to do so may have the potential to affect your current and future financial aid eligibility. It is recommended you schedule a meeting with an academic advisor in your college, an advisor in UNT-International or visit the Student Financial Aid and Scholarships office to discuss dropping a course.

See: [FINANCIAL AID](#)

LINK: [HTTP://FINANCIALAID.UNT.EDU/SAP](http://FINANCIALAID.UNT.EDU/SAP)

RETENTION OF STUDENT RECORDS

Student records pertaining to this course are maintained in a secure location by the instructor of record. All records such as exams, answer sheets (with keys), and written papers submitted during the duration of the course are kept for at least one calendar year after course completion. Course work completed via the Canvas online system, including

grading information and comments, is also stored in a safe electronic environment for one year. You have a right to view your individual record; however, information about your records will not be divulged to other individuals without the proper written consent. You are encouraged to review the Public Information Policy and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws and the university's policy in accordance with those mandates.

See: [FERPA](#)

Link: <HTTP://FERPA.UNT.EDU/>

COUNSELLING AND TESTING

UNT's Center for Counseling and Testing has an available counselor for students in need. Please visit the Center's website for further information:

See: [COUNSELING AND TESTING](#)

Link: <HTTP://STUDENTAFFAIRS.UNT.EDU/COUNSELING-AND-TESTING-SERVICES>.

For more information on mental health resources, please visit:

See: [MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES](#)

Link: <HTTPS://DISPARITIES.UNT.EDU/MENTAL-HEALTH-RESOURCES>

ADD/DROP POLICY

Please be reminded that dropping classes or failing to complete and pass registered hours may make you ineligible for financial aid. In addition, if you drop below half-time enrollment you may be required to begin paying back your student loans. See Academic Calendar (listed above) for additional add/drop Information.

Drop Information: <HTTPS://REGISTRAR.UNT.EDU/REGISTRATION/SPRING-ACADEMIC-CALENDAR.HTML>

STUDENT RESOURCES

The University of North Texas has many resources available to students. For a complete list, go to:

See: [STUDENT RESOURCES](#)

Link: <HTTPS://SUCCESS.UNT.EDU/AA-SA-RESOURCES>

CARE TEAM

The Care Team is a collaborative interdisciplinary committee of university officials that meets regularly to provide a response to student, staff, and faculty whose behavior could be harmful to themselves or others.

See: [CARE TEAM](#)

Link: <HTTPS://STUDENTAFFAIRS.UNT.EDU/CARE-TEAM>