Music and Sound in Video Games

MUMH 2080.001 (13707)
10.00 MWF
MU 2006 (MF) and UNT Media Library (W)

Instructor Contact

Name: Brian K. Anderson
Email: Brian.Anderson@unt.edu

Office Location: Bain 109
Office Hours: MF 2.00–3.00 in person
　　　　　　　　U 9.00–10.00 on Teams
　　　　　　　　And by Appt.

Communication Expectations:

If you have a private question, please contact me via email, and I will respond within 24 hours on weekdays (usually sooner) and around 48 hours on weekends. I'm very quick with email, and that is my preferred method of contact.

Welcome to UNT!

As members of the UNT community, we have all made a commitment to be part of an institution that respects and values the identities of the students and employees with whom we interact. UNT does not tolerate identity-based discrimination, harassment, and retaliation. UNT's full Non-Discrimination Policy can be found in the UNT Policies section of the syllabus.

Catalog Description

This course explores key moments in the history of video game music from 1950 to 2020. Previous experience with musical performance (including the ability to read music) is not required or expected.

Course Description

This course delves into both the history and the narrative power of video game music (VGM). In this course, students will think critically and communicate clearly about video game music, its history, and its function. As video game music differs from more traditional types of music, so too will the ways that students demonstrate mastery of the subject. This course incorporates monographs, videos, voiced-over recordings of gameplay, and collaborative projects as ways students demonstrate their knowledge of games and gaming music.

Course Objectives

1. By analyzing primary and secondary sources, a broad spectrum of musical examples, and video game music, students will cultivate the critical thinking skills needed to introduce problems and questions; present, interpret, and analyze a variety of source material; consider the context of a variety of source material; develop arguments with a logical progression; and present conclusions and their implications. (Core LO: Critical Thinking)
2. Students will develop communication skills by writing and speaking about video game music, its history, and its context with a clear statement of purpose, organization, developed content, and accuracy. (Core LO: Communication)

3. By exploring the role of the music in characterizing individuals and groups, students will learn social responsibility by acknowledging and assuming diverse cultural/intercultural perspectives; exploring aspects of civic responsibility; and reflecting personally on the ability to recognize, and even challenge notions of cultural bias. (Core LO: Social Responsibility)
4. As team members, students will contribute, prepare, collaborate, foster constructive team climates, and respond to feedback constructively related to the music and sources studied in this course. (Core LO: Teamwork)

Course Materials

Canvas:
You will need access to Canvas to receive announcements, view course readings and assignments, and submit much of their work.

Technology:
You will need access to a computer. We will use some programs to manipulate audio and video files, but these programs are free and open access. Instruction on how to accomplish the required tasks will be given in class and available on Canvas.

Required Games (only one, chosen by team after the semester starts):
This is a class about gaming, so you and your team will play the same game extensively throughout the semester. This will allow team conversations about one particular video game's music to be deeper and more nuanced than would otherwise be possible, and this in-depth experience will complement the whole-class excerpts of video-game music that come from a broader, representative sampling of video games. Below are some games that might be assigned to a group. Please plan to purchase one of the games from the following list, but do not do so before we meet for the first time. The list for each course is set after the semester begins, and you will have at least two weeks to obtain the necessary game.

Shorter Games	Longer Games
Spider-Man: Miles Morales	Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim (Rated M)
Super Mario Odyssey	Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom

If there is another game that a substantial portion of the class wants to add, I am more than happy to discuss it. I will assign students into teams based on which game they choose, in addition to other factors, but I cannot guarantee any person gets to play a specific game. With that said, under no circumstances will I ask you to buy a console. One alternative is using library resources (consoles, games, and PCs are available for checkout or reservation in the library); additionally, the class will always have at least one group that chooses a game that is playable on a computer and does not require a console.

The time you spend playing the course video game should not require more than 1.5 hours per week, though you are obviously welcome to play more if you are having fun! If you select a longer game, I will make every effort to focus on the first part of the game for examples and experiences in class. If your game is extremely large (Skyrim), I may ask that you only select that game for the class if you have already spent significant time playing the game.

Grading

This class employs a hybrid of [Team-Based Learning (TBL)](#) and [Project-Based Learning (PBL)](#) methods. In Team-Based Learning, students work in groups of 4–6 to complete the large assignments in the class. PBL also centers group work and projects as a driving force behind your learning, not just as the artifact at the end of the unit. For more information on TBL or PBL practices, please see the links above, and we will discuss them more in class.

Grade Weights	Within Area	Total
Readiness Assurance:		**150 points**
iRATs	50	
tRATs	100	
There are 6 opportunities, the lowest score will be dropped.		
iClicker polling / in-class activities		**150 points**
3-5 points per day, spread over 45 sessions.		
Opportunity to earn more than 175 points.		
Major Assignments		**500 points**
Justifying VGM (Unit 1 Application Exam and checkpoints)	100	
Anatomy of a Characters (Unit 2 App. Exam and checkpoints)	100	
Guided World Tour! (Unit 3 App. Exam and checkpoints)	100	
The Good Old Days (Unit 4 App. Exam and checkpoints)	100	
The Boss Level	100	
Exams		**100 points**
Units 1–3 Exam	50	
Units 4–5 Exam	50	
Team Maintenance		**100 points**
1 per Unit, 5 units	20	
Total		**1,000 points**

Readiness Assurance

RATs are closed-book tests based on the assigned readings. There will be seven short multiple-choice Readiness Assurance Tests (RATs) given during the course. The same RATs will be given to individuals and teams. Each RAT consists of an individual portion (iRAT grade) and a team portion (tRAT grade). The readiness assurance process is the backbone of TBL, and this is how I ensure that your team has sufficiently prepared to be a part of the day with you. It also holds you accountable to your team. This shared accountability encourages teamwork and rewards preparation.

You will be able to drop the two lowest iRATs and the two lowest tRATS. If you are absent, this will count for one of the drops. Generally, the iRAT is worth 10 points and the tRAT is worth 20 points. For a list of the readings for each RAT, see Canvas.

iClicker Polling / In-Class Activities

Throughout the semester, you will earn points in class each day for participating and answering questions using the iClicker both individually and with your group. The number of points will vary between 3 and 5 points per day, with a rough average of 4 points in any day. This means that there are approximately 180 points available throughout the year, and you need 150 of them here to earn "100%" for this category of points. This would represent attending 83% of the classes this semester. With that caveat, there are no makeups, redo attempts, or late submissions on iClicker polling /in-class activities.

Major Assignments

Please see Canvas for more detailed instructions, rubrics, and a video discussing the project.

Unit 1 Project: Who is Video Game Music For?

For this assignment, please consider the role of representation in video game music. You will select one and only one personal characteristic (e.g. race, gender, sex, gender expression, veteran status, age, etc.) and address the following:

1. Is <your characteristic> represented evenly in the composers of video game music? How has this changed over time?
2. Do you believe representation in composers of VGM reflects the audience of video gamers? Do you see gamers drawn to games where composers, developers, or characters mirror the audience? Do you believe this to be important? Why or why not?

Unit 2 Project: Anatomy of a Character

In this project, you as a YouTube content creator will work with your group to choose four to six characters (one per group member) from your game and create a video introduction for your game's characters and their music.

Your group's video is aimed at a YouTube audience, with the following guidelines:

1. The video must be between ten and twenty minutes.
2. Use samples and gameplay (with audio) to make your point.
3. Everyone in the group must speak for at least one minute, and no one may speak for more than 6 minutes. Part of your grade is roughly equitable speaking time.
4. This is a project, and not an actual YouTube video. Do not post it! You will get a copyright strike, and I do not want that for you (or for me!).

Unit 3 Project: Video Game World Tour!

In this project, your group will make a travel guide for your video game, highlighting the different settings in the game as well as the way you move between them. This guide will involve the following from you:

1. A detailed description of your setting, including images.
2. Peer review for accuracy and a consistent tone throughout.
3. A description of a boundary space.
4. An analysis of your group's guide and of the setting contained in your game.

Unit 4: The Good Old Days

This project is about a trip down memory lane, and about what makes memories meaningful. Take the two moments in your game series (past and present) and address the following components on your group's discussion post.

1. Define nostalgia in your own words.
2. Have you played earlier games in the series before now? If so, which ones and how much? If not, what are the games that are most like this one that you have played?
3. Describe the two scenes and set them in the general context of each game.
4. Did this pair of situations trigger memories, or nostalgia, for you in any way (within the video game or related to something completely outside it)? If so, how? If not, why do you think it did not? Is there something that could be done to trigger nostalgia for you, or do you see reasons that this might cause others to feel nostalgia?

Unit 5: The Final Boss

In this final boss project, there are three ways to earn all the points. Each choice presents its own challenges, but also allows you to highlight your individual strengths and skills. The three options are writing a paper, creating a video, and composing your own in-game music.

Write a paper – In this path, you will write a paper over one aspect of VGM. Your paper can focus on the game your group used in the class, or you can make this relate to other games like yours or predecessors in your line of games (the whole Zelda series, or about the Ocarina).

Video Game Analysis – This path takes you into the game itself and requires you to put everything together from the entire year. Instead of crafting a thesis-driven argument, you will record a live breakdown of your own gaming session. This needs to be from your game, and the fifteen minutes of gameplay you describe must encapsulate a wide swath of what makes your game's music noteworthy—either because it is great or because it can be improved.

Composition – For those of you who see room for improvement in the music, I invite you to submit your own! To choose this path, you must compose your own music for the video game. You need one musical theme for a character, two setting compositions, and transitions between each one (especially between the settings). Each section must be 30 seconds with a plan for repetition—it must hold up to the test of being modular and successfully repetitive in nature.

Quizzes

In addition to large projects, this course contains two more traditional exams consisting of a combination of multiple-choice and short-answer questions. The first covers Units 1-2, and the second Units 3-5.

Team Maintenance

Each individual will rate the contributions all of the **other** members of their teams five times throughout the semester—once per unit. Individual Team Maintenance scores will be the average of the points they receive from the members of their team. Each person must evaluate other members of the team. The Team Maintenance scores will produce differences in grades only **within** teams. As a result, team members can't help everyone in their team get an A by giving them a high peer

evaluation scores. The only way for everyone in a team to earn an A is by doing an outstanding job on the individual exams and team exams and projects.

If a person scores lower than a 70% on the Team Maintenance score as rated by their peers more than once, I will reach out to touch base with that student. If a team averages lower than a 70% for their team maintenance score, I will schedule a conference with that team.

Schedule

Unit 0: In Game Tutorial

WEEK	TOPICS	ASSIGNMENTS
WEEK 1	What is TBL What is Music Sample RAT (participation)	Sample RAT

Unit 1: What is Ludomusicology?

WEEK OF	TOPICS	ASSIGNMENTS
WEEK 2	RAT for Unit 1 Guided mini lessons.	RAT 1 Obtain your game (or check on it at the library.
WEEK 3	A history of VGM	Prepare Perspectives.
WEEK 4	Writing workshop on academic writing. Presenting your perspectives	Present your rough draft thoughts to your group. Submit Unit 1 Project (Thursday by 11:59 pm). Friday: Team Maintenance Forms (Friday by 11:59 pm)

Unit 2: Defining Your Characters – Leitmotifs in Movies and Games

DATE	TOPIC	ASSIGNMENTS
WEEK 5	RAT for Unit 2 The Leitmotif in Opera; The Leitmotif in Film	Unit 2 RAT
WEEK 6	Presenting a character – my turn! Presenting a character – your turn! Library Day (tentative)	Submit your individual character

WEEK 7	Workday
	Quiz Review
	
	Quiz 1
	    Listening
	    Short Response
		Quiz 1
		Final Video of Unit 2 Project
		Team Maintenance Forms

Unit 3: Bit by Bit – Music, Modularity, and World Crafting

DATE	TOPIC	ASSIGNMENT
WEEK 8	RAT for Unit 3 Scenery and imagery as text, image, and soundscape. Sample travel guide presentation from me.	Unit 3 RAT
WEEK 9	Travel Guides! Present your location to the group. Library Day What does it mean to explore a liminal space, and how can transitions work?	Final version of your first setting
WEEK 10	Present your liminal spaces to your group. Finalize your online travel blog.	Final version of your travel blog Team Maintenance Forms

Unit 4: Memory and Nostalgia in Video Game Music

DATE	TOPIC	ASSIGNMENTS
WEEK 11	RAT for Unit 4 Mini Lectures and discussion Memory and Nostalgia	Unit 4 RAT
WEEK 12	Emulator day – play through and discuss memory in your games. Discuss the final project, possibilities, samples. Time with groups to plan.	Initial Discussion Board Post Due Discussion Board Responses Due Team Maintenance Forms

Unit 5: The Boss Level!

DATE	TOPIC	ASSIGNMENT
WEEK 13	RAT for Unit 5	Unit 5 RAT
	Sound Box Day (tentative)	Opening Project Plan Due
	Final Project samples, Q&A	
WEEK 14	Sound effects and the res of the audio experience – revisited.	Project Checkpoint Due
		Quiz 2 (over Units 3-5)

	Workshops on your project.
	    Time with your group.
	    Time with similar projects.	

WEEK 15	Preliminary presentations
	    First, within groups.
	    Second, within class (volunteers).
		Unit 5 Major Assignment Due
		Final Team Maintenance Forms

FINALS WEEK	No Class	

Select Bibliography:

Collins, Karen. Game Sound: An Introduction to the History, Theory, and Practice of Video Game Music and Sound Design. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008.

Donnelly, K.J., William Gibbons, and Neil Lerner, ed. Music in Video Games: Studying Play. New York: Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2014.

Fritsch, Melanie and Tim Summers, ed. The Cambridge Companion to Video Game Music. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

Gibbons, William. and S. Reale, ed. Music in the Role-Playing Game: Heroes & Harmonies. New York: Routledge/Taylor and Francis Group, 2019.

Gibbons, William. Unlimited Replays: Video Games and Classical Music. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Ivănescu, Andra. Popular Music in the Nostalgia Video Game: the Way It never Sounded. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

Medina-Gray. Elizabeth. "Modularity in Video Game Music." In Ludomusicology: Approaches to Video Game Music, ed. M. Kamp, T. Summers, and M. Sweeney. Sheffield: Equinox Publishing, 2016, 53–72.

Miller, K. Playing Along: Digital Games, YouTube, and Virtual Performance. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Rone, Vincent E., Can Aksoy, and Sarah Pozderac-Chenevey, ed. Nostalgia and Videogame Music: A Primer of Case Studies, Theories, and Analyses for the Player-Academic. Chicago: Intellect, The University of Chicago Press, 2022

Summers, Tim. Understanding Video Game Music. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Whalen, Zach. "Play Along: An Approach to Videogame Music." Game Studies vol.4/1 (2004)

Course Policies and Accommodations Statement

Assignment Policy

Students can find all assignment information, submission guidelines, and due dates in the Introduction Module in Canvas, with the exception of the final project. There are two modules at the end of the course: the first addresses the final project and all steps, and the second contains student examples (who approved their use on condition of anonymity.

Instructor Feedback

Due to the class size, I will return feedback on all written assignments within two weeks of the due date. If I see that I will be unable to return your feedback within that timeframe, I will post an announcement to let everyone know when it can be expected.

Late Work

In general, I will accept anything for up to 24 hours without a penalty, after which I will not accept it. There are two caveats.

First, I will give an extension of two days to any assignment that is an individual assignment, without limit. The only caveat is that you must ask before the assignment is due. No reasons are needed, and I will work with you on a plan to get the assignment in. The key here is timely communication. Once the assignment is late, the best-case scenario for normal events is the loss of the missing points for the days you were late before contacting me, and no extension should be expected after the assignment is due. This does not apply to team assignments or in-class work.

With that said, there are unusual circumstances in all of our lives. When in doubt, reach out to me. Please do not email TAs – they just end up emailing me, and everything takes longer and involves more emails.

Statement on Accommodations

I will always work with you on accommodations, and will honor ODA accommodations. If you find any of my assignments or policies do not properly honor your accommodations, please reach out to me and I will work with ODA to ensure that we address and accommodate your needs.

Syllabus Change Policy

This syllabus can be modified. All modifications will be announced via Canvas and explained in writing.

UNT Policies

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

STUDENT BEHAVIOR

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

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/

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. (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

Registration Information for Students
See: Registration Information
Link: https://registrar.unt.edu/students

Academic Calendar, Spring 2025
See: Spring 2025 Academic Calendar
Link: https://registrar.unt.edu/registration/spring-academic-calendar.html

Final Exam Schedule, Spring 2025
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

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

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/

COUNSELING 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/fall-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