



COMM 4120: Communication & Sport

Spring 2026

“Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire, it has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope, where once there was only despair. It is more powerful than governments in breaking down racial barriers. It laughs in the face of all types of discrimination.” – Nelson Mandela, late South Africa president

“Sports teaches you character, it teaches you to play by the rules, it teaches you to know what it feels like to win and lose-it teaches you about life.” – Billie Jean King, former tennis great

“Just win baby.” – Al Davis, late owner of Oakland (now Las Vegas) Raiders

Professor: Dr. Brian Richardson
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Office Hours:
TTh 2:00-3:00 p.m.

& by appt.

* **Course communication:** We will use Canvas to communicate course-related messages. I also check my email regularly if you have question about non-course related items.

Your instructor’s bio: I am a first-generation college student from Bridge City, Texas. My research interests include organizational whistleblowing, disaster communication, and sport communication. I graduated with my B.S. from Lamar University and my M.A. from Louisiana Tech University. I completed my doctorate at UT-Austin, where I was one of the last students to be admitted and just one of two non-funded students in the program. In other words, I barely got in! Coming from a working-class background, I initially felt like I did not fit in nor belong compared to my peers who had graduated from more prestigious universities. Fortunately, I was afraid of failure which motivated me to try some novel behaviors. I went to office hours, where I learned from one professor that my comments in class were “pretty ordinary,” which was feedback I needed to hear. I read everything that was assigned in my classes as that was the best way to catch up to my classmates (and learn what the heck I was doing). I did receive funding my second semester and ultimately graduated with honors. When I graduated, the same professor who had noted my “pretty ordinary” class comments wrote me a recommendation letter and said, “he is one of the top two Organizational Communication students in our program.” I learned anyone can succeed in college by doing the following: asking questions, visiting your instructors during office hours, and giving your all to the assignments. It’s not always easy, but it’s worth it in the end!

Prerequisites: Communication Studies majors must complete COMM 3010 with a grade of C or higher prior to enrolling; minors and other majors must complete COMM 2020 with a grade of C or higher.

Course Rationale:

Sport directly or indirectly touches most facets of U.S. culture, communities, and families. Professional and amateur athletes kneeling during the national anthem generates controversy and interrupts political discourse; research into head injuries worries parents and challenges the long-term viability of American football; sexual assault scandals at Baylor University, Michigan State University, and Penn State raise questions about whether universities prioritize athletic department reputations over victims; streaming programs like *Drive to Survive* demonstrate the power of new media in promoting more obscure sports to global audiences; overzealous parents are often accused of “ruining” youth sports; collegiate athletes can now make (lots of) money from selling their name, image, and likeness to corporations which changes how they are recruited and stay at (or transfer from) universities; the recent arrest of an NBA coach, current player, and members of the Mafia, for betting on NBA games demonstrates wide-spread corruption is not limited to non-sport organizations; and, the banning of Russia from the 2018 Winter Olympics reminds us there is rampant cheating in sport against the backdrop of world politics. While all of these issues involve sport, at their core, they are created and sustained by *communication*. Indeed, this course was developed at a time when scholarly research into communication and sport phenomena was exploding.

Thus, the purpose of this course is to introduce students to the scholarly (and practical) domain of Communication and Sport. At the conclusion of this course, students should have a basic understanding of the dimensions of sport phenomena that are of interest to sport scholars and have a rudimentary knowledge of the theoretical and empirical approaches taken toward those phenomena.

Course Objectives;

1. To understand sport (communication) research from three perspectives: (1) a social scientific perspective for explaining large-scale data approaches to sport-related problems, (2) an interpretive perspective that addresses how sport participants make sense of their participation, and (3) a critical perspective that questions the problematic aspects of sport, including gender, race, and class imbalances.
2. To develop skills to research, interpret, and analyze communication and sport problems and issues.
3. To conduct a team research project into communication and sports phenomenon.



This cartoon demonstrates the current flux of college football, a multi-billion dollar industry, and how tradition is left behind in the wake of financial interests.

TEXTBOOK, READINGS, AND RESOURCES:

Billings, A. C., & Butterworth, M. L. (2022). *Communication and Sport: Surveying the Field (4th Ed.)*. Los Angeles: Sage.

Any additional readings will be posted on Canvas or distributed in class. These are not “optional readings.” They are relevant to the lecture material, the course assignments, and to the exams. **You are responsible for ensuring that you access copies of all class handouts.**

Course Format and Canvas:

We will generally follow the course textbook as we proceed throughout the semester. For each chapter in the textbook, there will be assigned readings, lectures, and discussion, and sometimes we will also engage in activities, host guest speakers or watch documentary films. Since nearly all of you have played sports, watch sports, or are fans of sports, I hope you share your experiences.

The Canvas course site will include: syllabus, announcements, supplemental readings, exam reviews, and additional, important course information. Additionally, grades will be posted online during the course of the semester. Please check Canvas regularly. **If you cannot sign onto Canvas, it is your responsibility to contact Canvas and request help during the first week of the semester.**

Technical difficulties with Canvas Learn are the responsibility of the student. If you encounter technical difficulties during the semester, you need to contact the Canvas Technical Support Desk:

Email: Helpdesk@unt.edu

Phone: 940.565.2324

ASSIGNMENTS

- I. **Exams:** There will be two in-person exams given during the term, including the non-cumulative final exam. The format of the exams will be multiple choice, true-false, matching, short answer, and analysis questions. Each exam is worth 100 points toward your course grade. The purpose of these exams is to ascertain that you understand the concepts presented. See Course Schedule for Exam dates.

Note 1: There are no makeup exams. If you miss an exam, you lose the points associated with it. The only exceptions are due to documented sickness, death in the family, or some other catastrophe. I am very unlikely to allow you to take an exam after the scheduled time if you do not contact me *prior* to the exam.

Note 2: Exams are closed book and closed notes. You just need to bring a #2 pencil; I will provide the Scantron forms and test booklets.

- II. **Term project:** Team documentary film: Students will be assigned to teams of 4 or 5 and tasked with developing a 9-11 minute documentary on a sport fan/athlete culture in the DFW area. See Assignment Instruction's packet for details.
- III. **Six reading quizzes.** You will have an opportunity to earn up to 5 points for successfully completing a reading quiz. If you have thoroughly read the assigned reading, you should do well. These quizzes will be given during the first five minutes of the class only with no exceptions. Exams will consist of multiple choice, true-false, and/or short answer questions. I will actually give you 10 reading quizzes, allowing you to drop your four lowest quiz grades.
- IV. **Homework assignments:** You will have a chance to earn up to 15 points each for successfully completing four homework assignments. Homework will be facilitated via Canvas. There will be NO makeup opportunities for these assignments and all must be completed by the given deadline. They are graded based upon writing clarity, support in form of evidence and arguments for one's responses, and demonstration of course knowledge.

Total points breakdown

Midterm & Final Exam (2x100)	200 pts.
Term project/documentary	150 pts.
Term project/doc proposal	20 pts.
Term project peer evaluation	40 pts.
6 reading quizzes (5 pts.)	30 pts.
4 homework assignments (15 pts.)	<u>60 pts.</u>
Total	500 pts.

Grade determination

Your final grade is based entirely on the sum of those points assigned in the class, and I will adhere rigidly to those points. The points correspond to the following university guidelines: an A is reserved for excellent work; a B is for above average performance; a C is awarded for average work; a D simply means passing, and an F indicates below average, non-passing work. Points-wise the grades will be categorized as follows: 500-450 = A; 400-449.5 = B; 350-399.5 = C; 300-349.5 = D; 0 – 299.5 = F

Extra Credit: During the semester, you will have opportunities to earn extra credit (XC) for (a) attending and documenting your experience at a sporting event, (b) participating in research projects by department faculty or graduate students, or (c) attending events/meetings related to COMM department organizations/events. Details for those opportunities will be announced as they arise and participation is strictly voluntary. Students who choose to not participate will not be penalized. Please note that extra credit opportunities are offered to all students in the course – I will not customize the number of extra credit opportunities to individual students. XC opportunities will be worth 5-10 points each and will be added to your final point total. The maximum number of XC points any students can receive is 20.

Course policies

ODA Policy: UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one's specific course needs. Students may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the [ODA website \(https://disability.unt.edu/\)](https://disability.unt.edu/).

Attendance: Much of this course's value comes from in-class conversation and learning exercises. Excessive absences are inconsistent with learning what this class is meant to teach. ANY STUDENT WITH 7 OR MORE CLASS ABSENCES MAY AUTOMATICALLY FAIL THE COURSE. Attendance is taken at the beginning of class using a seating chart. (The seating chart also helps me memorize your names.) You will be counted absent if you do not sign the attendance sheet. If you are too late, and miss the attendance sheet, you will be counted as absent. Cases where someone signs in for another student will be treated as academic misconduct cases. Students are expected to arrive on time and be present for the entire class period. Situations that may justify excused absences:

- A medical emergency or other emergencies that you could not have foreseen;
- School-sanctioned travel with appropriate and timely documentation;
- A medical condition recognized by the Office of Disability Services;
- Religious observances for which you have notified the instructor well in advance.
 - See the [campus policy regarding religious observances](#) for full details.

Late work. Except under the most extreme circumstances (and documentation of those circumstances is required), no late homework assignments will be accepted. If you encounter an emergency situation, it is best to communicate with me about it earlier rather than later. It is not fair to others who met the deadlines if I accept yours late. Also, no longer are technology problems reasonable excuses for late papers. **I suggest knowing technology well enough and allowing ample time in case of problems.** Before attempting any written assignment, please see the course packet for instructions and grading criteria. All assignments must be turned in by the due date or they will be considered late. **For the term paper only, late papers** will be graded for half credit. This is a severe penalty, but is better than zero points (plus, you get feedback on the assignment). It is not fair to others who met the deadlines if I accept your assignments late. I will not accept term papers more than one week late.

Please don't be a cheater (aka policy on using A.I.)

Generative A.I. (e.g. ChatGPT) is quickly emerging as an influential, dominant force for interpersonal and organizational communication, information exchange, idea generation, problem solving, and decision-making, among other uses. While A.I. can be utilized for constructive purposes, it can also be used in ways that detract from individual's creativity, thinking, individuality, and education. Rather than allowing A.I. to do the work for us or refusing to integrate it into the classroom, it is best we learn how to use it ethically and appropriately, in ways that foster, rather than detract from, your learning. For these reasons, I offer the following expectations regarding the use of A.I. As you can see, responsible use of A.I. will vary depending upon the type of assignment.

In-class activities	For these activities, use of A.I. will be determined in the moment depending upon the type of activity. In some cases, the instructor will disallow the use of any A.I. because the activity requires personal reflection on your part without input from a system that knows nothing about you. For other activities, the instructor will make the use of A.I. optional. This should allow us to explore distinctions and overlaps between information generated by the human brain vs. that generated by A.I. Finally, some activities will require use of A.I. in order to see how it restricts or expands your thinking (or has some other effect)
Reading quizzes	Because these quizzes are a test of your reading comprehension, use of A.I. will not be permitted.
Homework assignments	For homework assignments, use of A.I. is permitted for brainstorming ideas and reviewing your writing acumen (e.g. through Grammarly). If you choose to use A.I., you must show your work by sharing your conversations with A.I., explain how A.I. informed your responses, and respond to at least 3 questions from the A.I. Reflection assessment.
Exams	Because exams are a test of your comprehension of course material, use of A.I. will not be permitted.
Term projects	For term papers, use of A.I. is permitted, but not necessary, for brainstorming ideas or seeking guidance on narrative flow for a documentary film. If you are considering using A.I. for any of these purposes, you must include these in your term project proposal assignment for instructor approval.

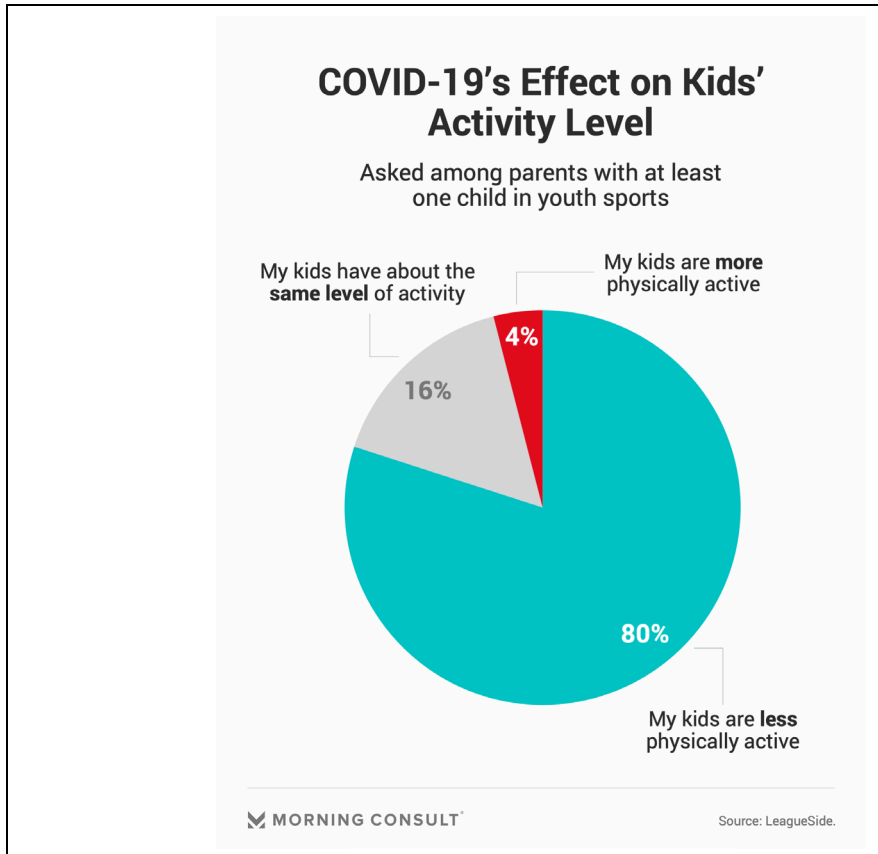
Proper use of A.I. in this class

Your instructor believes it is critical that students learn how to A.I. in an ethical, transparent way. Therefore, he will model this philosophy by documenting his use of A.I. in crafting this syllabus, course policies, assignment creation, activity development, grading, and even in projects he works on beyond this class. He expects the same transparency from you for your work in this class.

According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and using AI programs like ChatGPT to write papers or do assignments **without instructor approval**. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University. Of particular concern in a course with written and oral assignments is the issue of

plagiarism. Plagiarism is defined by Webster's (1989) as "the appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's original work" (p. 1100). In other words, plagiarism is stealing. You must cite your sources accurately and consistently in both your oral and written assignments. Penalties for plagiarism will vary according to severity and will range from a failing grade to prosecution through the University System. Please note: Your term paper will be uploaded to turnitin.com.

Youth sports participation rates were dropping before the COVID-19 pandemic occurred, which only made things worse. (see graphic below)



Acceptable Student Behavior: This course is designed to foster and maintain a positive learning environment. Your active participation during discussions will be encouraged and questions or comments at any time during lectures are welcomed. Importantly, all comments and responses should be friendly and respectful of the other students in the class. Diversity of perspectives is critical to a liberal arts education so you are free to share viewpoints which may differ from others in the class. Again, please do so in a respectful way and support your responses with evidence and data. Finally, class will begin promptly at the scheduled time. If extraordinary circumstances exist that require some deviation from these policies (e.g., family emergency), please email/message me. I know many of our students work, are parents, or are caregivers to others so I am happy to work with you – within reason - on scheduling issues. Please feel free to share any further suggestions for maintaining a positive learning environment that you may have.

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 Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities 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 classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at www.unt.edu/csrr

Writing quality assumptions. Considering this is a senior-level course, every assignment you turn in must be of quality, in content and style. I will harshly grade assignments with significant grammatical and typographical errors. I expect you to take advantage of the programs that guard against such errors; however, there is no substitute for good proofreading. Papers, particularly on the essay assignment must conform to APA standards. I will provide models of exemplary papers from past classes as resources.

Completing the Course. Students are expected to complete all assignments for this course during the semester. Assigning a grade of "incomplete" is rare, and in order to request an "I," the student must meet these requirements: a) The student must have completed at least 75% of the course assignments; b) The student must be passing the course; c) There must be an unforeseen and compelling reason why the course cannot be completed on time (usually a medical or military reason); and d) The student must present a plan for completing the assignments within the time period specified in the catalog.

Don't be a Rude Person in Class. We only have 80 minutes together twice per week. Let's use that time to connect and create a community of learners. If you must use your laptop, do so for taking notes or other class-related activities as they arise. My pledge to you is that I will never start texting my friends, family or co-workers, nor surf the internet, while we are in our community of learning. **I appreciate you doing the same for me and your classmates.** Put your cell phones on silent, pack them away, and participate in class. If you arrive to class late, please enter the room discreetly, not with your ear buds blaring music and catch the door so that it does not slam shut.

The Communication Studies Library is a valuable resource for students taking COMM courses. The library is located in GAB 318 and is staffed by COMM majors who can assist students with their projects and papers. The library has a large, searchable collection of scholarly books, e.g. *Handbook of Sports and Media*, and *Sport, Rhetoric, and Gender*, which are especially helpful for research-related assignments. You can work in the library and/or the library staff can copy chapters from books so that you can work on them at home.

Its **hours** are Monday-Thursday (10 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.). To make a reservation or request a scanned copy, email untcommlibrary@gmail.com. Our current catalog of books and handbooks is located on the communications Studies Website: <https://communication.unt.edu/research/library>

First week drops: The instructor reserves the right to drop students who do not participate in first week activities if other students are attempting to add the course.



Did you know? UNT competes in the American Athletic Conference. We won the Isleta New Mexico Bowl over San Diego State University this year; we were also regular season co-champions of the conference in women's basketball.

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

We will generally follow the order of the book, and I will keep you abreast of what to read prior to each week through class announcements and Canvas postings.

Class and individual introductions/Review syllabus and assignments

Ch. 1: Introduction to Comm. and Sport

Ch. 2: Community in Sport

Ch. 3: Sport Media: Navigating the Landscape

Ch. 4: Sport Fan Cultures

Ch. 5: Sport and Mythology

Ch. 6: Gender and Sport

Guest speaker: Jenna Reneau, NBA Referee

Ch. 7: Race and Ethnicity in Sport

Ch. 10: Interpersonal Communication in Sport

Ch. 11: Small Groups/Teams in Sport

Ch. 12: Crisis Communication in Sport

Ch. 8: Politics and Nationality in Sport

Ch. 13: The Commodification of Sport

Ch. 9: Performing Identity in Sport

Ch. 14: Sport Gaming

Key Dates:

- **March 5:** Midterm Exam
- **March 9-13:** SPRING BREAK
- **March 17:** Term project (documentary) assignment workshop
- **March 24:** Team project proposals due
- **April 14:** Attendance not recorded; work on term papers
- **April 21:** Attendance not recorded; work on posters
- **April 23:** COMM Day – Red Carpet premiere of documentaries at the University Union
- **May 7, 10-12 p.m.** Final Exam