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**COMM 4120: Communication & Sport**

**Spring 2024**

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“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 Raiders

Professor: Brian Richardson  
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<p><u>Office Hours:</u> TTh 11 a.m. -Noon TTh 2:00-2:30 pm &amp; by appt.</p>
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\* **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 originally from Bridge City, Texas. My degrees are from Lamar University (B.S.), Louisiana Tech University (M.A.), and the University of Texas at Austin (Ph.D.). My research interests include organizational whistleblowing, disaster communication, and sport communication issues like parents’ decision-making about youth football. You can find my research in journals such as *Communication and Sport*, *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, *Management Communication Quarterly*, the *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, and others. I do some consulting, having worked with Texas Fire Chiefs Academy, UNT Health Science Center, Department of Family and Protective Services, and the Texas Association of County Auditors. As a first-generation college student, I did not know many of the things other students took for granted, like “office hours” or “APA style” or “internships.” Further, I did not know about the department and university resources available to assist and support me. I encourage you to ask me about any concerns or issues you are facing; I am happy to put you in touch with resources and departments on campus that can assist you. I am sure you have many of the same questions I had back when I was in college, so feel free to ask me anything.

**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; 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 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.

Additional readings for most chapters 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](mailto:Helpdesk@unt.edu)  
**Phone:** 940.565.2324

## ASSIGNMENTS

- I. **Exams:** There will be three online exams given during the term. Each exam is worth 70 points toward your course grade. Exams may consist of any combination of matching, multiple-choice, true-and-false, fill-in-the-blank, or short-answer questions. The purpose of these exams is to ascertain that you understand the concepts presented. If you are keeping up with the readings and participating actively in the class, it should not be difficult to do well on these exams. See Course Schedule for Exam dates. You can use your notes, textbook, etc., when taking the exam.

*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:* I will only count your top two exam scores toward your grade.

- II. **Term project:** You have three options for your term project. They are: a research paper based upon an interview with a sport professional (individual), a podcast exploring research around a sport and communication issue (1-3 students), or development of a documentary on a communication and sport issue (3-4 students group project). A description of these options is included in the Assignment Instruction's document.
- III. **Reading quizzes:** On ten occasions this semester, you will have an opportunity to earn 10 points (100 points total) for successfully completing a reading quiz. If you have thoroughly read the assigned reading, you should do well. There will be NO make-up opportunities for these assignments. These quizzes will be given during the first five minutes of the class. I will actually give you 11 reading quizzes, allowing you to drop your lowest grade.
- IV. **Homework assignments:** On six occasions this semester, you will have a chance to earn up to 15 points for successfully completing a homework assignment. These assignments will be facilitated via Canvas. There will be NO makeup opportunities for these assignments and all must be completed by the given deadline.

### Total points breakdown

Exams – top two scores (2x70)	140 pts.
Term project	150 pts.
Reading quizzes (10x5)	50 pts.
Homework assignments (6x10)	<u>60 pts.</u>
Total	400 pts.

### Grade determination

The points in this class are based on the assignments discussed above. 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: 400-360 = A; 320 – 359.5 = B; 280 - 319.5 = C; 240-279.5 = D; 0 – 239.5 = 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 Access (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:** Attendance is taken at the beginning of class using a seating chart. (The seating chart also helps me learn your names.) A student is expected to arrive on time and be present for the entire class period. To allow for illness or other unforeseen situations, students in the course are allotted three absences. Excused and unexcused absences count the same, with the one exception being university-related absences, e.g. debate team, college athletics, etc. Each absence beyond the limit will result in **your final course grade being lowered by 10 points per absence** (e.g. from 335 to 325 for one excessive absence). Excessive absences caused by **serious** health problems will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. 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.

**Please don’t be a cheater.** 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. 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.

**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 strive to 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.

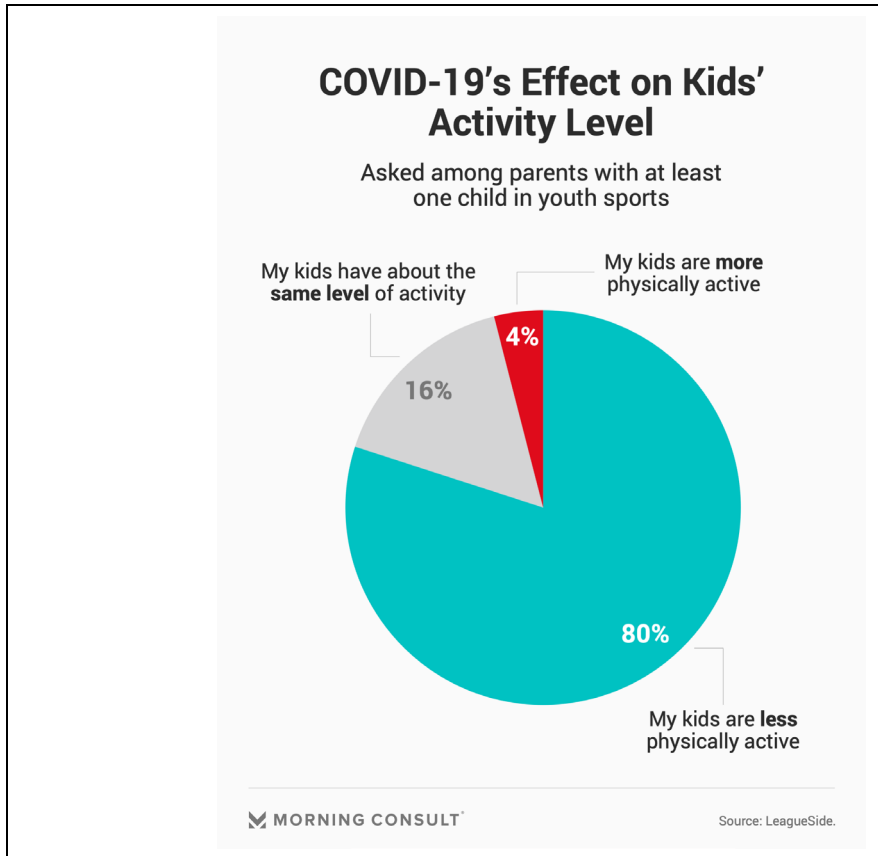
Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the 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](http://www.unt.edu/csrr)

**Writing quality assumptions.** Every assignment you turn in must be of quality, both in content and style. I will not accept papers 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.

**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.

**Crisis Contingency.** In the event of the university closing for weather-related reasons or illness outbreak please refer to Canvas for instructions about how we will proceed.

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



**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 your doing the same for me and your classmates.

What does research tell us about technology and class participation?

- "For the most effective learning and remembering, it was better for students to write or draw by hand versus typing out notes." (Askvik, 2020)
- "Electronics are a major distraction in class and disrupt class discussion. There is literature that supports this claim, one of which includes: Fried, C.B. (2008). In-class laptop use and its effects on student learning. *Computers & Education*, 50(3), 906-914."
- "(The technology companies) knew tech was addictive from early on. The warning signs were pretty clear. (The social media companies) design their technology to have social validation loops — the whole use of 'likes' is designed from the ground up to be addictive. They know intermittent reinforcement is more likely to push people to use it over and over again." – Bradshaw & Kuchler, 2018



**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. *Defining Sport Communication*, which are especially helpful for writing 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](mailto: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.**



## 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. 8: Politics and Nationality in Sport**

**Ch. 9: Performing Identity in Sport**

**Ch. 10: Interpersonal Communication in Sport**

**Ch. 11: Small Groups/Teams in Sport**

**Ch. 12: Crisis Communication in Sport**

**Ch. 13: The Commodification of Sport**

**Ch. 14: Sport Gaming**

### **Key dates:**

- **Online Exam I:** Feb. 26 at noon – Feb. 27 at 11:59 p.m.
- **March 11-15 – SPRING BREAK**
- **Online Exam II:** April 8 at noon – April 9 at 11:59 p.m.
- **April 25 – COMM Day**
- **April 29 at 11:59 p.m.** – Term projects due via Canvas
- **May 2 – Last class day – YEAH!**
- **Online Exam III:** May 9 at noon – May 10 at 11:59 p.m.