

MRTS 3615: Understanding Media Industries (Fall 2026)

University of North Texas, Department of Media Arts

Professor: Dr. Courtney Brannon Donoghue (she/her)

Email: courtney.donoghue@unt.edu

Office: RTFP 234

Office Hours: Thursday 1-2 pm in-person, or by appointment

Class Meetings: Thursday 2:25 pm to 5:15 pm

Classroom: RTFP 184

Teaching Assistants

Allie Bowden <AllieBowden@my.unt.edu>

Leo Crispin <CithlalyCrispin@my.unt.edu>

Course Description (3 credits):

This course provides an introduction to the organization and function of the major media industries across societies, nations, and time periods. Students will gain knowledge of how media industries work, why they work as they do, and the broader theoretical and practical implications of media industry structure and function. The knowledge and skills provided by this class will prepare students for success in 4000 level coursework and industry studies classes in particular.

Student Learning Goals:

- Understand the basic organization and function of the media industries
- Gain critical knowledge of the relationship between the media industries and culture
- Conduct research on the media industries using a variety of methods
- Clearly present complex ideas through both oral presentations and writing
- Ability to successfully work in a group as well as on individual projects

Required Readings:

There is no required textbook for this course. Readings are available on Canvas via PDFs and links.

Assessment:

Class Attendance/Participation	15 pts.
In-class Quizzes	25 pts.
In-class Activities	15 pts.
Project #1: Film Slate Management	20 pts.
Project #2: TV Market Report + Pitch	25 pts.
100 points total	

Course Expectations:

- Arrive on time prepared and ready to engage with assigned course materials for class.
- Bring available laptops or tablets every week to use for in-class activities.
- Check Canvas announcements for weekly reminders and any changes to the schedule. All assignment guidelines will be posted to Canvas and discussed during class meetings.
- Canvas or email is the best way to contact Dr. CBD. Please allow 24 hours for a response.

Grades and Late Policy:

Grades on course requirements are based on your ability to engage with course materials, follow directions, execute the assignment, interpret and comprehend the overall rationale for the course. All assignments must be turned in by the due date and time. Please contact us prior to the due date if you have an emergency or situation where you need flexibility with a deadline. *All late assignments will lose one point for each day late.*

Final letter grades indicate the following levels of performance:

A (90-100) = Outstanding work

B (80-89) = Good work

C (70-79) = Fair work

D (60-69) = Passing work

F (0-59) = Failing work

PARTICIPATION & ATTENDANCE

Students are expected to attend class regularly and you are expected to be on time. Your participation grade is made up of the following: regular attendance, taking notes, class questions/comments/discussion, small group activities and written responses, visiting office hours, etc. An attendance sheet will be passed around during class. If you miss a class, please do not email me to ask if you missed anything. I do not place my lecture notes online. If you need notes, ask one of your classmates.

Classmate contact info:

Name/Info: _____

Name/Info: _____

IN-CLASS QUIZZES

During the first 15-20 minutes of class, students will complete a weekly quiz. Quiz questions may come from readings, podcast episodes, lectures, and in-class screenings. Questions may be a short answer, multiple choice, or informal writing response. Each quiz is worth 2.5 points. You will be granted a “pass week” over the semester to skip one quiz AND still receive full credit. All you need to do is write “This is my pass week” as your response on the week’s quiz. Because you are given a pass week, **quizzes cannot be made up without a university approved reason.**

IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES

Throughout the semester, students will be given an individual or small group activity or exercise to work on towards the end of class. The activity will be related to the day’s lecture and will ask students to apply concepts or industry practices in a creative and engaging way. In-class activities will be completed in class and submitted by the end of that day’s class. Students will receive an overhaul holistic grade at the end of the semester for in-class activity work.

PROJECT #1: FILM SLATE MANAGEMENT

This assignment offers students the opportunity to engage with the contemporary film industry in an interactive way. Students will take on the role of a Hollywood executive and build a slate of films to distribute for their studio. The goal is to gross the highest domestic box office for their opening weekends. Students should pay attention to the marketing and box office revenues each week, and we will discuss each week’s results in class. The student(s) whose slate grosses the most money by the end of the semester will earn one extra credit point. The assignment will span the entire semester including creating and submitting your film slate (September), weekly discussion in class about each

box office weekend's performances (Weeks 5-14), and recording a short podcast-style reflection about how your film slate performed and the state of the film business (December). Detailed assignment guidelines will be posted to Canvas.

PROJECT #2: TV MARKET RESEARCH + PITCH PRESENTATION

In groups, you will develop and pitch a TV series idea to a Disney-owned company. As a group, this will require you to conduct market research on a Disney television brand—Disney+, Hulu, FX, ABC, or Freeform. You will need to determine how your TV series fits and why based on your company's business model, audience, formats, programming, regulations, etc. The project will culminate in group pitch presentations, group research report, and individual reflection. A detailed assignment sheet will be posted closer to the due date.

Writing and Research Resources

For assignments, you can use either Chicago or MLA Style. For more information about style guides, see the UNT Library site. Since this course relies on research and writing skills, you are encouraged to look for outside resources and support. I strongly recommend that you contact the UNT Writing Lab. Tutors are available to work with undergraduates and graduates. Learn more about the Writing Lab by visiting their website (<https://writinglab.unt.edu>), calling them at 940-565-2563, or by visiting their office in Sage Hall, room 152.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is of central importance in education, and academic misconduct will not be tolerated in this class. It is the responsibility of all UNT students to know and adhere to the Student Academic Integrity Policy (UNT Policy 6.003), which can be found at: <https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003>. If you have any questions concerning this policy or about documentation of sources in work you produce in this course, please meet with Dr. CBD.

The use of generative AI tools (such as ChatGPT, Claude, Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini, etc.) is not permitted in this class. Any use of AI tools for work in this class is not authorized and will be classified as a violation. According to the Student Academic Integrity Policy (UNT Policy 6.003), any form of “unauthorized assistance” constitutes cheating and requires official reporting. If use of a generative AI tool is confirmed, the student will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity and given a zero on the assignment. The learning process and examination of the media industries is YOUR journey and I want to know what YOU think. Your voice is an important one and unique only to you, so please use it.

Class Community Guidelines

Our class is a community and a space for intellectual exploration and expression. All students must attend class, show up on time and stay the entire time, keep up on readings, turn in assignments on time, and actively participate in discussion. But just as important, the success of this class as a whole depends on each one of us supporting, encouraging, and respecting each other people in the class. Every student is responsible for adding value to our classroom experience.

Every student in this class will be honored and respected as an individual with distinct experiences, talents, and backgrounds. Students will be treated fairly regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identification, disability, socio-economic status, or national identity. I will make every effort to ensure that an inclusive environment exists for all students. Even though there may be times when students disagree, it is expected that all students in this classroom treat each other with respect. You are asked to respect your instructor, teaching

assistants, and classmates during all discussions and group assignments. Potentially sensitive topics may arise from screenings or during class. Please see me immediately if you feel that you will have difficulties attending class or completing the assignments. It is your responsibility to notify me if you become triggered by readings, films, and/or discussions.

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave group meetings 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 classroom, labs, discussion groups, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct.

Prohibition of Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation (Policy 16.004)

The University of North Texas (UNT) prohibits discrimination and harassment because of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected under applicable federal or state law in its application and admission processes; educational programs and activities; employment policies, procedures, and processes; and university facilities. The University takes active measures to prevent such conduct and investigates and takes remedial action when appropriate.

Students with Disabilities

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable 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 a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable accommodations at any time; however, ODA notices of reasonable 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 reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information see the Office of Disability Access website at <http://www.unt.edu/oda>. You may also contact them by phone at 940.565.4323.

Course Materials and Recordings

- Students are not allowed to record class sessions, unless the Office of Disability Access has informed your instructor that a particular student has an approved accommodation that requires recording.
- All class materials are reserved for use only by students in this class for educational purposes. Lecture recordings or other materials should not be shared outside the class in any form. Failing to follow this restriction is a violation of the UNT Code of Student Conduct and could lead to disciplinary action.

Emergency Notification & Procedures

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety

emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials.

Contacting Dr. Brannon Donoghue

Please take advantage of my office hours. I will be available before and after class to answer questions. If you would like to meet via Zoom, please email me for an appointment time. Only use email to contact me for quick questions and *please allow at least 24 hours for an email response*. Depending on your question, I may request that you see me during office hours. Your success in this course is important to me. I am willing to make appropriate accommodations for any student who experiences problems understanding the material or meeting course requirements as long as they demonstrate a genuine desire to learn and takes the initiative to seek my help. If you are having difficulties, you should see me ASAP. I look forward to getting to know each of you during this semester!

Course Schedule

Please complete all readings, podcast episodes, and any other assigned course materials by the date listed.

Week 1 Welcome to Understanding Media Industries!

Th 8/20 Introduction to the course

Read: Walker, [“Zoomers Are Going to the Movies. This Is Great News for Everyone”](#)

Week 2 Contemporary Hollywood: Ownership & Conglomeration

Th 8/27

Topics: media industries as a field of study, Hollywood studio system, ownership, conglomeration, vertical & horizontal integration, corporate leaders and power roles

Read: Havens and Lotz, “The Industrialization of Culture Framework & Key Economic Concepts”
James, “Warner Bros. Discovery earnings tumble amid film studio struggles”

Review: Shapiro, [“Media Universe 2026”](#)

Listen: What Next: TBD, “Why Hollywood Is Afraid of the Paramount-WBD Deal”
(3.8.2026, 26 min)

Watch: *Barbie* (2023, dir. Greta Gerwig, 114 min) [Screen on your own; Swank via UNT Library]
--OR--

Sinners (2025, dir. Ryan Coogler, 137 min) [Screen on your own; Swank via UNT Library]

Week 3 Film Economics, Part 1

Th 9/3

Topics: media franchising, blockbuster vs indie models, tentpoles to universes production cultures, IP-driven studios, film slate management

Read: Kidman, “From Tentpoles to Universes: Hollywood’s Evolving Franchise Strategy”
Fennessey, [“The 10 New Rules of Movies”](#)

Listen: *Land of Giants*, “Disney is a Cinematic Universe Company” (S10/E4, 7.31.2024, 42 min)

Watch: *The Studio* (2025, “The Promotion,” S1/E1, 44 min, Apple TV+) [screen in class]

Week 4	**Independent Research Week**
Th 9/10	
To Do:	Work on Project #1: Film Slate Management (Part 1)
Sun 9/13	
DUE:	Project #1: Film Slate Management (Part 1) to Canvas by 11:59 pm
Week 5	2026 Box Office + Film Slate Catch-up!
Th 9/17	
Topics:	TBD
Read:	Shaw & Buckley, “This is the year we went back to the movies. Here are eight lessons Hollywood learned”
Listen:	<i>The Town</i> , “Why Spider-Man Broke Records, and Why Peacock Partnered With YouTube” (7.3.26, 38 min)
Week 6	Film Economics, Part 2
Th 9/24	
Topics:	Mid-budget and low-budget movies, genre filmmaking, marketing strategies, distribution windows, film exhibition and movie theater chains
Read:	Havens & Lotz, “Economic Conditions in Media Production” (pp. 97-121)
Review:	Harrison, “Blockbuster Movie Economics 101”
Listen:	<i>The Town</i> , “The Obsession Windfall & How Indie Hits Pay Out” (6.11.2026, 41 min) <i>The Business</i> , “Hunting for the next hit YouTube IP” (7.24.2026, 30 min)
Watch:	<i>Materialists</i> (2025, dir. Celine Song, 116 min) [Swank via UNT Library]
Week 7	TV Economics, Part 1
Th 10/1	
Topics:	television business models, legacy network programming & genres, linear TV, cross promotional strategies, changing audiences, CBS, Paramount+
Read:	Basin, “A Beginner’s Guide to Television” (pp. 1-21) Abrams, “A New Soap Opera Looks to Rekindle the Past While Breaking New Ground”
Listen:	<i>Channels</i> with Peter Kafka, “What is TV’s endgame?” (7.30.2025, 47 min)
Watch:	<i>Beyond the Gates</i> (2025, “Pilot,” S1/E1, 37 min, CBS) [screen in class]
Week 8	TV Economics, Part 2
Th 10/8	
Topics:	network programming & branding, Freeform, FX, teen/YA audience, demographics, cable TV, cord cutting
Read:	Basin, “The Life Cycle of a Television Series” Selznick, “Freeform: Shaking off the Family Brand Within a Conglomerate Family”
Listen:	<i>Land of Giants</i> , “Disney is a TV Company.” (S10/E1, 40 min, 7.10.2024)
Watch:	<i>Pretty Little Liars</i> (2010, “Pilot,” S1/E1, 45 min, ABC Family/Freeform) [screen in class]

Week 9 Streaming Media, Part 1

Th 10/15

Topics: Big tech vs legacy studios, streaming wars, SVOD/TVOD/PVOD, Apple TV, Disney and Hulu, subscriber-supported vs advertiser-supported models

Read: Parris, [“Apple TV+: Prestige Darling, Streaming Loser”](#)

Listen: *The Business*, [“The Quirky Alchemy of Widow’s Bay: Interview with Hiro Murai”](#), (7.31.26, 30 min)

Watch: *Land of Giants*, [“Disney is a Tech Company?”](#) (S10/E6, 36 min, 8.14.2024)

Widow’s Bay (2026, “Welcome to Widow’s Bay!”), S1/E1, 41 min, Apple TV) [screen in class]

Week 10 Streaming Media, Part 2

Th 10/22

Topics: co-productions, localization, local-language productions, Netflix originals, formats

Read: Lobato, “Netflix: The Uneven Globalization of a Video Platform”

Hoad, [“Bland, easy to follow, for fans of everything: what has the Netflix algorithm done to our films?”](#)

Review: [“The Netflix Effect”](#)

Listen: *The Town*, [“Netflix vs Everyone with Content Chief Bela Bajaria,”](#) (2.14.2025, 36 min)

Watch: Netflix original TBD [screen in class]

Week 11 Pitch Projects: Networks!

W 10/28

DUE: Project #2 Market Group Report + Pitch Slides (all groups!) to Canvas by 11:59 pm

Th 10/29

DUE: Project #2 Presentations (assigned groups)

Week 12 Pitch Projects: Streamers!

Th 11/5

DUE: Project #2 Presentations (assigned groups)

Sun 11/8

DUE: Project #2 Individual Reflections (all groups!)

Week 13 **Independent Research Week**

Th 11/12

To Do: Work on Project #1: Film Slate Management (Part 2)

Week 14 Hollywood’s Changing Industry Landscape

Th 11/19

Topics: TBD

Read: TBD

Listen: TBD
Watch: TBD

November 23-27 THANKSGIVING BREAK **No Class**

Week 15 Media Industries Today: Where Are We Now?

Sun 11/29

DUE: Project #1: Film Slate Management (Part 2) to Canvas by 11:59 pm

Th 12/3 **Course Wrap-up**

Topics: TBD