

MRTS 4450/MRTS 5400 Media Franchising
University of North Texas, Department of Media Arts
Fall 2026

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

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Office: RTFP 234

Office Hours: Tuesday 2-3 pm, or by appointment

Class Meetings: Tuesday 11:10 am to 2 pm

Classroom: RTFP 282

Course Description (3 credits):

New forms of convergent storytelling and media worldbuilding shape our contemporary era of media entertainment. This course is designed to explore media franchising and worldbuilding practices in relation to the changing Conglomerate Hollywood business. We will consider the historical and contemporary significance of media franchising and its evolving practices using examples from film, television, comics, toys, music, games, etc. Students will explore individual media texts to analyze the interconnected nature of larger industry franchising logic and economic factors in relation to changing creative practices, institutional dynamics, and digital media platforms. In addition to a variety of theoretical and methodological frameworks, students will become active media practitioners in creating and expanding a media franchise.

Student Learning Goals:

1. Become familiar with theoretical and conceptual debates emerging around media franchising and Hollywood business cultures.
2. Trace the development and evolution of franchising practices from Classical to Conglomerate Hollywood through a variety of industrial trends and case studies.
3. Examine the relationship between media production and distribution strategies, ownership structures, digital technologies, and changing audience practices.
4. Engage as creative practitioners in expanding a media franchise.

Required Readings & Screenings:

- All readings are available (PDFs or links) on Canvas. There is no assigned textbook.
 - Please refer to Canvas for where screenings are available to stream. Some screenings will take place in class while other screenings students are expected to watch on their own.
 - For screenings outside of class, please watch on your own to prepare for class. You are responsible for keeping up with weekly screenings and be prepared to discuss them in class.
- Note: Students will need access to Disney+ during weeks 2-8.

Course Expectations:

- 1) Arrive on time prepared and ready to engage with assigned course materials for class.
- 2) Bring available laptops or tablets every week to use for in-class activities.
- 3) 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.
- 4) Canvas or email is the best way to contact Dr. CBD. Please allow 24 hours for a response.

Assessment:

Class Participation/Attendance	25 pts.
In-class Written Responses	20 pts.
Franchise Infographic + Reflection	10 pts.
Group Project #1 – Experiential Marketing	20 pts.
Group Project #2 – Media Franchise Pitches	25 pts.
100 points total	

Grades and Late Policy:

Grades on course requirements are based on your ability to follow directions, execute the assignment, interpret and comprehend the overall rationale for the course by engaging with course materials. Your projects must be turned in by the due date. Please contact me 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.*

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

CLASS PARTICIPATION & ATTENDANCE

Students are expected to attend class regularly. Participation means regular attendance as well as working on in-class exercises and contributing ideas during class discussions. Your participation grade is made up of the following: regular attendance, class discussion, in-class reflections, small group activities and written exercises, visiting office hours, etc. An attendance sheet will be passed around at the beginning of class. If you miss a class, please do not email me to ask me if you missed anything. If you need notes, ask one of your classmates. I do not place my lecture notes online.

Classmate contact info:

Name/Info: _____

Name/Info: _____

IN-CLASS WRITING RESPONSES

To help us process and start to think about the weekly screening(s) and readings, students will complete a writing response or reflection at the beginning of class each week. This is your opportunity to write down initial reactions, observations, thoughts, questions, etc. you have about the required film(s) screening and readings. You may use any notes you have taken while watching the film(s) or completing the readings for the week. There are no makeups for written responses. However, you will be granted a “pass week” over the semester to skip one in-class writing response AND still receive full credit. You are responsible for keeping up with your pass week. All you need to do is write “This is my pass week” as your response in class.

FRANCHISE INFOGRAPHIC + REFLECTION

This assignment will ask you to choose a media franchise: 1) to write a short personal reflection and 2) to visually trace the evolution of your media franchise by creating an infographic. A detailed assignment sheet will be passed out closer to the due date.

GROUP PROJECT #1 – EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING

In small groups, you will develop and pitch an experiential marketing plan for a TV series. This will require you to conduct market research on the TV series, TV network or streaming platform, audiences and fans, and other successful experiential marketing plans. The project will culminate in a group pitch presentation and group report. A detailed assignment sheet will be passed out closer to the due date.

GROUP PROJECT #2 – MEDIA FRANCHISE PITCHES

In small groups, you will pitch a new iterations of an existing media franchise. The project can be one of the following: 1) a media property you think was mismanaged and you would like to resurrect, 2) a successful story world you want to expand further, OR 3) a media property that as yet to be expanded. The group will write a project statement contextualizing your decisions within a scholarly discussion of media franchising and contemporary Hollywood practices as well as include individual reflections analyzing your experience. Furthermore, your group will pitch your franchise idea during the last week of class. This project will require you to address both academic and industry audiences as well as utilize primary and secondary sources to justify why you think this media franchise should be expanded. A detailed assignment sheet will be passed out 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. Brannon Donoghue.

The use of generative AI tools (such as ChatGPT, Claude, Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini, etc.) are 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 important 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. Many of the topics we discuss may be emotionally charged. 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 and classmates during all discussions and group assignments. 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.

Triggers and Warnings

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.

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, screenings, and any other assigned course materials before class by the date listed.

Week 1

T 8/18

Topics: Course Introduction

Screen: *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935, dir. James Whale, 75 min) [screen in class]

Week 2

T 8/25

Topics: Universal Pictures, monster movies, Hollywood studio system, early franchising, genre-driven production cultures

Read: Edwards, “‘House of Horrors’ Corporate Strategy at Universal Pictures in the 1930s”
Hubler, “Scare ‘Em To Death and Cash In”

Listen: *You Must Remember This* podcast, Episode [“Bela and Boris”](#) (2017)

Screen: *Walt Disney’s Disneyland*, “The Disneyland Story” (1954) [screen in class]

Week 3

T 9/1

Topics: Walt Disney, evolution of an independent studio, authorship & corporate branding, broadcasting Disneyland, network era television, theme parks & ancillary markets

Read: Wasko, “Disney History(ies)”
Anderson, “Disneyland”

Screen: *Steamboat Willie* (1928, 7 min) [Disney+]
Trick or Treat (1952, 9 min) [Disney+]
Watch one animated feature film from 1937-1955 [Disney+]

Week 4

T 9/8

Topics: New Hollywood, worldbuilding, mothership, blockbuster models, Disney-Star Wars era, George Lucas & industrial authorship

Read: Johnson, “Imagining the Franchise” (pp. 27-56)
Jenkins, “The Reign of the ‘Mothership’” (pp. 244-254)

Screen: *Stars Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope* (1977, dir. George Lucas, 121 min) [Disney+]
Andor (2022, S1/E1, 41 min) [Disney+]

Week 5

T 9/15

DUE: Franchise Infographic + Reflection (Canvas by 11:59 pm)

Week 6 <u>T 9/22</u>	Turtle Time!: New Line Cinema and Genre Film Franchising
Topics:	New Line Cinema, genre franchising and horror, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, independent to mini major studio, Paramount expanding the franchise
Read:	Herbert, “‘So-Called Ancillary Markets’: New Line Takes the Margins to the Mainstream” Kit, “Cowabunga! Paramount Going All In on TMNT...”
Screen:	<i>Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles</i> (1990, dir. Steve Barron, 93 min) [screen in class]
Week 7 <u>T 9/29</u>	Film Slate Management and Disney’s Live-Action Franchise
Topics:	franchise refurbishment, Disney’s media library and IP management, animation to live-action, theme park to theatrical
Read:	Benson, “‘For Your Future Enjoyment’: Managing Intellectual Property Through Franchise Refurbishment”
Screen:	Watch a Disney live-action film version from 2015-2026 [Disney+] <i>Once Upon A Time</i> (2011, “Pilot,” E1/S1, 45 min) [Disney+]
Week 8 <u>T 10/6</u>	Experiential Marketing
Topics:	experience economy, alternate reality games (ARGs), brand activations, Comic Con & trade shows, interactive marketing, <i>The Dark Knight</i> , <i>Westworld</i> , Netflix House
Read:	Kohnen, “The experience economy of TV promotion at San Diego Comic-Con” Morgan, “Location-Based Experiences: A Guide to the Experience Economy”
Screen:	<i>Westworld</i> (2016, “The Original,” E1/S1, 68 min) [screen in class]
Week 9 <u>T 10/13</u>	Sequels, Extensions, and Expanding Universes
Topics:	female-driven and female-targeted franchises, comic book adaptations, genre-driven franchising, defining “failure” for a media property, tensions between media property & creative authorship
Read:	Brannon Donoghue, “Hierarchies of Value: Female Film Franchises & Industrial Forgetting” Johnson, Chapter 1 “Imagining the Franchise” (pp. 56-66) Kit, “Behind the Supergirl Bomb: Competing Cuts Creative Differences”
Listen:	<i>The Playlist</i> , “Interview with Cathy Yan,” (February 12, 2021, 50 min)
Screen:	<i>Birds of Prey and the Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn</i> (2020, dir. Cathy Yan, 109 min) [screen on your own, HBO Max] <i>Josie and the Pussycats</i> (2001, dir. Harry Elfont & Deborah Kaplan, 98 min) [screen in class]

Week 10
T 10/20
Topics: merchandising and licensing, gendered play, toys, ancillary markets, Mattel Studios, Barbie, Masters of the Universe
Read: Brannon Donoghue, [“‘Life in Plastic, It’s Fantastic’: Barbie, Gendered Expectations, and the Female-Driven Blockbuster”](#)
Listen: Scott, “#Wheresreya?: Toys, spoilers, & the gender politics of franchise paratexts”
Screen: “Selling *Barbie*: Inside the Marketing Phenomenon,” [The Town podcast 7.26.23](#)
Barbie (2023, dir. Greta Gerwig, 114 min) [Swank via UNT Library]
He-Man and the Masters of the Universe (1983, TBD) [screen in class]

Week 11
T 10/27
DUE: Group Project #1 – Experiential Marketing

Week 12
T 11/3
Meet: Media Library 250H (Willis Library)
Read: TBD

Week 13
T 11/10
To Do: **Independent Research Week**
Work on Project #2

Week 14
T 11/17
Topics: TBD
Read: TBD
Screen: TBD

November 23-27 **THANKSGIVING BREAK – NO CLASS**

Week 15
T 12/1
DUE: Course Wrap-up
Group Project #2 – Media Franchise Pitches
