

COM 4260-002: Performance & Culture

Fall 2025: T/TH 11:00 AM – 12:20 PM

GAB 321 (Blackbox)

Instructor Information

Dr. Elizabeth Melton

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Office: GAB 320A

In-Person Office Hours: T/W/Th 9:30 – 10:30 AM and by appointment

Virtual Office Hours: M-F by appointment (link posted on Canvas)

Course Overview

This course provides students with a foundational understanding of the field of performance studies. Developed in the second half of the twentieth century, performance studies pushes the boundaries of scholarly research to include embodied practices, oral traditions, and artistic inquiry. Radically interdisciplinary, understanding performance studies means situating it alongside a complex network of critical humanities and social science scholarship (including, but not limited to Cultural Studies, Theatre History, Anthropology, Sociology, Linguistics, and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies). With this in mind, students will explore the intersection between culture and performance using a range of critical research praxes, including artistic and anthropological approaches.

The goal of this course is to introduce students to the ways performance studies theories and methodologies can help them recognize and analyze cultural practices in everyday life. This means thinking through the ways culture is always/already in conversation with other social, political, and artistic practices and experiences. Diving into their lived realities, students will use poetic and narrative logics to unpack their own cultural contexts, develop and imagine new modes of enacting cultural practices, and re-present the complex cultural identities of historical actors through critical performance ethnography and oral history performance.

The prerequisite for this course is COMM 2060 or THEA 1050.

Course Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Explain performance studies and how it relates to the study of communication.
- Use foundational performance studies scholarship to craft a definition of “performance.”
- Answer the question, “What does it mean to use performance as research?”
- Develop an ethnographic praxis that uses participant-observation, reflexivity, and performance as methods for witnessing, documenting, and sharing scholarship;
- Articulate and embody the relationship between performance, ritual, and play.
- Use performance as a means of critical engagement for understanding memories, texts, and archival documents.
- Understand how performance serves as a method to analyze culture, politics, and everyday life.
- Develop a shared vocabulary to reflect on and analyze their own performances and those of their peers.

Required Materials

Readings are available on Canvas and include selections from the following books and articles:

- Alcoff, L. (1991). The Problem of Speaking for Others. *Cultural Critique*, 20, 5-32. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1354221>
- Barker, C. (2008). *Cultural Studies: Theory & Practice* (3rd Ed.). SAGE.
- Bogart, A. (2001). *A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and Theatre*. Routledge.
- Conquergood, D. *Cultural Struggles: Performance, Ethnography, Praxis* (E.P. Johnson, ed.). University of Michigan Press.
- Johnson, E. P. (2020). *Sweet Tea: A Play*. Northwestern University Press.
- Madison, D. S. (2012). *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance* (2nd ed.). SAGE.
- Madison, D. S. (2018). *Performed Ethnography & Communication: Improvisation and Embodied Experience*. Routledge.
- Schechner, R. (2013). *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Tips & Tricks for Succeeding in this Class

1. Make an appointment with me. You are more than welcome to e-mail, to visit during office hours, or make an appointment. I can help resolve many issues & questions.
2. Come to class with questions and ideas related to the reading (which you have already done well before class).
3. Rehearse, rehearse, and rehearse some more!
4. Writing Lab. This is great place to talk about ideas, improve the organization of a paper, or work on your writing skills. Check the Writing Center website for more information about hours, request an appointment, or even find out how to receive feedback on your writing online. You can also contact them at 940-565-2563, e-mail: WritingLab@unt.edu, or go visit them in Sage Hall 150 (to set up an appointment) or during Walk-In hours at Willis 250.
5. Use our COMM Library (GAB 318) and Student Workspace (GAB 301)! Seriously — our student librarians and student workers are awesome! Drop by either space; you can also see our library holdings and hours online through the [COMM website](#).

How the University Can Help You Succeed

& official policies and resources

Academic Integrity Standards and Consequences

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 sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University. **For more information about how this applies to this course visit Course Policies below.**

ADA accommodation statement:

The University of North Texas makes reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. To request accommodations, you must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) by completing an application for services and providing documentation to verify your eligibility each semester. Once your eligibility is confirmed, you may request your letter of accommodation. ODA will then email your faculty a letter of reasonable accommodation, initiating a private discussion about your specific needs in the course.

You can request accommodations at any time, **but it's important to provide ODA notice to your faculty as early as possible in the semester to avoid delays in implementation. Keep in mind that you must obtain a new letter of accommodation for each semester and meet with each faculty member before accommodations can be implemented in each class.** You are strongly encouraged to meet with faculty regarding your accommodations during office hours or by appointment. Faculty have the authority to ask you to discuss your letter during their designated office hours to protect your privacy. For more information and to access resources that can support your needs, refer to the [Office of Disability Access](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access) website (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access>).

Academic Success Resources:

UNT strives to offer a high-quality education in a supportive environment where you can learn, grow, and thrive. As a faculty member, I am committed to supporting you, and I want to remind you that UNT offers a range of mental health and wellness services to help maintain balance and well-being. Utilizing these resources is a proactive way to support your academic and personal success. To explore campus resources designed to support you, check out [mental health services](https://clear.unt.edu/student-support-services-policies) (<https://clear.unt.edu/student-support-services-policies>), visit unt.edu/success, and explore unt.edu/wellness. To get all your enrollment and student financial-related questions answered, go to scrappysays.unt.edu.

Attendance

There is a specific attendance policy for this course listed under Course Policies. For general information about UNT's attendance policy including religious observances, active military service, parenting, or official university events please review the following link:

<https://policy.unt.edu/sites/policy.unt.edu/files/06.039%20Student%20Attendance%20and%20Authorized%20Absences.pdf>

Basic Needs Policy

Any student who faces challenges securing their food or housing and believes this may affect their academic performance is urged to contact the Dean of Students for support (940-565-2648). UNT has both a Food Pantry and a "Seeking Options & Solutions" (SOS) team who work to help students navigate diverse concerns, including identifying resources for personal, academic, financial, and social issues.

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 check your email and Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials.

Food Insecurity & Other Well-being Challenges

Please note the Dean of Students office is available when students are struggling to meet basic needs and looking for resources that will help them face a range of challenges (food/clothing/housing insecurity, illness, parenting, military service, etc.). You can always speak with me if you are comfortable sharing your situation and I will help

you connect with the appropriate university resources. For more information visit:
<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/dean-of-students/programs-and-services/index.html>

Title IX Support

The University of North Texas (University) prohibits discrimination and harassment on the basis 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. The University also prohibits and takes actions to prevent retaliation against individuals who report or file a charge of discrimination, harassment, or sexual misconduct; participate in an investigation, or oppose any form of discrimination, harassment, or sexual misconduct. For more information or support: <https://titleixeo.unt.edu/index.html>

Course Policies

Attendance

You cannot pass this course with regular absences. You should plan to meet with me and discuss your performance in the class if you miss more than three full days of instruction. **Each student is allowed three unexcused absences as long as they are NOT performance days.**

Miss 0 -2 Days : possible extra credit for good attendance
Miss 3 Days: no penalty
Miss 4 Days: -100 points (highest possible grade 900)
Miss 5 Days: -200 points (highest possible grade 800)
Miss 6 Days: -300 points (highest possible grade 700)
Miss 7 Days: -400 points (highest possible grade 600)
Miss 8 Days: Fail. Point of No Return.

Because this course involves collaboration, participation is essential to learning. Our performance-based activities require you to be actively engaged in discussions and group work. I understand tardiness and absences may occur. If you are late to class, please drop me an email to let me know the circumstances. If you must miss class, please let me know prior to your absence.

Please arrive before class begins to find a seat, prepare your materials, and connect with your peers. **The beginning of class is especially critical**—just like the beginning of a movie or book. Being late to class is sometimes inevitable. If you are late, know that you are welcome to join the class, but please do so without distracting others. If it is a performance day, wait until you hear applause to attempt entering the classroom. More than two instances of tardiness will result in an absence from class.

Excused absences will not affect a student's final grade. For questions concerning what counts as an excused absence please refer to the following university information:

<https://policy.unt.edu/sites/policy.unt.edu/files/06.039%20Student%20Attendance%20and%20Authorized%20Absences.pdf>

This policy explains that there is a significant gray area concerning sick days, emergencies, and other extenuating circumstances. Generally, excused absences are those that are verifiable as well as documented. I will use my best

judgment when assessing a potential absence as excused. As the instructor of this course, I have the final say on what counts as an excused absence. Do not assume that your absence is excused simply because you inform me of the reason for your absence.

Performance Days

Attendance is required for both performers and audience members (that means everyone)! Performances will be given on the dates assigned so plan accordingly. Failure to perform the assignments on the day assigned results with a maximum grade of a D...as in Don't!

Class Dress

You should come to class with the expectation that we *may* engage in full-body performance practice. This means you should wear clothes that allow for free-flowing movement. You should feel comfortable bending down to touch the floor, squatting or sitting on the floor, and raising your hands above your head. If your clothes inhibit these movements they are not suitable for this class.

Communicating with Dr. Melton

The most effective way to contact me is via e-mail/Canvas or to see me before or after class. I am new to Canvas, so there may be some growing pains as I learn the platform. You are always welcome during office hours and have the option to schedule an appointment with me outside of official office hours. Typically, I will be on-campus and available Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursdays

Emailing me:

My goal is to respond to your emails within 24 hours, but do not expect an immediate response. I cannot guarantee that I will see time sensitive emails, particularly if you email me very late/early in the day or right before class. I am not on call 24/7 to respond to emails and may not respond as quickly to emails sent over the weekend. If you have questions about this, please see me in person. During busy times, my inbox becomes rather full, so if you contact me and do not receive a response within two business days, please send a follow up email. A gentle nudge is always appreciated.

Grade Disputes & Questions

Discussions regarding grades must take place face-to-face. No grades will be discussed within 24 hours after the graded assignment is returned; no grades will be discussed more than two weeks after the graded assignment is returned. If you ask me to re-grade an assignment you should know that I will approach the assignment with fresh eyes, but re-grading could result in a lower grade or you could retain the same original grade.

It is your responsibility to follow-up with me if you are absent when assignments are passed back to students. You should approach me before or after class if you think I may have feedback that you have not yet received.

Inclusive Learning Environment

Learning about, exploring, and applying performance theories means reflecting on and engaging with the real world and its local and global contexts. Complex and contentious issues appear in our course materials.

This means we may discuss a range of difficult topics as they pertain to key themes covered in the course. With this in mind, we will enter into conversation with one another and develop a collective performance praxis that requires a shared foundation of respect and courtesy. We will develop a class contract early in the semester that will serve as a living document on how we choose to proceed over the course of the semester. I also encourage

you to review UNT's student code of conduct so that we can all start with the same baseline civility understanding ([Code of Student Conduct](https://policy.unt.edu/policy/07-012)) (<https://policy.unt.edu/policy/07-012>). Failure to adhere to the class's code of conduct could result in removal from the course.

In my role as the instructor I will work to provide the following: 1) a positive, inclusive learning environment that fosters the open and honest sharing of ideas; 2) a safe and creative space where you can workshop ideas and performances; 3) the timely sharing of assignments, due dates, and grading rubrics; 4) assignment feedback that helps you meet the requirements of the course.

Discussing issues related to Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion in Texas

Texas Senate Bill 17, the recent law that outlaws diversity, equity, and inclusion programs at public colleges and universities in Texas, does not in any way affect content, instruction or discussion in a course at public colleges and universities in Texas. Expectations and academic freedom for teaching and class discussion have not been altered post-SB 17, and students should not feel the need to censor their speech pertaining to topics including race and racism, structural inequality, LGBTQ+ issues, or diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Missed Work & Incomplete Grades

I am in no way shape or form responsible for your missed work. You are responsible for keeping up with the course and course changes. Be sure to keep up with your readings and contact me for clarity regarding our course conversation. If you have concerns about missed content please visit me during office hours. I will not respond to "What did I miss?" emails.

Per university policy, I will award grades of "Incomplete" only in cases where a student has completed 75% of the coursework AND they have a documented and approved reason for requesting the incomplete. Inability to complete coursework in a timely fashion does not constitute an acceptable reason for requesting or receiving an incomplete.

Syllabus Change Policy

This syllabus should not be considered a binding contract on the part of the professor, who reserves the right to change any aspect of the course without prior notice. Students will be notified in-person, via email and canvas message if and when any changes are made to the syllabus.

Respecting and Sharing the Blackbox

Visit the Communication Studies Dept. website (<https://communication.unt.edu/about/black-box.html>) for more information on how to reserve the space. This info is also listed on our canvas page.

- Do **NOT** touch or use any of the tech, lights, sound, or projection. At All. Ever.
- Do not put chalk/paint/glitter/oil on the floor, the walls, the ceiling, or the chairs.
- No food or drink (or anything else that might attract ants/bugs/critters) is allowed in the space.
- Do NOT drag boxes, flats, etc. on the Black Box floor.
- Return all chairs/boxes/tables to their proper location before you leave.
- Make sure all trash is picked up and disposed of correctly.
- Respect the space. We encourage fun, but please be careful. The space and its condition is precious. We need you to take care of it.
- You are responsible for any damage done to the space during your reservation. Failure to adhere to these policies will result in you/your group losing access to the space in the future.

Technology/AI

In-Class Tech

You are allowed to use your laptops in class when it helps you comprehend course content. If students are using technology in a way that is not directly related to that day's course content they will be publicly called out, asked to put their technology away, and may be asked to leave class for the day.

Recording Class

This course will encourage open and robust discussions on issues and ideas without fear that any statements made will be used for inappropriate or retaliatory purposes. To ensure the comfort and protection of everyone in our classroom, recording of any kind is prohibited in this space (this includes audio recordings, live-streaming, photographs of course materials, etc.) unless a student has an approved accommodation from the Office of Disability Access (ODA). In such cases, all students in the course will be notified whenever recording will be taking place.

Prohibited AI Use

In this course, I want you to engage deeply with the materials and develop your own critical thinking and writing skills. For this reason, the use of Generative AI (GenAI) tools like Claude, ChatGPT, Gemini, and Grammarly is not permitted. While these tools can be helpful in some contexts, they do not align with our goal of fostering the development of your independent thinking. Using GenAI to complete any part of an assignment, exam, or coursework will be considered a violation of academic integrity, as it prevents the development of your own skills, and will be addressed according to the [Student Academic Integrity policy](https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003) (<https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003>).

You may request to use AI in a specific performance.

If you believe you have a legitimate reason to utilize any form of AI for a performance you MUST inform me and clear its use well in advance of the performance due date. We will discuss appropriate citational practices at that time.

Written Work

All written work submitted via Canvas must be typed and include your name at the top of the page. Other requirements will be listed on the individual assignment prompt. I will evaluate your written work on style as well as content. *The Publication Manual for the American Psychological Association* is the style guide utilized by faculty and students in the Department of Communication Studies. The department web site includes an abbreviated guide to address the most common errors made by student writers. I also accept MLA.

Writing in Class

I will expect you to complete several HANDWRITTEN assignments in class over the course of the semester. You should always bring paper and a writing utensil that allows you to write clearly and legibly (no orange, yellow, or hard-to-read colors; no crayons or thick markers; aim for a blue/black pen to be safe). If your handwriting is illegible your grade will reflect my inability to review the content of your answer. Please let me know if you may require ODA accommodations and we can brainstorm acceptable solutions.

Course Requirements

Assignment Values

Assignments	Points	Percentage
Class Preparation & Participation	200	25%
Performance Workshops (100 pts.)		
Writing Workshops (20 pts.)		
Reading Precis (80 pts.)		
Performance Observation Reflection Papers	100	10 %
Performance Observation 1 (50 pts.)		
Performance Observation 2 (50 pts.)		
Performance 1: Three Sentence Stories	100	5 %
Live Performance (50 pts.)		
Artist Reflection (50 pts.)		
Performance 2: Crafting Rituals	200	20%
Performance Script (50 pts.)		
Artist Statement (50 pts.)		
Live Performance (100 pts.)		
Performance 3: Oral History Performance	300	30%
Poetic Transcription (50 pts.)		
Performance Script (100 pts.)		
Artist Statement (50 pts.)		
Live Performance (100 pts.)		
Critical Reflection Paper	100	10%
Total Possible	1000	100%

**Please remember to review the attendance policy for how it may affect your final grade.*

Grading Scale

A 900-1000	Exceptional! Exceeded requirements with high degree of proficiency
B 800-899	Very good! Met requirements with a higher than average degree of proficiency
C 700-799	Good. Met requirements with an average degree of proficiency
D 600-699	Below average. Did not meet all requirements and/or did so with a lower than average degree of proficiency
F 0-599	Failed to meet requirements

Assignment Descriptions

Students will find more detailed assignment information, including prompts, instructions, grading rubrics, and specific due dates on Canvas.

Class Preparation & Participation (20%, 200 points)

Performance Workshops (10 pts./workshop) 100

We will explore key concepts and learn new performance practices during in-class workshops. I will count your best 10.

Writing Workshops (5 pts./workshop) 20

These workshops will take place both in and outside of class as mini writing assignments. Each will focus on a writing skill (or skills) necessary for other writing assignments in the course. I will count your best 4.

Reading Precis (10 points/precis) 80

These one-page (front & back) reading summaries are due the day we discuss a reading in class. You are expected to complete at least 8 precis over the course of the semester.

Performance Observation Reflection Papers (10 %, 100 points)

You are required to attend two live performances outside of class and write a reflection on your experience of each performance (50 pts. each). One performance should meet the Global Performance requirements and the other should meet the Local Performance requirements. We will discuss appropriate performance options as a class. It is your responsibility to pick a performance that meets your schedule and the requirements of the course. See Canvas or speak to your instructor for more information.

Performance 1 (solo): 3-Sentence Stories (10%)

Live Performance (50 Points)

Short solo performance that will be delivered in front of the class on your assigned day.

Artist Reflection (50 Points)

Students will write a reflection of their performance and articulate successes, challenges, and new questions. Due the following class after live performance.

Performance 2 (collective): Crafting Rituals (20%)

Performance Script (50 points)

Scripts provide a detailed and thorough textual representation of the live performance presented to the class. Due at the beginning of class on the day you are scheduled to perform. Each group will submit one final script.

Live Performance (100 Points)

Working in their groups, students will create and share a new cultural ritual with the class. This should be participatory and audience members should be able to participate in the ritual. Due on the assigned day

Artist Statement (50 Points)

Each group member will write their OWN artist statement, articulating the group's goals for their performance. Your statement should explain your ritual and what choices you made in crafting this ritual.

Performance 3 (collective): Oral History Performance (30%)

Poetic Transcription (50 pts.)

Students will select, edit, and poetically transcribe one oral history from either UNT's Oral History Collections or the Texas Storyscapes Project. They will also provide a short explanation of why they chose this oral history and provide any necessary historical or background information.

Live Performance (100 pts.)

Working collaboratively with a group, students will craft an oral history performance focused on a central theme present in the oral history archive. Each student is responsible for one oral history interpretation and performance. Each performance group will curate and stage this collection of oral histories to enhance the re-presentation of its narrators' stories.

Performance Script (100 pts.)

Scripts provide a detailed and thorough textual representation of the live performance presented to the class. Due at the beginning of class on the day you are scheduled to perform. This script should include the final version of each student's poetic transcription and should represent the staging and delivery choices made during the performance. Each group will submit one final script.

Artist Statement (50 pts.)

Each group member will write their OWN artist statement, articulating the group's goals for their performance and how these goals influenced their choices throughout the performance.

Critical Reflection Paper (10%)

A written reflection on Performance 3 successes, challenges, and new inquiries. This paper will also include reflections on what you learned this over the course of the entire semester.

Tentative Course Schedule : Fall 2025

Dates and assignments are subject to change based on the needs of the students and/or semester disruptions. Students will be notified in-person and via canvas/email if any changes are required to the schedule or its contents.

UNIT 1 – Situating Performance & Culture

Date	Topic
Aug. 19	Syllabus & Intros
Aug. 21	A. Bogart – Ch. 6 “Embarrassment”
Aug. 26	Schechner: Ch. 2 – “What is Performance Studies?”
Aug. 28	Performance Workshop Day
Sept. 2	Barker, C. – Defining Culture
Sept. 4	Performance Workshop Day
Sept. 9	Conquergood, D. – Introducing Ethnography
Sept. 11	Performance Workshop Day
Sept. 16	Performance #1 Due
Sept. 18	Performance #1 Due

UNIT 2 – Ritual & Play as Performance

Date	Topic
Sept. 23	Madison, D. S. – Critical Ethnography
Sept.25	Madison, D. S. – Performed Ethnography & Workshop
Sept.30	Schechner, R. – Ritual
Oct. 2	Performance Workshop Day
Oct. 7	Schechner, R. – Play
Oct. 9	Performance Workshop Day
Oct. 14	Rituals in Action – Creating Rituals
Oct. 16	Performance #2 Prep
Oct. 21	Performance #2 Due
Oct. 23	Performance #2 Due

UNIT 3 – Representing Others w/ Oral History Performance

Date	Topic
Oct. 28	Alcoff, L. – Representing Others
Oct. 30	Oral History Collections Introduction
Nov. 4	Madison, D. S. – Performed Ethnography Oral History Performance Introduction
Nov. 6	Texas Fashion Collection
Nov. 11	Poetic Transcription Workshop
Nov. 13	Johnson, E. P. - <i>Sweet Tea: A Play</i>
Nov. 18	Oral History Performance Workshop
Nov. 20	Group Rehearsal
Nov. 24-28	THANKSGIVING - No Class
Dec. 2	Performance 3 Due
Dec. 4	Performance 3 Due
Dec. 10	Final Reflection Paper Due