

MUAE 4500

Commercial Music Capstone

Mondays/Wednesdays 3:55pm - 5:15 pm, Room 287

PROFESSOR Jeffrey Hepker

EMAIL: Jeffrey.hepker@unt.edu

OFFICE HOURS: (will be posted in Canvas by week 2 after studio assignments)

Course Overview:

This capstone course is the culminating experience for Commercial Music majors. Students conceive, propose, produce, and pitch a professional-grade project in their area of specialization (performance, production/engineering, composition/media scoring, business/management, etc). The course simulates real industry conditions — client-style feedback, deadlines, revisions, and a final pitch to an industry panel — so that graduates leave with both a polished portfolio piece and direct experience with the professional processes surrounding it (rights management, budgeting, marketing, and pitching).

Credit Load:

This course carries a 3 hour credit load. Students should expect to spend additional 4 to 8 hours each week outside of class preparing. Some weeks will require more time spent working outside of class than others and actual time spent may vary depending on previous experience and knowledge.

Course Objectives / Student Learning Outcomes:

In completing this course, students will be able to:

- Produce a release-ready or industry-standard deliverable in their chosen specialization.
- Apply professional technical, formatting, and delivery standards used in the commercial music industry.

Course Objectives / Student Learning Outcomes (continued):

- Prepare business and career-readiness materials, including an EPK, rights/metadata documentation, and a release or pitch plan.
- Manage a multi-week creative project against milestones, budget, and collaborator/client feedback.
- Identify and address legal and ethical considerations, including sample clearance, copyright, and disclosure of AI-assisted tools.
- Articulate creative and business decisions clearly to a non-specialist or industry audience.

Policies:

- Do not use computers, phones, or other electronic devices for non-class-related activities (social media, shopping, work for other classes, etc.) during class meetings.
- Instruction begins at 3:55pm. Please be in your seat and ready to get started at that time.
- Phones are to be silenced and put away during classroom instruction. Some classes will have a "halftime", and you can attend to whatever you need to at that point.
- If I am in lecture, please interrupt me. Ask questions. If I present something you think is inaccurate or incomplete, please disagree with me. If there is something you do not understand, please pause me.
- No food in the classroom. Drinks must be kept on the ground.
- You will be expected to receive all Canvas Announcements. This is how I will be communicating to the class, sometimes on short notice.
- This class is structured in a way that the only way to succeed is to have perfect or near perfect attendance. This is not the class where you can miss many sessions then "cram" for a heavily weighted exam.

Format (Canvas-Driven)

Canvas will be the hub for everything in this course. All lab and project assignments will be submitted online via Canvas. All quizzes will be administered online via Canvas.

Weekly Schedule

Week	Topic/Activity	Location	Deliverable Due
1	Course Intro, Capstone Overview, Group discussion	Room 287 M/W 3:55pm to 5:15pm	Bio and update
2	Industry landscape, goal setting	Room 287 M/W 3:55pm to 5:15pm	Project concept draft
3	Proposal workshop: scope, timeline, budget	Room 287 M/W 3:55pm to 5:15pm	Formal project proposal
4	Production / writing. Proposal review meetings	30 minute 1-on-1 meeting with Prof Hepker	Signed Proposal + milestone plan
5	Production sprint.	30 minute 1-on-1 meeting with Prof Hepker	Progress check
6	Production sprint.	30 minute 1-on-1 meeting with Prof Hepker	Progress check
7	Production sprint.	30 minute 1-on-1 meeting with Prof Hepker	Progress check
8	Production sprint.	30 minute 1-on-1 meeting with Prof Hepker	Rough draft
9	Peer Critique workshop	Room 287 M/W 3:55pm to 5:15pm	Peer Feedback log
10	Production sprint.	30 minute 1-on-1 meeting with Prof Hepker	Progress check
11	Business and Legal week: rights, splits, PRO, clearance, etc.	Room 287 M/W 3:55pm to 5:15pm	Rights and metadata worksheet
12	Production sprint.	30 minute 1-on-1 meeting with Prof Hepker	Progress check
13	Industry mentor review session (guest professional feedback)	Room 287 M/W 3:55pm to 5:15pm	Mentor feedback response memo
14	Final Revisions	30 minute 1-on-1 meeting with Prof Hepker	Final deliverable draft
15	Final Capstone Jury / presentations to panel	Room 287 M/W 3:55pm to 5:15pm	Final deliverable and pitch/ presentation
16	Reflection Submission and grade conferences	30 minute 1-on-1 meeting with Prof Hepker	Process journal / reflection paper

Commercial Music Capstone Project - Evaluation Rubric

1) Creative and Technical Execution (30 Points)

Level	Description
Exemplary (27-30)	Work is release-ready. Demonstrates mastery of genre conventions and technical craft (performance, mix, arrangement, or composition) appropriate to the student's specialization. Distinct artistic or professional voice.
Proficient (21-26)	Work is strong and largely polished with only minor technical or creative weaknesses. Shows clear competency in core skills.
Developing (14-20)	Competent but inconsistent; noticeable technical flaws (tuning, timing, mix balance, structure) or underdeveloped ideas.
Beginning (0-13)	Significant technical or creative deficiencies; not workshop/industry ready.

2) Professional Deliverable Quality (15 Points)

Level	Description
Exemplary (14-15)	Final files meet industry delivery specs (format, sample rate/bit depth, loudness targets, metadata, file naming). Presentation (artwork, mix, packaging) is publish-ready.
Proficient (11-13)	Meets most specs with minor errors; presentation is clean.
Developing (7-10)	Multiple spec or formatting errors; presentation needs polish.
Beginning (0-6)	Does not meet delivery standards; unusable in current form.

3) Business & Career Readiness Components (15 Points)

You will need supporting materials to go alongside your creative works. This could include EPK/one sheet, rights/metadata (splits, PRO registration, ISRC, publishing info), budget or cost breakdown, marketing or release plan. Each student's specific deliverables will be detailed in the signed proposal by week 4.

Level	Description
Exemplary (14-15)	All components present, accurate, and professional-grade — could be handed to a manager, label, or supervisor today.
Proficient (11-13)	Components present and mostly accurate; small gaps in detail or polish.
Developing (7-10)	Components incomplete or contain factual/legal errors (e.g., missing splits, no PRO info).
Beginning (0-6)	Components missing or fundamentally unusable.

4) Process, Collaboration, and Professionalism (15 Points)

Level	Description
Exemplary (14-15)	Met all deadlines; incorporated feedback thoughtfully; clear evidence of iterative professional process; collaborated effectively.
Proficient (11-13)	Generally met deadlines and used feedback well; minor lapses in communication or documentation.
Developing (7-10)	Inconsistent deadline/feedback response; thin process documentation.
Beginning (0-6)	Missed milestones; ignored feedback; little to no process documentation.

5) Legal & Ethical Literacy (10 Points)

Level	Description
Exemplary (9-10)	Fully documented clearances/permissions; clear, accurate AI-use disclosure if applicable; understands rights implications of the work.
Proficient (7-8)	Mostly documented; small omissions that don't create legal risk.
Developing (4-6)	Gaps in clearance or disclosure that would need to be resolved before commercial use.
Beginning (0-3)	Uncleared samples, undisclosed AI use, or unaddressed rights issues.

Attendance, Drafts, Late Work, and Extension policies:

This is a highly interactive class. There is no replacement for experiences that take place during class time. Attendance is integral to improvement in this area of study. It is also an opportunity to practice professionalism in your work.

The instructor must be notified in advance of an absence or tardy. In the event of an absence, students are still responsible for turning in assignments on time (unless previous arrangements have been made) and staying caught up on what was missed.

Work more than a week late will not be accepted at all unless prior arrangements have been made ahead of time.

The instructor is not responsible for "catching you up on what you missed" for unexcused absences. In these cases, my expectation is that you engage your classmates to see what you need to catch up on.

Attendance Rules:

- 3 unexcused absences lowers final grade by one letter.
- 5 unexcused absences lowers final grade by two letters.
- 6 or more unexcused absences will result in an automatic fail.

Preferred Names, Preferred Gender Pronouns

This course affirms people of all gender expressions and gender identities. If you prefer a different name than what is on the class roster, please let me know (via email or in person). Please, feel free to correct us on your preferred gender pronouns either in person or in writing.

Link: <https://success.unt.edu/aa-sa-resources>

DEFIBRILLATORS IN THE COLLEGE OF MUSIC

- Music Building: Across from the west side of the Music Commons, directly across from the elevator
- Music Building: Third floor hallway, across from the staircase that comes up from the Copy Room. Next to Room 322
- Music Building: Across from the Copy Room next to Room 293
- Music Building: Voertman Lobby by the big double set of doors that lead out to the courtyard
- Music Building: Main Office (247) under the student worker's desk
- Music Annex: Next to room MA117, near the triple set of doors on the east side of the building
- Music Practice Building North: First floor on the Avenue C side
- Music Practice Building South: First floor on the Avenue C side
- Bain Hall: First floor by the restrooms
- Murchison Performing Arts Center: Located off the main lobby, beyond the grand staircase, across from the single occupancy restroom (next to the public water fountains)

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students caught cheating or plagiarizing will receive a "0" for that particular assignment or exam [or specify alternative sanction, such as course failure]. Additionally, the incident will be reported to the Dean of Students (Office of Academic Integrity), who may impose further penalty. According to the UNT catalog, the term "cheating" includes, but is not limited to: a. use of any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, or examinations; b. dependence upon the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments; c. the acquisition, without

permission, of tests or other academic material belonging to a faculty or staff member of the university; d. dual submission of a paper or project, or resubmission of a paper or project to a different class without express permission from the instructor(s); or e. any other act designed to give a student an unfair advantage. The term "plagiarism" includes, but is not limited to: a. the knowing or negligent use by paraphrase or direct quotation of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment; and b. the knowing or negligent unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic materials.

See: [Academic Integrity](#)

LINK: <https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003>

STUDENT BEHAVIOR

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 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 classrooms, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc.

See: [Student Code of Conduct](#)

Link: <https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct>

ACCESS TO INFORMATION – EAGLE CONNECT

Your access point for business and academic services at UNT occurs at my.unt.edu. All official communication from the university will be delivered to your Eagle Connect account. For more information, please visit the website that explains Eagle Connect.

See: [Eagle Connect](#)

LINK: eagleconnect.unt.edu/

ODA STATEMENT

The University of North Texas 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 you with an accommodation letter. You can now request your Letters of

Accommodation ONLINE and ODA will mail your Letters of Accommodation to your instructors. You may wish to begin a private discussion with your professors regarding your specific needs in a course. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester. For additional information see the Office of Disability Access.

See: [ODA](#)

LINK: disability.unt.edu. (Phone: (940) 565-4323)

Health and Safety Information

Students can access information about health and safety at: <https://music.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness>

Registration Information for Students

See: [Fall Academic Calendar Information](#)

Link: <https://registrar.unt.edu/registration/fall-academic-calendar.html>

Semester Calendar, Fall 2026

See: [Fall Semester Calendar](#)

Link: <https://registrar.unt.edu/registration/fall-academic-calendar.html>

Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress

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Undergraduates

A student must maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) to continue to receive financial aid. Students must maintain a minimum 2.0 cumulative GPA in addition to successfully completing a required number of credit hours based on total hours registered. Students cannot exceed attempted credit hours above 150% of their required degree plan. If a student does not maintain the required standards, the student may lose their financial aid eligibility.

Students holding music scholarships must maintain a minimum 2.5 overall cumulative GPA and 3.0 cumulative GPA in music courses.

If at any point you consider dropping this or any other course, please be advised that the decision to do so may have the potential to affect your current and future financial aid eligibility. It is recommended that you to schedule a meeting with an academic advisor in your college or visit the

Student Financial Aid and Scholarships office to discuss dropping a course before doing so.

See: [Financial Aid](#)

LINK: <http://financialaid.unt.edu/sap>

Graduates

A student must maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) to continue to receive financial aid. Students must maintain a minimum 3.0 cumulative GPA in addition to successfully completing a required number of credit hours based on total registered hours per term. Music scholarships require a 3.5 cumulative GPA. Students cannot exceed maximum timeframes established based on the published length of the graduate program. If a student does not maintain the required standards, the student may lose their financial aid eligibility.

If at any point you consider dropping this or any other course, please be advised that the decision to do so may have the potential to affect your current and future financial aid eligibility. It is recommended you schedule a meeting with an academic advisor in your college, an advisor in UNT-International or visit the Student Financial Aid and Scholarships office to discuss dropping a course.

See: [Financial Aid](#)

LINK: <http://financialaid.unt.edu/sap>

COUNSELING AND TESTING

UNT's Center for Counseling and Testing has an available counselor for students in need. Please visit the Center's website for further information:

See: [Counseling and Testing](#)

Link: <http://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services>.

For more information on mental health resources, please visit:

See: [Mental Health Resources](#)

Link: <https://disparities.unt.edu/mental-health-resources>

ADD/DROP POLICY

Please be reminded that dropping classes or failing to complete and pass registered hours may make you ineligible for financial aid. In addition, if you drop below half-time enrollment you may be required to begin paying back your student loans. See Academic Calendar (listed above) for additional add/drop Information.

Drop Information: <https://registrar.unt.edu/registration/fall-academic-calendar.html>

STUDENT RESOURCES

The University of North Texas has many resources available to students. For a complete list, go to:

See: [Student Resources](#)

Link: <https://success.unt.edu/aa-sa-resources>

CARE TEAM

The Care Team is a collaborative interdisciplinary committee of university officials that meets regularly to provide a response to student, staff, and faculty whose behavior could be harmful to themselves or others.

See: [Care Team](#)

Link: <https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/care-team>