

Course Syllabus

MUJS 5900 Section(s) 714 and MUCO 1200 Section(s) 001

MUCO 1200 Section 001 - Analysis and Critical Listening in Commercial Music and Music Production

Spring 2026

Class Meetings: Tuesdays & Thursdays

Semester Start: January 13, 2026

Location: MUSI (Room as assigned)

Professor: Jonathan (Jon-John) Robinson, 2x Grammy Award-Winning Producer

Email: Jonathan.Robinson@unt.edu

Office Hours: Thursdays or by appointment

Course Description

This course develops critical listening and analytical skills essential to music production, mixing, and songwriting. Students will train their ears to recognize and evaluate subtle sonic details in commercially released recordings, including texture, frequency balance, dynamics, distortion, modulation effects, delay, reverb, and spatial depth.

Through guided listening, discussion, and analysis, students will explore popular music from the 1960s to the present, examining how production techniques, technologies, and aesthetic choices shape musical identity across genres including pop, rock, R&B, hip-hop, and select country recordings. Emphasis is placed on developing perceptual awareness and critical judgment rather than memorization of technical definitions.

Student learning is assessed through cumulative, project-based analysis rather than traditional exams.

Course Objectives

1. Analyze commercially released recordings with attention to production, mixing, and songwriting choices.
2. Identify and describe sonic elements such as EQ, compression, distortion, chorus, delay, reverb, and spatial placement.
3. Develop heightened listening awareness of texture, frequency ranges, dynamics, and depth.
4. Recognize how historical, cultural, and technological shifts influence production aesthetics.
5. Communicate musical and production analysis clearly through written and/or audio-based formats.
6. Apply critical listening skills to inform creative and professional decision-making.

Required Materials

1. Access to a music streaming service (Spotify, Apple Music, Tidal, or equivalent).
2. High-quality headphones or studio monitors (recommended).
3. Notebook or digital tool for listening notes.

4. Access to Canvas for course materials, announcements, and submissions.

Assessment and Ungrading Framework

This course uses an ungrading-informed, participation-centered assessment model. Emphasis is placed on engagement, consistency, listening growth, and professional responsibility rather than exams or quizzes.

Grading Breakdown

Component	Percentage
Project 1 - Historical Transition Analysis	20%
Project 2 - Contemporary Critical Analysis	20%
Attendance, Participation, and Engagement	60%

There is no midterm examination and no final exam.

Major Projects

Project 1 - Historical Transition Analysis (February)

Students analyze music from the transition between the 1960s and 1970s, focusing on changes in production techniques, sound, and aesthetic direction.

Non-majors: Written critical analysis.

Commercial Music majors: Written analysis or audio-based analytical response with brief reflection.

Project 2 - Contemporary Critical Production Analysis (April)

Students analyze contemporary recordings, evaluating production choices, sonic space, and artistic intent.

Non-majors: Written critical analysis.

Commercial Music majors: Audio-based production or sonic response with written reflection.

Both projects use the same rubric framework, scaled for depth and rigor.

Final Self-Assessment Conference

During the final weeks of the semester, students will meet individually with the instructor to reflect on attendance, participation, and engagement; discuss work completed on both major projects; articulate what they learned and how their listening skills developed; and propose the final grade they believe they have earned, supported by evidence.

The instructor retains final authority over grades. Student self-assessment is a required component of the course.

Course Schedule

Module I - Foundations of Critical Listening

Week 1 (Jan 13 & Jan 15)

Tuesday: Course introduction; what is critical listening

Thursday: How we hear sound; listening with intention

Week 2 (Jan 20 & Jan 22)

Tuesday: Frequency ranges and tonal balance (EQ awareness)

Thursday: Dynamics and loudness; recognizing compression

Week 3 (Jan 27 & Jan 29)

Tuesday: Distortion, saturation, texture, harmonic color

Thursday: Reverb, delay, space, and depth

Module II - Historical Eras and Production Transitions (1960s-1970s)

Week 4 (Feb 3 & Feb 5)

Tuesday: 1960s production; tape, mono to stereo, Motown

Thursday: 1970s production; multitrack recording, funk, disco

Week 5 (Feb 10 & Feb 12)

Tuesday: Comparing 1960s vs 1970s production aesthetics

Thursday: Guided listening workshop; Project 1 preparation

Week 6 (Feb 17 & Feb 19)

Tuesday: Project 1 work session and listening support

Thursday: Project 1 discussion and submission (Project 1 due)

Module III - Modernization and Genre Expansion

Week 7 (Feb 24 & Feb 26)

Tuesday: 1980s production; synthesizers, digital recording, gated reverb

Thursday: Iconic producers and era-defining sounds

Week 8 (Mar 3 & Mar 5)

Tuesday: 1990s; sampling, hip-hop, DAWs

Thursday: Grunge, rock, and alternative production

Week 9 (Mar 10 & Mar 12)

Tuesday: 2000s; home studios and bedroom producers

Thursday: Loudness, streaming, and modern mastering

Week 10 (Mar 17 & Mar 19)

Tuesday: Spring Break (no class)

Thursday: Spring Break (no class)

Week 11 (Mar 24 & Mar 26)

Tuesday: Genre listening; pop, R&B;, hip-hop

Thursday: Space, minimalism versus density

Week 12 (Mar 31 & Apr 2)

Tuesday: Critical comparison across genres

Thursday: Reference listening and professional judgment

Module IV - Contemporary Listening and Applied Analysis

Week 13 (Apr 7 & Apr 9)

Tuesday: Contemporary production aesthetics

Thursday: Intentional versus accidental sound (Project 2 assigned)

Week 14 (Apr 14 & Apr 16)

Tuesday: Project 2 work session and listening support

Thursday: Audio versus written analysis strategies

Week 15 (Apr 21 & Apr 23)

Tuesday: Project 2 refinement and discussion

Thursday: Project 2 submission and reflection (Project 2 due)

Week 16 (Apr 28 & Apr 30)

Tuesday: Listening back; skill integration

Thursday: Final self-assessment conferences

Policies

Attendance:

Attendance and active participation are essential components of this course. The music industry depends on dependability, preparation, and consistency. Students are expected to attend class regularly, arrive on time, and participate meaningfully in listening sessions and discussions.

Four unexcused absences will result in an automatic reduction of the final course grade. Excused absences are permitted but may not exceed five total for the semester. Documentation may be requested at the instructor's discretion.

Extra Credit:

Extra credit opportunities may be offered at the instructor's discretion. Extra credit will be offered once during the semester and is intended as grade recovery. The extra credit assignment will most likely take the form of a written critical analysis paper.

Academic Integrity:

Plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Academic dishonesty includes:

- Use of uncredited work or ideas.
- Misrepresentation of others' work as your own.
- Falsification of data or citations.

Violations will result in a zero for the assignment and may lead to further disciplinary action.

Late Work:

Late work policies will be communicated in Canvas. Participation-based components cannot be made up retroactively.

Emergency Notification and Procedures:

UNT uses Eagle Alert to notify students of emergencies. For details, consult the UNT Emergency Guide:

<https://emergency.unt.edu>

Disability Accommodations:

The University of North Texas provides reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. Register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) to verify eligibility and receive a reasonable accommodation letter. For more information, visit:

<https://www.unt.edu/oda>

Title IX Compliance:

UNT prohibits discrimination, harassment, and violence based on sex, gender identity, or expression. If you or someone you know has experienced sexual harassment or violence, support is available. Visit the UNT Title IX Office:

<https://edo.unt.edu/title-ix>

Contact and Communication

Assignments and announcements will be posted on Canvas. For questions, email Jonathan.Robinson@unt.edu with the subject: MUCO 1200 – [Your Topic].

Resources

UNT Counseling and Testing Services:

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

For more information on mental health issues, please visit:

<https://speakout.unt.edu>

The counselor for music students is:

Myriam Reynolds
Chestnut Hall, Suite 311
(940) 565-2741
Myriam.reynolds@unt.edu

Add/Drop Policy

Please be reminded that dropping classes or failing to complete and pass registered hours may make you ineligible for financial aid. After the 12th class day, students must first submit a completed “Request to Drop” form to the Registrar’s Office. Information about add/drop may be found at:

<https://registrar.unt.edu/academic-calendar>

Student Resources

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

<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:

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