# KEY ASSIGNMENTS:

COMM 3340

Methods of  
Rhetorical Criticism

### COMM 3340, Methods of Rhetorical Criticism | Fall 2025 | MoWe 9:30 am – 10:50 am | WH 321

### Dr. Matthew Heard | Assoc. Professor, Communication Studies | [matthew.heard@unt.edu](mailto:matthew.heard@unt.edu) | Office Hrs MW 11am – noon | Office: GAB 328

## Reading Responses

* Brief responses to selected readings posted on Canvas before class.
* Uses set questions and structure (explained in class)
* Graded on a simple 3-point scale for timely and thoughtful completion.

## Article Analysis

* A 3-4 page analysis of a peer-reviewed article of rhetorical criticism.
* Break apart and explain the scholarly works by identifying artifact, method, and claims.
* Serves as a model for your own critical writing and research practices.

## PopCrits

## Grading Breakdown

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Daily Assignments and In-Class Work | 20 |
| Reading Responses and Article Analysis | 20 |
| PopCrits | 20 |
| Final Project (parts 1 and 2) | 40 |
| Total | 100 |

* Short in-class critiques of contemporary popular culture artifacts.
* Practice applying specific methods from class in a low-stakes format.
* Focus on experimentation and generating novel insights about everyday rhetoric.

## Final project: Critical Intervention

A scaffolded, semester-long research project on a "wicked problem" of your choice. ·

* **Part 1: Research Proposal (15%).** A 4-5 page document identifying your problem, research question, and an annotated bibliography of 5-7 sources.
* **Part 2: Final Project (30%).** A critical intervention in the form of a 10-12 page paper, a 15-minute podcast, or a 10-minute video essay. Applies a method from our course to produce a compelling, original rhetorical criticism.

# ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

Although I encourage perfect attendance, I recognize the challenges of the semester by offering you four “free” absences. You do not need to provide any excuses or doctor’s notes for these, although I would ask that you give me notice ahead of time when you know you will be absent. After four absences, each additional absence will bring down your attendance and participation grade. Note that if you are absent more than 8 times, you will not earn any points for your entire attendance and participation grade. If you are absent more than 10 times, you will not pass the course.

Please note that I will begin class on time every class period, and that we may have quizzes or other in-class assignments at the start of class. These assignments cannot be made up or missed if you are late or absent. If you are late, please join the class without distracting others. More than two instances of lateness will result in an absence from class, and habitual lateness will affect your participation grade. Please talk with me if you have a problem with getting to class on time.

# Course Description

We are all critics, constantly making judgments about the world around us. For rhetoricians, however, criticism isn’t about tearing down or critiquing. In this course, we learn to take part in rhetorical criticism from the ancient Mediterranean tradition of *krī́nein*, the Greek word meaning “to separate, choose, decide, judge.” Rhetorical criticism aims not to dismiss, but to understand, expand, amplify, and create space. Criticism in this course will be a creative and generous act of generating new perspectives. We will learn and practice a variety of rhetorical *methods*—ways of making new paths forward. These methods of criticism will help us hone our attention to powerful messages that shape our lives, from viral social media posts to debates about urgent public problems. As we aim to think about rhetoric in the context not only of words, but also of persuasive performances, social actions, and organizational strategies, this course provides the foundational toolkit for becoming a more insightful, ethical, and effective communicator. We will not just learn about rhetoric; we will learn how to transform our own ways of seeing the world and others.

# Catalog Description

Survey of significant methodologies available to rhetorical critics. Emphasis on the critical abilities necessary to describe, explain, analyze, and evaluate symbolic influence in the public sphere. *Prerequisite(s)*: Communication Studies majors must complete [COMM 3010](https://catalog.unt.edu/preview_course_nopop.php?catoid=37&coid=170628) with a grade of C or better prior to enrolling; minors and other majors must complete [COMM 2140](https://catalog.unt.edu/preview_course_nopop.php?catoid=37&coid=170626).

# Required Texts

All readings in this class will be posted to our Canvas course site. You do not need to purchase any books for this course.

# Instructor Information

Matthew Heard, Associate Professor, Dept. of Communication Studies.

[Matthew.heard@unt.edu](mailto:Matthew.heard@unt.edu)

Pronouns: He/Him/His

Office: GAB 328

Office Hours: MW 11:00 am – noon

# Communication with me

To facilitate communication with me, please connect with me through my UNT email and/or by attending office hours. Keep in mind that I always try to respond to emails within 24 hours. Please reach out if you need help or want to talk over anything related to our class.

# Course Objectives:

## We will thoughtfully consider these big questions:

* When does an argument shut down conversation, and when does it create new possibilities?
* What is the difference between judging a text and being generous to it?
* What makes criticism successful, and how can we evaluate our own attempts at it?
* Whose perspective is missing from a conversation, and how do we find it?
* How does rhetorical criticism fit with other forms of symbolic action, from performance to data science?

## We will work to understand that:

* Rhetorical criticism is a **generative act** that creates new perspectives and possibilities for understanding, rather than simply delivering a final, negative judgment.
* Effective criticism is a **vulnerable practice** that requires intellectual humility and a willingness to open up texts for others, rather than simply proving a point.
* All judgments and analyses are **situated**, meaning they arise from specific social positions and have real, material consequences.
* A rhetor’s primary responsibility is to be **reflective** about power, positionality, and who has the authority to speak.



Methods of Rhetorical Criticism

## We will develop these key ideas and skills:

* Reading, understanding, and reverse-engineering complex scholarly arguments in Communication Studies.
* Applying diverse critical methods—including classical, symbolic, narrative, and ideological approaches—to a variety of rhetorical artifacts.
* Developing and sustaining an original critical argument based on textual evidence and scholarly research.
* Conducting research to situate a specific analysis within a larger public conversation about a "wicked problem."
* Communicating critical insights clearly and persuasively in multiple formats, including academic prose and public presentations.

# CLASS POLICIES

## Artificial Intelligence

From the UNT VPAA Office: based on the Student Academic Integrity Policy (UNT Policy 6.003), any form of "unauthorized assistance" constitutes cheating. The use of artificial intelligence to create phrases, sentences, or paragraphs for assignments in this class is not authorized. Violations of this policy will be considered cheating and will be reported to the office of Student Academic Integrity office.

## Texas Senate Bill 17

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 regarding 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 pertaining to race and racism, structural inequality, LGBTQ+ issues, or diversity, equity, and inclusion.

## ADA ACCOMMODATION

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. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. 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, refer to the Office of Disability Access website (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access). You may also contact ODA by phone at (940) 565-4323.

# ACADEMIC SUCCESS

UNT strives to offer you a high-quality education and a supportive environment, so you learn and grow. As a faculty member, I am committed to helping you be successful as a student. To learn more about campus resources and information on how you can be successful at UNT, go to unt.edu/success and explore unt.edu/wellness. For all of your enrollment and student financial-related questions answered, go to scrappysays.unt.edu.

## SUPPORTING YOUR SUCCESS AND CREATING AN INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

I value your perspective along with the many different perspectives your classmates bring to our campus. Please work with me to create a classroom culture of open communication, mutual respect, and belonging. All discussions should be respectful and civil. Although disagreements and debates are encouraged, personal attacks are unacceptable. My goal each class is to ensure a safe and welcoming classroom for all. If you ever feel like this is not the case, please stop by my office and let me know. We are all learning together. I also encourage you to review UNT’s student code of conduct so that we can all start with the same baseline expectations (Code of Student Conduct) (https://policy.unt.edu/policy/07-012).



Methods of Rhetorical Criticism

## ASSESSING YOUR WORK

### Grading Scale

For the purposes of this course,

* “A” WORK will constitute a final score of 90-100% of total points, and will represent an overall response that is impressively sophisticated and illuminating: inventive, balanced, justified, effective, mature, and expertly situated in time and context
* “B” WORK will constitute a final score of 80-89.99% of total points, and will represent an overall response that is thorough and systematic: skilled, revealing, developed, perceptive, but not unusually or surprisingly original
* “C” WORK will constitute a final score of 70-79.99% of total points, and will represent an overall response that is acceptable but limited: coherent, significant, and perhaps even insightful in places, but ultimately insufficient in organization, articulation, perception, and/or effectiveness
* “D” WORK will constitute a final score of 60-69.99% of total points, and will represent an overall response that is incomplete and severely lacking: incoherent, limited, uncritical, immature, undeveloped, and overall, not reflective of the performance expected of UNT undergraduates
* “F” WORK will constitute a final score of 0-59.99% of total points, and will represent an overall response that is unacceptable.

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Every student in my class can improve by doing their own work and trying their hardest with access to appropriate resources. Students who use other people’s work without citations will be violating UNT’s Academic Integrity Policy.

A long dirt road with trees and grass

AI-generated content may be incorrect.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.

The decision of the instructor will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity, which is responsible for maintaining student conduct records. The incident may result in an official disciplinary record for the student(s).

Academic integrity violations can include copying a passage from a source verbatim, but they can also include improper or misleading citations. Please note that all source material must be acknowledged, even if the material is paraphrased. Be careful to always acknowledge the work of other writers, and take the time to work out your thoughts and arguments without copying the work of others.

Please read and follow this important set of guidelines for your academic success (https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003). If you have questions about this, or any UNT policy, please email me or come discuss this with me during my office hours.

## LATE WORK

All assignments are due by class time on the due date indicated on the assignment schedule or in Canvas. Late work will be penalized per class period and assignments more than two weeks late will not be accepted. In some cases, I may grant extensions on assignments. To request an extension, please contact me before the assignment is due and I will consider your circumstances. Note that I will not grade subsequent assignments from any students until all previous assignments have been completed, and you cannot pass the course if you have not received a grade for all major assignments. Please contact me as soon as possible if you miss a deadline for an assignment.

## Additional Class Support:

* 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.
* Writing Lab. This is great place to talk about ideas, improve the organization of your 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](mailto:WritingLab@unt.edu), or go visit them in Sage Hall 150 (to set up an appointment) or during Walk-In hours at Willis 250.
* Use our COMM Library! Seriously — our student librarians are awesome! Drop by GAB 318; you can also see our holdings and hours online through the [COMM website](https://communication.unt.edu/communications-library-search).

## Basic Needs Security

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.

## 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.

## Concealed Handgun Carry

As of August 1, 2016, a concealed handgun license holder may carry a concealed handgun while on the campus premises, except in locations and at activities prohibited by law or UNT policy. A license holder may not carry a partially or wholly visible handgun, or intentionally or knowingly display a handgun in plain view of another person.

## 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 the UNT Learning Management System (LMS) for contingency plans for covering course materials.

# Student Support

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

In order to help support you as a student in every way, UNT offers multiple resources to care for your physical, mental, and academic health. Here are some of the resources:

* Student Health and Wellness Center (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center)
* Counseling and Testing Services (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services)
* UNT Care Team (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/care)
* UNT Psychiatric Services (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center/services/psychiatry)
* Individual Counseling (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services/services/individual-counseling)

## Other student support services offered by UNT include

* Registrar (https://registrar.unt.edu/registration)
* Financial Aid (https://financialaid.unt.edu/)
* Student Legal Services (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-legal-services)
* Career Center (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/career-center)
* Multicultural Center (https://edo.unt.edu/multicultural-center)
* Counseling and Testing Services (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services)
* Pride Alliance (https://edo.unt.edu/pridealliance)
* UNT Food Pantry (https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/resources/food-pantry)

## Academic Support Services

* Academic Resource Center (https://clear.unt.edu/canvas/student-resources)
* Academic Success Center (https://success.unt.edu/asc)
* UNT Libraries (https://library.unt.edu/)
* Writing Center (http://writingcenter.unt.edu/)
* MathLab (<https://math.unt.edu/mathlab>)

# Schedule of Assignments

Please have all readings read by class time of the date indicated on the schedule below. All readings will be posted on Canvas unless otherwise indicated. Schedule is subject to change. Always check our CANVAS page before class to see if any readings have changed!

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| WK | UNIT | M | M Class Readings /Assignments | W | W Class Readings /Assignments |
| 1 | Unit 1 | Aug 18 | **Unit 1: Foundations**  Course Intro | Aug 20 | Defining Method & Criticism; Intro to "Wicked Problems" |
| 2 | Aug 25 | Traditions in Rhetorical Criticism | Aug 27 | New Questions in Rhetorical Criticism  **"Wicked Problem" Inquiry Memo DUE** |
| 3 | Unit 2 | Sep 1 | LABOR DAY - NO CLASS | Sep 3 | **Unit 2: Classical Criticism**  Intro to Classical Criticism |
| 4 | Sep 8 | Classical Criticism: Method | Sep 10 | Classical Criticism: Examples  **Article Analysis DUE** |
| 5 | Unit 3 | Sep 15 | **Unit 3: Symbolic & Narrative Criticism**  Intro to Symbolic Criticism | Sep 17 | Symbolic Criticism: Method |
| 6 | Sep 22 | Symbolic Criticism: Examples | Sep 24 | Intro to Narrative and Performative Criticism |
| 7 | Sep 29 | Narrative and Performative Criticism: Method | Oct 1 | Narrative and Performative Criticism: Examples |
| 8 | Unit 4 | Oct 6 | **Unit 4: Cultural Criticism**  Intro to Cultural Criticism | Oct 8 | Cultural Criticism: Feminist Methods |
| 9 | Oct 13 | Cultural Criticism: Methods of Race and Culture | Oct 15 | Cultural Criticism: Methods of Ability |
| 10 | Oct 20 | Cultural Criticism: Examples | Oct 22 | Cultural Criticism: Examples |
| 11 |  | Oct 27 | Workshop: Structuring the Project | Oct 29 | In-Class Research & Analysis Day |
| 12 |  | Nov 3 | Methods Lab  In-Class Drafting & Production Day | Nov 5 | Peer Review Workshop: Rough Drafts  **Final Project: Research Proposal Due** |
| 13 |  | Nov 10 | Publics Project Lab  In-Class Conferences | Nov 12 | In-Class Conferences |
| 14 |  | Nov 17 | Publics Project Lab  Open Workshop & Peer Support | Nov 19 | Open Workshop & Peer Support |
| TG |  | Nov 24 | THANKSGIVING BREAK | Nov 26 | THANKSGIVING BREAK |
| 15 |  | Dec 1 | Project Presentations & Showcase | Dec 3 | Project Presentations & Showcase  **Final Project DUE** |
| F |  | Dec. 8 | TBD |  |  |