



COMM 3040: COMMUNICATION & PUBLIC DIALOGUE

Fall 2026 | COMM 3040-001 | MW 11:10 a.m.–12:30 p.m. | GAB 337

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Course Overview

This course overall supports your ability to collaborate with others in your communities about important issues. Civic collaboration of this kind asks something difficult of us: it requires us to make judgments about shared problems while recognizing that other people may experience those problems differently. Others may have different values, think differently, and even disagree with us genuinely even while we work to collaborate with them.

This course therefore treats communication and civic engagement not simply as “speaking civilly” or “finding common ground.” Instead, this course teaches us to practice locating ourselves, listening carefully, staying with complexity, and revising judgment. We practice these habits over the course of the semester through stories, public controversies, media, oral histories, academic readings, collaborative labs, and a public event, attended by community members and connected to the history of Denton.

Across the semester, we will practice five moves over and over again:

Locate → Listen → Complicate → Test → Revise

Three primary questions underlie and motivate our work together:

1. Where am I standing?
2. What am I not hearing yet?
3. What might we do together without erasing our differences?

This work also has practical applications. Our practices together will develop your capacities to do future work in public-dialogue facilitation. You will be trained to listen beneath stated positions, ask productive

questions, recognize tensions and tradeoffs, attend to power, identify when others partially align, and adapt to what actually happens in a conversation. You will not become expert facilitators in one semester, but this course will provide a foundation for your training in facilitation.

Big Questions and Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, students should be able to participate in and analyze difficult public conversations by (1) accounting for their own situated judgment, (2) reconstructing other perspectives responsibly, (3) recognizing tensions and unequal conditions, and (4) developing possibilities for collective action without assuming consensus.

We will return to questions such as:

- How does “where I stand” shape what I can hear, see, and understand?
- What becomes possible when I (and others) stay with tension instead of rushing toward agreement or certainty?
- What should change in my judgment when I seriously encounter different experiences, histories, or perspectives?
- How can I (and others) understand other positions without pretending that understanding means agreement?
- When does apparent disagreement conceal overlapping commitments?
- When does apparent agreement conceal important differences?
- How do history, institutions, and power affect public judgment?
- What can I responsibly do together with others even when we continue to disagree?



Image from Josiah Lee Lopez, Creation Lot 20, 2023, acrylic, marker, and archival ink pen on recycled paper, 48 x 48 inches

<https://www.dariamag.com/home/nepantla>

Students will develop the ability to:

- identify how experiences, places, communities, institutions, histories, and assumptions shape public judgment;
- distinguish a surface position from the values, concerns, constraints, hopes, fears, and histories that may support it;
- reconstruct another perspective using evidence while distinguishing evidence from inference;
- revise interpretations when new information or encounters complicate an initial account;
- recognize contradiction, uncertainty, and competing goods without forcing premature resolution;
- analyze how unequal power, risk, authority, and access affect public dialogue;
- identify partial alignment and continuing disagreement among stakeholders;
- develop and revise plausible proposals that account for tradeoffs, boundaries, and competing responsibilities;
- communicate intellectual development to academic and public audiences;
- recognize and practice foundational moves used in responsible public-dialogue facilitation.

Required Materials and Digital Access

There is no required textbook.

Required academic readings, oral histories, media, and other course materials will be provided through Canvas. Many scholarly readings will be assigned in carefully selected portions so that we can read difficult ideas closely and return to them repeatedly in different contexts.

This course has digital components. To fully participate in this class, students will need internet access to reference content on the Canvas Learning Management System and access to a word-processing program capable of producing common file formats. If circumstances change, you will be informed of other technical needs to access course content. Information on how to be successful in a digital learning environment is available through UNT Learn Anywhere.

How Your Work Will Be Assessed

Category	Points	Percent
Daily Practice & Labs	200	20%
Positionality Memo	100	10%
Layered Perspective Analysis	150	15%
Coalition / Negotiation Brief	150	15%
Nov. 14 Public Dialogue Event	100	10%
Final Public Narrative	300	30%
TOTAL	1,000	100%

Extra credit: Up to 50 points (5% of the course grade) may be earned through selected public events, intellectual extensions, or other opportunities announced during the semester. Extra credit cannot replace missing major assignments, required developmental work, or participation in the Nov. 14 event.

Major Assignments

Daily Practice & Labs — 200 Points

Much of the learning in this course happens through practice: listening exercises, perspective and stakeholder maps, media analysis, oral-history work, short written responses, reading checks, peer feedback, workshops, event preparation, and other collaborative activities.

Approximately 220 Daily Practice & Lab points will be available during the semester, but the category is capped at 200 points. The additional points provide flexibility for occasional absences, low scores, or other ordinary circumstances. Routine Daily Practice & Labs ordinarily cannot be made up.

Activities will generally be worth:

- 5 points: quick responses, annotations, exit notes, brief checks, or small analytical moves;
- 10 points: normal labs, maps, listening exercises, reading checks, peer response, or short analyses;
- 15 points: substantial synthesis exercises, major workshops, or developmental checkpoints.

Most Daily Practice work will be evaluated for thoughtful completion and appropriate engagement rather than polish.

Positionality Memo — 100 Points, 2–3 pages

You will examine how your own experiences, communities, institutions, places, and assumptions shape the way you initially understand a public question or situation.

The goal is not simply to describe your identity or tell a personal story. Instead, you will explain how where you stand affects what you are prepared to notice, value, or take for granted—and what your standpoint may not allow you to know automatically.

Layered Perspective Analysis — 150 Points, 3–4 pages

You will practice understanding a perspective more fully than its surface position.

Using evidence from a person, group, or set of public texts, you will examine the values, experiences, histories, pressures, hopes, fears, and constraints that make a position intelligible. You will distinguish evidence from inference, consider contradiction and unequal relations of power, and explain how your own initial understanding became more complicated.

The goal is understanding without assuming agreement, sameness, or complete access to another person's experience.

Coalition / Negotiation Brief — 150 Points, 3–4 pages

Public problems often require people who disagree to decide whether and how they can act together.

You will analyze stakeholders, identify areas of partial alignment as well as continuing disagreement and non-negotiable concerns, and develop a plausible course of collective action. Your proposal should account for unequal power, costs, risks, and tradeoffs. You will test and revise it in response to other perspectives and evidence from our public-dialogue work.

The goal is not to manufacture consensus. It is to develop responsible possibilities for action without erasing meaningful differences.

Nov. 14 Public Dialogue Event — 100 Points

Our Nov. 14 event connected to Quakertown provides an opportunity to put course learning into practice with a public audience.

Graduate students working with the event will serve as primary facilitators. Students in this course will contribute through selected Public Learning Narratives and other meaningful event-support roles.

Evaluation will emphasize preparation, reliability, responsible contribution, professional conduct, thoughtful interaction, and the ability to adapt when circumstances change. You are not being evaluated as an expert facilitator.

Final Public Narrative — 300 Points, 3–5 pages or approved equivalent

Across the semester you will develop a narrative about how your understanding of public life has changed, expanded, or become more complicated.

Before the Nov. 14 event, everyone will prepare and share a short Public Learning Narrative connecting something you now understand differently to a public question that the history of Quakertown helps us consider. A small number may be selected for presentation at the public event.

The final narrative will draw across all three course cycles:

Where were you standing? What were you not hearing yet? What complicated your judgment? What did engagement with others teach you about the possibilities and limits of public action?

The assignment does not require a conversion story or a claim that every tension has been resolved. Increased complexity, uncertainty, reframing, recognition of a previously invisible tension, or more responsible judgment can all constitute meaningful intellectual development.

Grading Scale and Quality Standards

A = 900–1000 | B = 800–899 | C = 700–799 | D = 600–699 | F = 0–599

Extra-credit points are added after the 1,000-point base grade is calculated, up to the 50-point course cap.

A work is impressively sophisticated and illuminating: perceptive, careful, well-supported, intellectually responsible, and effective.

B work is thorough and systematic: skilled, developed, thoughtful, and well-supported, but not unusually sophisticated or illuminating.

C work is acceptable but limited: coherent and significant, but insufficiently developed in reasoning, evidence, complexity, organization, or articulation.

D work is incomplete and severely lacking: limited, uncritical, undeveloped, inaccurate, or otherwise below the performance expected of UNT undergraduates.

F work is unacceptable, missing, or does not demonstrate the required course performance.

Attendance, Preparation, and Daily Practice

Because this course is learned through repeated listening, discussion, analysis, collaboration, and revision, regular attendance and preparation matter.

Daily Practice & Labs provide much of the evidence of attendance and engagement. Approximately 220 points are available, but only 200 may count toward the course grade. The built-in 20-point cushion is intended to absorb ordinary absences, occasional low scores, and other common circumstances. When you miss class, you ordinarily lose the opportunity to earn Daily Practice points completed during that meeting, and routine make-up work is not offered.

University-authorized absences and approved accommodations will be handled in accordance with UNT Policy 06.039 and applicable university procedures.

If you arrive late, you are welcome to join class without disrupting others, but work already completed or collected ordinarily cannot be recreated.

The Nov. 14 Public Dialogue Event is a separate required course activity, not an ordinary Daily Practice opportunity. If a serious circumstance may prevent your participation, communicate with me as early as possible.

Late Work and Readiness Deadlines

All work is due by the beginning of class on the date indicated unless otherwise stated.

Daily Practice & Labs ordinarily cannot be made up. Developmental work that prepares students for a workshop, showcase, rehearsal, or public activity may lose much of its value when submitted after that activity has occurred.

Major assignments submitted late are ordinarily penalized 10% per calendar day for up to three days. After three days, major work is not accepted without an approved exception.

Contact me before a deadline whenever possible if serious circumstances interfere with your work.

Generative AI: Limited and Transparent Use

Generative AI tools can support learning, but they cannot substitute for the listening, reading, interpretation, reflection, judgment, and interaction this course is designed to develop.

Unless a specific assignment explicitly authorizes otherwise, you may not use GenAI to generate, rewrite, or supply analytical claims, reflections, perspective reconstructions, narratives, evidence selections, or other substantive content that you submit as your own work.

You may use GenAI for limited study and process support—for example:

- generating practice questions;

- clarifying a term after completing the assigned reading;
- brainstorming search terms;
- troubleshooting technology;
- identifying surface-level proofreading issues in prose you have already written.

If GenAI materially contributes to submitted work in an authorized way, disclose the tool and explain how you used it. When in doubt, ask before using it.

Unauthorized substitution of AI-generated work for your own learning or authorship may constitute academic dishonesty under UNT Policy 06.003.

Academic Integrity

Every student can improve by doing their own work and using appropriate resources honestly. According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty includes behaviors such as cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage.

Source material must be acknowledged whether quoted or paraphrased. Findings of academic dishonesty may result in academic penalties and are reported through the university academic-integrity process.

If you are uncertain about citation, collaboration, or AI use, ask before submitting.

Communication and Office Hours

Connect with me through UNT email (matthew.heard@unt.edu) or office hours. I aim to respond promptly during business days; if you do not receive a response within two business days, please send a follow-up.

Office hours are a good place to clarify course concepts, talk through an assignment or public question, discuss feedback, or get support when something is not working. Additional meetings are available by appointment.

Classroom Discussion and Professional Conduct

This course examines public questions on which people may disagree substantially. Good public dialogue does not require students to share political commitments, experiences, identities, or conclusions.

You will be evaluated on the quality of your listening, reasoning, evidence, interpretation, participation, and academic work—not on whether you adopt a particular viewpoint.

Disagreement, questioning, criticism, uncertainty, and revision are appropriate parts of academic inquiry. Personal attacks, harassment, or conduct that prevents others from participating are not.

Our goal is a classroom in which students can examine difficult questions seriously, test interpretations, challenge ideas with evidence, and revise judgments when warranted.

ADA Accommodation

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 is important to provide ODA notice to your faculty as early as possible in the semester to avoid delays in implementation. 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 resources, refer to the UNT Office of Disability Access.

Emergency Notification, Campus Closures, and Course Changes

UNT uses Eagle Alert to communicate critical information, including severe weather, campus closings, and other emergencies. Students will be notified through Eagle Alert when a campus closing affects university operations or class meetings. In an emergency, follow instructions provided through Eagle Alert and by university or emergency personnel.

If a closure affects this course, consult Canvas for course-specific instructions.

The course calendar is subject to reasonable change. Students will receive reasonable notice of changes through Canvas and/or UNT email. Campus closures are governed by UNT Policy I5.006.

Recording Class

This course depends on open and robust discussion. Recording of class meetings—including audio, video, livestreaming, or photographs of course materials—is not permitted unless authorized by the instructor or required by an approved Office of Disability Access accommodation.

When approved accommodation requires recording, implementation will follow university procedures and protect the privacy of class participants.

Academic Course Content

This course examines rhetoric, public dialogue, history, positionality, power, identity, disagreement, coalition, and public judgment as subjects of academic study.

Students are expected to engage course material and one another through academic standards of evidence, interpretation, critical inquiry, and respectful discussion. No student is required to affirm a particular political or ideological position.

Concealed Handgun Carry

Texas law and UNT policy govern concealed handgun carry on campus. A license holder may carry a concealed handgun where permitted but may not intentionally or knowingly display a handgun in plain view or carry in locations or at activities prohibited by law or UNT policy.

Consult current UNT campus-carry information for applicable restrictions.

Student Success and Academic Support

UNT provides academic, health, financial, legal, career, and basic-needs support. Students whose circumstances may affect academic performance are encouraged to use appropriate university resources.

Useful starting points include UNT academic-success resources, UNT Libraries, the UNT Writing Center, Student Health and Wellness, Counseling services, the CARE Team, the UNT Food Pantry, Financial Aid, Student Legal Services, and the Career Center.

Final Examination

Saturday, December 5, 2026, 10:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m., GAB 337

Course Schedule

Complete all readings before class on the date listed. Assignments are due by the beginning of class unless otherwise stated. The schedule is subject to reasonable change; always check Canvas for current readings, links, and instructions.

WEEK	DAY	DATE	TOPIC	READING/ PREPARATION	ASSIGNMENTS/DAILY PRACTICE
WEEK 1 — Welcome: Public Dialogue and Formative Stories					
1	M	Aug. 17	Course opening: What is public dialogue?	Course introduction	Stories + opening diagnostic
1	W	Aug. 19	Where I'm From: formative stories	No new reading	Micro-story / story circle
WEEK 2 — Place, Belonging, and What We Assume					
2	M	Aug. 24	Place, belonging, community	No new reading	Place-map lab
2	W	Aug. 26	Assumptions and what we miss	In-class media case	First-interpretation exercise
WEEK 3 — From Story to Standpoint					
3	M	Aug. 31	Story → standpoint	Harper, pp.346-353	Story → Standpoint Trace
3	W	Sept. 2	Your first answer is data	In-class public/media case	Starting Assumptions Note
WEEK 4 — Different Accounts of Where We Stand					
4	M	Sept. 7	LABOR DAY — NO CLASS		
4	W	Sept. 9	Same place, different realities	Selected media representations	Comparison lab
WEEK 5 — Positionality and Situated Knowledge					
5	M	Sept. 14	Positionality in context	Mejia & Martínez, pp. 319-324, orange	Positionality Inventory
5	W	Sept. 16	Situated knowledge and its limits	Selected Quakertown oral histories	Knowledge / Limits Chart
WEEK 6 — Self-Location → Listening					
6	M	Sept. 21	Positionality Memo workshop	No new reading	Draft + peer response
6	W	Sept. 23	From self-location to listening	No new reading	Positionality Memo due
WEEK 7 — Listening Beneath Positions					
7	M	Sept. 28	Positions and underlying commitments	Carcasson, pp. 44-47	Underneath-the-Position Map
7	W	Sept. 30	Listening without mind-reading	No new reading	Reconstruction → Correction → Revision
WEEK 8 — Nepantla and Movement in Understanding					
8	M	Oct. 5	Nepantla: staying with contradiction	Mejia & Martínez, pp. 324-328, yellow; Anzaldúa media	Nepantla Note
8	W	Oct. 7	Conocimiento as movement	Leon & Pigg, pp. 260-265	Movement Map
WEEK 9 — Reconstructing Perspective and Power					
9	M	Oct. 12	Reconstructing another perspective	Case/media packet	Perspective Reconstruction

9	W	Oct. 14	Power and the terms of listening	Lozano-Reich & Cloud, pp. 221-222	Power Layer
WEEK 10 — Complex Listening in Practice					
10	M	Oct. 19	Complex listening in practice	In-class case	Full-framework application
10	W	Oct. 21	Staying with contradiction	Return to selected Anzaldúa material	Before / Now / Still Unresolved; Public Narrative seed
WEEK 11 — From Complex Listening to Action					
11	M	Oct. 26	Layered Perspective Analysis workshop	No new reading	Draft + challenge/revision
11	W	Oct. 28	From understanding to action	No new reading	Layered Perspective Analysis due
WEEK 12 — Coalition Without Sameness					
12	M	Nov. 2	Coalition without sameness	Chávez, pp. 1-5; 13-15	Stakeholder / Coalition Map; Public Learning Narrative ready
12	W	Nov. 4	Public Learning Narrative Showcase	No new reading	All students present; peer response
WEEK 13 — Preparing for Public Dialogue					
13	M	Nov. 9	Designing a public-dialogue event	No new reading	Event planning and role coordination
13	W	Nov. 11	Public-event rehearsal	No new reading	Rehearsal / readiness
13	Sat.	Nov. 14	PUBLIC QUAKERTOWN EVENT	Event preparation	Required Public Dialogue Event
WEEK 14 — Encounter, Power, and Coalition					
14	M	Nov. 16	Reflection: what did the encounter change?	No new reading	Event-Informed Revision
14	W	Nov. 18	Coalition across unequal power	Silvestri / Standing Rock, pp. 75-82; 85-88	Power revision of coalition map
Holiday Week - Thanksgiving					
	M	Nov. 23	THANKSGIVING BREAK — NO CLASS		
	W	Nov. 25	THANKSGIVING BREAK — NO CLASS		
WEEK 15 — Coalition → Semester Synthesis					
16	M	Nov. 30	Build → Challenge → Revise	Carcasson framework revisit	Coalition / Negotiation Brief due after class
16	W	Dec. 2	Reflection: How has my judgment developed?	No new reading	Final Public Narrative workshop / facilitator synthesis
FINALS WEEK					
—	Sat.	Dec. 5	FINAL EXAMINATION — 10:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m., GAB 337	No new reading	Final-period activity
	M	Dec. 7	Final submission	—	Final Public Narrative due