



**CIVIC COLLABORATION: COMM 4849:
Special Topics in Rhetorical Studies**

Spring 2026, MON/WED 2:00-3:20 PM | GAB 337

Course Overview

As we face polarization in our communities, we often see how people and groups are demonized in ways that make problems seem unsolvable. This course is your entry into a different process for seeing conflict, where you will learn communication strategies and skills to help you become an expert in collaborative processes. You will not learn how to "win" arguments; instead, you will learn to manage the messy, competing values that keep people anxious and stuck in their habits of thought. Through "stacks" of skills including listening, vetting misinformation, recognizing patterns, and more, you will exit the course feeling more comfortable with facilitating high-tension conversations and telling powerful stories about your own journey toward a more nuanced perspective. Note that because this is an advanced upper-division course, you will be expected to enter the course with advanced skills in critical thinking, leadership, class discussion, research, and writing.

Course Materials

To keep your costs at a minimum, all course readings will be posted on the Canvas site. You do not need to buy any other materials for the semester.

You can print out essays either from your home computers or in a General Access Computer Lab on campus. Please see the General Access Computer Labs website, <http://www.gacl.unt.edu/location-labs>, for more information about where to find labs, print quotas, etc. There are two labs in the General Academic Building (GAB 330 and GAB 550), along with quite a few labs spread throughout campus.

*If you ever cannot log onto Canvas, please use your library privileges to

find the article through EBSCO. If the library fails you, e-mail another classmate or us directly.

Assignment Overview

Daily Assignments & Exit/Entrance Tickets (30%): Frequent, low-stakes assessments—such as short quizzes or writing prompts—designed to improve learning. Out of 20, you must complete at least 15 of these "entrance/exit tickets" on time to be eligible for maximum points.

Skills Journal (10%): Low-stakes journal entries designed to encourage specific practice with deliberation, listening, misinformation vetting, and framing tactics.

Issue Framing Analysis (15%): Diagnostic assignment analyzing how language and rhetorical choices shape public perception of a contemporary issue across at least two different sources.

Rhetorical Situation Analysis (15%): A 4–5 page analysis considering the specific exigence, audiences, advocates, and constraints facing the class's chosen topic.

Civic Collaboration Portfolio (30%): A capstone portfolio representing overall learning, including the planning document, live event facilitation, and a final framing report for community partners.

Instructor Information

Dr. Suzanne Enck (she/her/hers), suzanne.enck@unt.edu. Office GAB 309. Office Hrs. TU 2-4pm.

Dr. Matthew Heard (he/him/his), matthew.heard@unt.edu. Office GAB 328. Office Hrs. MON 12-2pm.



Catalog Description

Investigation of various topics related to the study of humans using symbolic discourse to influence others. Theory and application using qualitative and historical/critical methodologies. *Prerequisite(s):* Communication studies majors must complete COMM 3010 with a

grade of C or better prior to enrolling; minors and other majors must complete COMM 2140.

Communication with Us

To facilitate communication, please connect with us through our UNT email addresses and/or by attending office hours.

Email: We always try to respond to emails within 24 hours. A gentle nudge is always appreciated if we miss an email during busy times.

Office hours: we can resolve many conflicts by talking in person. Office hours offer you an opportunity to ask for clarification or find support with understanding class material—please come visit us!

Course Learning Objectives

We will work to understand that civic life is a rhetorical and cultural construction shaped by language, culture, and argument. Specifically, we will work to:

- Recognize ethical, cultural, and power dimensions that shape deliberative practices.
- Translate complex research into accessible and ethical pieces of public communication.
- Reframe conflict by shifting community debates from battles to negotiations
- Identify challenges such as "magic bullets," "devil figures," and "paradox splitting" that oversimplify complex public truths
- Bridge information gaps by using strategies to analyze facts and find common ground
- Tell stories of change by creating public narratives that invite others to listen to our stories and perspectives
- Engage in enduring tensions of democracy by using rhetorical tools and avoiding oversimplified solutions.

Grading Scale

A (90-100%): Work is impressively sophisticated, inventive, and expertly situated.

B (80-89.99%): Work is thorough, systematic, revealing, developed, and perceptive.

C (70-79.99%): Work is acceptable but limited; coherent but ultimately insufficient in organization.

D (60-69.99%): Work is incomplete and may be uncritical or not fully developed.

F (0-59.99%): Work is unacceptable.

What You Should Expect from Us

We view the classroom as one of the few spaces where taken-for-granted notions of privilege and power can be productively challenged and hopes voiced. Our approach to teaching takes seriously the charge of raising students' consciousness and aiding your progression in becoming more engaged participants in our public culture. We will be prepared for all class sessions, evaluate your work in a timely manner, and offer constructive criticism for improvement. We do not have the goal to make all students simply "think like us," but to enable students to think critically.

Grading Breakdown

Assignment Category	Percentage
Daily Assignments, In-Class Work, Entrance/Exit Tickets	30%
Skills Journal	10%
Issue Framing Analysis	15%
Rhetorical Situation Analysis	15%
Civic Collaboration Portfolio (Final Project)	30%
Total	100%

Discussing Identity in Texas (SB 17)

Texas Senate Bill 17, which outlaws diversity, equity, and inclusion programs at public colleges and universities in Texas, does not in any way affect content, instruction, or discussion in this course. Expectations and academic freedom for teaching and class discussion have not been altered, 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.

Class Policies

Attendance and Participation: Research has shown that students who attend class are more likely to be successful. We recognize the challenges of the semester. At the same time, because this is a "studio" class emphasizing practice, we need you to be in class with us as much as you can. To this end, we remind you that: (1) your daily work counts for a large portion of your grade. Daily work functions as a check against absences and cannot be made up if missed. (2) We will have some extra credit opportunities, such as extra "exit/entrance tickets," to incentivize attendance and participation.

Late Work: All assignments are due by class time on the date indicated. Late work will be penalized per class period and assignments more than two weeks late will not be accepted. You cannot pass the course if you have not received a grade for all major assignments.

Preparation: Complete all assigned readings before coming to class and bring them with you. Do not give up on a reading just because you're feeling challenged; come to class with questions.

Academic Integrity: Students who use other people's work without citations violate UNT's Academic Integrity Policy (06.003). All work submitted must be your own. Violations will result in failure for the assignment and possibly failure for the course.

Artificial Intelligence (AI): In accordance with the UNT Honor Code, unauthorized use of GenAI tools is prohibited unless we give you explicit permission to use it. The use of artificial intelligence to create phrases, sentences, or paragraphs for assignments in this class is not authorized and constitutes cheating. Please talk with us if you're unsure whether something is allowed.

Classroom Climate & Inclusive Learning:

We value your perspective along with the many different perspectives your classmates bring. We will be talking about challenging issues in this class! Please work with us to create a classroom culture of open communication, mutual respect, and belonging. While disagreements are encouraged, personal attacks are unacceptable.

Recording Class: To ensure the comfort and protection of everyone in our classroom, recording of any kind is prohibited in this space (including audio, live-streaming, or photographs) unless you have an approved accommodation from the ODA.

E-Mail & Canvas: Please check your e-mail and Canvas frequently in order to stay current with course communications. If you have a question outside of class and can't make it to office hours, please contact us via email. If you are experiencing problems with the Canvas system (e.g., if you can't log on or access the system), please contact the UNT Help Desk immediately: 940-565-2324 or helpdesk@unt.edu. If they cannot help, you should contact a peer to ask them to send you the reading or contact us.

Incompletes: In accordance with University policy, a student can only receive a course grade of "I" if the student 1) has completed at least 75% of the coursework, 2) is passing the course, and 3) has a justifiable and documented reason beyond the control of the student for not completing the work on schedule (e.g., serious illness, military service).

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 at <https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access>. You may also contact the ODA office by phone at (940) 565-4323.

Readings & Strategic Thought

The readings for this course vary in length and difficulty. Some essays are complex and will likely challenge you; they

**"We are in our
skins, given over,
in each other's
hands, at each
other's mercy"**

-- Judith Butler

have been chosen because they are strong examples of nuanced positions. Reading strategies for this class include:

Reading to Comprehend: Understand the basic content and arguments being made by the author.

Reading to Agree: Put yourself in the position of the author to see how the argument applies to real-world dissent.

Reading to Disagree: Critically evaluate the assumptions, values, or goals in the text or position that you find insufficient or lacking.

UNT Student Support and Resources

COMM Library: Drop by GAB 318; you can also see our holdings and hours online through the COMM website. Make use of this—our librarians are awesome!

Writing Lab: Sage Hall 150 or Willis 250J. This is a great place to talk about ideas and improve the organization of your writing.

Basic Needs Security: Students facing challenges securing food or housing are 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. Furthermore, please talk to Suzanne if you are comfortable doing so. If there are resources she can connect you to, she will—and she will advocate for your needs whenever possible.

Survivor Advocates (Title IX): UNT is committed to providing a safe learning environment free of all forms of sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. Federal laws (Title IX and the Violence Against Women Act) and UNT policies prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, and therefore prohibit sexual misconduct. If you or someone you know is experiencing sexual harassment, relationship violence, stalking, and/or sexual assault, there are campus resources available to provide support and assistance.

UNT's Survivor Advocates can assist students who have been impacted by violence by filing protective orders, completing crime victim's compensation applications, contacting professors for absences related to an assault, working with housing to facilitate a room change where appropriate, and connecting students to other resources available both on and off campus. The Survivor Advocate can be reached at SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu or by calling the Dean of Students Office—940-565-2648. Additionally, alleged sexual misconduct can be non-confidentially reported to UNT's Title IX Coordinator at oeo@unt.edu or at (940) 565-2759.

Emergency Notification: UNT uses Eagle Alert to notify students of severe weather or campus closings. Describe that the calendar is subject to change, citing the Campus Closures Policy.

Course Schedule

All readings and assignments will be due ON THE DATE assigned. Readings should be completed BEFORE coming to class. Note that assignments, readings, and topics **may be added/change** as the semester progresses. Check Canvas for updates!

Wk	MON Class (Studio / Theory)	WED (Lab /Practice)
1	1/12 Course Intro: What is a "Civic Collaborator"? What is this course about?	1-14 Course Intro: Why is affective polarization such a barrier to solving community problems?
2	1-19 HOLIDAY: MLK DAY (No Class)	1-21 Diagnosis: Which local "wicked problem" creates the most emotional friction for us?
3	1-26 Deliberative Inquiry: What is the difference between a "wicked person" and a "wicked problem," and why do we prefer simple stories to complex truths?	1-28 DI Stack: How do we recognize "magic bullets," "devil figures," and "paradox splitting" in our own thinking? DUE: Skills Journal 1
4	2-2 Pattern Recognition: How can we map the systemic tensions and values inherent in our selected community issue?	2-4 DI Stack: Which single issue will serve as our common ground for the rest of the semester? DUE: Class Issue Selection
5	2-9 Rhetorical Listening: How do we "stand under" the logic of a narrative we fundamentally dislike?	2-11 Listening Stack: How do silence and listening help us build coalitions and recognize signs of emotional distress? DUE: Skills Journal 2
6	2-16 Invitational Rhetoric: How do we move from "persuasion" to "understanding"?	2-18 Listening Stack: How can we understand a value system that we personally find problematic?
7	2-23 Storytelling: How can crafting stories of "change" help depolarize situations?	2-25 Storytelling Stack: How do our own personal experiences reflect our chosen wicked problem? DUE: Skills Journal 3
8	3-2 Public Narrative: How do our personal stories connect to the community tensions?	3-4 Storytelling Stack: How do we reach publics with our stories of personal transformation? DUE: Issue Framing Analysis
--	SPRING BREAK	SPRING BREAK
9	3-16 Info Literacy: How can information literacy strategies help us vet the quality of collective knowledge?	3-18 Misinformation Stack: How do we work with those we disagree with to find common facts and information gaps?
10	3-23 Structural Framing: How do we define problems without relying on "devil figures" or scapegoats?	3-25 Misinformation Stack: How can we map "wicked tensions" to provide usable knowledge for our community? DUE: Skills Journal 4
11	3-30 Facilitation and Leadership: How do we facilitate conversations with impartiality?	4-1 Facilitation Stack: How do we manage "Hot Moments" and conflict without losing our neutral frame?
12	4-6 Reporting Task: How do we analyze why people hold positions rather than just what they believe?	4-8 Facilitation Stack: How do we design ground rules and exigence to promote common ground? DUE: Rhetorical Situation Analysis
13	4-13 Practice: How do we lead a full DI cycle within our classroom studio?	4-15 Practice: How do we weave our "Change of Mind" stories into the facilitated dialogue?
14	4-20 PUBLIC EVENT: Preparation for civic collaboration	4-22 PUBLIC EVENT: Preparation for civic collaboration. DUE: Final Framing Report
15	4-27 Closure: What have we learned about our own growth as "Wise Collaborators"?	4-29 Reflection: How has our shared work changed the way we view our community and ourselves? DUE: Self-Reflection
FIN	Final Reflections	