

Course Syllabus

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Opera Theater

MUEN 5040/3040

Fall 2025 and Spring 2026

INSTRUCTORS

Dr. Stephanie Rhodes Russell

stephanie.russell@unt.edu (mailto:stephanie.russell@unt.edu)

Office: 146 Murchison

Hours: M 2:30 – 3:30

Dr. Sharon Bjorndal Lavery

sharon.lavery@unt.edu (mailto:sharon.lavery@unt.edu)

(mailto:sharon.lavery@unt.edu)_(mailto:sharon.lavery@unt.edu)_Office: 104 Bain

Hours: Th 2:00 - 3:00

OVERVIEW

An ensemble course providing intensive training and performing experience in opera. This season features the following three mainstage productions:

Aleko; Rachmaninoff

Gianni Schicchi; Puccini

Conductor: Dr. Stephanie Rhodes Russell

Director: Eliza Escalante  (<https://www.elizapescalante.com/>)

Performances: October 30, November 2 (matinee), 7, 8

Alcina; Händel

Conductor: Stephen Mulligan

Director: Claire Choquette  (<https://www.clairechoquette.com/>)

Performances: Feb 28, March 1 (matinee), 6, 7

That Hellbound Train; Lisa DeSpain & David Simpatico

WORLD PREMIERE

Conductor: Dr. Stephanie Rhodes Russell

Director: Stefan Novinski  (<https://www.stefannovinski.com/>)

Performances: April 17, 19 (matinee)

COURSE SCHEDULE

UNT Opera Theater's rehearsal schedule includes standard class meeting times and added rehearsals/adjusted meeting times. Added rehearsals are indicated in the Master Calendar and standard meeting times are below:

Monday 3:45-6:00; 7:00-10:00

Wednesday 3:45-5:45

Thursday 3:15-6:00; 7:00-9:30

Friday 2:15-6:15

GOALS/COURSE OBJECTIVE

Expand the young singing artists' skills to help them become fully-rounded opera artists.

MATERIALS

Principals as a rule must purchase their own scores for operas, chorus parts will be provided.

COURSE POLICIES

1. More than two unexcused absences will result in one automatic grade drop
2. Three unexcused late arrivals or early departures will constitute an unexcused absence
3. Failure to complete contracted assignments will result in one automatic grade drop
4. The following may result in your being removed from your assigned role:
 - *Failure to learn music, text, or staging satisfactorily*
 - *Failure to make appropriate vocal progress*
 - *Failure to honor commitments to the schedule*

EVALUATION/GRADING CRITERIA

Your final grade will be computed as follows:

30%: *Musical Preparation, Performance and Progress*

30%: *Stage Preparation, Performance and Progress*

20%: *Attendance and Promptness*

20%: *Crew Work*

ALPHABETIZED INFORMATION & POLICIES FOR REFERENCE

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY STANDARDS AND CONSEQUENCES

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.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION – EAGLE CONNECT

Students' access point for business and academic services at UNT is located at: my.unt.edu. All official communication from the University will be delivered to a student's Eagle Connect account. For more information, please visit the website that explains Eagle Connect and how to forward e-mail: eagleconnect.unt.edu/ D. Student Evaluation Administration Dates. Student feedback is important and an essential part of participation in this course. The student evaluation of instruction is a requirement for all organized classes at UNT. The survey will be made available during weeks 13, 14 and 15 of the long semesters to provide students with an opportunity to evaluate how this course is taught. Students will receive an email from "UNT SPOT Course Evaluations via IASystem Notification" (no-reply@iasystem.org) with the survey link. Students should look for the email in their UNT email inbox. Simply click on the link and complete the survey. Once students complete the survey they will receive a confirmation email that the survey has been submitted. For additional information, please visit the SPOT website at www.spot.unt.edu or email spot@unt.edu (<mailto:spot@unt.edu>).

ACCEPTABLE 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 classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct.

ADA ACCOMMODATION STATEMENT

UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one's specific course needs. Students may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of 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 accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the ODA website at disability.unt.edu.

ATTENDANCE

More than two unexcused absences will result in one automatic grade drop

An excused absence requires one of the following:

- An approved N/A form
- An email of explanation from the student's applied voice instructor
- A doctor's note

Students are expected to attend class meetings regularly and to abide by the attendance policy established for the course. It is important that you communicate with the professor and the instructional team prior to being absent so you, the professor, and the instructional team can discuss and mitigate the impact of the absence on your attainment of the course learning goals. Please inform the professor and instructional team if you are unable to attend class meetings because you are ill, in mindfulness of the health and safety of everyone in our community. ***Students are responsible for learning any staging missed due to absence.***

CHOIR CONFLICTS

No absences from choir for opera assignments are approved, except for the following policy:

- The standard excused leave of absence from choir rehearsals for those performing a Lead Role with UNT Opera is **one week**. Cast lists indicate which roles are considered Lead Roles and which are Featured Roles.

CHURCH CHOIR

We understand many of you rely on singing in church choirs to earn necessary income. We support this and will never call Sunday morning rehearsals and as a rule will only call Wednesday evening rehearsals for main productions during tech and performance weeks. **If you are in the cast or crew of a show, you are not excused from a Wednesday night rehearsal because of a church job or other church obligation.** If you are double-cast, you must also attend the Wednesday night rehearsal even if your double-cast colleague is scheduled to sing that evening. Please clear this with your church music director as soon as you accept any opera assignment. Also, please note that Wednesday afternoon rehearsals last until 5:45pm. You must remain for the entire rehearsal. Please make any necessary arrangements so that you can remain in opera rehearsal until 5:45pm.

COACHINGS

Coachings are intended to help you progress in your musicianship and artistry. While we are here to help, please be sure you come to coachings having done all your requisite homework: pitches and rhythms learned comprehensively, all text translated, and proper pronunciation of the text learned. Coaching sessions are not intended to teach you notes or words. Failure to meet these expectations may result in you being removed from a role or put on “probation”, which means being removed until you prove you have reached an adequate level of preparation.

CONFLICTING CLASSES

It is your responsibility to sign up for (non-opera) classes, lesson times, and coaching times that do not conflict with standard opera times. Please do not accept a role or chorus assignment if you cannot attend the rehearsals. Please speak first with the Opera TAs then, if needed, with the opera faculty if you have questions regarding class scheduling.

CONTRACTS

At the beginning of the year all students will receive a contract including both casting and crew assignments for the academic year. You have one week to accept your assignments and turn in your contracts. When you sign your acceptance of any role assignment for an opera program activity, you indicate that you understand and accept the participation guidelines and schedules outlined in this syllabus. These assignments will be what you are graded on and, while they may be amended in consultation with opera faculty, **failure to complete contracted assignments will result in one automatic grade drop.**

COVID & SICKNESS

As musicians, health is a critical component of our preparation and performance. If you are feeling unwell, please stay at home, and if you are feeling slightly unwell, please wear a mask. **Opera faculty must be notified of your absence prior to the missed rehearsal and a doctor's note should be supplied to formally excuse an absence.** The absence policy above will continue to apply in these scenarios.

Contact the UNT COVID Team at COVID@unt.edu for guidance on actions to take due to symptoms, pending or positive test results, or potential exposure.

CREWING ASSIGNMENTS

As is standard in university opera programs, students are required to assist in a variety of crewing activities, which are essential to a successful production. An operatic education would be incomplete without a comprehensive understanding of what it takes to bring a performance to the stage. Through

these assignments you will gain insight into the various career opportunities that exist and the skillsets that are required to succeed in the industry.

Students may register in the beginning of the year a preference for a certain category of crew if they already have pre-existing interest or expertise in a certain area.

CREWING CATEGORIES

Crewing assignments will be made with an effort to balance crewing time commitments between all students.

Crewing activities take place in the following categories, with examples in parentheses. Non-performers, those who have not been cast in a show, may be assigned to be crew members.

- **Deck Run Crew** (scene changing, set up, strike, etc.)
 - Needed for final chorus rehearsals, scene change rehearsals, tech week, all performances and final strike.
 - Often pulled from chorus members who are already involved in the production.
- **Props Crew** (helping maintain props, running shows, helping with finding or creation of props)
 - Needed at various times during the rehearsal process (to help create props, set up prop tables, organization), for tech week, and all performances and strike.
 - Often pulled from chorus members who are already involved in the production.
- **Costume Crew** (helping find or occasionally build costumes, maintain costumes, launder costumes, dress performers, complete small fixes during performances, assist with quick changes, and strike/clean-up)
 - Must be available tech week and all performances. Occasionally called outside of that timeframe to help with small sewing/creation items. For performances, must arrive 1.5 hours before downbeat and stay until everyone is out of costume for the evening.
 - Usually a mixture of chorus members and non-performers. We must have at least 2 non-performers for this crew to function efficiently.
- **Makeup Crew** (applying makeup)
 - Must be available tech week and all performances. Sometimes called outside of that time frame for makeup training or makeup practices (lead by makeup designer or crew head). For performances, must arrive 1.5 hours before the downbeat and stay until everyone is out of makeup for the evening.
 - Usually a mixture of chorus members and non-performers. We must have at least one non-performer to help organize. Note: double casts may choose to assist their counterparts with complicated makeup, which is helpful when appropriate.
- **Orchestra Support Crew** (setting up orchestra pit for opera orchestra rehearsals, Sitzprobes, and performances; erasing markings and putting cuts in scores before and after production; maintaining pit cleanliness and organization between shows; working with Maestro on any additional needs)

- Generally needed for 30 mins per call before any orchestra rehearsal. There are generally 5-6 calls per show. The crew head also organizes their crew to check on the state of the pit before performances.
- Needs a maximum of 4 students. There is a need for some flexibility because calls often happen during orchestra rehearsal hours, which may be outside of opera rehearsal hours. The crew head determines these calls based on the availability of the crew members.
- **Other Technical Fields** (operating a follow spot or a projector, supertitle projection, child wrangler, etc.)
 - Needed for training, tech week and all performances.
 - Supertitles projection is an important, rewarding, and challenging task!
 - When a child wrangler is needed, they are asked to be at all the children's rehearsals. Those dates will be communicated by the Assistant Director.
- **Admin Crew** (photocopying, assisting Opera TAs)
 - Called on an as-needed basis.
- **Public Relations (PR) Crew** (creating social media content, distributing flyers and posters, website and email designing, maintaining patron lists, etc.)
 - This is a full year crew. All members are expected to assist throughout the academic year.
- **Crew Head** (for any of the previously listed crews)
 - Called for the same time periods as the crews listed above, generally with more managerial responsibilities. They may be asked to attend extra rehearsals to learn their duties or help AD/SM as needed.

TAs, Crew Heads, and ASMs will be tasked with keeping records of crew attendance, and **more than two unexcused absences will drop students a grade.**

EMBARGO

For the final rehearsals of our productions to run smoothly, no absences (N/A) will be approved from any opera rehearsal for cast, chorus, or crew beginning **two weeks before opening night** for all productions and continuing until the strike of each production. The only exceptions to this policy are official Dress Rehearsals and Performances of other school activities such as choir concerts. This two-week period is called the “Embargo” period. For shows that are not fully staged, such as concert operas or scenes programs, the embargo may be less than two weeks before the show opens. Embargo dates are indicated in the Master Calendar.

MEMORIZATION

For each role/chorus assignment there will be a scheduled memorization hearing. This allows us to effectively assess individual preparation and to be sure that all are prepared for the staging process.

Staging sessions are conducted only with students who are fully off-book. You also need to have thought deeply about your character: ‘Who am I? What do I want? Why do I want it right now?! Why can’t I get it?!? Failure to meet these expectations may result in you being removed from a role, or put on “probation”, during which you will be temporarily removed until you demonstrate an adequate level of preparation.

N/As (NON-AVAILABILITIES)

Requests to be non-available for opera rehearsals must be made **a minimum of two weeks in advance** through our NA form, available on Canvas. However, please submit non-availability requests as soon as they are known and well before the two week deadline. Please do not commit to another obligation until you have received an official written release. UNT Opera aims to be flexible and accommodate an individual’s conflicts and other class schedules as best as possible. However, for the benefit of all students involved in our productions, we want to set out some guidelines for participation:

- Those cast in named roles should not request recurring NAs of more than 2 hours per week during staging periods.
- NA request forms must be submitted for **all absences** from Opera Studies classes and rehearsals **including other school performances, rehearsals, and/or class conflicts**.
- A Leave of Absence granted by the Dean’s office can substitute for an NA from the Opera Department. If a student is taking a leave of absence, the student must coordinate with the Dean’s office and have the office notify both Dr. Stephanie Rhodes Russell and Dr. Sharon Lavery.
- NAs are granted on a case-by-case basis at the sole discretion of the Opera Department faculty. Students are responsible for submitting the NA request form. An NA is not officially approved until the email confirmation has been received indicating approval. This may require the student to follow up with the opera faculty.
- For students involved in productions, NAs will not be granted on and after the embargo date directly preceding performances. Embargo dates for each production will be given to students at the beginning of the semester via the Master Calendar on Canvas. These dates can also be found on the Master Calendar outside the Opera Office. Please contact Lauren Koszyk, the opera scheduling TA with any questions.
- If you have an absence that is likely but not confirmed (such as participation in an outside competition or audition) please submit an NA form for this anticipated absence—do not wait to begin the approval process until you have received confirmation as these confirmations are sometimes extremely last-minute.
- Students may not book any travel arrangements prior to obtaining NA approval. *If a student chooses to book travel prior to obtaining approval, the UNT Opera Department is not responsible for any travel expenses that may be lost if an NA request is not approved.*

OPERA SCHOLARSHIPS

If you are a holder of an opera scholarship you effectively pledge to be part of the opera program. If you are unable to observe the participation guidelines in this document, your opera scholarship will be in jeopardy and may be allocated to someone who is available to participate. Opera scholarship holders are also expected to be a positive role model in work ethic, attitude, and collegiality.

REGISTRATION

- **Undergraduates:** must register for the full year (both terms) for any year they wish to be involved in opera
- **Masters:** must register for one full year (either first or second year). Masters may sign up for an additional full year if they wish to perform in opera.
- **DMA and GAC:** if they wish to be involved in opera, must register for at least one full year; in subsequent years may sign up for one term only.
- **Opera Scholarship Holders:** must register for full year of opera and participate in crewing as assigned for each year they hold an opera scholarship.

REHEARSAL CONFLICTS

We will share with you a schedule of rehearsal times for each production in advance of each term, including regular and extra production week rehearsals, in our Master Calendar. These will be the times you are expected to commit to if you accept an assignment in an opera. If you anticipate major conflicts with rehearsals, do not accept the opera assignment. Prior to auditions, you can, if you wish, indicate which operas you are interested in, and those to which you know you cannot commit.

SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION

UNT is committed to providing a safe learning environment free of all forms of sexual misconduct. Federal laws and UNT policies prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex as well as 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. The Survivor Advocates can be reached at SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu or by calling the Dean of Students Office at 940-565- 2648.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

A weekly schedule will be published on Friday evening to the course Canvas page. Be sure to read the schedule thoroughly to avoid missing assigned coaching and staging sessions.

Course Summary:

Date	Details	Due
Fri Aug 29, 2025	 <u>UNT Opera Bio & Headshot</u> (https://unt.instructure.com/courses/133013/assignments/2796764)	due by 5pm
Fri Sep 5, 2025	 <u>2025-26 Opera Contract</u> (https://unt.instructure.com/courses/133013/assignments/2809205)	due by 11:59pm
Fri Oct 10, 2025	 <u>UNT Media Release</u> (https://unt.instructure.com/courses/133013/assignments/2827522)	due by 11:59pm
Tue Dec 2, 2025	 <u>Alcina Aria Submissions</u> (https://unt.instructure.com/courses/133013/assignments/2853615)	due by 5pm