

Syllabus

ART3996: Honors College Mentored Research

Spring Semester 2026

January 12th - May 8th

University of North Texas (UNT)

College of Visual Arts and Design

Foundations Program

Class Format

Independent research with required weekly mentor meetings.

Location: ART 220A and/or Zoom (as scheduled)

Instructor Contact

Instructor: Terry K. Spyker, MFA (he/him)

Email: terry.spyker@unt.edu

Office Location: Art Building, ART 220 A

Office Hours: Wednesdays/Fridays, 9:00 - 10:00 am, ART 220 A, by email appointment

Course Description

This Honors College Mentored Research course provides students with the opportunity to conduct sustained, faculty-guided research in visual culture, philosophy, and critical writing. Students enrolled in ART 3996 work independently under the close mentorship of a faculty member, dedicating approximately 10–12 hours per week to research, writing, and creative production.

This particular mentorship focuses on expanding an existing scholarly essay through deeper philosophical research, comparative analysis, and creative translation. The project integrates existential philosophy, narrative analysis, and visual design to produce a revised research essay, a printed zine, and a final presentation reflecting both intellectual growth and professional-level research practices.

Course Structure

This course is structured around **weekly one-on-one mentor meetings** and independent research activities. There are no scheduled class meetings or labs.

Each week, the student will:

- Complete assigned readings or research tasks
- Produce written research notes or drafts

- Engage in visual or design-based experimentation
- Meet with the instructor for feedback, discussion, and planning

Course materials, deadlines, and feedback will be managed through Canvas.

Course Objectives

By the end of this mentorship, the student will be able to:

- Conduct a sustained literature review across philosophy, visual culture, and narrative media
- Apply existential and cultural theory through close reading and comparative analysis
- Develop a cohesive, research-driven scholarly argument
- Integrate visual and design elements to enhance accessibility and engagement
- Document research processes according to professional academic standards
- Revise written work through iterative feedback and reflection
- Communicate research findings clearly through writing, design, and oral presentation

Expectations

This course is **self-directed and rigorous**. Students should expect to devote approximately **10–12 hours per week** to research, writing, visual development, and documentation.

Students are expected to:

- Attend all scheduled mentor meetings
- Maintain consistent weekly progress
- Meet deadlines for drafts, notes, and deliverables
- Engage critically and thoughtfully with feedback
- Communicate proactively about challenges or scheduling conflicts

Because this is an Honors research course, consistent engagement is essential.

Course Materials and Textbooks

There are no required textbooks for this course. All readings will be provided digitally or selected collaboratively based on research needs.

Students may choose to work with:

- Word processing software (Word or Google Docs recommended)
- Adobe InDesign, Illustrator, or Photoshop (optional)
- Analog drawing, collage, or print methods
- Found or self-selected materials for zine production

Technology Requirements

The minimum technology requirements are as follows:

- Reliable computer and internet access
- Canvas access
- Word processing software
- Presentation software (PowerPoint, Google Slides, or similar)
- Optional access to Adobe Creative Cloud via CVAD labs

Grading

Grading Scale

A: 90-100% (Outstanding, excellent work. The student performs well above the minimum criteria.)

B: 80-89% (Good, impressive work. The student performs above the minimum criteria.)

C: 70-79% (Average, college-level work. The student meets the criteria of the assignment.)

D: 60-69% (Below-average work. The student fails to meet the minimum criteria.)

F: 59-0% (Sub-par work. The student fails to complete the assignment.)

A grade of **C or above** represents successful completion of the Honors research experience.

Assessment

This course is graded holistically, based on research engagement, quality of work, and demonstrated growth.

The following table shows how your final grade will be weighted:

Assignment Category	Points Distribution
Weekly Research Notes & Participation	30%
Revised Scholarly Essay	30%
Zine (Concept, Design, & Execution)	25%
Final Presentation and Reflection	15%
Total:	100%

Appendix A: Week-by-Week Research Schedule

ART 3996 — Honors College Mentored Research (Spring 2026)

This schedule outlines expected weekly focus areas, readings, writing, and production milestones. Specific readings may shift based on research needs. All weeks include a required mentor meeting and ongoing research documentation.

Week 1 — Orientation & Project Framing

Focus: Establish scope, expectations, and research questions

- Revisit original *Shimeji Simulation* essay
- Write a 1–2 page research reflection identifying unresolved questions
- Compile a working bibliography (philosophy, literature, visual media)

Mentor Meeting:

Project goals, workflow expectations, and refinement of research direction

Deliverables:

- Research reflection
 - Preliminary annotated reading list
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Week 2 — Existential Philosophy Foundations

Focus: Philosophical grounding

- Read selected existential philosophy texts
- Maintain annotated research notes focused on purpose, absurdity, and self-definition

Writing:

750–1000 words of exploratory writing (informal, generative)

Week 3 — Barriers, Constraints, and Systems

Focus: Barriers as philosophical and narrative structures

- Comparative readings across philosophy and narrative media
- Develop conceptual maps linking barriers to cultural gravity

Visual Practice:

Initial sketches, diagrams, or visual notes

Deliverables:

- Concept map
 - Revised working thesis statement
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Week 4 — Comparative Case Studies

Focus: Contextual analysis

- Analyze selected comparative texts or artworks
- Identify formal and thematic parallels with *Shimeji Simulation*

Writing:

Draft a comparative analysis section

Week 5 — Culture, Meaning, and Gravity

Focus: Cultural inheritance and meaning-making

- Read theory addressing culture and identity
- Apply theory directly to narrative analysis

Writing:

Expand cultural analysis section

Week 6 — Argument Structure & Organization

Focus: Essay architecture

- Create a detailed essay outline
- Identify gaps, redundancies, and structural issues

Mentor Meeting:

Structural critique and revision planning

Week 7 — Draft 1: Full Essay

Focus: Integration

- Produce a full essay draft (70–80% complete)
- Continue visual experimentation tied to essay sections

Deliverables:

- Full draft
 - Visual direction statement (1 page)
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Week 8 — Revision & Refinement

Focus: Depth, clarity, and cohesion

- Revise essay based on mentor feedback
- Clarify philosophical stakes and strengthen transitions

Checkpoint:

Confirm final essay direction prior to zine production

Week 9 — Zine as Scholarly Object

Focus: Format, audience, and accessibility

- Research zines as critical and academic formats
- Determine tone, pacing, and layout strategy

Studio Practice:

Initial layout and format experiments

Week 10 — Visual–Text Integration

Focus: Design as meaning-making

- Pair visuals with essay sections

- Test typography, spacing, and sequencing

Mentor Meeting:

Design critique and refinement

Week 11 — Zine Draft

Focus: Assembly

- Produce a complete zine draft
- Write a short design rationale

Deliverables:

- Zine draft
 - Design rationale
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Week 12 — Final Revisions

Focus: Polish and preparation

- Final essay edits
- Finalize zine for print

Deliverables:

- Final essay
 - Final zine (PDF and printed copy)
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Week 13 — Reflective Analysis

Focus: Metacognition and process

- Write a reflective analysis addressing research growth, challenges, and conceptual shifts

Week 14 — Presentation Development

Focus: Research communication

- Develop a 10–12 minute presentation
 - Select key excerpts and visuals
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Week 15 — Professionalization

Focus: Conferences and publication pathways

- Research potential conferences, journals, or submission venues
- Draft an abstract or proposal

Mentor Meeting:

Strategic guidance and feedback

Week 16 — Final Presentation & Wrap-Up

Focus: Synthesis and closure

Final Deliverables:

- Final presentation
- Complete research archive (notes, drafts, visuals)
- Final reflection memo

Ongoing Weekly Requirements (All Weeks)

- Maintain organized research notes
- Document visual and written process
- Prepare discussion points for mentor meetings
- Communicate progress and challenges proactively

ART 3996 Policies

Attendance & Participation Policy

Attendance is defined as:

- Attendance at scheduled mentor meetings
- Completion of weekly research deliverables

Missed meetings without communication may negatively affect the Participation grade. Students should notify the instructor as early as possible if rescheduling is necessary.

Late Work Policy

Because research builds cumulatively, deadlines are important.

- Late submissions may result in point deductions unless prior arrangements are made
- Drafts submitted late may limit the quality of feedback available
- Final deadlines must be met to complete the course

Extenuating circumstances should be communicated as soon as possible.

Academic Integrity

According to [UNT Policy 18.1.16](#), 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 a warning to expulsion from the university.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools Policy

Students enrolled in ART 3996 may use Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools (such as ChatGPT, DALL-E, Gemini, Grammarly, or similar platforms) **for limited purposes during the brainstorming, ideation, and research phases** of an assignment. Appropriate uses include generating ideas, exploring directions, defining unfamiliar terms for personal understanding, or organizing early thoughts.

AI tools may not be used to complete an assignment in full, including written work, visual work, or conceptual development. Final submissions must reflect the student's own thinking, decision-making, and creative labor.

Transparency Requirement

If you use AI at any point in your process, you must clearly document:

- **Which AI tool(s)** were used
- **How and when** the tool was used in your process
- **What decisions you made independently** after using the tool

This documentation may take the form of process notes, screenshots, supporting images, or a brief written reflection, as specified by the assignment.

Critical Use & Limitations

Students should be aware that AI-generated content is often inaccurate, incomplete, biased, or misleading. Overreliance on AI may also limit the development of your own critical thinking, visual language, and creative voice—skills that are central to this course.

Restrictions & Academic Integrity

- You may not submit unaltered or undocumented AI-generated material as your own work.
- Any assignment (written or visual) completed primarily or entirely through AI may receive a failing grade.
- Misrepresentation of AI-generated content constitutes academic dishonesty and will be addressed in accordance with university policy.

Instructor Review & Exceptions

The use of AI will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. If you have questions about whether a particular use of AI is appropriate—or would like to propose an exception—you must consult your lab instructor **before submitting the assignment**.

ODA Policy

The University of North Texas makes reasonable accommodation for students with disabilities. Students needing a reasonable academic accommodations must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the student will request their letter of accommodation. ODA will provide faculty with a reasonable accommodation letter via email to begin a private discussion regarding a student's specific needs in a course. Students 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 meet with faculty regarding their accommodations during 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](#).

Use of Student Work

A student owns the copyright for all work (e.g., software, photographs, reports, presentations, and email postings) they create within a class, and the University is not entitled to use any student's work without the student's permission unless all the following criteria are met:

- The work is used only once.
- The work is not used in its entirety.
- Use of the work does not affect any potential profits from the work.
- The student is not identified.
- The work is identified as student work.

If the use of the work does not meet all the above criteria, then the University office or department using the work must obtain the student's written permission.

Student Support Services

Mental Health

UNT provides mental health resources to students to help ensure there are numerous outlets to turn to that wholeheartedly care for and are there for students in need, regardless of the nature of an issue or its severity. Listed below are several resources on campus that can support your academic success and mental well-being:

- [Student Health and Wellness Center](#)
- [Counseling and Testing Services](#)
- [UNT Psychiatric Services](#)
- [Individual Therapy](#)

Chosen Names

A chosen name is a name that a person goes by that may or may not match their legal name. If you have a chosen name that is different from your legal name and would like that to be used in class, please let the instructor know. Below is a list of resources for updating your chosen name at UNT:

- [UNT Records](#)
- [UNT ID Card](#)
- [Legal Name](#)

Pronouns

The concept of pronouns (she/her, they/them, he/him, etc.) is a public way for people to address you, much like your name, and can be shared with a name when making an introduction. Just as we ask and don't assume someone's name, we should also ask and not assume someone's pronouns. Below is a list of additional resources regarding pronouns and their usage:

- [What are pronouns and why are they important?](#)
- [How do I use pronouns?](#)
- [How do I share my pronouns?](#)
- [How do I ask for another person's pronouns?](#)

- [How do I correct myself or others when the wrong pronoun is used?](#)

Additional Student Support Services

- [Registrar](https://registrar.unt.edu/registration) (https://registrar.unt.edu/registration)
- [Financial Aid](https://financialaid.unt.edu/) (https://financialaid.unt.edu/)
- [Student Legal Services](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-legal-services) (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-legal-services)
- [Career Center](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/career-center) (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/career-center)
- [UNT Food Pantry](https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/resources/food-pantry) (https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/resources/food-pantry)

Academic Student Support Services

[Academic Resource Center](https://clear.unt.edu/canvas/student-resources) (https://clear.unt.edu/canvas/student-resources)

[Academic Success Center](https://success.unt.edu/asc) (https://success.unt.edu/asc)

[UNT Libraries](https://library.unt.edu/) (https://library.unt.edu/)

[Writing Lab](http://writingcenter.unt.edu/) (http://writingcenter.unt.edu/)

****Your instructor of record reserves the right to change the syllabus/schedule as needed****