MUET 4500 / 5500: Introduction to Ethnomusicology

Instructor
Dr. Vivek Virani
(pronouns: he/him/his)

Email
Vivek.Virani@unt.edu

Class Time
Tues, Thurs.
3:00-4:20pm

Office Hours
Tues and Thurs.
11am-12pm, MUS 146
(Or by Appointment)

Course Overview
This course introduces students to the history, theory, and practice of ethnomusicology. It includes foundational texts from the discipline and current literature on emerging issues and topics. Students will be exposed to multiple perspectives from ethnomusicology and its related disciplines, including musicology, anthropology, folklore, critical theory, and cultural studies.

The primary objective of this course is to provide students with a richer understanding of the various roles, meanings, and functions of music in human life. Students who intend to pursue research in music will develop a diverse analytical toolkit to aid in their future endeavors, and all students should develop a greater appreciation for the many ways music may be practiced and understood as a meaningful human activity.

Evaluation
Your final grade will be based on the following criteria:

- Reading Responses: 150 points (30 points each)
- Other Written Assignments: 200 points
- Student-Led Article Presentation/Discussion: 100 points
- Final Project: 350 points
- Discussion Participation: 150 points
- TOTAL: 950 points

COURSE INFORMATION

Attendance and Participation
Students are expected to attend class sessions regularly, to come prepared and participate actively in all activities. Your presence in every class session is absolutely essential to your success in this course. Any student who accrues 5 unexcused absences will be asked to withdraw from the course. In case of a foreseeable absence, students should notify the instructor as soon as possible to arrange a way to make up for content or activities missed during a class session. In addition, consistent lateness, inattentiveness, or lack of participation may result in a grade penalty.

COVID-19 Attendance Statement

Academic excellence is important, but your health and wellbeing always take the first priority. If you are experiencing physical or mental health difficulties directly or indirectly related to the global
pandemic that may interfere with your success in this course, **please communicate with the instructor as soon as possible.** In most cases, the instructor will do whatever is possible to determine appropriate accommodations to help you succeed in the class.

**No student will be penalized for missing class due to illness or quarantine.**

If you are experiencing any [symptoms of COVID-19](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html) or suspect you have been exposed:

- Contact the UNT COVID Hotline at 844-366-5892 or COVID@unt.edu for guidance on actions to take due to symptoms, pending or positive test results, or potential exposure.
- Seek medical attention from the Student Health and Wellness Center (940-565-2333 or askSHWC@unt.edu) or your health care provider PRIOR to coming to campus. UNT also requires you to contact the UNT COVID Hotline at 844-366-5892 or COVID@unt.edu for guidance on actions to take due to symptoms, pending or positive test results, or potential exposure.

While attendance is an important part of succeeding in this class, your own health, and those of others in the community, is more important.

**Required Materials**

**Required Readings**

All required readings will be made available on Canvas. Students are responsible for completing each week’s assigned reading before Tuesday’s class.

**Technology Requirements for Remote Instruction**

Due to the spread of new variants of COVID-19, there is a possibility that we may need to switch to partially or fully online instruction midway through the semester. Accordingly, students are expected to have access to:

- A device capable of accessing Zoom and Canvas (desktop or laptop computer, tablet, etc.).
- A stable internet connection.
- A microphone and web camera (either discrete or integrated into the device used to access class meetings).
- Sufficient technological competence to use Zoom, Canvas, and Microsoft Office.

Further helpful information on how to succeed in a remote learning environment can be found at [https://online.unt.edu/learn](https://online.unt.edu/learn). If you have difficulty gaining access to any of the necessarily materials, please communicate with the instructor as soon as possible.
## Class Schedule

| Week 1 | **Introduction – Defining Music and Ethnomusicology**  
Reading: Bruno Nettl (2005 [1983]) “The Art of Combining Tones” |
|--------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Week 2 | **What Does it Mean to Study Music?**  
*The role of the ethnomusicologist; Components of “music culture”; Origins of Comparative Musicology*  
| Week 3 | **Early Ethno-musicology**  
*18th-19th ethnography; studies of “primitive” and “folk” musics; research on “evolutionism”; Cultural nationalism*  
| Week 4 | **Post-War American Ethnomusicology**  
*Lomax, Merriam, Hood; Anthropology of music, bi-musicality, “Cantometrics,” Musical functionalism*  
| Week 5 | **Field Research**  
*Choosing a site; documentation; participant-observation*  
Reading: Jackson (1987) chapters from *Fieldwork* |
| Week 6 | **How Musical is Man?**  
*“People making music”; musicality; music cognition*  
Reading: Blacking (1973) “Humanly Organized Sound”  
Student-Led Discussion I:  
Commodification, Consumption, and Cultural Tourism |
| Week 7 | **What does Music Mean?**  
*Music as symbol; “Frames”; Peircean semiotics; “Cultural Cohorts”*  
### Student-Led Discussion II: Community and Social Space

**Week 8**  
October 12 & 14  
**Virtual Ethnography**  
*Research design and planning; virtual ethnography methods*  
Reading: Chapters from *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds*

Student-Led Discussion III: Globalization and “Glocalization”  
Student-Led Discussion IV: Media, Technology, and Technoculture

### Writing Music and Culture

**Week 9**  
October 19 & 21  
**Writing Music and Culture**  
*Ethnographic writing; Interpretive writing, “Thick Description”*  
Reading: Geertz (1973) “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight”

Student-Led Discussion V: Gender and Sexuality

### Experiencing Music

**Week 10**  
October 26 & 28  
**Experiencing Music**  
*Participation vs. Presentation, Embodied Analysis, Music Cognition, Phenomenology*  
Reading: Turino (2008) “Participatory and Presentational Performance”

Student-Led Discussion VI: Nationalism and Transnationalism  
Student-Led Discussion VII: Embodiment and Cognition

### SOCIETY FOR ETHNOMUSICOLOGY ANNUAL CONFERENCE

**Week 11**  
November 2 & 4  
**Postmodern Critique of Ethnography**  
*Subjectivity; reflexivity; feminist ethnography*  
Reading: Clifford (1986) “Partial Truths”

Student-Led Discussion VIII: Racial and Ethnic Identities

### Decolonizing Music Studies

**Week 12**  
November 9 & 11  
**Decolonizing Music Studies**  
*Legacies of Colonial Anthropology; Socially Engaged Scholarship; Inclusive Theory and Praxis*  
Reading: TBD

Student-Led Discussion IX: Social and Political Action

### Writing Workshop

**Week 13**  
November 16 & 18  
**Writing Workshop**
Week 14-15  Student Final Presentations

November 23 & 30, December 2 & 7 (finals week)

**FINAL PAPER DUE THURSDAY DECEMBER 2**

Assignment Descriptions

Note: Students are responsible for regularly checking Canvas and staying aware of deadlines during the semester. With the exception of the Reading Responses (see below) assignments will receive a 5% grade penalty for each day they are submitted late. Assignments will not be accepted more than 1 week late without prior instructor approval.

Reading Responses

Students will be assigned 1-2 chapter-length readings (20-30 pages) per week on average. Approximately every two weeks, students will be required to submit a Reading Response on Canvas (in the Discussion section). Responses should be 3-4 paragraphs and should demonstrate a sincere and insightful engagement with the reading. Do not worry if you feel you did not understand everything! Your response can include statements like: “This was my understanding of what the author meant on page X, but I felt like I was missing something.” You are also welcome to respond to your classmate’s responses (in addition to submitting your own) to generate discussion.

Responses will be due by 8pm on Sunday evening for full credit. Late responses will receive partial credit. Responses will not be accepted 1 week after the deadline.

(Virtual) Ethnography Project

The primary form of research in ethnomusicology is called ethnographic participant-observation, which generally involves spending a long period of time in a musical community or space and interacting with music and people in that space. The final project in this class is a smaller-scale musical ethnography, intended to give students the experience of doing participant-observation and help them acquire some of research skills involved in ethnomusicological research.

During the course, you will conduct a small-scale music ethnography, culminating in a final presentation and an academic paper. You will determine an appropriate “field site,” which will typically be a community or event in which sound/music (broadly defined) plays an appreciable social role. Typically, this project MUST be done in-person with a musical community that shares a physical space. However, as COVID-19 and its Delta-variant surge continue to pose a significant and unpredictable threat, students will have the option of conducting “virtual ethnography” – research conducted through and about online events or communities. This semester, students will have the option of choosing a live or virtual/online “site” for research. All research sites must be approved by the instructor.

Live fieldwork sites must meet the following criteria:
• They should not (foreseeably) put the student at above-average risk for COVID exposure (e.g. crowded dance clubs or anti-vax rallies would not be approved)
• They should not be communities/sites that would cease to be options for research if the rise in COVID cases in Texas necessitated a return to large-scale quarantine (e.g. venues or festivals that would shut down and not transition to online/live-streaming modes of interaction).
• Note: students MAY choose live fieldwork communities that can reasonably be expected to continue meeting in virtual modes in the event of a quarantine (e.g. churches, ensembles, or venues that would transition from in-person to live-streamed services/performances).

Online fieldwork sites must meet the following criteria:

• They must involve community interaction (broadly defined); i.e., they cannot be one-way performances without space for discussion and conversation.
• The student must be able to “participate” in some ways beyond passive listening (e.g. engaging in chat/conversation, requesting interviews with participants or community members, etc.)

During your research, you will document music / sound, conduct interviews if possible, and interpret your findings to formulate a clear argument or thesis about people’s practices of making and/or listening to sound at your site.

Your goal is NOT simply to report your observations in the manner of a magazine article, but to provide your own interpretation and attempt to draw a broader cultural or social conclusion. Ideally, your project should make a statement about how people at your site/community find or create “meaning” through specific musical activities.

Project requirements

• You may NOT use a site with which you are already familiar or have already visited multiple times, nor a musical group/community of which you are already a member.
• The general requirement for fieldwork is a minimum of 3 visits to your chosen site.
• However, I recognize that the definition of a “visit” is vague when applied to an online community. As a general guideline, plan to do a minimum of 5-6 hours of engagement/interaction within your chosen site.
• If the student wishes to focus on a one-time event as concert or festival, they should consider the following options:
  ○ Is it possible to redefine the “site” in a way that allows for multiple visits? For example, if a concert is part of an on-going series, the series as a whole could be used as the “research site.”
If the focus is on a one-time event that draws largely from an existing community (e.g., an online forum or massive multiple game) than the student should find ways to engage with or document the community outside the event.

- Present your project (including photos / recordings) during final three weeks of class.

**Final Paper**

During Week 15, you will submit a final paper that should include the following:

- 12-pt Times New Roman font, 1-inch page margins,
- 1200-2000 Words (approximately 5-8 pages) for undergraduates.
- 2000-3000 Words (approximately 8-12 pages) for graduate students.
- A list of references formatted in a consistent style (Chicago Author-Date style preferred).
- A title that describes the central idea of your paper (not simply the name or date of the event).
- Ethnographic description of a musical event(s).
- Background research related to the community, genre, or theoretical ideas you are exploring in your paper. Include a minimum of three citations.
- Description of the sound / music itself in some form.
- Your own analysis / interpretation.
- Graduate students:
  - Your paper should include an original argument, or point that you want to state, about your research site. It should not merely be a description of events.
  - Your analysis must engage with at least one body of theory (from class discussions or outside scholarship).

**“My Music” Interview (75 points)**

Your assignment is to conduct an interview with a friend, fellow student, or family member (outside of your immediate family) and to write a description of this person's relationship with music from multiple viewpoints (minimum 4 pages, double-spaced). The interview itself should be at least 40min to an hour, but you are free to conduct a longer interview if your interviewewee is amenable (doing so may provide more information for you to write your paper). Ideally, the interview subject should be someone who does not consider themselves to be a musician primarily.

At the end of your paper, you must include an APPENDIX comprising a transcription of 5-10 minutes of the interview. In simple terms, this means you will write out that segment of the interview word-for-word. Transcribing interviews is very helpful for drawing your attention to statements/implications you may have missed while conducting the interview. You are not required to transcribe your entire interview, but may choose to do so if you feel it will help write your paper.

In the paper, you will draw from the ideas of Alan Merriam and Christopher Small in describing:
1. The interviewee’s conceptions of or ideas about music.
2. Interviewee's behaviors related to music.
3. The role music plays in your interviewee’s social relationships.

Questions that might help you answer these questions in sufficient depth include:

- What music do you listen to when you are by yourself? What do you listen to when you are with your friends?
- What music makes you remember your childhood?
- Why is X your favorite band/artist? What do they do differently from other bands/artists?
- What music do you really NOT like? What do you not like about it?
- What does music mean to you?
- Are there any songs you associate with memories of special times or places?
- Try to think of other questions that are specific to your interviewee, or that follow up on responses they have already given.

Your paper should use quotations from the interview to illustrate your statements, but should NOT consist primarily of long block quotations. Quotations should be chosen selectively to illustrate specific points - you will find that your peers can be remarkably poetic when they talk about music.

Student-Led Article Presentation and Discussion (50 points)

Each group (2-3 students) will present a summary of the chosen article and lead a discussion about the concepts and modes of research it addresses. The presentations will take place during class-time, using screensharing and your choice of platform (Powerpoint, Keynote, Prezi, etc.) You may contact the instructor if you would like to do a technical run-through of your presentation beforehand to ensure everything works as planned.

Your presentation should include:

1. Your names and article title
2. Research Review: Mention important articles or scholars who have dealt with these issues in the past (this may require a bit of searching!)
3. Important terms or concepts related to topic or used in the article.
   1. Cultural Terms - "insider" names of specific ideas/principles discussed in the article.
   2. Conceptual / theoretical terms - usage might be coined by the author, or might refer to larger bodies of cultural/social theory.
4. Description of the author’s main argument.
5. Relevant audio / video / YouTube examples. These examples should be discussed and explained within the context of the article – do not just show tangentially related videos!
6. After summarizing the article, your last slides should contain quotes or questions for class discussion.
• Discussion should include critique or expansion of the authors’ arguments. What are some limitations of the author’s approach? What might they have been able to better understand if they had used a different approach?

• Think of questions to engage your classmates and challenge them to think about the author’s arguments in broader contexts. Do the author’s conclusions have implications beyond the specific community they are studying? How might their intellectual approach be used in research about other communities?

Musical Documentary Report (Undergraduate Students Only)

Your assignment is to watch a documentary film about a musical community, movement, individual, or event, and write a report. Your report should summarize what you learned from the film and offer a review/critique. The review/critique should focus on the cultural significance of the performances/people/events involved.

1. The instructor will provide a list of suggested documentaries, but you are welcome to suggest one that is not on the list (with instructor approval).

2. Ideally, this assignment should be an opportunity for you to learn about a musical genre or community that is new to you. That means that, in most cases, films about contemporary American popular musicians would NOT be suitable. However, you are welcome to suggest a film that you feel might be an exception.

3. In your review, describe not only what kinds of music or performances are depicted in the film, but why they are culturally significant. Do they reveal anything about broader patterns of identity or values for the cultures involved? Are they used to change the values of the cultures in which they take place?

4. In your critique, focus on how the music and people are depicted. Do the filmmakers seem to have a particular narrative/message/ideological stance that they would like to impress upon viewers? Do they do so effectively? What kind of relationships do they have with the subjects of the film (if that is made clear)? How might that impact our understanding of the topic(s) presented?

Critical Ethnography Review (Graduate Students Only)

Your assignment is to read an ethnographic monograph (i.e., a book by a single author that is based on ethnographic fieldwork) in the discipline of ethnomusicology and to write a critical review. Critical reviews usually follow this general structure:

1. (1-2 paragraphs) Introduction: background information about the author and topic. Include information about the author’s research methods (where and when did they do research, etc.) and their main topic. Be sure to address what is new/different about this book and what issues the author is centrally interested in exploring.

2. (1 paragraph per chapter) Chapter-by-chapter summary – this will make up most of your review. Describe the main ideas of each chapter, and remark on what evidence the author provides to support these ideas. You may also comment on how effective you think the author’s arguments are.
3. Concluding thoughts: comment on your overall thoughts about the book: what are some ideas that resonated with you? Did the book change your thinking about any issues or open you with new questions and ideas?

Remember: the key to critical review is that you assess the strengths and weaknesses of the author’s arguments. The basis for critique is not merely personal opinions, but an analysis of the author’s logic and use of evidence.

The best way to get a sense of how to write a review is to read a few of the book reviews in the Ethnomusicology journal. You can find issues in the library or at www.jstor.org/journal/ethnomusicology (you will need to access the site from the UNT network or VPN). You may even find other reviews about the same book that you are reviewing. You are welcome to discuss some of those reviewers critiques and comment on whether or not you agree with them, or if there are issues you found interesting that the other reviewers decided not to comment on (be sure to cite these reviews at the end of your review).

If you are having trouble finding an ethnographic monograph you would like to review, a great place to start is the list of works that have won the Alan Merriam Prize, the yearly award for best monograph published in the field of ethnomusicology. Alternatively, if you are interested in finding a monograph on a specific musical genre or conceptual topic, you may work with the instructor or the music librarians to find options.

POLICIES AND RESOURCES

Writing Lab

Strong writing skills are an important asset in academic and professional life in every field. During class, we will work to improve student writing skills through instructor feedback and group workshops. However, many students will benefit from intensive focus on writing skills that we will not have time to provide during class. I encourage all students who wish to further develop their writing skills to work with the UNT Writing Lab. http://writinglab.unt.edu/

Academic Integrity

Students caught cheating or plagiarizing will receive a "0" for that particular assignment or exam. Additionally, the incident will be reported to the Dean of Students, who may impose further penalty. According to the UNT catalog, the term "cheating" includes, but is not limited to: a. use of any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, or examinations; b. dependence upon the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments; c. the acquisition, without permission, of tests or other academic material belonging to a faculty or staff member of the university; d. dual submission of a paper or project, or resubmission of a paper or project to a different class without express permission from the instructor(s); or e. any other act designed to give a student an unfair advantage. The term "plagiarism" includes, but is not limited to: a. the knowing or negligent use by
paraphrase or direct quotation of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment; and b. the knowing or negligent unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic materials.  https://policy.unt.edu/sites/default/files/06.003.AcadIntegrity.Final_.pdf

ODA Statement

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking 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 an accommodation letter. You can now request your Letters of Accommodation ONLINE and ODA will mail your Letters of Accommodation to your instructors. You may wish to begin a private discussion with your professors regarding your specific needs in a course. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester. For additional information see the Office of Disability Access.

See: disability.unt.edu. Phone: (940) 565-4323

Counseling and Testing

UNT’s Center for Counseling and Testing has an available counselor whose position includes 16 hours per week of dedicated service to students in the College of Music and the College of Visual Arts and Design. Please visit the Center’s website for further information: http://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services.

For more information on mental health issues, please visit: https://speakout.unt.edu.

The counselor for music students is:

Myriam Reynolds
Chestnut Hall, Suite 311
(940) 565-2741
Myriam.reynolds@unt.edu

Add/Drop Policy

Please be reminded that dropping classes or failing to complete and pass registered hours may make you ineligible for financial aid. In addition, if you drop below half-time enrollment you may be required to begin paying back your student loans. After the 12th class day, students must first submit a completed “Request to Drop” form to the Registrar’s Office. The last day for a student to drop a class in Fall, 2021 is November 12. Information about add/drop may be found at: https://registrar.unt.edu/registration/dropping-class

Student Resources

The University of North Texas has many resources available to students. For a complete list, go to: https://www.unt.edu/sites/default/files/resource_sheet.pdf