# History of American Country Music

*“Country music isn’t a guitar, it isn’t a banjo, it isn’t a melody, it isn’t a lyric. It’s a feeling.”*

*-Waylon Jennings*

## Course Overview

### Class Meetings

*Denton, TX: May 19-June 4 and June 19*

*Nashville, TN: June 8-17*

Classroom Hours: Mo/Tu/We/Th 10:00 – 11:50 am

Classroom: Wooten Hall 262

## Instructor Information

 **Dr. Wesley Phelps** (he/him)

Wooten Hall 255

wesley.phelps@unt.edu

Student Drop-In Hours: Mo/Tu/We/Th 12:00-12:30 pm or by appointment

**Dr. Danielle Dumaine**

(she/her)

Wooten Hall 245

danielle.dumaine@unt.edu

Student Drop-In Hours: Mo/Tu/We/Th 12:00-12:30 or by appointment

## Course Description, Objectives, Materials, and Assignments

### Course Description

This course examines the history and evolution of country music and its subgenres in the United States from the early twentieth century through to the present day. We will explore how country music reflects larger social, cultural, historical, economic, political, ethnic, and demographic changes taking place, paying particular attention to concepts of authenticity, race, gender, sexuality, politics, and popular culture.

### Course Objectives

1. Describe and analyze the varieties of music that fall under the umbrella term “country music.”
2. Identify the diverse foundational elements of country music.
3. Evaluate contributions of influential artists and others in the continuing development and evolution of country music.
4. Articulate an understanding of how social, political, and economic factors have shaped country music and how country music has influenced society.
5. Understand the role of country music in American culture and analyze how the history of country music is presented to the public in the city of Nashville.

### Required Materials

[*Country Music*](https://libproxy.library.unt.edu/login?url=https://video.alexanderstreet.com/p/99X1GklRx), dir. by Ken Burns, PBS documentary, 8 episodes – available streaming via UNT Libraries

Additional materials will be made available on Canvas

### Assignments

#### Introduction Paper, Due May 19 by 11:59 pm, 5% of Final Grade

**Write a short essay (1 page or less) introducing yourself to us.** This assignment is designed to allow us to get to know you better, so tell us your pronouns, whether you have a preferred name that is different from what is on the class roster, where you are from, what your major is and why you are interested in that subject, what you hope to learn in this course, any fears or concerns you have about this course, and at least one interesting thing about you. You may also include a photo of yourself, which will help us learn names. Including a photo is optional but greatly appreciated.

#### Song “Bibliography” and Analysis, variable due dates, 15% of Final Grade

On the second day of class, you will select one class meeting to **present a musical bibliography for the class meeting** (3-5 songs that embody the themes of the day). You will play one song for the class, present the historical context for the song and its creator(s), and guide everyone through a close analysis of the lyrics.

#### Midterm Exam, Due June 5 by 11:59 pm, 20% of Final Grade

Before our departure to Nashville, you will complete a **midterm exam consisting of short essay questions** that ask you to reflect on and analyze the material covered over from May 20-30th. ***Successful completion of this exam is a prerequisite for participation in the travel portion of the course.***

#### Nashville Reflection Journal, variable due dates, 20% of Final Grade

**You will keep a reflection journal while we are in Nashville.** Your journal can include information such as your personal thoughts about each day’s excursions, themes that you have noticed in common between museums, exhibits, and other sites, ideas you would like to express, questions and critiques regarding what you have seen and experienced, areas you would like to explore further, etc. You will be graded on the overall thoughtfulness, originality, relevant content, and attention to detail of these responses. While these reflections will be relatively casual and written in the first person, your writing must follow conventions of Standard American English.

*In-Class Engagement, 20% of Final Grade*

This course is designed to facilitate active engagement with the reading and viewing materials. Much of the time we spend together in class will be devoted to discussion. In order for everyone to reap the full benefits of these discussions, you should arrive in class having read and/or viewed to the assignment for that day. We encourage you to offer your own thoughtful comments about the reading material during our discussions. We also realize that not every student is outspoken. Additional ways to demonstrate your engagement are: taking productive notes during lectures; asking questions during lectures and discussions; answering questions posed by us and by other students; and otherwise being present, alert, and involved in what is happening during class.

#### Final Mixtape Assignment, Due June 20 by 11:59 PM, 20% of Final Grade

The final assignment in this course will ask you to **create a mixtape and accompanying paper (5-6 pages) exploring a theme in the history of American country music.** Your paper should provide an overview of your chosen theme, justify and explain your song choices, analyze the songs, contextualize the songs within the broader cultural, social, and/or political moment in which they were produced, and articulate the significance of your theme to the broader history of American country music.

### Grading Scale:

### A = 90-100%; B = 80-89%; C = 70-79%; D = 60-69%; F = 59% or below

## Course Schedule

**Note: If a viewing requirement appears on a particular date, please view it before arriving in class.**

| **Date** | **Topic / Viewing** | **Assignment Due (by 11:59 pm)** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Week 1** | | |
| May 19 | **Course Introduction** | **Introduction Paper Due** |
| May 20 | **The Roots of Country Music**  [*Country Music* documentary, Episode 1: The Rub (Beginnings -1933)](https://libproxy.library.unt.edu/login?url=https://video.alexanderstreet.com/p/99X1GklRx) | **Musical Bibliography Date Selection Due** |
| May 21 | **Hard Times and the Singing Cowboy**  [*Country Music* documentary, Episode 2: Hard Times (1933-1945)](https://libproxy.library.unt.edu/login?url=https://video.alexanderstreet.com/p/J8KXK5M1o) |  |
| May 22 | *No Class Meeting* |  |
| **Week 2** | | |
| May 26 | *Memorial Day – No Class Meeting* |  |
| May 27 | **Hank, Honky Tonks, and Rockabilly**  [*Country Music* documentary, Episode 3: The Hillbilly Shakespeare (1945-1953)](https://libproxy.library.unt.edu/login?url=https://video.alexanderstreet.com/p/z64l4M4GZ) |  |
| May 28 | **Countrypolitan and the Nashville Sound**  [*Country Music* documentary, Episode 4: I Can’t Stop Loving You (1953-1963)](https://libproxy.library.unt.edu/login?url=https://video.alexanderstreet.com/p/WPKBK3DVE) |  |
| May 29 | **Country Alternatives and Social Upheaval**  [*Country Music* documentary, Episode 5: The Sons and Daughters of America (1964-1968)](https://libproxy.library.unt.edu/login?url=https://video.alexanderstreet.com/p/oZnJnwjRN) |  |
| **Week 3** | | |
| June 2 | **A Divided America**  [*Country Music* documentary, Episode 6: Will the Circle Be Unbroken? (1968-1972)](https://libproxy.library.unt.edu/login?url=https://video.alexanderstreet.com/p/NOK1KznE8) |  |
| June 3 | **A New Era of Country Music**  [*Country Music* documentary, Episode 7: Are We Sure Hank Done It This Way? (1973-1983)](https://libproxy.library.unt.edu/login?url=https://video.alexanderstreet.com/p/z64l4LGRO) |  |
| June 4 | **Looking Backward, Moving Forward / Travel Prep**  [*Country Music* documentary, Episode 8: Don’t Get Above Your Raisin’ (1984-1996)](https://libproxy.library.unt.edu/login?url=https://video.alexanderstreet.com/p/z64l4Wm45) |  |
| June 5 | *No Class Meeting* | **Midterm Exam Due**  ***YOU MUST PASS THE MIDTERM TO PARTICIPATE IN THE NASHVILLE PORTION OF THE CLASS*** |
| **Weeks 4 and 5: Nashville Trip and Wrap-Up Class Meeting** | | |
| June 8-17 | *Nashville Travel (see Nashville Itinerary)* |  |
| June 18 | *No Class Meeting* | **Nashville Journal Due** |
| June 19 | **Nashville Wrap-Up** |  |
| June 20 | *No Class Meeting* | **Final Mixtape Assignment Due** |

## Course Expectations

### Land Acknowledgment

Acknowledging the land is an Indigenous protocol, and it is important to note that the University of North Texas in Denton is located on the un-ceded territory of the Wichita and Caddo Affiliated Tribes. The city of Nashville, Tennessee, occupies the ancestral hunting and traditional lands of the Cherokee, Shawnee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Creek peoples. Today, these people have nation boundaries in Oklahoma, North Carolina, and Mississippi, after the Indian Removal Act of 1830 led to the forced removal of southern tribes west of the Mississippi River. It is important to study the long processes that have brought us all to reside on this land, and to seek to better understand our places within these histories.

### Attendance

Research has shown that students who attend class are more likely to be successful. The knowledge and skills you will gain in this course highly depend on your participation in class learning activities. Because of that, we expect you to attend all class sessions unless you are ill or have a valid reason for missing. We plan to track class attendance to help us understand how and when students are engaging in the course. If you are ill or have another valid reason for missing class, please contact us in advance of the absence.

### Communication

Student drop-in hours offer you an opportunity to ask for clarification or find support with understanding class material. We want to be as accessible to you as we can be. We encourage you to visit us to discuss any aspect of this course or whatever else is on your mind. If you cannot visit during drop-in hours, please email us and we will find a time that works for you.

### Diversity and Inclusion

As members of the UNT community, we have all made a commitment to be part of an institution that respects and values the identities of the students and employees with whom we interact. Consistent with UNT’s policy on diversity and inclusion, we view this commitment as encompassing the intersecting identities that make us unique individuals, including, but not limited to, ethnic/racial identity, nationality, sexual identity, gender identity and expression, age, religious/spiritual beliefs, socioeconomic status, body shape/size, physical ability status, and varying points of view. Together we will strive to build a classroom environment that recognizes and acknowledges the impact of stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, oppression, power, and privilege and work to create a learning atmosphere that embraces and celebrates diversity. If you ever have a concern about the inclusivity of this learning space, please come and talk to us.

### Course Conduct

​We are committed to creating a positive learning environment where diverse perspectives are recognized and valued as a source of strength. We request that you work with us to create a classroom culture based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion. As a class we will approach all discussions with respect and civility. Disagreements and debates in academic discourse are expected and welcome, but personal attacks are never OK, and will not be tolerated. We strive to ensure an open and welcoming classroom for all students. If we ever miss the mark, please don’t hesitate to come and talk to us. We are all learning together.

### Caregiver Responsibilities

We have great respect for students who are balancing their pursuit of education with the responsibilities of caring for children or other family members. If you run into challenges that require you to miss a class, please contact us. There may be some instances of flexibility we can offer to support your learning.

### School-Life Conflict

Many students face obstacles to their education as a result of work or family obligations or unforeseen personal difficulties. If you are experiencing challenges throughout the semester that are impacting your ability to succeed in this course, or in your undergraduate career more broadly, please reach out to us immediately so that we can work together to form a plan for your academic success. If you are unable to attend our student drop-in hours, please email to set up a time that works for you or to arrange a meeting by Zoom.

### Emergency Notifications and Procedures

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials.

### ADA Accommodation Statement

We are committed to the principle of universal learning. This means that our classroom, our virtual spaces, our practices, and our interactions will be as inclusive as possible. Mutual respect, civility, and the ability to listen to and observe others carefully are crucial to universal learning. Any student with particular needs should contact the Office of Disability Access (ODA) at the beginning of the semester. If necessary, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter that you can submit to me. Then we can work out the details of any accommodations needed for this 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. For additional information, refer to the [Office of Disability Access](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access) website (http://www.unt.edu/oda). You may also contact ODA by phone at (940) 565-4323.

### Academic Integrity

The University of North Texas promotes the integrity of learning and embraces the core values of trust and honesty. Academic integrity is based on educational principles and procedures that protect the rights of all participants in the educational process and validate the legitimacy of degrees awarded by the University. In the investigation and resolution of allegations of student academic dishonesty, the University’s actions are intended to be corrective, educationally sound, fundamentally fair, and based on reliable evidence. Students should be aware that “acts of dishonesty” include cheating, plagiarism, furnishing misleading information, and forgery. We will uphold the policies and regulations of the University. A finding of academic dishonesty in this course will result in a grade of 0 for the work in question. Students have the right to appeal a finding of academic dishonesty.

### Late Work

In 2025, we are all living through multiple world-historical events and lead complicated lives – juggling health, child care, care of others, work, finances, and of course mental health. With this in mind, we will accept late work on a case-by-case basis whenever it makes sense to do so. If a situation arises where you cannot submit work by the due date, please notify us that you will be submitting the assignment late. **Please note, however, that we cannot accept any late work after Friday, June 20th at 11:59 PM.**

### *Additional UNT Policies Available on Canvas*