**ENGL 3385-001: Topics in Rhetoric: Music/Sound**



**Instructor:** Dr. Michael Brittain

**Day/Time** M/W 1:00 - 2:20pm, TH 115

**Email: brittain@uta.edu**

**Office:** 413 Central Library

**Phone:** (817) 272-2692 (English Department)

**Office Hours:** 2:30 – 4pm M/W, or by appointment

**Faculty Profile:** https://mentis.uta.edu/explore/profile/michael-brittain

**Required Texts:**

*Theorizing Sound Writing*, Deborah Kapchan

*Shadowbahn*, Steve Erickson[[1]](#footnote-1)

Additional readings provided as PDF files on Blackboard

Access to Netflix or streaming movie capability

Access to Spotify or music streaming capability

Notebook/Journal (for in-class writing)

**Course Description:**

The connections between rhetoric and music have been questioned by musicologists for centuries, with many focusing on the relations of text to music. With the recent rise in popularity of sound studies, the questioning of rhetorical concepts in regard to music has broadened – allowing for a more expansive approach to textual, musical, and film analysis – creating what Deborah Kapchan refers to as “genres of listening.” In this course, we will apply these expanded approaches not only in the act of listening to music (be it lyric-driven, instrumental, ambient, etc.) but also by participating in “close-listening” of both songs and texts, which will involve asking questions of space, acoustics, and temporality, and their rhetorical implications. We will apply these rhetorical strategies to examples of music memoir, film (in the genres of soundtrack and music documentaries), fiction, and, of course, song. Overall, we will explore the complex relation of sound and culture through multiple approaches and genres in hopes of answering the question: “Are any of us *really* listening?”

**Student Learning Outcomes:**

* Students should be able to compose and communicate more effectively in using both written and sonic media.
* Students should have a clearer understanding of the intertwined histories of rhetoric, sound, and writing.
* Students should be able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a variety of texts.
* Students should be able to analyze and interpret texts and films employing close reading skills as well as a variety of other theories and methods employed in English Studies.
* Students should be able to effectively communicate orally with small groups and in front of the entire class.
* By the end of the semester, students should be able to discuss and enact rhetorical principles, practices, and theories that involve sound studies and their own listening and compositional approaches.

**Assignments:**

*Readings*: Complete the entire reading selection by the discussion date. Since some of the readings we’ll be studying are fairly long, I advise you to read ahead when possible. I also suggest that you annotate **and** take text notes to help you keep track of terms and theoretical approaches. This not only helps in you in preparation for the terminology exam; it makes you an active rather than a passive reader. Also, we will have a midterm exam that will cover the sound studies theories and terminology that we will be discussing in class (see below). Keeping an annotated list of these theories and terms will not only be helpful with the exam, but the list will be a key source to reference for the final podcast project.

NOTE: The following are brief descriptions of the major writing assignments. More detailed assignment prompts will be provided to you and discussed in class in the coming weeks.

*Sound Writings*: You will write five short responses which will address the course readings and sound/listening concepts that we will discuss in class. Prompts will be given in class for each sound writing paper. Critical analysis is more than an opinion (I liked/didn’t like a reading or agreed/disagreed with a point). To be “critical” requires identifying the criteria that informs your judgment (explaining *why* you had that response). These essays give you a space to explore your reactions to the reading, discuss an element/concept that you find intriguing, or ask questions about the text and/or its historical context. Use close textual analysis of the readings to illuminate your discussion. These assignments will be graded on the originality of your thought and the depth of analysis used to support your position.

*Audiography*: This assignment (adapted from Jentery Sayers) allows us to question how sounds influence our everyday lives and help form our individual cultural “soundscapes.” Each student will work on recording a series of sounds that to some degree “represent him/her sonically.” The Audiography will also allow each of us to gain some initial experience in recording and editing audio.

*Rhetorical/Music Analysis*: Students will be provided a list of recordings in which to chose to perform his/her rhetorical analysis. The analysis will be based around the rhetorical impact of the recording as well as how sound (not lyrics) contributes to the argumentative approach of the recording.

*Sound Terminology Exam*: This exam will cover the major theories and terms concerning sound, rhetoric, and music. As state above in the Readings section, keeping copious notes and annotating the readings will help you greatly with this exam.

*Film Sound Study*: From a short list of films that are known for being “sonically exceptional,” students will choose a film and analyze it from a sound theory perspective while also addressing the film’s rhetorical characteristics.

*Podcast (Group Project)*: For this project, each group of 4-5 students will choose one specific sound studies theory (acoustemology, spatiality, ambience, etc.) in order to put together a podcast series. Each student will create a 5-7 minute podcast. Students can use any of the semester’s assignments as evidence or talking points in their podcast. Approach and content are completely open as long as the podcast series is reflective of a single idea or theme.

NOTE: For those of you who have little experience with recording or editing sound, fear not! We will have class time in which we will go over recording and editing techniques. Also, I will reserve time in the UTA Writing Center’s Writer’s Studio so that students can record or edit.

**Grading:**

The course grade will be determined as follows:

Sound Writings 15%

Audiography 15%

Film Sound Study 15%

Rhetorical/Music Analysis 20%

Sound Terminology Exam 15%

Podcast 20%

**Please Note**: I will also take into account ***the quality of your preparation*** for class and ***your contribution to class discussions***. **All papers and exams** must be completed to receive credit for the course.

In accordance with the UTA undergraduate catalogue, final grades are as follows:

90-100%: A

80-89%: B

70-79%: C

60-69%: D

Below 60%: F

**Keep all papers** until you receive your final grade from the university. You cannot challenge a grade without evidence. Students are expected to keep track of their performance throughout the semester and seek guidance from available sources (including the instructor) if their performance drops below satisfactory levels.

**Paper Reuse Policy**

You are not allowed, under any circumstances, to reuse papers from prior classes in this course or any other course that you have taken at any institution. Reusing papers does not demonstrate any advance in knowledge or skill, and so would not be helpful for you either in terms of your learning this semester, or for me in terms of assessing this learning. If you feel your situation constitutes a clear or significant exception to this rule, you must discuss this with me prior to the due date of the first draft.

**Turning in Assignments to Blackboard**

All major assignments in this course will be submitted to Blackboard. I will not accept any assignments via e-mail. All assignments submitted to Blackboard must be saved as a .doc or .docx file to ensure that I am able to open them on my computer. It is your responsibility to ensure that all of your work is saved in this way and submitted in the correct format. If you submit work in the wrong format, then you will receive a zero for the assignment.

**Attendance**

At The University of Texas at Arlington, taking attendance is not required but attendance is a critical indicator in student success. Each faculty member is free to develop his or her own methods of evaluating students’ academic performance, which includes establishing course-specific policies on attendance. As the instructor of this section, I have established the following attendance policy: students can miss 3 classes without penalty. Any absences over 3 will result in a 5% drop in your final grade for each day missed beyond this limit. However, while UT Arlington does not require instructors to take attendance in their courses, the U.S. Department of Education requires that the University have a mechanism in place to mark when Federal Student Aid recipients “begin attendance in a course.” UT Arlington instructors will report when students begin attendance in a course as part of the final grading process. Specifically, when assigning a student a grade of F, faculty report the last date a student attended their class based on evidence such as a test, participation in a class project or presentation, or an engagement online via Blackboard. This date is reported to the Department of Education for federal financial aid recipients.

**Tardiness**

You are college students, and I should not have to remind you to show up to class on time. Some in-class writing assignments are given at beginning of class, so be on time. When students arrive late, it disrupts what we are doing and takes away from our class time. Therefore, excessive tardiness will not be tolerated. Every two tardies (that is, coming in after we’ve begun work) will count as one absence.

**Late Assignments**

Papers are due at the beginning of class on the due date specified. Summary responses **will not** be accepted late. Assignments turned in after the class has begun will receive a ten-percent deduction unless the instructor has agreed to late submission *in advance of the due date*. For each calendar day following, the work will receive an additional ten percent deduction. Work is not accepted after three late days. If you must be absent, your work is still due on the assigned date.

**Drop Policy:** Students may drop or swap (adding and dropping a class concurrently) classes through self-service in MyMav from the beginning of the registration period through the late registration period. After the late registration period, students must see their academic advisor to drop a class or withdraw. Undeclared students must see an advisor in the University Advising Center. Drops can continue through a point two-thirds of the way through the term or session. It is the student's responsibility to officially withdraw if they do not plan to attend after registering. **Students will not be automatically dropped for non-attendance**. Repayment of certain types of financial aid administered through the University may be required as the result of dropping classes or withdrawing. For more information, contact the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships (<http://wweb.uta.edu/aao/fao/>).

**Expectations for Out-of-Class Study**

A general rule of thumb is this: for every credit hour earned, a student should spend 3 hours per week working outside of class. Hence, a 3-credit course might have a minimum expectation of 9 hours of reading, study, etc.

**Communication**

I have provided my UTA email address so that you can contact me whenever you have questions. If I need to contact you, I will use Blackboard or MyMav to email you. This means that you have a responsibility to know what your UTA email address is and to check that address regularly.

**Conferences and Questions**

I have three regularly scheduled office hours each week. These times are reserved for students to drop by or to make an appointment to discuss course assignments, grades, or other class-related concerns. I will be happy to make other appointment times for you if your class schedule conflicts with regular conference times or if I am not available on certain days. If you receive a grade on an assignment about which you have questions, please wait twenty-four hours before discussing it with me. This gives you time to process the assignment comments and to think about how your course work meets the requirements set forth for each assignment.

**Classroom behavior**

Class sessions are short and require your full attention. All cell phones, laptops, and other electronic devices should be turned off and put away when entering the classroom; all earpieces should be removed. Store materials from other classes, reading not related to this class, bulky bags, and other distractions so that you can concentrate on the readings and discussions each day. Bring book(s) and Blackboard readings (heavily annotated and carefully read) to every class. Students are expected to participate respectfully in class, to listen to other class members, and to comment appropriately. I also expect consideration and courtesy from students. Professors are to be addressed appropriately and communicated with professionally.

According to *Student Conduct and Discipline*, "students are prohibited from engaging in or attempting to engage in conduct, either alone or in concert with others, that is intended to obstruct, disrupt, or interfere with, or that in fact obstructs, disrupts, or interferes with any instructional, educational, research, administrative, or public performance or other activity authorized to be conducted in or on a University facility. Obstruction or disruption includes, but is not limited to, any act that interrupts, modifies, or damages utility service or equipment, communication service or equipment, or computer equipment, software, or networks” (UTA Handbook or Operating Procedures, Ch. 2, Sec. 2-202). Students who do not respect the guidelines listed above or who disrupt other students’ learning may be asked to leave class and/or referred to the Office of Student Conduct.

**Classroom Visitors:**  Only students officially enrolled in this section are allowed to attend class meetings. Students may not bring guests (children, spouses, friends, family) to class unless an academic request has been submitted and approved by the instructor well in advance of the proposed class visit. Children are not allowed in class as visitors at any time.

**Academic Integrity.** All students enrolled in this course are expected to adhere to the UT Arlington Honor Code:

*I pledge, on my honor, to uphold UT Arlington’s tradition of academic integrity, a tradition that values hard work and honest effort in the pursuit of academic excellence.*

*I promise that I will submit only work that I personally create or contribute to group collaborations, and I will appropriately reference any work from other sources. I will follow the highest standards of integrity and uphold the spirit of the Honor Code.*

It is the philosophy of The University of Texas at Arlington that academic dishonesty is a completely unacceptable mode of conduct and will not be tolerated in any form. All persons involved in academic dishonesty will be disciplined in accordance with University regulations and procedures. Discipline may include suspension or expulsion from the University. "Scholastic dishonesty includes but is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts" (Regents’ Rules and Regulations, Series 50101, Section 2.2)

You can get in trouble for plagiarism by failing to correctly indicate places where you are making use of the work of another or colluding with another to prepare assignments. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the conventions of citation by which you indicate which ideas are not your own and how your reader can find those sources. Read your textbook and/or handbook for more information on quoting and citing properly to avoid plagiarism. If you still do not understand, ask your instructor. All students caught plagiarizing or cheating will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct.

**Disability Accommodations:** UTArlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of all federal equal opportunity legislation, including *The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), The Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act (ADAAA),* and *Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.* All instructors at UT Arlington are required by law to provide “reasonable accommodations” to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of disability. Students are responsible for providing the instructor with official notification in the form of **a letter certified** by the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD).Only those students who have officially documented a need for an accommodation will have their request honored. Students experiencing a range of conditions (Physical, Learning, Chronic Health, Mental Health, and Sensory) that may cause diminished academic performance or other barriers to learning may seek services and/or accommodations by contacting:

**The Office for Students with Disabilities, (OSD)** [www.uta.edu/disability](http://www.uta.edu/disability) or calling 817-272-3364. Information regarding diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining disability-based academic accommodations can be found at [www.uta.edu/disability](http://www.uta.edu/disability).

Counseling and Psychological Services, (CAPS) [www.uta.edu/caps/](http://www.uta.edu/caps/) or calling 817-272-3671 is also available to all students to help increase their understanding of personal issues, address mental and behavioral health problems and make positive changes in their lives.

**The Writing Center**

The Writing Center, Room 411 in the Central Library, offers tutoring for any writing you are assigned while a student at UT-Arlington. You may schedule appointments online by following directions available at www.uta.edu/owl, by calling 817 272-2601, or by visiting the Writing Center. If you come to the Writing Center without an appointment, you will be helped on a first-come, first-served basis as tutors become available. Writing Center tutors are carefully chosen and trained, and they can assist you with any aspect of your writing, from understanding an assignment to revising an early draft to polishing a final draft. However, the Writing Center is not an editing service; tutors will not correct your grammar or rewrite your assignment for you, but they will help you become a better editor of your own writing. I encourage each of you to use the Writing Center. Website: [www.uta.edu/owl](file:///C:\Users\owner\Desktop\www.uta.edu\owl).

**Non-Discrimination Policy:** *The University of Texas at Arlington does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, genetic information, and/or veteran status in its educational programs or activities it operates. For more information, visit*[*uta.edu/eos*](http://www.uta.edu/hr/eos/index.php)*.*

**Title IX Policy:** The University of Texas at Arlington (“University”) is committed to maintaining a learning and working environment that is free from discrimination based on sex in accordance with Title IX of the Higher Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in educational programs or activities; Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII), which prohibits sex discrimination in employment; and the Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act (SaVE Act). Sexual misconduct is a form of sex discrimination and will not be tolerated. *For information regarding Title IX, visit* [www.uta.edu/titleIX](http://www.uta.edu/titleIX) or contact Ms. Jean Hood, Vice President and Title IX Coordinator at (817) 272-7091 or <jmhood@uta.edu>.

**Emergency Exit Procedures**

Should we experience an emergency event that requires us to vacate the building, students should exit the room and move toward the nearest exit, which is at the east and west ends of the building. When exiting the building during an emergency, one should never take an elevator but should use the stairwells. Faculty members and instructional staff will assist students in selecting the safest route for evacuation and will make arrangements to assist handicapped individuals.

**Electronic Communication:** UT Arlington has adopted MavMail as its official means to communicate with students about important deadlines and events, as well as to transact university-related business regarding financial aid, tuition, grades, graduation, etc. All students are assigned a MavMail account and are responsible for checking the inbox regularly. There is no additional charge to students for using this account, which remains active even after graduation. Information about activating and using MavMail is available at <http://www.uta.edu/oit/cs/email/mavmail.php>.

**Campus Carry:** Effective August 1, 2016, the Campus Carry law (Senate Bill 11) allows those licensed individuals to carry a concealed handgun in buildings on public university campuses, except in locations the University establishes as prohibited. Under the new law, openly carrying handguns is not allowed on college campuses. For more information, visit <http://www.uta.edu/news/info/campus-carry/>

**Student Feedback Survey:** At the end of each term, students enrolled in face-to-face and online classes categorized as “lecture,” “seminar,” or “laboratory” are directed to complete an online Student Feedback Survey (SFS). Instructions on how to access the SFS for this course will be sent directly to each student through MavMail approximately 10 days before the end of the term. Each student’s feedback via the SFS database is aggregated with that of other students enrolled in the course. Students’ anonymity will be protected to the extent that the law allows. UT Arlington’s effort to solicit, gather, tabulate, and publish student feedback is required by state law and aggregate results are posted online. Data from SFS is also used for faculty and program evaluations. For more information, visit <http://www.uta.edu/sfs>.

**Final Review Week**: for semester-long courses, a period of five class days prior to the first day of final examinations in the long sessions shall be designated as Final Review Week. The purpose of this week is to allow students sufficient time to prepare for final examinations. During this week, there shall be no scheduled activities such as required field trips or performances; and no instructor shall assign any themes, research problems or exercises of similar scope that have a completion date during or following this week *unless specified in the class syllabus*. During Final Review Week, an instructor shall not give any examinations constituting 10% or more of the final grade, except makeup tests and laboratory examinations. In addition, no instructor shall give any portion of the final examination during Final Review Week. During this week, classes are held as scheduled. In addition, instructors are not required to limit content to topics that have been previously covered; they may introduce new concepts as appropriate.

**Student Support Services:** UT Arlington provides a variety of resources and programs designed to help students develop academic skills, deal with personal situations, and better understand concepts and information related to their courses. Resources include [tutoring](http://www.uta.edu/universitycollege/current/academic-support/learning-center/tutoring/index.php), [major-based learning centers](http://www.uta.edu/universitycollege/resources/college-based-clinics-labs.php), developmental education, [advising and mentoring](http://www.uta.edu/universitycollege/resources/advising.php), personal counseling, and [federally funded programs](http://www.uta.edu/universitycollege/current/academic-support/mcnair/index.php). For individualized referrals, students may visit the reception desk at University College (Ransom Hall), call the Maverick Resource Hotline at 817-272-6107, send a message to [resources@uta.edu](mailto:resources@uta.edu), or view the information at <http://www.uta.edu/universitycollege/resources/index.php>.

**Emergency Phone Numbers: In case of an on-campus emergency, call the UT Arlington Police Department at 817-272-3003 (non-campus phone), 2-3003 (campus phone). You may also dial 911. Non-emergency number 817-272-3381**

**Necessary Changes**

I have tried to make this syllabus as complete and thorough as I possibly can. Even so, during the course of the semester I may be required to alter, add, or abandon certain policies or assignments. I reserve the right to make such changes as they become necessary.

1. Paperback edition of *Shadowbahn* will be published and available in the UTA bookstore on February 13th, 2018. Rather than buy it in hardback, t’s okay to wait and purchase it until then. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)