



Course Syllabus

HU 4890 Topics in Communication: Sound & Culture
College of Science and Arts, Humanities Dept
Fall 2022

Instructor Information

Instructor: Sarah A. Bell, PhD (you can call me Dr. Bell or Sarah, please)
[redacted for Web]

Course Description/Overview

We are surrounded by sound. Sound plays a crucial but often understudied role in experiences of media and cultural life. From the mundane sounds of our daily routines to constructed soundworks, sound, or lack thereof, is fundamental to communications media and, more broadly, to our perceptions of the world around us.

This course will immerse you in the experience of listening as we learn to think about sound as historical, cultural, architectural, and ecological, as well as aesthetic.

Course Materials and Resources

All course readings, videos, and listening assignments are on Canvas (i.e., there are no required textbooks for this course).

Devices and Software

You will need to have access to basic sound recording equipment and editing software for some assignments in this course. A smartphone will work just fine, as will a basic digital recorder (we are only interested in suitable quality, not professional quality). If you have any concerns about accessing an appropriate device, please speak with me and I can loan you something to use for the course. I will also provide recommendations for free editing software for Mac/PC and/or iOS/Android, or you can also use the resources of the HDMZ including Digital Audio Workstation (DAW) software that we'll talk about later. **No previous experience with sound editing is required to be successful in this course.**

Course Learning Objectives

1. Reflect on how sounds affect your perceptions of the world in your daily life.
2. Understand how technological changes have impacted what and how human beings heard at various points in history.
3. Use sounds to support a written project that explores a specific subculture.

Undergraduate Student Learning Goals

This course provides an engagement with the following USLGs:

Goal 4: **Critical and Creative Thinking**

Students will be able to think critically and creatively, as demonstrated by their broad, adaptable and versatile use of reasoning, logic, and evidence, to access and evaluate information and solve complex problems both independently and in groups.

Goal 5: **Communication**

Students are able to communicate effectively orally, in writing, and in new media to a wide variety of audiences.

USLG rubrics are here: <https://www.mtu.edu/assessment/undergrad/resources/goals/>

Grading and Assignments

Grading Scale

Grades will be figured according to the following scale.

Letter Grade	Percentage	Grade points/credit	Rating
A	93% & above	4.00	Excellent
AB	88% – 92%	3.50	Very good
B	83% – 87%	3.00	Good
BC	78% – 82%	2.50	Above average
C	73% – 77%	2.00	Average
CD	68% – 72%	1.50	Below average
D	60% - 67%	1.00	Inferior
F	59% and below	0.00	Failure
I	Incomplete; given only when a student is unable to complete a segment of the course because of circumstances beyond the student's control.		
X	Conditional, with no grade points per credit; given only when the student is at fault in failing to complete a minor segment of a course, but in the judgment of the instructor does not need to repeat the course. It must be made up by the close of the next semester or the grade becomes a failure (F). An (X) grade is computed into the grade point average as an (F) grade.		

Assignments

Grades will be based on the following assignments.

Participation (mostly attendance at discussions)	250
Reflection journal (10 x 25)	250
Soundscape project	200
Subculture research paper/presentation	300
Total Points	1000

Late Assignments

Late assignments may be accepted when arrangements have been made in advance.

Due to the ongoing COVID 19 pandemic, there is some flexibility with regard to due date extensions. The Dean of Students office has stated that if a student misses class due to illness (Covid-related or otherwise), **it is the student's responsibility** to work with the instructor to make up missed material. Please keep me informed so that I can help you.

Discussions (participation grade)

This is a senior level class that proceeds largely as a seminar rather than a lecture. This means that weekly class and small group discussions are a significant part of the learning process. I know that public speaking is not comfortable for everyone, nevertheless, **please share your perspective and questions**. A diversity of experiences and ideas will help us all learn. However, **belittling or abusive speech and behavior will not be tolerated**.

University Policies

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Course Schedule (*subject to revision)

Refer to Canvas for full list of/links to reading & listening assignments

date	topic	prepare for class	assignment due
Week 1: August 29 – September 4 What is Sound? What is Sound Studies?			
M 8/29	Welcome to class		
W 8/31	Physics of sound		
F 9/2	What is sound studies? What is culture?	Read Sterne “Sonic Imaginations”	
Week 2: September 5 – 11 **NO CLASS SESSIONS THIS WEEK** Silence			
M 9/5	LABOR DAY HOLIDAY – NO CLASS		
W 9/7	We will not meet in class , but please watch the movie <i>In Pursuit of Silence</i> and read “Silence” from <i>Keywords in Sound</i> As you read and watch, reflect on your preliminary ideas about noise and silence in your Google doc “journal” due on Sunday 9/11		
F 9/9	K – DAY – NO CLASS		

Week 3: September 12 - 18 Noise What makes a sound a noise? Who decides? Can sound have positive and/or negative impacts to human health?			
M 9/12	Noise overview	Read "noise" from <i>Keywords in Sound</i> , "Mic Check", and "Struggle for the Urban Landscape"	
W 9/14	Noise and Health	Links on Canvas	
F 9/16	Noise Pollution	Read "Noise and Modern Culture, 1900-1933" and explore project website	Journal #2 due Sunday 9/18
Week 4: September 19 - 25 Soundscapes We'll define the idea of "soundscape" and look at several examples as models for your own soundscape assignment			
M 9/19	What is a soundscape?	Read Shafer and Krause	
W 9/21* Career fair	Sound maps	Links on Canvas	(talk about soundwalk map assignment)
F 9/23	Environmental use of sound	Links on Canvas	
Week 5: September 26 - October 2 Recreating a History of Sound Can we know what the past sounded like?			
M 9/26	Elizabethan England	Listen to "Hark!" podcast and explore virtual Pauls' Cross project	
W 9/28	18 th Century	Read "The Soundscape of Early Modern European Towns"	
F 9/30	Bells (19 th c and beyond)	Read "Identity, Bells, and the Nineteenth-Century French Village"	Journal #3 due Sunday 10/2

Week 6: October 3 - 9 Sound Recording Technology A very quick overview of what it meant to be able to record sound for the first time and how sound recording technologies impact what and how we hear			
M 10/3	Hearing recorded sound	Watch "Edison" from <i>American Experience</i> and read selections about the phonograph	
W 10/5	Sound media	Watch "War of the Worlds" from <i>American Experience</i>	
F 10/7	TBD		Journal #4 due Sunday 10/9
Week 7: October 10 - 16 The Sound of War Examples of sound used as a weapon, from ancient times to now			
M 10/10	Overview	Read "Listening to War"	
W 10/12	Explore examples	Canvas links	
F 10/14	TBD		Soundwalk map due Sunday 10/16
Week 8: October 17 - 22 The Sounds of Sport By thinking about what one hears while watching and participating in sports, we encounter many of the issues explored throughout the semester: sound as historical, sound design, sound and cultural cohesion, voice and bias, sound and war, etc.			
M 10/17	Overview	Listen to "Sound of Sport" podcast	(talk about subculture assignment)
W 10/19	Crowds and players	Links on Canvas	
F 10/21	Fans	Read "Football Soundscapes of Java"	Journal #5 due Sunday 10/23

Week 9: October 24 - 30 Sound Design Examples to help us think about how our sonic experiences are designed to influence us in specific ways.			
M 10/24	What constitutes sound design?	Read selection from <i>Sound Design and Science Fiction</i> and watch Filmmaker IQ video	
W 10/26	Examples	Links on Canvas	
F 10/28	TBD		Journal #6 due Sunday 10/30
Week 10: October 31 - November 6 Spaces Speak From architecture to cars, the built environment influences what we hear and how we hear it.			
M 10/31	Architecture and acoustics	Read selection from <i>Spaces Speak</i>	
W 11/2	Navigating Urban Space	Read "Acoustic Cocooning"	
F 11/4	Automobiles	Reading TBD	Journal #7 due Sunday 11/6
Week 11: November 7 - 13 Voices How does the sound of your voice impact how you live in the world?			
M 11/7	What's in a voice?	Links on Canvas	Journal #8 due Sunday 11/13
W 11/9	NO CLASS, Dr. Bell is at a conference		
F 11/11			
Week 12: November 14 - 18 Projects Due			
M 11/14	NO CLASS, Dr. Bell is at a conference		
W 11/16	More about voice		
F 11/18	NO CLASS, but subculture projects are due before you leave town Have a great Fall Break! And safe travels		

Fall Break, November 19 - 27

Week 13: November 28 - December 4

Deaf and deaf

Expanding how we think about hearing, listening, and speaking.

M 11/28	Physical and cultural definitions	Read "deaf" from <i>Keywords in Sound</i> and "Letter from Rochester"	
W 11/30	Listening beyond hearing	Links on Canvas	
F 12/2	TBD		Journal #9 due Sunday 12/4

Week 14: December 5 - 9

Present Subculture Projects

Responses to subculture projects and Journal #10 due

There is no final exam