

SIUC University Honors Program
UHON 351: Seminar in Sound
Professor, Jay Needham, MFA

Course Description

The study and practice of sound encompasses a fascinating and critically important range of disciplines in contemporary culture today. This course will study sound from a multivalent perspective, by examining sound's role in western culture with an ear towards perception, physics, musical forms, media, environmental sciences and the built environment. We will listen to a wide variety of sound-based work from the rumbling of glaciers and how geologists sonify data to how we all hear music through our distinct cultural differences. Our work will be informed by some of the more recent writings in the field of sound studies and we will establish listening and critique forums as an essential component of our learning environment. Written responses to assigned readings will be used to help facilitate discussions and to energize our creative responses. The semester is drawn into four distinct acts, with each act having specific lectures, discussions, readings and creative responses assigned to them.

Student Learning Objectives

This course will better inform your understanding of how sound operates as a physical, cultural, technological and social force in culture today. The course will also expand your aesthetic sensibilities and appreciation for the role of sound in the arts. Additionally, you will learn about how sound is contextualized by theorists and historians whose writings have been essential in establishing sound studies as a discipline over the past 20 years. You will gain new insights and be able to reflect on and engage with your own sense of sound, beyond that of hearing and towards a consideration of the human body as a form that senses.

Learning Environment and Assignments

The learning environment has been designed as a synthesis of humanities and sciences teaching methods. It will feature classroom and field work experiences that will complement and increase your awareness of how sound operates in various social, political and aesthetic dimensions in today's culture. We'll also engage in and study how collaboration, improvisation, listening, artistry and observation help to shape our sonic world view. Together, we will work to create and sustain a critical forum for learning that will help you refine and expand your knowledge about how sound operates in today's culture.

Your written assignments are to be your own original writing and research. I will help to individualize your learning experience, by providing additional resources for your papers and written responses.

Creative response assignments will have a technical and aesthetic component; high points will be given if you are able to achieve a level of artistic integrity and relevancy that supersedes technical mastery. Creative responses will be sound-based and may involve live performances, short-term installations, playback of recorded works or combinations of these elements.

Active participation is required in all class discussions and critique sessions and counts for a portion of the participation grade. Discussions can be rigorous, and I strive to maintain an atmosphere of inclusivity, productivity and engagement. Please bring your best ideas and honest reactions to our class sessions. Two meetings with the instructor during the course of the semester are required. Due dates are established well in advance of the semester, if you are having problems or have questions, please contact me.

Relevance of this course the SIUC Honors Students

Sound is a *big* topic, from the echoes of the Big Bang, to how we all use the audible spectrum to listen, speak and our share musical experiences. Students who have excelled to the level of an Honors program are experienced at looking for deeper connections and sound is a stable and ready subject that you may have not considered, yet it is all around you. From your listening habits (social science) to how you perceive sound as space and time (Psychoacoustics), sound is relevant for advanced study because it literally bends the air it travels in (physics). Finally, sound studies and practice have quickly emerged as an uncommon area of transdisciplinary study: the field is open and this seminar is uniquely poised to help in the creation of new knowledge in many fields as they relate to sound.

Required texts:

Background Noise Perspectives on Sound Art by Brandon LaBelle.

The Sound Studies Reader, edited by Jonathan Sterne

The Soundscape of Modernity by Emily Thompson

Additional readings will be supplied as .pdf files

Required Materials

SD memory cards as needed

Headphones (Sony MDR-6 recommended)

This course has a 1000-point grading scale

Participation	200 points
Readings Responses	400 points
Creative Responses	400 points

A+	990-1000
A	910-989
A-	900-909
B+	980-899
B	810-899
B-	800-809
C+	790-799
C	710-780
C-	700-709
D+	690-699
D	610-679
D-	600-609
F	0-599

Act 1- Perception: Animals, Ears and Voices

Week 1. Course introduction and syllabus overview

Listening room works by: Lucier, Anderson, Truax and Baraka.
Assigned readings: Kahn & Eidsheim, Friedner and Helmreich.

Week 2. Lecture- Animals, Ears and Voices

Listening room works by: Westerkamp, Leonard and English.
Assigned: Creative Response I
Assigned readings: Schaffer, Bijsterveld & Chion.

Week 3. Field Trip/Road Trip: Listening to Spaces and Power

Field work: Car listening and field recording workshop.

Week 4. Field Listening Room

Listening room works by: Quin, Barclay and López.
Terms: long form listening, silence, acoustic ecology.

Week 5. Act 1 Discussion Session / Creative Response Critique

Due: Reading response questions
Creative Response I
Assigned readings: Toop, Eno and Eshun

Act 2 – Music: Time, Sound and Aesthetics

Week 6. Lecture - Music: Time, Sound and Aesthetics

Listening room works by: Beethoven, Derbyshire, Scanner, Satie, Schaeffer, Xenakis and works chosen by the class.

Assigned Readings: Pennman, LaBelle, Kahn and Tompkins.

Assigned: Creative Response II

Collaboration workshop discussion

Week 7. Recording Studio Session

Session: Sound collaboration workshop

Topics: DIY recording strategies, plunderphonics and the ethics of collaboration.

Week 8. In progress critiques: Sound collaboration

Terms: Fidelity, dissonance, harmony, voicing self, distortion, authorship.

Week 9. Sound editing workshop

Session: sound editing topics and techniques: mixing/remix, stereo theory, effects use, sound formats and self-distribution.

Terms: collage, timbre, temporal design, acousmatic, aleatory.

Week 10. Act 2 Discussion Session / Creative Response Critique

Due: creative response

Due: Reading response questions

Assigned readings: Kahn & Milutis

Act 3 - Earth Sounds: Signals and Noise

Week 11. Lecture - Earth Sounds: Signals and Noise

Listening Room works by: Kogowa and Friz,

Assigned readings: Kahn, Milutis and Kogowa

Assigned: Creative Response 3

Week 12. Radio spectrum workshop

Topics: VLF, micro-radio, radio party, low power-FM

Micro-radio production planning meeting

Week 13. Act 3 Discussion Session / Creative Response Critique

Due: Creative Responses as live micro-radio event

Due: Reading response

Assigned readings: LaBelle, Thompson

Act 4 - Sound and the Built Environment

Week 14. Lecture - Sound and the Built Environment

Assigned: Final creative response

Assigned Readings: Mitchell, Thompson and Fuller

Week 15 Sonic/ Architectural tour of the SIU campus

Terms: Neoclassical, Geodesic, Brutalism, Modernism, echo, reflection, first-order reflection, refraction, noise floor, point of audition.

Week 16. Fuller Dome Home Visit

Site visit includes the opportunity to create a short recording project in the space.

Week 17. Closing seminar and final critique

Due: Reading response

Due: Final creative response