**New York City College of Technology  
Interdisciplinary Committee**

**Criteria for an Interdisciplinary Course**

1. **Interdisciplinary Studies Definition**

Interdisciplinary studies involve two or more academic disciplines or fields of study organized around synthesizing distinct perspectives, knowledge, and skills. Interdisciplinary study focuses on questions, problems, and topics too complex or too broad for a single discipline or field to encompass adequately; such studies thrive on drawing connections between seemingly exclusive domains. Usually theme-based, interdisciplinary courses intentionally address issues that require meaningful engagement of multiple academic disciplines. Pedagogical strategies focus on, but are not limited to, inquiry or problem-based learning.

Although many academic disciplines, such as African American Studies and Engineering, are inherently interdisciplinary, to be considered an interdisciplinary course at City Tech the course must be team-taught[[1]](#footnote-1) by more than one faculty member from two or more departments[[2]](#footnote-2) in the College. An interdisciplinary course, by definition, has an interdisciplinary theme as its nucleus. In its essence, such a course brings the analytic methods of two or more academic disciplines to bear on a specific problem or question. Thus, a course in Music History is not likely to be considered interdisciplinary, but a course in Music History from an economist’s perspective might very well lead to such a course. The application of different methods and concepts is the key to assessing whether a course is or is not interdisciplinary. The term interdisciplinary is occasionally used to identify individual projects or assignments, but these, though possibly commendable, fall short in the necessary scope for learning experiences that demand in-depth exposure to the methodologies of distinct intellectual disciplines, and the creative application of these methodologies to specific problems.

Studies show that interdisciplinary courses improve student learning (Elrod & Roth, 2012; Klein, 2010; Lattuca, 2001; Lattuca, Voigt, & Fath, 2004; Project Kaleidoscope, 2011). To foster interdisciplinary learning, the Interdisciplinary Committee has identified goals and outcomes that students taking interdisciplinary courses should be able to achieve.

**Learning Outcomes of Interdisciplinary Courses**

Students will be able to:

* Purposefully connect and integrate across-discipline knowledge and skills to solve problems
* Synthesize and transfer knowledge across disciplinary boundaries
* Comprehend factors inherent in complex problems
* Apply integrative thinking to problem-solving in ethically and socially responsible ways
* Recognize varied perspectives
* Gain comfort with complexity and uncertainty
* Think critically, communicate effectively, and work collaboratively
* Become flexible thinkers

**New York City College of Technology**

**Interdisciplinary Committee**

**Application for Interdisciplinary Course Designation (REVISED)**

**Date:** March 27, 2016 (original on February 21, 2016)

**Submitted by** Profs. Ting Chin and Christopher Swift

**Department(s):** Library and Architecture Technology

1. **Proposal to Offer an Interdisciplinary Course**

1. Identify the course type and title:  
     
   An existing course: LIB/ARCH 2205, Learning Places (Special Topics),
2. Provide a course description:

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| *This special topics course offers an interdisciplinary approach to investigating built environments in New York City. The two case studies at the center of investigation may vary each semester, and will be selected on the basis of continuity among historical, communal, geographical or architectural principles (for instance, Times Square, Stuyvesant Town, Lincoln Center, Brooklyn Waterfront). Students from architecture technology, liberal arts, and from across the college will study collaboratively in place-based learning environments. The work of the semester will include the physical examination of built environments, inspection of historical documents, and critical analyses from architecture theory, urban studies, and performance studies. Through these investigations, students will also improve information literacy skills.* |

1. How many credits will the course comprise? 3 How many hours? 1 classroom hour, four lab hours.
2. What prerequisite(s) would students need to complete before registering for the course? Co-requisite(s)?

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| *ENG 1101 and 1 Flexible Core Course* |

1. Explain briefly why this is an interdisciplinary course. *This course’s central approach is place-based learning: students research two case studies each semester that are inherently rich in cultural information. The mode of operation in the course will be to uncover the multiple layers, complexity and interdependency of the sites’ histories, technologies, communal and performative uses, economic impacts, geographies, and social impacts.*
2. What is the proposed theme of the course? What complex central problem or question will it address? What disciplinary methods will be evoked and applied? *The theme of the course focuses on the study of designed spaces and environments in order to learn to see (observation) and reveal new knowledge (research). The central problem the course addresses is the way in which human interaction with space teaches us to observe the world around us and helps broaden our knowledge and understanding of social, economic, and cultural dynamics. In turn, these new realizations will foster the desires and skills for lifelong learning. Careful observation skills of the physical environment will be developed through the lens of architectural investigation and research skills and analysis will be conducted using methods from performance studies.*
3. Which general learning outcomes of an interdisciplinary course does this course address?   
   Please explain how the course will fulfill the bolded mandatory learning outcome below. In addition, select and explain at least three additional outcomes.

🞎 **Purposefully connect and integrate across-discipline knowledge and skills to solve problems**

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| *The curriculum will underscore research and critical analysis methodologies from architecture technology and performance studies in order to reveal multiple, interconnected layers of meaning and relationships in built environments. Students will begin to understand the differences between archival research and data collection, and how to interpret these materials using critical terminology and analysis.* |

🞎 **Synthesize and transfer knowledge across disciplinary boundaries**

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| *The case study structure of the course will involve investigation along seemingly disparate disciplines and will highlight points of interconnectedness, especially in the area of social and community interaction. The final report prepared by the students will require synthesizing the findings across the lines of research and disciplines to communicate a coherent story about the place undertaken for study.* |

🞎 Comprehend factors inherent in complex problems

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| *The case study project will challenge the students to come to terms with the breadth and level of complexity in the many layers of issues that are impacted by urban space and that need to be considered in the research process.* |

🞎 Apply integrative thinking to problem solving in ethically and socially responsible ways

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🞎 Recognize varied perspectives

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🞎 Gain comfort with complexity and uncertainty

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🞎 Think critically, communicate effectively, and work collaboratively

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| *The development of the final report will require critical thinking as well as effective communication. Each student team will prepare the report together, requiring productive collaboration.* |

🞎 Become flexible thinkers

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| *The investigation of specific places (case studies) will begin with archival research and data collection. Students will first summarize their quantitative and descriptive findings. As the semester progresses and the students’ interests become more defined, students will be challenged to interpret the data and descriptions in order to understand social and performative values and engagements. Students will learn to be flexible in their approach to a project as new ideas, frames of analyses, and points of interest arise that are different than what they anticipated. Furthermore, students will be given a variety of interpretive tools for unpacking meaning of urban public spaces and this will encourage them to view their case studies from many different perspectives.* |

🞎 Other

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**General Education Learning Goals for City Tech Students**

* **Knowledge:** Develop knowledge from a range of disciplinary perspectives, and hone the ability to deepen and continue learning.
* **Skills:** Acquire and use the tools needed for communication, inquiry, creativity, analysis, and productive work.
* **Integration**: Work productively within and across disciplines.
* **Values, Ethics, and Relationships**: Understand and apply values, ethics, and diverse   
  perspectives in personal, professional, civic, and cultural/global domains.

1. How does this course address the general education learning goals for City Tech students?

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| *This course will leverage the diverse talents of the students and multiple perspectives and ideas will emerge from student projects. The case studies themselves will allow for varied perspectives and lines of inquiry. The open-ended nature of the course (where the instructors’ main teaching activities will be to lead students to research materials, meetings with specialists, and site visits while guiding critical conversations) will encourage creative analysis, and the final report will require integration across the disciplines.* |

1. Which department would house this course[[3]](#footnote-3)? Architecture Technology

Would all sections of the course be interdisciplinary? Yes

* 1. Would the course be cross-listed in two or more departments? Yes   
     Explain.

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| *Cross-listed between Library, Humanities, and Architecture Technology.* |

* 1. How will the course be team-taught[[4]](#footnote-4)? Co-taught   
       
     If co-taught, what is the proposed workload hour distribution? Shared credits, 50/50.

Evaluation framework used to assess the interdisciplinarity of the course.

*We propose to team teach this course with a credit distribution of 2.5 credits for the Architectural Technology faculty member and 2.5 credits for the Humanities (theatre) faculty member. Our evaluation framework is as follows:*

* *For the Student Evaluation of Teaching, we would like students in the course to complete two evaluation forms, one for each faculty member. This will allow students the opportunity to consider our teaching individually.*
* *For the Faculty Classroom Observation, we would like one faculty member to observe a class session in which both instructors are participating. This will allow both faculty members teaching the course to be observed, while not imposing an undue time burden on the observer. The observer could be a faculty colleague from either Humanities or Architectural Technology.* 
  1. What strategies/resources would be implemented to facilitate students’ ability to make connections across the respective academic disciplines?

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| *The observations made on site will involve note taking, sketching, and photography. Students will make nuanced, careful observations of various elements and dynamics within the site: gender, ethnic, and class composition, economic activity, physical structure, social interaction, and performative interaction. None of these areas of focus can be understood in a vacuum, since designed spaces and architectures inform performances, community statuses, economic activity, and social interaction. Therefore, the connection between disciplines will be explicit and part of the discussion and analysis. Independent research into the archives will compliment field work, and materials gathered from these activities will then undergo critical modes of inquiry from performance studies and architectural technology.* |

1. Would the course be designated as a College Option requirement[[5]](#footnote-5) and an elective?

Explain.

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| *This course is structured and conceived to fulfill the College Option requirement for an interdisciplinary course. The course is rooted in a liberal arts approach to research places through the perspective of multiple disciplines.* |

1. See “Application for Interdisciplinary Course Designation” question 9b for team-teaching options. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Exceptions are made for Departments that provide a home for multiple disciplines, such as Humanities and Social Science. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. An interdisciplinary course for the College Option requirement may be housed in a department that is not liberal arts. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Attach evidence of consultation with all affected departments. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. To qualify for the College Option, such a course must also meet the New York State definition of a liberal arts and sciences course.  
   <http://www.highered.nysed.gov/ocue/lrp/liberalarts.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)