**New York City College of Technology**

**Interdisciplinary Committee**

**Application for Interdisciplinary Course Designation**

**Date:** 2/27/2015

**Submitted by:** Shapiro and Jean Hillstrom

**Department(s):** English and Psychology/Social Sciences

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

1. **Identify the course type and title:**  
   **X** An existing course: ENG 1161: Language and Thinking  
     
   🞎 A new course \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

🞎 A course under development \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. **Provide a course description**

A study of communication designed to increase understanding and control of language on both the individual and social levels. Class work includes reading and discussion of elements of semantics and psycholinguistics and guided practice in effective thinking. The course is a study of the nature of language and the relation of language to individual and social attitudes and behavior. Readings, discussion, and research in these areas.

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

ENG 1101 is the only current pre-requisite.

1. **Explain briefly why this is an interdisciplinary course.**

The complex problemsof the course bring together elements of how language is produced by various parts of the body and by the brain in particular, as well as how language is developed, used, adapted, and changed by people and groups for different purposes—individual, social, psychological, and physical. This course is well suited to being taught in an interdisciplinary manner because it touches on several fields of study and can be adapted by different departments and for different purposes and topics. The faculty will be in the classroom together at times and the classes they teach separately will be interrelated and overlapping, bringing together their respective areas but allowing them to focus on specialties and specific expertise that the other lacks. The course is writing intensive already, so there are several writing assignments with revision built in, essay questions each week, research projects bringing together aspects of both disciplines, the application of APA style and its research methods, exams that ask students to integrate their knowledge.

1. **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 course theme concerns how acquiring and using languages is one of the more remarkable features of human nature and the brain. The use of language generally seems effortless and intuitive, but that is not necessarily the case; it is a process of complex neurological, auditory, aural, psychological, and social processes that work together to create and share meaning through written and spoken language, in signs, symbols, and speech. In this course, we explore several aspects of the language acquisition, how people and groups use it for a variety of purposes, and in a variety of ways. Topics for study include language and different species, language and the individual, language and thought, language and society, language and history, and the structure, organization, and production of language such as phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics.

1. **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.**

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

Students study how ideas and concepts of register, in-groupness, language choice, dialect, social class, and biology affect and make up an individual’s concept of his or her place in a group or socio-cultural unit. Students learn that there are right answers (how sounds are produced in the mouth) but there are not always right answers (how people feel about language and those who use it)—accepting that there is uncertainty in social and psychological situations is part of the learning process.

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

Students will learn that language—and attitudes and beliefs about it—changes across time and cultures; they will learn how language and the brain create circumstances conducive to bilingualism, or the value of certain kinds of literacy in groups and in the body. The course is a study of linguistic and psychological communication designed to increase understanding and control of language on the individual, cognitive, and social levels—synchronically and diachronically.

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

Students learn how trends as national language movements, linguas francas, and the like affect how an individual interacts within, between, and among various cultures and groups. They will consider what bilingualism means and how it affects learning and literacy in first and additional languages. Students will understand that there are ethical issues in using certain kinds of language and for certain purposes. Language can bring together or push apart people and groups depending on context and circumstance; people think about what they say and make choices about others based on what is said, written, or understood by and with language. Moreover, students will learn the implications of using and applying language that is often considered the purview of those belonging to other groups, whether dominant or subordinate and in what kinds of power relations.

**X Recognize varied perspectives**

Students critically read, analyze, and write about theories and ideas related to how language works in groups, cultures, societies as well as how it is created and processed in the brain and psychologically. Students study how different language work, why, and for what purposes, as well as under which circumstances and contexts do certain types of language or communication occur. In written work, exams, and presentations students consider how language and communication styles function within and across groups. Students learn that there are different responses to language as well as various perspectives and even schools of thought.

**X Become flexible thinkers**

One of the most important things that students will learn is that language (and how we think about it and interpret it) is arbitrary. That is the single most difficult idea they consider over the semester: language in the abstract is a collection of sounds that humans produce and then assign various meanings to and what kinds of meaning and who is “allowed” to make, utter, transmit, or otherwise engage in language is all socially constructed. How people and groups think about the language they and others use is often extremely challenging to their enculturated ideals about themselves, their language, and that of others. Being able to consider that there is not always one single way to express ideas or information is profoundly complex and difficult for students.

1. **How does this course address the general education learning goals for City Tech students?**
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| * 1. The course has been approved under Pathways for the Individual and Society category, and it already asks students to consider how individuals think about language, use it in groups, and how their choices have personal, political, and social ramifications.   2. Students will practice the skills they learn regarding the two disciplines: they will write, revise, and edit their work and then understand how to apply social science methodology to their final fieldwork projects, testing hypotheses and analyzing information, drawing conclusions based on evidence.   3. In written work, exams, and presentations students consider how language and communication styles function within and across groups as well as within various parts of the body and brain. |

1. **Which department would house this course[[1]](#footnote-1)?** English  
   **Would all sections of the course be interdisciplinary?** X No

**Would the course be cross-listed in two or more departments?** X Yes   
First, linguistics is as often housed in social science departments as it is in English departments and those who have linguistic backgrounds often teach it with an eye toward anthropology, sociology, or psychology. It makes sense that the course would be applicable to both English and Social Sciences since the course would have enough and substantive elements of both areas of expertise. Second, the course is designed to address these objectives:

* To recognize the basic structures of language.
* To know the important mutual influences of language and psychological behavior, especially concept formation and memory.
* To know the important mutual influences of language and social behavior, especially the interaction of the individual and society and the interaction of social groups.
  1. **How will the course be team-taught[[2]](#footnote-2)? x** Co-taught   
       
     If co-taught, what is the proposed workload hour distribution? 2/3 English and 1/3\_Psychology  
       
     Please attach the evaluation framework used to assess the interdisciplinarity of the course.[[3]](#footnote-3)
* At the beginning of each class, students write a 5-minute essay exam question based on the concepts from the previous week’s reading and class discussion. The questions are based on such questions as the recent renaming of chronic fatigue syndrome to systemic exertion intolerance disease and what implications there might be for patients and doctors; another question asks students to consider the word “dope” over time and how it came to be a noun that described illegal drugs to an adjective that describes someone positively.
* Each week students will write a 1-page Reflection Paper that is based on the previous week’s reading and apply the concepts they read about. Such activities are considering the literacy levels of three daily newspapers in New York City and determine how the language used would impact audience response to a story. Another topic asks students to consider the psychological impact of using passive vs. active voice and understanding or acceptance of events (“mistakes were made” vs. “I made a mistake.”)
* In-class lectures, workshops, and presentations will take place that expose students to the scientific method of gathering, analyzing, and discussing ideas in their long project; students will interview each other and discover proper strategies for asking questions and achieving appropriate responses.
* Students will give brief presentations at the end of the semester in which they present their topics, and discuss their findings with the class. The other students will ask questions and make comments based on their understanding of the presentation and apply their knowledge to the final discussion.
* Two exams ask students— in a variety of ways— to disseminate and analyze the information contained in the book, the classroom discussion, and the real-life examples. They will not only have to know/define terms and concepts but they will need to apply them and give examples.
* Students get the New York Times free with their CityTech email account and each week they are asked to find, read, and discuss articles that connect the concepts and theories presented in the book with articles that explore language and its implications in “real time.” We provide outside articles dealing with these current issues—a New Yorker piece described the first-of-its-kind therapy and suicide prevention program that exists solely on smart phones and texting. In this article psychologists and linguists are studying the kinds of language used to effectively understand and defuse difficult and emotional states for these mostly young people, as well as consider the kind of training therapists or “responders” need in order to be most effective.

1. **What strategies/resources would be implemented to facilitate students’ ability to make connections across the respective academic disciplines?**

Students demonstrate mastery of key terms and concepts via exams, quizzes, essays, and writing assignments. The writing assignments are response papers to each week’s reading and activities that ask students to consider applied linguistics and psychology—how they think about and use language every day. The major project is a fieldwork paper that builds on the semester’s reading and work in which students go into the “field,” as in their lives and gather and interpret linguistic information. They will lean data collection, how to transcribe, how to ask subjects questions, and then how to interpret the information they collect. Sample projects are: write a mini dictionary and consider the changes of meaning in words over time and the ramifications psychologically, semantically, and grammatically; study political speeches and determine the audiences and what speech patterns speakers use such as pauses, hesitations, mistakes, speed of speech—they will consider the audience, the goals, the rhetorical moves, the conceptual fields being introduced; the representation of women and men or different genders and how people think about them re ideology and values ascribed to different groups; the effect of texting on literacy and how people can—or cannot—express themselves because time and space are limited.

1. Would the course be designated as:

a College Option requirement[[4]](#footnote-4)? **X** an elective? 🞎 a Capstone course[[5]](#footnote-5)? **X** other? Explain.

1. An interdisciplinary course for the College Option requirement may be housed in a department that is not liberal arts. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Attach evidence of consultation with all affected departments. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In the case that a course is equally taught, include proposed plans for faculty classroom observation and student evaluation of teaching. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 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-4)
5. A course proposed as a Capstone course must be separately approved by the Capstone Experience Committee. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)