**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**

**Date** March 24, 2017

**Submitted by** Jean Hillstrom & Rebecca Shapiro

**Department(s)** Social Science & English

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

1. Identify the course type and title:  
     
   X An existing course: ENG 1161 Language and Thinking AND SBS2000 Research Methods for the Behavioral and Social Sciences WE ARE PROPOSING A LEARNING COMMUNITY PAIRING THESE TWO COURSES  
     
   🞎 A new course \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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

1. Provide a course description - LEARNING COMMUNITY COURSE DESCRIPTION: Acquiring and using language is one of the more remarkable features of humans. The use of language seems effortless and intuitive, but this does not mean that language really is simple, or is the result of a system so automatic that it requires little or no conscious attention. In this learning community, we use various research methods in the social and behavioral sciences to explore language and thinking in individuals, groups and society. This course brings together linguistics and research methodology to bear on the complex problems of how language is developed, used, adapted, and changed by individuals and groups for different purposes.
2. How many credits will the course comprise? 3 each How many hours? 3 class hours each
3. What prerequisite(s) would students need to complete before registering for the course? Co-requisite(s)? ENG 1101 is the prerequisite for ENG 1161; Any Introductory ANTH, ECON, GEOG, GOV, HIS, PSY, SOC, or, any AFR or LTAM 1400 series course, or AFR 1501, 1502, 2402 or 3000, or COMM 2402, or 3401 and MAT 1180 or higher for SBS2000. (ADGA students in certain catalog years will also need the prerequisite of PSY 3407 Psychology of Perception.)
4. Explain briefly why this is an interdisciplinary course.

This interdisciplinary learning community is designed to provide students with the research skills to address complex questions and problems across various social and behavioral disciplines, particularly linguistics and the subfields of psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics. Using lecture, in-class discussion and assignments, and group work, students will be exposed to the theories and methods of various social and behavioral disciplines with a particular emphasis on socio- and psycholinguistics while developing integrated, original research projects. As a paired learning community, both faculty (Rebecca Shapiro, English/Linguistics; Jean Hillstrom, Social Science/Psychology) 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.

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 focus of this interdisciplinary learning community is to bring research methods together with linguistics to bear on the complex problems of how language is developed, used, adapted, and changed by individuals and groups for various purposes. We will use various research methods in the social and behavioral sciences to explore language and thinking in individuals, groups and society. The intent and goal of the learning community format is to provide a supportive context for students to identify and apply appropriate research methodology to investigate various research problems in socio- and psycholinguistics including formulating hypotheses to data collection and analysis to the final write up either in poster or paper format. Disciplinary methods are evoked and maintained in the respective courses and the interdisciplinary context for application of research methods to research questions in socio- and psycholinguistics are brought to bear in the interdisciplinary learning community.
2. 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**

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| In ENG 1161, 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. In SBS 2000, students learn various research methodologies that cut across all areas of social and behavioral science and the goal is to purposely connect and integrate concepts and methods to specific research questions from multiple disciplines in the social and behavioral sciences including linguistics and its subfields. We proposed the learning community format specifically to emphasize the integration across integration while providing a supportive structure for students to explore and develop their research skills and methodology in the context of socio- and psycholinguistics. |

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

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| In ENG 1161, 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. In SBS 2000, all students who take this course will have taken an introductory social and/or behavioral course and therefore will have been introduced to the foundations of research methods for that discipline. The purpose of this course and this learning community will be to integrate that introductory level of learning across other disciplines that use the scientific method, specifically linguistics. The skills developed in this course will expose students to a deeper understanding of the scientific process that will broaden their methodological options for use in the creation of a research project for this class, and later can be generalized to meet the challenges presented in other courses and/or their careers that require critical analysis of a problem. |

X Comprehend factors inherent in complex problems

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| 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. The scientific study of language use in different contexts provides invaluable insight into individual, group and societal processes. |

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

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X Recognize varied perspectives

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| In ENG 1161, 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. As part of the learning community and as part of the research methods course, students acquire an understanding of the varied theoretical principles underlying social and behavioral science and the ability to apply these diverse perspectives to the development of fundamental research design techniques. They will test their ideas using evidence from the social and behavioral sciences as a foundation to form conclusions that are creative and dynamic. |

🞎 Gain comfort with complexity and uncertainty

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🞎 Think critically, communicate effectively, and work collaboratively

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| Research methods requires that students develop a variety of research skills than span across the social and behavioral sciences and must show the ability to apply these competencies in creating a testable research question that can be answered using scientific methodology. Students will work collaboratively using this knowledge to evaluate and critique their own socio- or psycholinguistics proposals as well as the proposals of fellow students. |

X Become flexible thinkers

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| 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. |

🞎 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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| a. ENG 1161 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. SBS2000 is not a pathways course but many students take this course to fulfil their interdisciplinary requirement because it is taught as an interdisciplinary course. The learning community seeks to bring to bear what students learn in research methods on content learned in linguistics, language and thinking.  b. 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 research methodology to their final fieldwork projects, testing hypotheses and analyzing information, drawing conclusions based on evidence.  c. 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.  d. Students develop an understanding of the values, ethics and diverse perspectives that lead to an understanding of the conclusions that are based on scientific evidence through working with others in developing and testing hypotheses. |
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1. Which department would house this course[[3]](#footnote-3)? English & Social Science  
   Would all sections of the course be interdisciplinary? X No 🞎 Yes
   1. Would the course be cross-listed in two or more departments? 🞎 No X Yes   
      Explain.

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| Yes, as an interdisciplinary learning community |

* 1. How will the course be team-taught[[4]](#footnote-4)? X Co-taught 🞎 Guest lecturers X Learning community  
       
     If co-taught, what is the proposed workload hour distribution? 2.5/.5 for each course 🞎 Shared credits 🞎 Trading credits   
     If guest lecturers, for what approximate percentage of the course? 🞎 Minimum 20%[[5]](#footnote-5) 🞎 other: \_\_%  
       
     Please attach the evaluation framework used to assess the interdisciplinarity of the course.[[6]](#footnote-6)  
     The Primary evaluation is the Language Fieldwork Writing Project.
* This assignment requires students to record how language operates in your daily lives. Students will find examples from their own experiences, record the date of observation and the type, and explain the example and its significance. Students will research the characteristics of a specific linguistic community, focusing on the ways language is used to create/define identity and to build group solidarity. A combination of sources for this project may be drawn upon (depending on the specific project), including scholarly publications, general audience resources, popular media, and possibly interviews/surveys with members of this community. The components for this assignment will be 1) the final long paper, 2) a short oral presentation with an outline/chart of key findings and examples, and 3) a handout for the class; this handout also makes connections between your findings and our course material.

Additional assessments of interdisciplinarity include:

* 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.
* At various points in the course, 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.
* Exams ask students— in a variety of ways— to disseminate and analyze the information contained in the book, the classroom discussions, 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:

X a College Option requirement[[7]](#footnote-7)? X an elective? 🞎 a Capstone course[[8]](#footnote-8)? 🞎 other? Explain. Students can enroll in this learning community to fulfil elective(s) and/or their interdisciplinary course requirement for baccalaureate degree.

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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. While an interdisciplinary course must be team-taught, there is no formal percentage requirement, but this minimum is a guideline. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In the case that a course is equally taught, include proposed plans for faculty classroom observation and student evaluation of teaching. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. 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-7)
8. A course proposed as a Capstone course must be separately approved by the Capstone Experience Committee. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)