**New York City College of Technology**

**Interdisciplinary Committee**

**Course Review Form**

**DATE:** 9/05/15

**REVIEWER:** Dionne Bennett, Ph.D.

**COURSE TITLE & NUMBER:** THE2280: History of Theater: Technology and Stages

**PROPOSED BY:** Christopher Swift and Ting Chin

**CREDIT HOURS:** 3 Credits/2.5 Hours

**PREREQUISITES:** CUNY Certification in Reading and Writing

**COURSE IS: X** Existing New In development

**PROPOSED COURSE DESIGNATION**: X College Option elective Capstone other:

**DEPARTMENT HOUSED IN:** Humanities and Architectural Technology

**PROPOSED STRUCTURE (e.g., co-taught, guest lecture, LC, other):**  Co-taught

**CREDIT DISTRIBUTION** (if co-taught): 1.5 credits each

**CATALOG DESCRIPTION:** This course examines contemporary and historical theater structures using research methods and knowledge bases from both theater and architecture technology and history. This course satisfies the interdisciplinary college option. The survey of approximately 12 historical performance spaces and buildings will be contextualized in terms of prevailing aesthetic, technological, and performative movements.

**DESCRIBE & EVALUATE HOW COURSE MEETS INTERDISCIPLINARY CRITERIA?**

This is an exciting and innovative course that meets multiple interdisciplinary criteria both in terms of its discursive frameworks and pedagogical methodologies. The course will be co-taught by accomplished professors in the departments of Humanities and Architectural technology thus fulfilling the goal of City Tech’s interdisciplinary courses of exposing students to experts from diverse disciplinary backgrounds. In both its structure and its learning outcomes, the course engages multiple disciplines both theoretically and methodologically. In addition to exploring the intersections between the broader disciplines of Theater Studies and Architecture, the course also engages disciplinary concepts central to history, performance studies, design & technology studies, cultural studies, media studies, etc. Though the proposal does not label the methodologies as such or include references to these disciplines the course uses ethnographic research methods that have been historically associated with social sciences such as anthropology and sociology. The course, also, uses a comparative cross-cultural research and analysis model that is often valued within the social sciences. The work that the students do in the course will be interdisciplinary as it will combine reading, research, and writing practices with field work and with drawing and design practices. Through these theoretically and methodologically diverse and interdisciplinary practices, the students will develop skills directly related to the course and valuable transferrable skills that they can use elsewhere. One of the greatest strengths of the course from an interdisciplinary and general education perspective is its rich place-based learning component. The course exposes students to New York City theater, which means they will be conducting their field work in what is arguably the most dynamic location for theater and live performance on the planet. These numerous interdisciplinary, mixed methods, and cross-cultural components make this course different from other sections of the course and make it stand out within the context of other courses.

**DESCRIBE & EVALUATE THE INTERDISCIPLINARY STRUCTURE?**

The structure of the course is interdisciplinary in that it will be Co-Taught by professors from two different disciplines and departments and through its exploration of the intersection between theater and architecture which are addressed throughout every aspect of the course. The entire course honors the “spirit of interdisciplinarity.” In addition to providing students access to the two professors and teaching them interdisciplinary methods including fieldwork and design, the course uses place-based learning to expose students to a range of educators. Arguably, every aspect of the live theater experience exposes them to a different educator who has mastered a different methodology including production design, acting and performance, writing, directing, costume design, lighting design etc. The opportunities for interdisciplinary learning in this course are limitless.

**DOES COURSE MEET REQUIREMENTS FOR GENERAL EDUCATION?**

The course meets requirements for general education in all four of the stated learning outcomes and addresses them in both specific interdisciplinary learning outcomes and in pedagogical and assessment methods.

**STRENGTHS:**

The course has numerous strengths as described above. While it is technically only required to address two disciplines, it is interdisciplinary in multiple ways and forms. Its interdisciplinarity is represented in its structure, content, methods, and through its exciting place-based learning opportunities. The course is includes a strong, thoughtfully-developed syllabus, innovative assignments and rubrics that students will find useful. The course includes supportive letters from the department chairs which indicates that the professors will receive support and, one hopes, recognition for their efforts. I think the students are going to enjoy and benefit greatly from exploring diverse interdisciplinary methods of learning and of representing their knowledge. The course is very exciting and is sure to be a great success.

**WEAKNESSES:**

Please note: None of these concerns would prevent the reviewer from wholeheartedly supporting the course, which I do. However, I am sharing them because I think they may be useful to the authors of the proposal as they proceed.

The authors of the proposal did not complete the “explanation” component of question number 10. They may wish to add a couple of sentences to complete this part of the application Also, this is not the concern of this committee, but the authors may want to place the Gen Ed learning outcomes directly into the body of the syllabus. They may have decided not to do so because they did not want the syllabus and the application to be redundant.

Given the course’s interdisciplinary focus on “space,” I would like to see the authors explicitly discuss the dynamics of spatial context, perhaps from an urban studies perspective or another disciplinary perspective, so that students will address questions of where theaters are located in the city of New York and why and how the context of the neighborhoods in which the theaters are located relates to student observations of what occurs once they step into the world of the theater. Also, it is important to remember that some off our students are not taught that they are, for lack of a better word, “entitled” to attend the theater or to participate in other aspects of New York’s cultural activities. Their concerns are legitimate. Some students may not be treated as respectfully as others in the theater context, and the authors of the proposal should be prepared for this eventuality and for questions this may raise. It may be useful for the authors to find a careful and respectful way to address student concerns about these issues. This may be something that they already intend to do but was not part of the proposal.

The following is a concern that is linked to the reviewers own disciplinary background as an anthropologist and is intended to be useful but not prohibitive. I would like to see a more explicit analysis of both culture and ethnographic field work practices. Perhaps if as the reviewer, I were not an anthropologist this would not concern me, but I am, and it does. The concept of “culture” is used as a central concept throughout the proposal yet the authors do not explain how the concept of culture will be addressed in the course. The concept of culture itself has different disciplinary connotations and constructions, and I would have liked there to have been an indication that the students were going to engage in a thoughtful and critical interdisciplinary analysis of the concept, particularly in relationship to themes of cultural diversity and cultural bias. Also – this is, once again an anthropologist’s concern – the use of field methods is very exciting, and I am glad to see it in the course. However, I would like to see the authors more explicitly address issues of cultural bias and ethnographic ethics and how they will address those issues with students so that the students understand field research as a cultural construct and not only as an academic practice. Again, I would like to see this issues addressed explicitly. These issues may not be of interest to the authors of the proposal and are not prohibitive in terms of the application moving forward, but I thought I would share this perspective in case it may be useful to them. Again, I think this is going to be a wonderful course and very valuable for the students.