

New York City College of Technology Interdisciplinary Committee

Criteria for an Interdisciplinary Course

I. 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-taught¹ by more than one faculty member from two or more departments² 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

¹ See "Application for Interdisciplinary Course Designation" question 9b for team-teaching options.

² Exceptions are made for Departments that provide a home for multiple disciplines, such as Humanities and Social Science.

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

Application for Interdisciplinary Course Designation

Date: March 5, 2018

Submitted by Nora Almeida and Christopher Swift

Departments: Library and Humanities

II. 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

This special topics course offers an interdisciplinary approach to investigating relationships between place, performance, activism, and the archive. Using contemporary and historical theatrical performances (Living Theater, Bread & Puppet) and performative protests (ACT UP, Pink Bloque, Yippies) as case studies, students will examine how performances can reshape NYC communities. Students will examine sites of historical protests (Astor Place Riots, Stonewall, 2004 RNC Convention, Occupy Wall Street), contemporary contested spaces, and documentation from live direct-action events (Critical Mass, The Church of Stop Shopping). Through these investigations, students will be asked to consider how the occupation of public space plays a role in exposing injustice and provoking social change. Readings, podcasts, live theater, and documentaries will help students understand how parallel social movements and artistic practices—such as the squatting movement, performance art, and drag performance—help contribute to the formation of an aesthetic of performance activism. Students will be exposed to non-traditional research environments like community archives that emphasize the continuum between historical struggles for social justice and ongoing activism. Students will conduct research on historic and contemporary social issues affecting their own communities and on the history of performance, and from out of these investigations develop frameworks for their own strategic theatrical interventions.

3. How many credits will the course comprise? 3 How many hours? 1 classroom, 4 lab
4. What prerequisite(s) would students need to complete before registering for the course? Co-requisite(s)? *ENG 1101 and 1 Flexible Core Course*
5. Explain briefly why this is an interdisciplinary course.

The course focuses on interrelationships between theatrical performance, urban places, and socio-political action. In the process of examining these intersections, students will acquire

research skills, both archival and performative. Through scaffolded assignments, students will learn how to conduct research about social activism and theatre, while simultaneously learning how theatre itself constitutes a kind of living ethnography or performative means of communal self-reflection and agency. Through visits to non-traditional libraries and archival sites, students will also learn about the cultural production of social movements and about the history of information workers in contested spaces (The People's Library, Radical Reference at the 2004 RNC). By examining theater as a kind of living ethnography and information work as a performative and politicized activity, traditional boundaries between research subjects and research processes will be troubled.

6. 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?

At this historical moment in the United States, a number of crucial political and social issues impacting the civil rights of its residents are being debated in the public sphere, and the outcomes of these debates (through legislation and methods of enforcement) will materially affect the lives of the students at NYCCT. Meanwhile, with the rise of social media, many students feel detached from, or cynical about, social action and change. While the "Facebook Effect" (Kirkpatrick 2010) may lead to greater sharing of information and the formation of new networks of power, social media also has the effect of creating an echo chamber of like-minded thinkers and inertia. Researchers have also shown that despite initial hopes that the internet would have a democratizing effect, algorithmic technologies exacerbate economic inequality (Eubanks 2017) and the corporatization of the internet has led to unbridgeable political fissures and the suppression of voices of dissent (Taylor 2014; Tsukayama 2017).

With this in mind, this interdisciplinary course engages with the histories and potentialities of *live* performance in public spaces as a means for social change. The course will ask students to investigate the complex social phenomena at play in urban protest theatre in public spaces in order to better understand the ways in which the presence of living bodies can resignify and subvert the implicit and explicit rules and meanings of urban spaces, and as a result, address the rights of disenfranchised groups (the homeless, minorities, immigrants, the LGBT community, and the poor). While designed spaces and architectures often dictate spatial rules for public behavior, they may also invite alternative uses (Lefebvre 1991; DeCerteau 1984; Tschumi 2008). This is especially true in urban environments like New York City where interaction among diverse communities has a greater potential for social friction and change. In this context, students will examine how the meanings of social space are constituted and will be invited to consider how ethnic and gender identity, texts, performances, built environments, and opportunities for participation are constructed. Three main disciplinary methodologies will be applied in the study of historical and contemporary events: performance studies, information literacy, and the semiotics of architecture and public space.

7. 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

Three site reports will ask students to research designed urban places. Students will then analyze the data in order to better understand rules of public behavior (restrictions and violations). Students will put ethnographic and architectural information into conversation with one another in order to draw conclusions. The site reports will prepare students for in-depth analyses of chosen sites and performance interventions. In other words, once a communal deficiency, imbalance, or conflict is identified, students will devise a performative solution to address social problems in communal spaces.

X Synthesize and transfer knowledge across disciplinary boundaries

The use of case studies in this course will allow for interdisciplinary investigations of space and emphasize the way that the meanings of spaces are socially constituted and reinforced through information (signage, historical documentation, site-specific art and performance). Assignments and class activities will expose students to different rhetorical and performative modes and in a final group project, students will explore how place or community might be transformed through a real or hypothetical performance event.

X Comprehend factors inherent in complex problems

Through an examination of historic performative protests and contemporary sites of contestation, this course will explicitly introduce issues including economic stratification, discrimination, and political polarization. Students will consider how systems of power work to define urban spatial rules, delimit or promote socio-political participation, and privilege certain voices and histories. Through an examination of the potentialities of live performance in public spaces to provoke social change, students will also consider relationships between engagement and spectatorship and the stakes of bodily presence and identity.

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

The final project of the semester (a script or plan for social activism presented in podcast or slide presentation form) will ask small groups of students to collect data about an urban space (demographic, zoning, architonic, etc.) and then propose a performative intervention into that place in order to give voice to a social cause. This will challenge students to draw conclusions about the relationships between architonic data and the social dimensions of habitation and use. They will then be asked to address the needs of that community with a performance intervention that will require creativity while also observing ethical uses of public space and the responsible engagement of participants and audiences.

☐ Recognize varied perspectives

- ☐ Gain comfort with complexity and uncertainty
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X Think critically, communicate effectively, and work collaboratively

Students will respond to questions about readings in blog form on OpenLab. The questions will not ask the students to summarize writing, rather they will require students to think critically about the text by applying concepts to real-life situations. In preparation for the final project students will analyze examples of podcasts and presentations in order to reflect on effective means of communication and persuasion. Finally, students will work in small groups of 3-4 on the final research/performance project, the success of which will depend on their ability to work collaboratively.

- ☐ Become flexible thinkers
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- ☐ 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.

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

The course will principally address the following general education goals: writing, research, theatre and architectural history, and urban studies. See details above.

9. Which department would house this course³? Library

10. Would all sections of the course be interdisciplinary? ☐ No ☒ Yes

- a) Would the course be cross-listed in two or more departments? ☐ No ☒ Yes
Explain. (Library and Architecture Tech).
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³ An interdisciplinary course for the College Option requirement may be housed in a department that is not liberal arts.

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- b) How will the course be team-taught⁴? ☒ Co-taught ☐ Guest lecturers ☐ Learning community

If co-taught, what is the proposed workload hour distribution? Divided in half

☒ Shared credits ☐ Trading credits

If guest lecturers, for what approximate percentage of the course? ☐ Minimum 20%⁵ ☐ other:
___%

Please attach the evaluation framework used to assess the interdisciplinarity of the course.⁶

Each instructor will be evaluated separately by students using standard SET forms. Separately, students will complete an “internal” response form for evaluating the interdisciplinary aspects of the course (see attached). Finally, the instructors will discuss the successes and challenges of the course by examining the quality of writing and intellectual depth and creativity of the final projects at the end of the semester in preparation for teaching the course again.

- c) What strategies/resources would be implemented to facilitate students’ ability to make connections across the respective academic disciplines?

OpenLab, site visits, libraries, museums, archives, multimedia presentations (podcasts), PowerPoint, active learning.

11. Would the course be designated as:

☒ A College Option requirement⁷? ☐ an elective? ☐ a Capstone course⁸? ☐ other? Explain.

⁴ Attach evidence of consultation with all affected departments.

⁵ While an interdisciplinary course must be team-taught, there is no formal percentage requirement, but this minimum is a guideline.

⁶ In the case that a course is equally taught, include proposed plans for faculty classroom observation and student evaluation of teaching.

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>

⁸ A course proposed as a Capstone course must be separately approved by the Capstone Experience Committee.