**New York City College of Technology**

**Interdisciplinary Committee**

**Course Review Form**

**DATE:** 2/12/19

**REVIEWER:** Christopher Swift

**COURSE TITLE & NUMBER:** **THEATRE OF LAW, THE/LAW 3000**

**PROPOSED BY:** Sarah Ann Standing and Marissa J. Moran

**CREDIT HOURS:** 3

**PREREQUISITES:** **ENG 1101; and COM 1330 or COM 1340 or THE 2180 (or one other course that satisfies the oral communication requirement)**

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

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

**DEPARTMENT HOUSED IN:** Humanities and Paralegal Studies

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

**CREDIT DISTRIBUTION** (if co-taught): Not specified.

**CATALOG DESCRIPTION:** *An introduction to the use of theatrical theory and techniques in the presentation of legal arguments and their societal context. The disciplines of theatre and law introduce different perspectives on theme, rhetoric, persuasive argument, written and oral storytelling, and performance. These components form an integral part of the legal profession in general, and are particularly relevant to litigation and trial practice. Conversely, this class will also look at how the law has been represented in theatre through the genre of “Courtroom Drama,” contextualized within larger societal forces. This course is open to, and relevant for, any student in the City Tech community who has successfully passed the prerequisites.*

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

A fascinating course with terrific interdisciplinary potential, some of which has already been built into the syllabus. The heart of the course, and where the two fields benefit from cross-disciplinary study, is the ancient trivium: grammar, logic, and rhetoric. Although this is not explicitly acknowledged in the proposal, it could offer a useful way of framing the material and bringing the two fields into closer conversation.

The learning outcomes offer great opportunities for drawing connections between fields, and some of the assignments are able to synthesize the knowledge and skills of the disciplines. In the course description, “societal context” is mentioned twice, but it is not apparent in the proposal which social context is being explored. Likewise, phrases like “issues of power dynamics around race, class, gender, and sexual orientation”, “socio-economic” forces, and “law in the context of society” are not explicitly engaged in assignments or readings, as far as I could tell. I would want to know more about how these contexts are taught/learned or how they impact courtroom or stage drama.

**DESCRIBE & EVALUATE THE INTERDISCIPLINARY STRUCTURE?**

The instructors mostly alternate weeks of lecturing, and subject matter is grouped accordingly. The course description underscores the differences between law and theater, but it seems to me that the course is focusing on the concordances as well.

I think the course can only be housed in one department (but can be listed in both)? Please check.

Credit distribution not made clear.

The reading list is not cohesive and parts do not relate to the topics of the course (“Transmission Model of Communication”, for instance). The Lanham discusses rhetorical strategies, but in the context of prose, not drama or law.

Overall, proposers need to make it clearer how the syllabus carries out the aims that are described in the application. The learning goals need to be more thoroughly baked into the assignments. I don’t think this will require a major overhaul, since the course concept is sound and the basic weekly structure makes sense.

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

**STRENGTHS:**

I like how the professors get the students on their feet and reading/acting trial scenes right from the start of the semester so they begin understand rhetorical strategies and vocal technique, as well as the differences between the written and spoken argument.

The playwriting assignment based on trial transcripts is excellent, especially since it touches on subjects taught throughout the course – climactic structure, roles of courtroom participants, forms of discourse (*voir dire,* cross-examination, etc.)*.* How the different stages of legal procedure would transfer into play structure could be made clearer.

The focus of week 8 is really interesting, and might offer more opportunities for students to talk about social justice and courtroom ethics in other parts of the semester. For instance, more distinct connections between the work of EJI and documentary and social justice theater (week 7) could be made. Topics from each discipline are taught back-to-back, but there are more opportunities for the instructors to explore how these topics are connected (see ID Learning Outcomes: “Purposefully connect and integrate across discipline knowledge and skills to solve problems; Synthesize and transfer knowledge across disciplinary boundaries…”).

The play selections are wonderful and having some on video will be useful. It seems particularly relevant in a course about western law and theater that Greek theater be introduced to the students. The Oresteia trilogy essentially traces the movement of the Greek legal system from a system of Dionysian vengeance to Apollonian trial by jury (the bedrock of the Western legal process). Although certainly not a requirement, proposers may want to look at Emily Mann’s “Execution of Justice”, since during production audience members are seated in a jury box on stage. The play also explores social justice and ethics in the courtroom – both of which I think could be made stronger in the proposal.

**WEAKNESSES:**

The “Potential Paper Assignment” needs more clarity. “Technical elements” (lighting, set design, costume) are not studied in the weekly curriculum, so students would not be prepared to discuss these in a final paper. Perhaps the paper could connect more directly to topics discussed earlier – ethics, procedure, etc. For the final presentation of plays, students are asked to direct plays but again, there isn’t anything in the curriculum about directing that would prepare them for this task.

The proposal states that scaffolded writing is assigned, but the final paper isn’t scaffolded. I think the proposers are asking too much of the students to write and rehearse a play and also submit a formal paper all in the last three weeks of the semester. Perhaps shorter writing assignments (blogs are mentioned in the application) throughout the semester could substitute for a major end-of-the-semester paper.

I don’t understand goals or work of week 11.

Week 14: “second draft is due” – of what?

The catalogue description states that “*Techniques are developed through self-exploration and heightened awareness of senses and emotions,*” however there are no specific assignments for actor training. Trial lawyers certainly “act” and use emotions to argue convincingly, and students could certainly learn how emotional appeals affect theater audiences and juries on a conceptual level. Many students will have learned vocal strategies in communication courses and would be prepared to use these in classroom performances (the prerequisites for the course speak to this), but I don’t see space in the semester for teaching emotional preparation or actor training to this degree.