DATE: December 15, 2019

TO: Phillip Ross Anzalone, Chair

College Council Curriculum Committee

FROM: Interdisciplinary Studies Committee

Reneta D. Lansiquot (Founding Chair), Sean P. MacDonald (Co-Chair)

RE: ID Report for Proposal 19-02, New Course: Theatre of Law

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COURSE TITLE AND NUMBER: Theatre of Law, THE 3000/LAW 3000

CREDIT HOURS: 3 credits; 3 class hours

PREREQUISITES: ENG 1101 and (COM 1330 or COM 1340 or THE 2180 or with department approval)

CATALOG DESCRIPTION:

An investigation into the dynamic and embodied live communication common to both theatre and law. Students will read plays written about foundational cases involving actual trial transcripts, and probe the ways in which these cases have influenced society. Additionally, students will write and perform short plays based on actual court cases. Persuasive argument and the courtroom itself are also investigated as enactments of theatre and performance (examining the courtroom in terms of costume, roles, design, power dynamics, etc.).

STRENGTHS:

As noted in the Course Review Form dated 3/12/2019:

Students are on their feet and reading/acting trial scenes right from the start of the semester so they begin to understand rhetorical strategies and vocal technique, as well as the differences between 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.)*.*

The focus of week 8 is really interesting, and offers opportunities for students to talk about social justice and courtroom ethics. This also prepares students for thinking through issues of performance ethics in the final paper.

The play selections are wonderful and having some on video will be useful (and perhaps even attending live events).

WEAKNESSES:

Committee members expressed strong support for the law course, but there were several concerns with the ID proposal: A) the scope of the course proposal does not adhere to what the New York State Education Department considers a liberal arts and sciences course due to its specialized focus (e.g., there is a distinction between an art history course that is GenEd, and studio and performance arts courses that are not). A course has to qualify as a GenEd course for it to be designated as an ID course at City Tech. B) The course is designed exclusively for law and paralegal studies students, making it unlikely that other students will take it to satisfy the GenEd requirement. C) It does not have an overarching theme that calls for an interdisciplinary perspective, a requirement for ID courses at City Tech.

The committee discussed the following solutions:

* Looking at the courtroom as a performance space is great, but having students role-playing in the courtroom setting is a very different kind of focus. The focus should not be that students learn acting skills to perform better in the courtroom.
* In the broader social context, there is the opportunity to examine several contemporary trials: the impeachment proceedings, Roger Stone trial, O.J. Simpson trial, etc. – what is the impact of law beyond the courtroom?   
  Expand the scope of the course to consider the intersection between performance and law beyond the courtroom setting by moving beyond plays to considering a broader range of performances of law. To do so, it might be helpful to engage with such issues as, for example, how social movements function as performative ways to challenge and engage with laws. Similarly, a focus on race and gender might provide a helpful vantage point for considering inequalities and power differentials in performances of the legal system; the O. J. Simpson being a case in point. Additionally, a closer look at how different media channels shape performances would yield a deeper understanding of the settings in which such performances take place. Engaging with the field of communications would also be helpful in this respect. What is the larger social, cultural and historical context? How is language used? Look at the performance of language.
* Revise readings and course assignments so that they not only teach students to perform in the courtroom, but to understand, reflect and critically engage with other settings in which laws are performed.

Perhaps the proposers could flip the focus of the course (plays, books about famous cases such as the O.J. Simpson trial). In addition, they could add more readings and assignments that go beyond just plays, such as readings that address social justice; race and gender; popular culture.

* Engage more deeply with philosophical debates and current social theories regarding the performance of social norms, laws, and truth-claims to enable the students to develop deeper critical thinking and analysis skills which are key learning outcomes across GenEd courses.
* We define interdisciplinary studies as focusing “on questions, problems, and topics too complex or too broad for a single discipline or field to encompass adequately.” (Application for Interdisciplinary Course Designation)

To meet the ID course requirements, develop a broader interdisciplinary theme that integrates perspectives from both disciplines. There should clearly be more of a GenEd focus, rather than a law and acting focus. Overall, there is the need for a theme that ties the course together.

All members present during the discussion agreed with the aforementioned points. In addition, following the discussion of the course within the ID committee, the second reviewer of the course reconsidered her assessment of the course in the original course review she presented to the committee. She expressed the evolution of her thinking on the course both during the 3/12/2019 and the 12/12/2019 committee meetings.