

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

**Application for Interdisciplinary Course Designation**

**Date** August 26, 2020

**Submitted by** Prof. Alyssa Dana Adomaitis and Prof. Kerin E. Coughlin

**Department(s)** Prof. Adomaitis is a member of the Business Department; Prof. Coughlin is a member of the Law and Paralegal Studies Department; and this course will be offered through the Social Science Department.

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

**1. Identify the course type and title:**

☐ An existing course \_\_\_\_\_

☒ **A new course** History of U.S. Fashion Law, 20th Century to the Present: The Ugly Side of Fashion (unanimously approved by College Council at its December 10, 2019 meeting)

☐ A course under development \_\_\_\_\_

- 2. Provide a course description:** This legal history course traces the development of U.S. fashion law from the twentieth century through the present, in three areas in which complex questions frequently have arisen: intellectual property (including trademarks and counterfeiting), employment (including safety, wages, and workplace dress), and constitutional rights (including freedoms of religion and expression). Students will study the historical contexts of legal developments in each of those areas, including the relevant social, political, economic, and other circumstances, in order to understand the legal developments, and particularly the responses to the questions that arose, more clearly.
- 3. How many credits will the course comprise?** 3 cr. **How many hours?** 3 hrs.
- 4. What prerequisite(s) would students need to complete before registering for the course? Co-requisite(s)?** Two prerequisites: (1) ENG 1101 and (2) either HIS 1111 or GOV 1101.
- 5. Explain briefly why this is an interdisciplinary course.** First, this course will be team-taught by two faculty members, each of whom will have backgrounds in history, business and/or law. The current plan is for the course to be taught by its proposers, Profs. Adomaitis and Coughlin. Prof. Coughlin holds a JD and has taught and practiced the legal concepts addressed in this course, including intellectual property, employment, and constitutional issues. Prof. Coughlin also is presently in her fourth year of the History PhD program at the CUNY Graduate Center, focusing on twentieth century US legal history. She also holds a MA in Urban Studies from Queens College. Prof. Adomaitis holds a PhD in Social Psychology of Dress and Human Behavior and a MBA in Marketing. She has taught courses and worked in the fashion industry on issues relating to those

addressed here: intellectual property, beauty injustice (lookism), and freedom of expression. This course also could easily be taught by other faculty with history, business and/or law backgrounds.

Second, this course involves three academic disciplines: history, law, and the business of fashion. It synthesizes the distinct perspectives, knowledge, and skills involved in each of those disciplines, as a means of analyzing the complex legal questions and problems that historically have arisen in the business of fashion, and how the various stakeholders have responded to those questions and problems.

Finally, this course explores the strong connections between the seemingly exclusive domains of fashion and law, which numerous commentators have recognized. *Crain's NY Business* observed that "issues of design and law increasingly intersect"<sup>1</sup> and *Fashionista* cited "the melding of fashion and law."<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, law schools have developed fashion-related programs of various kinds, including Harvard Law School's "Fashion Law Lab" course,<sup>3</sup> Loyola Law School's "Fashion Law Project,"<sup>4</sup> and Fordham Law School's two fashion law degree programs: one for lawyers, called a Master of Laws, or LL.M.; and one for members of the business community, called a Master of Studies in Law, or M.S.L.<sup>5</sup>

For all of these reasons, the College Council Curriculum Subcommittee stated in its Final Report to College Council recommending approval of this course that it "is fundamentally interdisciplinary, so the proposers will apply to the ID committee in order to designate the course as fulfilling the ID requirement necessary for all students."

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?** The proposed theme of this course is the development of U.S. fashion law from the twentieth century through the present. The complex problems and questions it addresses are ones that have arisen frequently in the fashion business since the twentieth century, in three central areas: intellectual property (such as trademarks and counterfeiting), employment (such as safety, wages, workplace dress), and constitutional rights (such as freedoms of religion and expression). The main disciplinary method that will be evoked and applied is reading and analysis of primary and secondary historical sources, and conveying one's interpretations and arguments regarding those sources and the events they reflect, principally through writing. The writings in this course serve two main purposes: First, like professional historians' writing, they will be the principal means by which students communicate their interpretations and arguments to each other, and to others in the academic community. Second, they will enable students to process their own thinking about, and reactions to, the complex issues raised in this course, many of which can be emotional, including religion, race, and gender. To quote the

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<sup>1</sup> "Legal specialty more than just a trend, as issues of design and law increasingly intersect," by Adrienne Pasquarelli, *Crain's NY Business*, June 22, 2015 ([http://www.crainsnewyork.com/article/20150622/RETAIL\\_APPAREL/150629978/fordham-to-offer-advanced-degrees-in-fashion-law](http://www.crainsnewyork.com/article/20150622/RETAIL_APPAREL/150629978/fordham-to-offer-advanced-degrees-in-fashion-law)).

<sup>2</sup> "You Can Now Get a Degree in Fashion Law," by Dhani Mau, *Fashionista*, June 22, 2015 (<http://fashionista.com/2015/06/fordham-fashion-law-degree-program>).

<sup>3</sup> Harvard Law School, [hls.harvard.edu/academics/curriculum/catalog/default.aspx?o=71170](http://hls.harvard.edu/academics/curriculum/catalog/default.aspx?o=71170).

<sup>4</sup> Loyola Law School, [www.lls.edu/academics/centers/thefashionlawproject/](http://www.lls.edu/academics/centers/thefashionlawproject/).

<sup>5</sup> Fordham Law School, [www.fordham.edu/info/23599/fashion\\_law](http://www.fordham.edu/info/23599/fashion_law).

author Flannery O'Connor, "I write because I don't know what I think until I read what I say." We will also employ such methods as group discussion and independent research.

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.

☐ **Purposefully connect and integrate across-discipline knowledge and skills to solve problems**

Students will purposefully connect and integrate knowledge and skills across the disciplines of history, law, and the business of fashion to consider the various solutions to legal problems that have arisen in fashion, aided by an understanding of the historical development of the relevant legal and business principles.

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

Students will synthesize and transfer knowledge across the disciplinary boundaries of history, law and fashion, such as understanding the difference between a fashion original and a "knockoff" in both the business and legal contexts, historical developments that led to fashion piracy, and legal methods of addressing the consequences of piracy over time.

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☐ **Comprehend factors inherent in complex problems**

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

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☒ **Recognize varied perspectives**

Students will recognize varied perspectives on legal problems relating to fashion and how they developed since the twentieth century, including perspectives of designers, manufacturers, and retailers; employees and employers; and members of various demographic groups.

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☒ **Gain comfort with complexity and uncertainty**

Students will gain comfort with complexity and uncertainty by developing their understandings of how U.S. fashion law has developed in complex areas of intellectual property, employment, and constitutional rights; the uncertainties facing stakeholders who confronted problems and questions that arose in those areas; and how and why those stakeholders chose particular responses from among various options.

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☐ Think critically, communicate effectively, and work collaboratively

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X Become flexible thinkers

Students will become flexible thinkers regarding the many perspectives on legal problems that have arisen in the fashion business since the twentieth century, and the wide variety of potentially appropriate solutions to those problems.

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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?

**Knowledge:** This course will develop students' knowledge of history, fashion, and law, and hone their ability to deepen and continue learning, by introducing them to new, and increasingly complex, concepts and analyses in each of those disciplines.

**Skills:** This course will help students acquire and develop tools needed for communication, inquiry, and analysis in the disciplines of history, business of fashion, and law, including research and understanding of primary historical and legal sources; application of law to real life scenarios; and oral and written presentation of historical analyses and conclusions.

**Integration:** Students will synthesize the legal and business perspectives on the historical developments in the various areas addressed. Students will also demonstrate productive use of problem-solving approaches that integrate the disciplines of history, law, and the business of fashion.

**Values, ethics and relationships:** Each of these concepts will be explicit topics in this course, as they are intrinsically related not only to the substantive areas of law we will address (intellectual property, employment, and free expression) but also to the craft of historical research and writing, the practice of law, and the conduct of business.

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### 9. Which department would house this course<sup>6</sup>? Social Science (History)

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<sup>6</sup> An interdisciplinary course for the College Option requirement may be housed in a department that is not liberal arts.

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

b) How will the course be team-taught<sup>7</sup>? ☒ Co-taught ☐ Guest lecturers ☐ Learning community

If co-taught, what is the proposed workload hour distribution? 1.5 hours each

☒ Shared credits ☐ Trading credits

c) If guest lecturers, for what approximate percentage of the course? ☐ Minimum 20%<sup>8</sup> ☐ other: \_\_%

Please attach the evaluation framework used to assess the interdisciplinary of the course.<sup>9</sup>

**Evaluation Framework:** Students will be evaluated based on two main forms of writing assignments: weekly writing assignments (25%); and a scaffolded research paper, which is the major project of the course (40%). In addition, students will be evaluated through written examinations at the ends of each of the three units (30% total), and class participation (5%). Each of these methods is described below.

**I. *Writing Assignments:*** Writing is integrally important to each of the three disciplines involved in this course: history, law, and business of fashion. Writing is particularly critical for historians, who rely heavily on written documents, including court opinions, statutes, and the U.S. Constitution, all of which we will use in this course, to understand the past and develop a reasoned and persuasive interpretation of a historical event or process—that is, a historical argument. Historians also use writing to communicate with one another and with the public, through books, articles, and papers explaining their interpretations and arguments. A goal of the writing assigned in this course will be practicing this work of a historian.

A second, but related, goal of the writing in this course is facilitating students' own understanding of what they are learning. Much of the reading in this course is challenging: court opinions, in particular, can be models of poor writing, and students may struggle with them (as do historians and attorneys). Moreover, many issues addressed in this course are emotional, including religion, race, and gender. Thus, writing will be a tool for students to process their own thinking and reactions. To quote the author Flannery O'Connor, "I write because I don't know what I think until I read what I say."

To achieve these dual goals of writing, the following projects will be assigned:

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<sup>7</sup> Attach evidence of consultation with all affected departments.

<sup>8</sup> While an interdisciplinary course must be team-taught, there is no formal percentage requirement, but this minimum is a guideline.

<sup>9</sup> In the case that a course is equally taught, include proposed plans for faculty classroom observation and student evaluation of teaching.

- (a) **Weekly writing assignments (25%).** Each week, students will write a 1-2 page (250 to 500 words) written reflection on either (a) some aspect of the week's assigned readings, including historical background and legal sources; or (b) a recent news article relating to fashion law. The reflections may take a variety of forms, including open-ended, where each student chooses her/his particular focus; responses to specific questions provided by the instructors; persuasive writing, where students argue for a particular point of view; relating the reading to a class discussion; etc. The assignments will be assessed on the extent to which they reveal the student's engaged thinking about the topic. For example, does the student identify and articulate complexities, delve into puzzles and problems, confront inadequate explanations, question and respond to the sources?
- (b) **Research paper (40% total).** The main project of this course will be a scaffolded research paper of eight to ten pages, in which each student will trace, through primary and secondary research, the historical antecedents of a contemporary legal problem in fashion, and address and evaluate potential approaches to solving the problem. Students will be provided a specific schedule for the progress of this paper, and will receive feedback from the instructor after each step. The steps include: (i) topic proposal and preliminary bibliography (3%); (ii) detailed annotated bibliography (with primary and secondary sources) (5%); (iii) rough draft and/or outline (7%); (iv) oral presentation to the class, with Powerpoint or other visual content, in which classmates provide immediate feedback orally during class discussion (10%); and (v) the final revised paper, which addresses classmates' and instructor's feedback (15%).

II. **Unit exams (30%):** The written examinations at the end of each of the three units (10% each) assess students' comprehension of the historical developments in the various legal areas addressed in the course, as well as the relevant legal and business concepts, including terminology and how the concepts and procedures apply in factual situations. Exams require students to demonstrate understanding of the social, political, economic and cultural influences on the development of the law relating to fashion, as well as the business and legal perspectives, including how they converge, diverge, and interact. Exams will include essays as well as other question types such as multiple choice and short answer. For example, an exam might offer students a selection of essay questions testing broad, general historical knowledge of the development of fashion law during the twentieth century, as well as multiple choice questions asking students to select from several options the best definitions of terms related to the areas of law we address, and short answer questions asking students to identify the purpose of certain statutes we cover, such as the Lanham Act and the Fair Labor Standards Act, and/or explain how those statutes apply to hypothetical situations.

III. **Participation (5%).** Participation includes carefully reading all assigned materials, and thoughtfully completing the weekly writing assignments before class. Because significant class time will be spent in discussion, participation also includes orally contributing one's understandings of, and responses to, assigned materials during those discussions; respectfully listening to other students' points of view even, perhaps

especially, when one strongly disagrees with those views; and responding thoughtfully to questions and comments raised by the instructor and by other students.

**d) What strategies/resources would be implemented to facilitate students' ability to make connections across the respective academic disciplines?** The primary strategies that would be implemented to facilitate students' ability to make connections across the disciplines of history, law, and business of fashion are set forth above, in response to question 7 (learning outcomes) and in the Evaluation Framework. Resources include primary legal sources such as court decisions, statutes, and the U.S. Constitution, as well as secondary sources such as monographs, scholarly articles, and other materials for historical and business contexts, such as the following:

- Ruthann Robson, *Dressing Constitutionally: Hierarchy, Sexuality, and Democracy from our Hairstyles to Our Shoes* (New York: Cambridge U.P., 2013)
- Ursula Furi-Perry, *The Little Book of Fashion Law* (Chicago: American Bar Association 2013)
- Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Massachusetts: Harvard U.P., 1977)
- Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 2001)
- Gowri Ramachandran, "Freedom of Dress: State and Private Regulation of Clothing, Hairstyle, Jewelry, Makeup, Tattoos and Piercings," *Maryland Law Review* 66 (2006): 11-93
- Jonathan Grossman, "Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938: Maximum Struggle for a Minimum Wage," U.S. Department of Labor website, <https://www.dol.gov/oasam/programs/history/flsa1938.htm>
- Hilda L. Solis, "What the Triangle Shirtwaist fire means for workers now," *The Washington Post* (March 21, 2011) (editorial by then-U.S. Secretary of Labor).

We will also invite guest lecturers from the historical, fashion and legal fields to address particular topics from their expert perspectives. CUNY Law School Professor Ruthann Robson, author of an assigned text, *Dressing Constitutionally: Hierarchy, Sexuality, and Democracy from our Hairstyles to Our Shoes*, has offered to appear as a guest lecturer, as well as Adjunct Professor Joseph Murphy of the Law and Paralegal Studies Department, who has practiced fashion law for many years.

**11. Would the course be designated as:**

**X a College Option requirement<sup>10</sup>? ☐ an elective? ☐ a Capstone course<sup>11</sup>? ☐ other? Explain.**

This course will be available to baccalaureate students throughout the college to satisfy the Interdisciplinary course requirement.

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<sup>10</sup> 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>

<sup>11</sup> A course proposed as a Capstone course must be separately approved by the Capstone Experience Committee.