Field-Of-Study Course Proposal:  Cover Application

Proposed Field of Study:  Music
Course Number:  MUS 232
Course Title:  Creating Original Opera

Catalog Description: In partnership with the Metropolitan Opera, this course provides a forum in which students of varied interests and majors come together to produce an original opera. Students will apply for one of twelve jobs——production manager, stage manager, historian, carpenter, electrician, set designer, costume designer, make-up artist, librettist, composer, performer, public relations—that parallel the division of labor in a real opera company and will work together to create a single integrated production.

Course Prerequisites:  None
Number of Credit Hours:  3
Typical Estimated Enrollment:  30
How often and by whom will the course be offered:  Annually, Ruth Longobardi
Staffing Implications:  None anticipated

Adequacy of Library, Technology, and Other Resources:  Adequate  (Course should be held in Webb 207)

Any Interdepartmental and Interschool Implications:  This course may involve theater, music, art, and arts administration students through independent study projects; details pending.  The course will also involve a one-week artist residency supported by the Metropolitan Opera in New York City.

Contact Person:  Ruth Longobardi

Written Explanation: Description, Objectives, Syllabus:

Course Description
In partnership with the Metropolitan Opera, and using their Creating Original Opera program (COO) as a model, this new Field-of-Study course will provide a forum for operatic creation through which students of all interests, and of non-musical backgrounds, can engage with the world around them.

As children, we learn about our universe through make-believe—through stories, dance, painting, and poetry—and not just by looking at these arts but also by applying them.  And yet the arts have the potential to also engage students of all ages and to deepen their studies of all areas and disciplines.  Opera is a special genre in this regard, because it provides unique possibilities for students to connect collaboratively with contemporary issues through interdisciplinary channels: through literature, painting, sewing, singing, and also through broader channels like history, sociology, political science, ethics, and so
The opportunity to piece these disciplines together in order to create an original work of art is rare, exciting, and absolutely worthwhile. Above all, the premise of this class is that practical application is the only way to ask questions and also to investigate answers.

While class time will provide some background on opera history, production, and significance, the semester will be taken up largely by the student creation and production of an original opera. Students will apply for one of twelve jobs——production manager, stage manager, historian, carpenter, electrician, set designer, costume designer, make-up artist, librettist, composer, performer, public relations——that parallel the division of labor in a real opera company. Every job will bring unique challenges, but students will also have to work throughout the semester to create an integrated production. Together they will select a subject for their opera—one that will be grounded in contemporary issues—and at all times they will be challenged to engage in critical thinking, collaborative activity, and interdisciplinary integration.

Vital to the success of this class will be a one-week visit from one of the Metropolitan Opera’s artists-in-residence. The artist, though mainly a composer, will be trained in six of the twelve COO job areas. The artist will also be skilled in principles of curriculum integration, a fundamental feature of the COO program. During this visit, the composer will spend up to six hours per day with teachers and students. During classroom time, the artist will lead workshops in six job areas and will encourage and demonstrate methods of integration among all of them. The artist will also meet with the professor outside of class to discuss issues of curriculum integration, artistic development, coaching, and composing. In addition, the artist will be available to other music and theater classes throughout the week.

The benefits of adapting the COO program to an FSVP course are many (see also Course Objectives below). Through operatic creation, students will work over long periods to solve problems together. Students will learn how to participate actively and collaboratively, how to ask questions about the production of meaning in the arts, how to integrate their own interests into a broader paradigm, how to listen to the interests of others. They will also learn about the interpretation of texts and the creation of multiple layers of meaning that may mirror, augment, or work against those texts. While other FSVP courses in music provide musical context and access to performances, this course would truly provide hands-on practical experience for students. The focus is not on the final performance but on the process of creation over time. Moreover the course would be uniquely student directed. The opera would be born out of student interest and would grow accordingly. If at times, collaborative efforts result in the co-production of meaning, just as often we will see that it can produce contention; one of the unique benefits of this class is its dialogic mechanisms and its necessary foregrounding of diversity. The class will thus also raise questions about the fusion of opera’s various domains, questions about ideology and power dynamics and about cultural and social politics.

One final note: I believe that a collaboration between the Metropolitan Opera and the University of Richmond will be a rewarding one, in part because the COO program is so
successful on a national level. Since 1983, over 800 schools throughout the United States and around the world have participated in this program. During the 2003-04 school year, over 400 schools formed student production companies and produced their own opera in their classrooms and in their schools. The Metropolitan Opera is also excited about beginning a relationship with the University of Richmond; we will be one of the first universities (along with CUNY) to engage in this program.

Objectives

? **Practical Experience**: Practical application is the best way to ask questions and to find answers. While other FSVP courses in music provide historical context and access to live performance, this course would truly provide hands-on experience in the arts for students and would demonstrate ways in which the arts apply to the world all around us.

? **Curriculum Integration**: Integrating the skills learned in this course into a broader curriculum is a primary focus of the COO program. Students will learn that the skills they use for solving problems, for dialoguing, and for creative thinking can be applied with great benefit to other classes and interests. On the other hand, students may also find that the most successful collaboration comes from integrating their own unique skills into a single work of art.

? **Dialogue Amid Diversity**: Because this course is uniquely student directed, one of its benefits will be the dialogue it encourages among an inevitably diverse population. Through collaboration students will learn about diversity: how to live with it, and how to manage it as an advantage and not as a detriment.

? **Problem Solving**: Operatic creation necessitates that students collaborate over an extended period of time, working together to solve problems. Through the creative process, students will learn how to participate actively and collaboratively, how to ask questions about the production of meaning, how to integrate their own interests into a broader paradigm, how to voice opinion but also how and when to listen to the opinions of others.

Syllabus

The course will be largely organized as a series of workshops. A specific syllabus will be designed as part of the Metropolitan Opera’s COO summer training course (to take place in July 2005). Please see attached as example.
**WEEK 0—Teachers—Set Parameters**
- Set performance dates
- Find places to work
- Figure out schedules for teaching
- Describe jobs / preference sheets
- Find place for call board, company meeting and storage of materials
- Construct a production schedule

**Week 1—Audition Week**
**Schedule**
- Complete audition form one and two

**Production Schedule**
- Performer auditions and call backs
- Manager interviews
- Announce the company / name the company

**Week 2—Protocol**
**Schedule**
- Manager meeting
- First company meeting
- Set meeting protocol
- First job meetings
- Examine booklets
- Teach individual job professionalism
- Trust exercises for performers
- Theme and thesis for writers, including lyrics for theme songs

**Week 3—Theme**
**Schedule**
- Unified design meeting with all visual jobs
- Composers make character motifs and theme song composition,
  - assemble some “underscoring” out of motif work
- Electricians start footlights and dimmers

**Week 4—Skills / Drills**
**Schedule**
- Assignments by job
- Performers learn a song, learn subtext, create a character
- PR drafts press release

**Week 5—The Script—Casting**
**Schedule**
- Company read-thru of script
- All jobs begin first sequence of work involving script (Set Designers, Composers, Electricians become Lighting Designers)
- Director forms initial concept
- Character bio and subtext assignments
- Press releases mailed

**Week 6—Final Creation / Production**
**Schedule**
Composers and Set Designers complete work  
Director/Teacher blocking  
Set Designers and Carpenters meet to discuss building

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 7—Production Schedule</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performers learn all songs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set construction completed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composers become the “band,” work on arrangements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final blocking given</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 8—Rehearsal—Saturday Rehearsal Schedule</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electricians wire stage, preliminary cues by Stage Managers and Electricians</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costume parade/adjustments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit designed and organized/hung</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 9—Performance Schedule</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 dress rehearsal, 4 performances and strike</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final company meeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>