**ENGL O294-0J1: Circus Arts and Literature**

Request for Experimental Approval

Tracey Watts

During the 2024 J-term, I would like to launch ENGL O294: Circus Arts and Literature. It will run as a course that is both experimental and experiential. Specifically, the course will require students to engage creatively with literary texts while also practicing circus arts, specifically aerial silks. We will read a selection of fiction and nonfiction texts, which will likely include Angela Carter’s *Nights at the Circus* andErin Morganstern’s *The Night Circus,* along with shorter selections from other genres, such as poetry, history, and memoir. We will also watch a video of a performance titled *Boom Vol. II* from a Prague-based circus arts troupe. In addition to discussing and writing about literature, performance, and circus-themed nonfiction, students will have approximately 10 to 12 hours (over the course of 6 sessions) of aerial silks instruction under the guidance of Alexandra White, owner and instructor at Crescent City Aerial Arts. I will be contracting Ms. White’s services via funding from the English department’s gift account. Additionally, I may incorporate other physical activities, including yoga or acro-yoga and slackline. (I am a certified yoga instructor.) I may also reach out to other circus arts practitioners in the New Orleans area to give students access to additional opportunities, and I am considering having students develop a mobile circus arts routine as a final project, which we could potentially launch as a Chewbacchus walking krewe.

Circus Arts and Literature will meet the Category I criteria of a CAC course: the practice of a specific creative art. Students will meet this goal by learning to maneuver on aerial silks. Both the readings and the physical practices will introduce students to a new vocabulary related to circus arts (Goal 1), and our discussions of the texts and the *Boom Vol. II* performance will allow students to practice basic aesthetic analysis (Goal 4a). In order to meet Goal 2, students will spend at least 10-12 hours over the 2-week period immersed in experiential circus arts training. They will be able to execute several basic aerial silks skills well by the end of the course. In order to meet Goal 3, students will also read selections from creative nonfiction texts that explore historical and social contexts of the circus, and they will read some selections from memoirs toward the same end.

My plan for the 9 days of J-term instruction is to meet face to face with students from 9 to 3 daily, with a short break for lunch. I would like to use the morning blocks (9 - 12) primarily for discussion of assigned texts, though I would also plan to lead 45-60 minutes of yoga instruction or other physical activity daily (i.e., slackline practice in Audubon Park). Six of the afternoon blocks would include our silks instruction at Crescent City Aerial Arts. The other three blocks would involve creative writing practice or the development of a mobile circus-arts themed routine that could debut at the Chewbacchus Mardi Gras parade.

\*A note regarding students with disabilities: the circus arts community is an inclusive one that values body positivity and the integration of all bodies into liberatory movement to the greatest extent possible. To that end, persons of all fitness levels and ability are encouraged to sign up for this course. The aerial practice will begin on apparatuses positioned close to the ground – and students can remain at a low-risk, low-rise placement level for as long as they wish. Students with mobility concerns may inquire with Professor Tracey Watts to determine how their physical needs can be accommodated in the course. No grades will be based on a student’s ability to complete aerial movements or sequences, and physical instruction can be modified to make the practice accessible.”