October 23, 2012

To: Nord Grants Committee  
From: Jeffrey Ullom, Assistant Professor and Director of Undergraduate Theater Studies  
RE: Support for New Course in Musical Theatre

Musical theatre is often considered “total theatre” in that it is the most conventionalized form of theatre in Western culture. Traditional Broadway musicals are filled with scenic and lighting marvels, dazzling costumes, lush or provocative orchestrations, and talented performers—all united to present an idealized world view or an avenue for escapism. Of course, there are exceptions to this rule, but how and why the newer forms of musical theatre altered the traditional structure of the musical reveals as much about the shifts in popular culture as it does the development of theatre in America.

Despite the fact that musical theatre has the most popular form of American theatre for nearly a century, the study of the genre is slowly making its way into academia as an area deserving serious study. I propose to use a Nord grant to develop a course that not only teaches the history of American musical theatre and how it reflects trends of American culture, but I would also dedicate a portion of the course to teaching how to create musical theatre (namely lyric writing, playwriting, and composition) through exercises that can be performed by students with little/no experience in musical theatre.

This course taps into the growing desire for musicals on campus as exhibited not only by the yearly sell-outs of student-produced shows on campus, but our own department’s musical (the first in decades) broke all attendance records. In total, between these productions, it is estimated that over one thousand students view a musical production on campus each year, yet there is currently no academic correlation to these shows. This event provides a unique opportunity to teach critical thinking, creative standards, and history to the many students interested in the genre. Furthermore, because the assignments are either critiques or creative projects, this class could serve the goals of a SAGES course.

The money from this grant would be used to cover expenses in three categories: first, a DVD set and a few books would be purchased to help supplement instructional material. I currently own a large number of books, so I envision this amount being relatively small. Second, I would like to travel to the Association for Theatre in Higher Education conference which features a musical theatre focus group which will allow me to learn from my colleagues who are currently teaching
similar courses at other institutions. Furthermore, it has been a while since I published an article on musical theatre (five years ago), and my current research project has taken me away from the field of musical theatre; the conference would allow me to understand the direction of current scholarship in order to better serve students. Finally, I am requesting money to invite two or three guest artists into the classroom during the semester. Given the number of touring productions that visit Playhouse Square, it would be easy to invite an actor, technician, or conductor onto campus for a discussion.

**Budget**

**Class Materials**
- DVDs of performances (e.g. *Passing Strange, Oklahoma*, etc.) $200
- Books (scholarship and librettos) $175

**Conference**
- Travel to conference in Orlando, FL $425
- Hotel for three nights ($189 plus tax) $650
- Per diem (four days) $192
- Travel to hotel/airport parking $110
- Conference fees $385

**Guest artists/lectures**
- Three lectures at $100 each $300

**TOTAL REQUESTED:** $2,437.00

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Jeffrey Ullom  
Assistant Professor of Theater

Ron Wilson  
Chair, Department of Theater