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DANC 220A.01: Beginning Composition

Heidi M. Eggert

University of Montana - Missoula, heidi.eggert@umontana.edu

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University of Montana, School of Theatre & Dance
Fall 2014: **Beginning Composition** 2 credits
75085 – DANC 220A-01 T Th 9:10-10:30 am

Instructor: **Heidi Jones Eggert**
Email: heidi.eggert@umontana.edu

Office: PARTV 186
Office hours: **Wed 11:00-12:00**
Thurs 10:30-11:30 Fri 12:00-1:00

*We look at the dance to impart the sensation of living in an affirmation of life, to energize the spectator into keener awareness of the vigor, the mystery, the humor, the variety, and the wonder of life.
This is the function of the American dance. ~ Martha Graham*

Course Description

A discussion and laboratory based class. Through the practice of improvisation, choreographic principles, reflection and evaluation – students will learn methods to compose dance.

Required Text

- Blom, Lynne and Chaplin, L. Tarin. The Intimate Act of Choreography. Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1982.
- *Supplementary readings as assigned.*

Objectives

- To explore improvisations as vehicles through which student come to understand and learn various choreographic principles.
- To explore creative processes designed so one becomes familiar with traditional choreographic elements and tools such as: phrase, body, space, time, energy, quality, form, abstraction, sound, performance and evaluation.
- To discover a personal method and creative process to shape material derived from improvisational work into choreographic studies.
- To invent new, fresh and personal movement vocabulary.
- To develop an understanding of the vital importance of intent, theme and subject matter within one's choreography.
- To develop a way to deliver and receive feedback and criticism in a way that is constructive.

Methods

The following will enable objectives to be met: completion of assigned readings, participation in discussion, improvisation and choreographic studies, self and peer evaluation, archiving creative process and product in both journal and video format throughout the semester.

Course Content

Specific schedule of readings, improvisations, studies and the arrangement of content will be determined as the course progresses and according to the student's development and needs.

Approach

- Providing structure for improvisations.
- Lecture/video references to serve as roots and means from which choreographic studies will develop.

Essentials

- Isolating choreographic intention.
- Implementing thematic content to motivate intent (choreography is an opportunity to SAY something).
- Movement invention

Phrase

- Methods of creation
- High point

Space

- Level
- Direction, dimension, plane
- Pathway, floor patterns
- Line (curved, straight, angular, symmetrical, asymmetrical)
- Positive and Negative space
- Stage Space
- Environment (dynamic space, symbolic space, site-specific)

Time

- Phrasing
- Breath
- Momentum (acceleration/deceleration)
- Accent
- Stillness

Dynamics

- Energy: High / Low
- Force: Strong / Gentle
- Movement qualities: Percussive / Sustained

Sound

- Music
- Words

Form

- Landscape as form
- Transition
- Sequence
- Compositional structures
- Choreographic devices

Performance

- Weekly studies and showings
- Site-specific concert framing *Dance Up Close*, Nov 4-8
- **Final showing – Wednesday, December 10th 10:10am – 12:10pm PARTV 005**

Course Requirements

1. Studio Work: Improvisations, Studies: (40%) Each student will participate in improvisational structures and present choreographic studies as assigned. Each study must be individually titled and regarded as a complete entity in and of itself. There is a fundamental expectation in this course that you will approach each of the assignments as an inventor, exploring and defining your own movement language. The studies in choreography are the equivalent of essays in a composition class. Both solo and group studies are required throughout the semester. Students will be graded according to:

- * Effort to fulfill the requirements of each study

- * Effort to communicate through complete thoughts – beginning-middle-end.

- * Effort to rise to the challenge of the studies

- * Ability to thoughtfully articulate intent

- * Inventiveness. To experiment beyond the classroom phrases learned day to day in technique classes. Composition offers unlimited opportunity to shape movement the choreographer has already learned and transform it into one's own.

NOTE: Students are not permitted to “make up” studies they miss due to absence.

2. Discussion and Critique: (20%) Directed improvisations and choreographic studies will be discussed, reflected upon and evaluated during class, through journaling and on Moodle. Students will deliver and receive feedback in a critically constructive manner that goes beyond the subjective “I liked it.” Students must thoughtfully construct their feedback and be able to justify their critique.

3. Journal: (5%) Students are expected to record ideas for choreography, important notes about the tools, exercises, skills, the structures and concepts used to create choreography, feedback, criticism, notes for improvement, questions as well as topics that arise through discussion and assigned readings. Students are expected to bring the journal/notebook to each class session. This may be submitted twice over the course of the semester.

4. Video: (5%) Students are expected to have a video recording device available for choreographic showings each day. This visual tool enables students to archive their work and reflect upon / learn from past studies. One DVD or flash drive containing your semester's work will be submitted at the conclusion of the semester.

5. Showings: (20%) Students are required to publicly show a developed **site-specific choreographic study** at the [School of Theatre & Dance's Dance Up Close, Nov 4-8](#). These showings will take place around the PARTV building before the performance, during intermission and following each scheduled show. **Final showing – Wednesday, December 10th 10:10am – 12:10pm PARTV 005:** The goal of the final composition project is to provide an opportunity for the choreographer to exhibit the tools s/he has learned throughout the semester. Secondly, this project provides the chance for the choreographer to decide what her or his motivation for the piece is, and on what specifically s/he wishes to focus.

6. Creative Process and Choreographic Criticism Essay: (10%) To learn more about the creative and choreographic process, students are required to interview a peer choreographer who is producing work this semester in the [Dance Up Close \(November 4-8\)](#). Write a five-page essay that both documents the peer choreographer's process as well as your personal choreographic criticism of their work.

Due: Tuesday, November 18th. *More details to follow.*

***Attendance Policy** (taken from UM Dance's *Injury Policy Consideration*)

For classes that meet 2 times a week, each student is permitted 1 excusable absence. For each absence thereafter, 1/2 of a letter grade is docked from the student's grade. If a student sits out for an entire week of class (2 classes), an entire letter grade is docked from the student's grade.

Academic Misconduct and the Student Conduct Code

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code. The Code is available for review online at http://life.umt.edu/vpsa/student_conduct.php.

All Theatre & Dance students must have an in-depth knowledge of the practices and procedures outlined in the School of Theatre & Dance *Student Handbook*. The *Handbook* is available online at <http://www.umt.edu/theatredance/about/handbook>.

There is inherent risk involved in many Theatre & Dance classes as they are very physical in nature. Please proceed through class, shop time, or rehearsal with caution. Always be mindful of your personal safety and the safety of others. Students participating in class/shop/rehearsal/performance do so at their own risk.

Due to safety considerations, at **no** point during a student's time spent in class or serving on a production (in any capacity) should non-enrolled persons be guests of that student **without my consent**. Presence of such unauthorized persons in a class, shop, or any backstage/off-stage area will negatively affect a student's grade.

The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students (DSS). If you think you may have a disability adversely affecting your academic performance, and you have not already registered with DSS, please contact DSS in Lommasson 154. I will work with you and DSS to provide an appropriate accommodation.