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Example of a Well-Designed Course in: DANCE HISTORY

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Institution: Appalachian State University

1. Specific Context

- **The Subject Matter:** Dance History – Western and Nonwestern traditions
- **The title of the course:** Dance History
- **Typical class size:** 25 – 30 students
- **Level of the course:** 300
- **Mode of delivery:** mostly face-to-face lecture with small group discussion, and lecture-demonstrations in the studio on selected dance forms
- **Type of institution:** Master's comprehensive university - Appalachian State University

2. General Description of the Course

This course is aimed towards two populations of students. The first are those Dance Studies students who are either majoring or minoring in the subject area. The second are those students who are interested in Dance and who enroll in the course as a way in which to satisfy their General Education requirement. The composition of the course is generally evenly divided between these two populations.

3. Big Purpose of the Course

This course is designed to engage the student with the importance of the human-body-moving-through-space that has informed the human experience from pre-literate times to today. It places our "embodied way of knowing" within a social, artistic, religious, political and cultural context. The student should experience an appreciation for the dynamic, varied and complex role that dance has played in human societies over time.

In addition, the course is structured so that the students can learn how history is constructed by the questions that we ask, by the methods we employ, and by the curiosity we bring to this subject. Many of these students have taken choreography class and they can draw comparisons to how we creatively choreograph a dance with the notion of how we creatively engage with and construct our understanding of history.

4. Important Situational Factors/Special Pedagogical Challenges

a. Nature of the Subject

Dance History is the study of dance in human societies. Dance Anthropologist Judith Lynn Hanna writes simply: "to dance is human." This statement is as complex as it is simple. As humans, we tell each other stories and construct narratives to better understand that humane experience. Some of these narratives take shape in verbal or written accounts; some find expression in visual imagery; others in complex musical languages; still others in movement vocabularies that are culturally constructed and which challenge us to interrogate them with a variety of methodologies so that we might better understand them. Contemporary dance history requires that we move from "give us the facts" approach to historical inquiry to include a richer appreciation for the role of theoretical inquiry as a way in which we "make meaningful" the role of dance in various societies across time. At its heart, dance history is based and informed by the practice of dance making, dance doing and dance writing. By those who "do" dance, it may be viewed as convergent; for those who "see" dance, it may be viewed as divergent.

There are a number of "changes" and/or "controversies" in the field of Dance History. One of the most fundamental has to do with how one defines the parameters of the field itself. Dance History is a recent discipline in higher education – pioneered in the early 1960s by such major figures as Selma Jean Cohan, Sondra Fraleigh, Curt Sachs, Richard Krauss and others. For many dance programs, there is room for only one course on Dance History and consequently, it is often designed to focus on ballet and modern dance with a brief mention of "primal" or "ancient" dance and contemporary popular forms of jazz and musical theatre. By and large, it is Eurocentric. In addition, the timeline generally encompasses European Renaissance to what is contemporary in Western Europe and the United States today.

To address the fact that most of the world is left out of this model, some historians are encouraging that we think more in terms of Dance Histories rather than one monolithic Dance History. Some suggest that we add or redesign our thinking to develop courses commonly known as World Dance, or Global Dance Studies. The conflict comes because each of these ideas favor a Dance Anthropological and/or a Cultural Studies basis for these redesigned courses and consequently, the conventionally understood study of the History of Dance is squeezed into a smaller and smaller portion of a 15 week course that is often the only history course Dance Studies majors will take in their field.

Many accomplished Dance Historians have weighed in on this controversy in articles and conference presentations and often bring an artist's sensibility to this issue. They see the study of Dance History as an act of creative inquiry. They do not see the study of Dance History as a retelling of an agreed upon

narrative enhanced by one's own particular areas of interest. What they do see is what Alexandra Carter calls a "dispersing interplay of discourses."

Consequently, I have tried to distill their understanding of where the study of Dance History is today by designing this course more from the perspective of a choreographer informed by issues of historiography rather than as a sage on the stage. The course looks to the students, as well as the professor, to act as co-investigators into the study of Dance History.

b. Characteristics of the Learners

Half of the students in the course are Dance Studies majors or minors for which this course is a requirement. Half of the students are taking the course as a General Education requirement. If they are majors/minors, they generally come to the course interested in the subject but impatient with the reading and writing requirements for the course. If they are from General Education, their experience with Dance is generally limited, their vocabulary with movement almost nonexistent and their motivations to look at specific dance traditions, vocabularies, and styles weak unless these can be connected to larger issues and questions of their cultural, historical, political, religious and social significance.

The majors and minors are often enthusiastic about learning about those forms of dance with which they have experience. At times, they are impatient with learning about forms of dance with which they have no particular interest or with which they aesthetically "disagree." At times, they discover dance traditions with which they are unfamiliar and it peaks their interest. With the General Education students, all of it is fair game. Their lack of experience actually opens them up to be more receptive because they do not bring specific biases or prejudices to the subject; at the same time, they are often held hostage to those aspects of the study of history that are more easily digested and/or understood. Issues of historiography and technical languaging and/or theoretical discussions can sometimes leave some of them "out in the cold."

Both groups respond well to active learning strategies, shifting teaching strategies, student engagements, applying Gardner's multiple intelligence theory to teaching and learning modalities and mixing lecturing with some studio practice or illustrations.

c. Characteristics of the Teacher

This teacher comes to Dance from a family who are engaged with dance professionally and socially. Consequently, dance has never been viewed as a "frill" or "ornamental." My experience with Dance is broad and my passion for it is long standing. This can be an advantage when I am in the act of teaching because I can adapt quickly by incorporating different teaching and learning strategies based on experiences of the students at that time. One of the disadvantages is that I need to remind myself (by staying in touch with the

students throughout the semester) that not all people see the value in Dance as its own valuable means of expression on par with film or literature and that not all people are comfortable with their bodies nor with the bodies of others. I do not view this so much as a problem but as an opportunity to devise learning experiences that will help my students to engage more comfortably and imaginatively with Dance History.

d. Two Special Pedagogical Challenge

How to engage Dance Majors and Minors whose primary experience with dance is either in the studio, in rehearsal or in performance. The academic study of the History of Dance strikes many of them as dry, uncreative, unexciting and unimportant when compared to performing, choreographing, designing or teaching dance.

The second special pedagogical challenge is based on the idea that half of the students in the course are Dance Majors and Minors, while the other half come from the general student population. While they may have some interest in Dance, most have had little actual experience and most are taking the course to fulfill a General Education requirement.

5. 3-COLUMN TABLE

**Learning Goals:
Activities:**

Assessment Activities:

Learning

<p>1. Students will identify major choreographic structures in the dances of selected cultures. (Foundational Knowledge)</p>	<p>Students will observe examples of different choreographic structures in life performance, lecture-demonstrations, in film and on video and they will identify and critique them.</p>	<p>1. Students will construct and demonstrate physically each of the choreographic structures for comment and observation by their peers</p>
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<p>2. Students will be able to apply varied lens (anthropological, aesthetic, historical, sociological) in order to describe dances from varied cultures around the world. (Application)</p>	<p>Students will identify each of the four lenses for viewing dance and then they will apply those to an analysis of specific live dance performances</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduce the four lens for viewing dance in a reading/lecture 2. Introduce a specific and clear example of each with a video clip for each 3. Provide a series of video clips of examples and ask students to apply the criteria for each lens and to do so in small groups 4. Identify students who have experience of dances from different cultures and ask them to demonstrate and talk about those dances.
<p>3. Students will value dance more through personal participation and through attending dance performances by writing clear descriptions of dance performances for varied readerships (general, educated audience, fellow professionals). (Caring)</p>	<p>Students will be more interested in attending live performances of dance and/or master classes with guest artists in order to be able to appreciate and analyze these experiences from a critical and contextual point of view.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students will be enthusiastic about viewing, analyzing and discussing examples of dance performance and identifying vocabulary appropriate to different audiences or readerships. 2. Students will value the reading and critiquing of carefully selected writing samples of other critics, historians and theorists who have written for varied audiences 3. Students will be excited and challenged to

		write a brief description for one dance that is ineffective for a particular audience and then re-write it in a way that is appropriate and clear for that same audience.
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<p>4. Students will connect current dance performance practice with projected future performance practice by anticipating questions of inquiry. (Integration)</p>	<p>Students will read, view and analyze the work of contemporary artists that they would describe as avant-garde and then connect their work with relevant questions that anticipate the role of dance and present their work in several media in a Google doc format.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students will present short presentations of dance artists whose work they think reflect meaningful expectations for dance in the future. 2. Students will write and present orally trends in those areas of future predictions that interest them (i.e. technology, business models, educational practice, global effects, etc.) and how they see these impacting dance in those contexts.
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<p>5. Students will identify methods of historical inquiry and apply them to an original research question (Learning to learn)</p>	<p>Students will pose a research question, investigate it, and answer it.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Short reflective and short responsive papers to prompts, questions and lecture-demonstrations. 2. Pose original questions to reading materials and meta criticize those questions based on relevancy 3. Present to the instructor and peers parts of the research essay as it
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		is being developed.
<p>6. Students will examine where the artistic impulse comes from within their own lived experience, particularly the need for humans to move in ways that are aesthetic as well as practical. (Human Dimension)</p>	<p>Students will examine how dance has informed their personal lives through three exercises.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. write a brief autobiography of a previously meaningful aesthetic experience in their lives. 2. write a brief biography of a family member or friend for whom dance was important 3. write a brief thumb nail biography of a dance artists who they do not know personally but who they admire for their dance ability 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students will has a lecture and several readings on issues of historiography related to Dance History 2. Students will propose a question regarding either a dance in the past or a contemporary dance and relate which historical methods would be most appropriate for unearthing the past or preserving the present for future historical writing.

6. Weekly Schedule

Week	Monday	Wednesday	Friday
1	Introduction to Course and Each Other	Impressions of Dance	Students will present their Autobiographic Essay and participate in a discussion on an Aesthetic Experience that continues to resonates with them today
2	Issues of Historiography Related to Dance	Writing About Dance – Discussion and Movement Exercise	Students will present their Biographic Essay on an “Artist” One

	<p>Studies</p> <p>Students will participate in a movement study that combines the theory making of the historiographer with simple dance exploration of the choreographer</p>	<p>Based on Laban's Effort/Shape Theory</p>	<p>Knows in one's family or close acquaintance and in small groups compare and contrast how biography and autobiography inform our historical understanding</p>
3	<p>Preliterate Dance Forms. Students will identify the four lens for viewing dance</p>	<p>Dance Anthropology</p> <p>Students will apply the four lenses for viewing dance to selected video clips of dances from various cultures and/or from the performance of dances from various cultures by their peers in the class.</p>	<p>Students will present in brief oral presentations a summary of their Biographical Essay on an Artist one does not know. A group discussion will follow regarding the confluence of an historian's enthusiasm for a research topic and their writing style on that topic.</p>
4	<p>Ancient Dance – Greece, Egypt and Rome</p>	<p>Dance in European Middle Ages</p>	<p>Studio Workshop on early Renaissance Forms of Dance</p>
5	<p>Ballet Comique de la Reine and the beginnings of ballet</p> <p>Students will apply the terms, movements and ideas presented in the workshop on Friday to this class and the following one.</p>	<p>Louis the XIV and ballet finds a vocabulary</p>	<p>Studio workshop on ballet vocabulary</p>
6	<p>The Classical Ballet</p> <p>Students will apply the language and the technique of</p>	<p>The Romantic Ballet</p>	<p>Classic Dance in India</p> <p>Over the next several classes, students will write short descriptive</p>

	<p>ballet that they learned the previous workshop to this and the following day's class on ballet history</p>		<p>commentary on the classic dances forms from Nonwestern countries and build a vocabulary that they will share in small groups to learn how to articulate that which is normally outside of their experience.</p>
7	<p>Classic Dance in Japan</p> <p>Students will critique the classic dance of Japan and later Indonesia from a historical and an anthropological point of view in short reflective responses to the films and/or lecture-demonstrations by the dancers themselves</p>	<p>Classic Dance in Indonesia</p>	<p>Workshop on Classic Dance Forms with Guest Artist</p>
8	<p>Native American Traditions: Hopi, Apache and the Plains Indians</p> <p>Students will pose potential research questions regarding the dance traditions they are looking at this week and suggest methodologies by which those questions could be investigated.</p>	<p>Dance of the Yoruba peoples of Nigeria (Wole Soyinka)</p>	<p>Caribbean Dance: Haiti (and Katherine Dunham) West African Dance(Pearl Primus)</p>

9	<p>Popular Dance Forms: The Waltz to the Can-Can</p> <p>For the next two weeks, students will identify specific movement vocabularies for social and popular dance, physically learn several of them, and place them within a wider cultural context in which they were popular.</p>	Popular Dance Forms: The Cakewalk to the Continental	Workshop on Percussion in Dance
10	Social Dance in the Americas	Social Dance in selected other cultures	Social Dance Workshop with Guest
11	<p>Tap Dance: from Master Juba to Savion Glover</p> <p>Students will critique tap, jazz and musical theatre dance for the next three classes in short reflective papers as they relate to major American cultural achievements in other art forms</p>	Jazz Dance: From the Lindy Hop to Hip-Hop	Broadway Dance: From the Minstrel to Susan Stroman
12	<p>Modernism and Dance: Isadora Duncan, Loie Fuller and the Salome dancers</p> <p>For the next four classes, students will physicalize and then critique the shifting definitions of – what</p>	Modern Dance Pioneers and Second Generation: Martha Graham to Merce Cunningham	Postmodern dance: from the Judson to Contact Improvisation

	is dance – as we explore the various permutations of modern dance over time		
13	Contemporary Ballet and Modern Dance – domestic and international	Global Fusion on the Popular Stage: Hip-Hop Goes International	Global Fusion in Concert Dance
14	Dance in Film: Maya Deren to Busby Berkeley Students will identify choreographic themes and structures in the film examples present in this and the following class	Dance in Film: Astaire, Kelly and others	Dance in Film: Third Generation – Hip-Hop to Happy Feet Students will analyze selected examples and present their work in a Google doc format
15	Dance on Television Students will read some criticism on this topic and present brief commentaries in oral and written formats on their analysis.	Dance in a Digital Age – Merce Cunningham, Bill T. Jones and John Chu’s LXD Students will present short presentations on digital dance artists whose work is meaningful to them	Contemporary Dance: Future Possibilities Students will present short oral and written prognostications of future trends in dance studies and performance

Special Notes on the Weekly Schedule:

In the first week of the course, I ask students to write three questions that they would like to have addressed concerning some area in dance history before the end of the semester. The responses range from:

Are their dance forms in which men go “on pointe” like ballerinas?

Is ballet a European art form? Is hip-hop an American art form? What does that mean? Or, are they both international art forms? What does that look like? What does that mean?

What is trance dance? Is it always associated with religious ritual?

How do we know what dance was like before there were written records?

Why are most choreographers in jazz, tap and musical theatre men?

From the varied questions I receive, I put together a schedule for the semester with timelines that allow me to structure the course to address those questions, and more, as well as the interests of the students enrolled during that particular semester. What you see in the weekly schedule above is one model for one semester for one group of students. This will change and be modified by the students taking the course in a different semester.

What this strategy allows me to do is to tailor the course to the interests and experiences of the students that I have within the class. But, it also allows me to search for connections between topics and teaching strategies from one class to the next. This keeps me “on my toes” and permits me to come to each semester fresh with anticipation because I do not know exactly how one course will be structured. It prevents me from seeing each new group of students as simply a variation on the previous one in the previous semester. One size syllabus, or in this case, weekly schedule, does not fit all.

7. Teaching Strategies

a. Responses to Two Special Pedagogical Challenges

One of the ways in which I address the first pedagogical challenge is to incorporate pedagogical strategies that are common in dance technique and choreography classes into the teaching of Dance History. For example, when we look at issues of historiography, we will “choreograph” strategies for historical construction by using the student’s bodies, desks, tables and other personal items. In that way, they can literally “see” the theory behind certain issues that inform aspects of historiography.

For the second, we look at the importance of the relationship between performer and audience. Then, I ask them to write two short essays – one is autobiographical and the second is biographical. They critique and share these with their peers and we begin to build a commonly agreed upon vocabulary that does not necessarily privilege one kind of student from the other.

b. Active Learning

Much of the class is comprised of the following:

- lecture-discussion
- individual and group quizzes
- lecture-demonstration
- guest speakers

and then, there are doing and observing experiences that include:
studio technique classes taught by the
instructor

students themselves
guest artists

observing a dance workshop, doing a reflection writing assignment, and follow up discussion in small groups and with the class
interview guest artists that are in residence that semester
Finally, there is opportunity for them to reflect – individually and collectively – about the meaning of their learning experiences.

Those related to the course specifically would include:

1-2 minutes reaction papers to video clips of new or experimental dance performances

3-4 page critique and analysis of a dance performance by professional dance company

participant-observation writing of a social dance experience (i.e. Goth dancing, hip-hop concert, clog dance competition, liturgical dance, Cotillions, and so on) These papers are vetted in small groups before they are turned in to the instructor.

Those related to how students critique and understand their own learning would include responses to the following kinds of questions in various forms. Some might be short, anonymous 2-3 minute response to more considered and reflective essays that would be a part of their portfolios, or journals. The questions might include the following:

- what am I learning in the course, or in a segment of the course?
- How am I learning this? What specifically is helping me to learn? What is interfering or preventing me from learning?
- What do I see as the primary value of what I am learning? How does it relate to my life?
- What else might I want to learn about dance, or dance history, after completing this course? How would I learn that?
- What is my primary strength as a learner and how can I build on that strength? What is my primary weakness that prevents me from learning as well as I could, and what steps can I take to eliminate or counter that perceived weakness?

c. Assessment Events that have forward-looking tasks for Students to Perform

Their Research Essay is focused on a question they wish to answer. This question is identified early in the semester. Some of the questions posed in the past include: 1. Where did the tutu come from and why do we continue to use it today? 2. In America, why is ballet attractive more often to girls and tap dance to boys? 3. Are there societies or cultures that do not dance, or who

minimize and devalue dance and why? Throughout the semester, the students and I identify source materials and experts for them to interview. They write and re-write parts of the essay. By the end of the semester, they have vetted the essay several times through the writing center, their peers and me.

In the final exam, I provide the students with a question on the impact of digital technology on dance. They receive this question a week before the scheduled exam and they can write the answer and bring it to class. They have seen, discussed, and read about the topic beforehand. The question is framed not so much on what has already occurred but rather on what may occur or develop over the next 5 – 10 years.

In the Final Exam essay on technology and dance, the students are exposed to the topic almost from the beginning of the course. They interrogate technology as various body techniques that inform dance, such as ballet or bharata natyam, and then on to the idea of dance notation systems and then on to dance on film and television, and finally to dance created on the Internet and through social networking systems. There are discussions, small group games, case study analysis and problem solving exercises that the students participate in throughout the semester on this topic. They are given instructor and peer feedback throughout.

d. In and Out of Class Activities

Students are encouraged to see how history is constructed by the kinds of questions one poses, the sources one looks to, the variety of ways in which one put these disparate pieces of knowledge together and the overall meaning that one gives to the kind of “answer” one receives. Throughout the semester, students are exposed to how others have done these kinds of things and they are given many opportunities to do the same. Because the study of Dance History is still so new in the academy, many of the writings of the dance historians they look at come not only from professional dance historians but also from dancers, choreographer, designers, anthropologists, sociologists and amateurs who simply have a love of dance and have taught themselves how to do credible history. I think that this is a valuable lesson for them to learn so they come to understand that history is creative, not passive and dynamic, not deadly.

And secondly, there is the idea that I try to structure the class in ways that mimic choreography classes. There is a mixture of music presented and music invented by the students in class. There is a mixture of looking at live performance and/or film clips of dance and of their getting up out of their seats and doing a small phrase of a dance from a period in history. They read a lot, to be sure, but they also write weekly in ways that are critical, analytical, creative, and free style. When they come into class each day, I challenge myself to employ a variety of learning styles within each class so that they cannot easily anticipate what we will be doing from one day to the next. I think this is

important for many reasons – not the least of which has to do with the idea that dance itself is dynamic, ever changing, ephemeral and active. The study of Dance History should be nothing less.

8. Most exciting Aspect of the Re-Designed Course for You

I am in the midst of teaching this course after participating in the Course (Re) Design Retreat facilitated by Stewart Ross. Among the exciting aspects for this course now is the engagement with fellow faculty members about scholarly teaching practice. For many, there is a sense that we close our classroom doors and emerge an hour or two later to interact with our colleagues on matters of departmental activities, committee responsibilities, research collaborations or creative production work. Seldom is teaching and learning mentioned – unless it is to offer “a tip” or to respond punitively to poor student evaluations.

Working through the Re-Designed course workshop provides not only a means of re-thinking and re-constructing a particular course, but it also offers a perspective and accompanying vocabulary with which to engage intellectually with colleagues on a range of topics concerning teaching and learning in higher education today.

9. Your Contact Information

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