

## Smith College Department of Dance

### *Retreat Report*

The Faculty of the Department of Dance met for a six hour retreat on April 23, 2008; the retreat continued on May 2 in a shorter afternoon meeting. Attending these meetings were Susan Waltner, Professor and Director of the MFA in Dance, Rodger Blum, Professor and Department Chair, Donna Mejia, Guest Artist in Residence, Mike Vargas, Musician and Lecturer, Candice Salyers, Guest Lecturer, and Pat Rist, Administrative Assistant. John Eue from College Relations attended the Friday afternoon retreat to help lead a discussion of the Department's website. After the Department received authorization for a tenure track search this past September we decided to delay this retreat report and hold a group of extended departmental meetings to revise and refine our discussions and decisions. The three primary topics of these retreats and meetings were reconfiguration of the existing two-track major in Dance, the Department's web presence, and information literacy.

#### **I. Reconfiguration of the Major**

The faculty unanimously agreed that, for any meaningful development and update of the major, students should be allowed to take more technique courses for credit. Currently, students are limited to 12 credits or 6 courses. This is far below studio/performance credit allotments for other departments (Studio Art requires 20 credit hours of studio course work and Music allows up to 24 credits in performance). For each new emphasis described below, 20 credit hours of technique would be possible or be required, and intermediate and advanced technique courses could be taken three times for credit (as opposed to the present limit of two).

Majors in Dance currently have two different emphases to choose from. *Emphasis I in Technique and Performance* is a studio-based track with a focus on advanced technique classes and choreography classes. *Emphasis II in Theoretical Practices* provides a major option that concentrates on the theory of dance: it is more theoretically based and does not require advanced technique classes. In our retreat, the faculty redrew these two tracks to bring them in line not only with the faculty resources of the department but current trends in other colleges and universities. Also, the faculty decided to do away with the two-track minor in dance in favor of a more specific, one-track minor. An additional discussion concerned the use of the term Modern Dance versus the more accurate term of Contemporary Dance. The Department would like to change the title of our six levels of Modern Dance to Contemporary Dance.

The reconception of the two major emphases in the Department of Dance was partially inspired by developments in other departments: 1) our sister department at Mount Holyoke College recently redrew their major to a 44 credit major; 2) last year the Department of Geology developed a set of four tracks in their major, three were based on 44-46/56 credit hours and a Bachelor of Science that requires 72-80 hours for completion; and 3) the plan of study in the Engineering Program that requires an early commitment to the major. With these examples in mind, we redrew our major into two new emphases: a BA in Dance that encourages a broad study of the field and allows students to double major in another department and/or pursue interests in other fields in the arts and sciences, and a BFA in Dance that focuses the students on a deep artistic investigation through studio work and intensive intellectual challenge in theory study at the 100, 200, and 300 levels. Additionally, the more rigorous BFA emphasis incorporates a plan of study that satisfies the prerequisites of most graduate programs in dance.

In addition to the reconfiguration of the major, we redesigned our senior capstone course. This new course was submitted to and approved by CAP this fall. It will be taught for the first time this spring semester and be required for both new major tracks in dance. The catalogue copy of this course reads as follows:

*DAN 399: Senior seminar is a capstone course designed to integrate dance studies through an individual research or creative project and to articulate critical analysis and feedback for peers. Required for senior dance majors and open by permission to other seniors with a serious interest in dance.*

**NEW Emphasis I: Bachelor of Fine Arts in Contemporary Dance Studies**

(Students who wish to pursue a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Dance must be at the advanced level in at least one technique and make a formal petition to the department to request acceptance into the program.)

<b>THEORY</b>	<b>MUST TAKE EACH OF THE FOLLOWING:</b>	<b>CREDITS</b>
171	Dance in the 20th Century	4
272	Dance & Culture	4
241	Scientific Foundations of Dance	4
287	Analysis of Music from a Dancer's Perspective	4
~OR~ 285	Laban Movement Analysis	4
151	Elementary Dance Composition	4
252	Intermediate Dance Composition	4
200	Dance Production (crew)	1
200	Dance Production (crew)	1
200	Dance Production (crew or performance)	1
200	Dance Production (performance)	1
<b>ALLIED ARTS</b>	<b>MUST TAKE TWO COURSES IN THEATRE, MUSIC, ART, OR FILM</b>	8
<b>DANCE TECHNIQUE</b>	Ten technique courses are required for the BFA. BFA students should explore at least two courses in two technique forms for credit. Students must reach advanced level in at least one form. A single level of technique courses may be taken for credit up to three semesters. Advanced technique courses (Levels V and VI) require a placement exam.	20
<b>ADVANCED THEORY</b>	<b>MUST TAKE THREE OF THE FOLLOWING:</b>	12
207	Intermediate Repertory	
309	Advanced Repertory	
342	Scientific Foundations of Dance II	
353	Advanced Dance Composition	
377	Advanced Studies in History and Aesthetics	
<b>SPECIAL STUDIES</b>	<b>MUST BE TAKEN DURING THE JUNIOR YEAR:</b>	
400	Special Studies (Choreography, Performance or Research)	4
<b>THESIS</b>	<b>MUST BE TAKEN DURING THE SENIOR YEAR:</b>	
399	Senior Seminar in Dance (Choreography)	4
	~OR~	
430d or 431	Honor Thesis (Choreography)	8
		76-80 Total Credits

**NEW Emphasis II: Bachelor of Arts in Contemporary Dance Studies**

(Students in the Bachelor of Arts in Dance are urged to pursue a breadth of study in their technique courses and, in consultation with their advisor, make connections to other arts departments.)

<b>THEORY</b>	<b>MUST TAKE EACH OF THE FOLLOWING:</b>	<b>CREDITS</b>
171	Dance in the 20th Century	4
272	Dance & Culture	4
241	Scientific Foundations of Dance	4
287	Analysis of Music from a Dancer's Perspective	4
~OR~ 285	Laban Movement Analysis	4
151	Elementary Dance Composition	4
200	Dance Production (crew)	1
200	Dance Production (crew)	1
<b>DANCE TECHNIQUE</b>	Five technique courses are required for the BA (Ten are allowed). BA students must explore at least two courses in two technique forms for credit. Students should reach intermediate or advanced level in at least one form. A single level of technique courses may be taken for credit up to three semesters. Advanced technique courses (Levels V and VI) require a placement exam.	10
<b>ADVANCED THEORY</b>	<b>MUST TAKE AT LEAST TWO OF THE FOLLOWING:</b>	4
252	Intermediate Dance Composition	
207	Intermediate Repertory	
309	Advanced Repertory	
342	Scientific Foundations of Dance II	
353	Advanced Dance Composition	
377	Advanced Studies in History and Aesthetics	
<b>THESIS</b>	<b>MUST BE TAKEN DURING THE SENIOR YEAR:</b>	
399	Senior Seminar in Dance (Choreography or Research)	4
	~OR~	
430d or 431	Honor Thesis (Choreography or Research)	8
		44-54 Total Credits

**NEW Configuration: Minor in Contemporary Dance Studies**

171	Dance in the 20th Century	4
272	Dance & Culture	4
241	Scientific Foundations of Dance	4
287	Analysis of Music from a Dancer's Perspective	4
~OR~ 285	Laban Movement Analysis	4
151	Elementary Dance Composition	4
200	Dance Production (crew)	1
	Three 2-credit Studio Courses	6

## II. Web Presence

The Department of Dance currently has an informative and well-designed web site. Yet, the faculty sees room for improvement. During the school year we average at least one call a week from prospective students who are not able to develop a sense of the department from the web site. As mentioned before, John Eue, Senior Director of Publications in College Relations joined us for the second half of our retreat where we developed the following design ideas to be implemented into the web site over the next 1-2 years:

1. Updated photo galleries from recent performances with possible archives from past performances
2. Streaming video clips from recent performances
3. More detailed information for current or prospective majors on advising, including downloadable checklists of requirements
4. A “Frequently Asked Questions” page for prospective and in-coming students that not only supplies information on our program and the experience of being a dance student at Smith College, but addresses the complicated navigation of the Five College Dance Department
5. Refining of the information for the Master in Fine Arts in Dance, both for current and perspective students
6. Information on graduates from the program
7. Pictures and information on the diversity of technique offerings in the program with an emphasis on the variety of cultural dance offerings
8. Information for non-dancers who would like to find a path of entrance into the department
9. Detailed information about creative research opportunities at Smith and in the field (Praxis and JYA) with links to the Library’s Information Literacy page

## III. Statement on Information Literacy

*The brain is embodied and the body is embedded.*  
Gerald Edelman, Nobel prize-winning immunologist

Integrating philosophical, anthropological, historical, embodied, and transdisciplinary ways of knowing, our current approach to dance studies provides students with the foundation to engage in and contribute to dance scholarship of the 21st century. The question of how best to develop guidelines for information literacy in Dance has provoked a rich and invigorating discussion for the Department. The question at the heart of this discussion is how does a discipline that requires extensive *physical* experiential research (non-verbal body/mind explorations and non-verbal performance situations, for example) define a course of research that contributes to and easily fits into the larger college information literacy program. There are already many excellent resources for students who want to research the theoretical aspects of dance via print and digital media (many of these are located at <http://www.smith.edu/libraries/research/subject/dance.htm>), and we will be adding to this list.

Our most challenging and exciting question is what are the best resources we can recommend for research in the laboratory of the body, for research into the creative process itself? We want to be sure to indicate that literacy in the art of dance should also include physical approaches to learning and research, through dancing and other activities in real time, such as studio work, attending live performances, etc. Successful works of dance provoke a response that often surpasses text or numerical expression. They spring from and speak to deep embodied knowledge. A key question for us is how to make the tools of that creative research as accessible as the tools we can list for students working in theoretical dance studies. How do we help young artists discover previously unseen connections and combinations of disparate ideas that are so vital in the creative process?

For a student pursuing creative research in a liberal arts setting, the route of inquiry and investigation becomes highly specialized to that student. Our information literacy plan should underscore the immeasurable value of tools beyond the prominent literature of our field. Access to the work of a wide variety of artists, past and present, and an understanding of their influences are critical to the study of creative process. Films of diverse global traditions and analysis of kinesthetic and anatomical models of movement science that extend the department's customary offerings will all be crucial resources. Informed and imaginative faculty, modern library resources with professionals who know how to navigate those resources, and classes designed to help students evaluate the often complex information these resources generate are all important parts of finding, evaluating, and making ethical use of information available in the performing arts.

In order to best serve the broad spectrum of creative minds in the Smith community, we believe our approach to information literacy should be as fluid and malleable as the nature of experiential learning itself. In theoretical research, the curricula for dance studies continue to cross disciplines; students must address issues in dance from multifaceted perspectives. For example, by merging topics that have typically been separated into "Dance History" and "Dance & Culture," we will be able to help students develop an integrated understanding of dance, its movement and location in our culture, and its presence in global contexts. The Department of Dance's plan for information literacy should, ultimately, not only help young creative scholars see themselves in a vast historic context, but give them the tools to project themselves forward.

We are scheduled to continue these discussions early in the spring semester. We expect to complete our program on information literacy in April 2009.