

DANCE AT BERRY COLLEGE: EXTERNAL REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

I want to begin by stating the importance of dance, especially modern dance, as an integral part of the liberal-arts education. Given American dance's history, and the fact that it continues to give birth to innovative male and female artists, it only makes sense that the study of dance and its many facets would be an active component of a liberal arts college curriculum. Berry College can stand with other liberal-arts colleges which have vibrant and flourishing dance programs. Like these schools, Berry is fully capable of attracting students *because* of a stellar dance program.

BERRY AND ITS RECENT DANCE HISTORY

The current state of the dance program suggests a history of both positive and negative aspects. The program is existing on a minimal budget and feels pressure to attract more of the student population to its courses. I feel it is noteworthy to comment on the fact that with the introduction of the dance minor in 2006 the Academic Council charged the faculty not to hire additional faculty or create additional courses. The continued pursuit to improve the Dance Program under such limitations, including the revision of the curriculum and the new housing of the Dance Program under the umbrella of the Department of the Fine Arts, proves the importance of dance as an academic program to the students and dance faculty at Berry College.

Through my interviews with director and founder of Dance, Jeanne Schul, I found her to be deeply committed to the mission of Berry College through its dance program. With positive energy, creative ideas, and great comradery with students, she is quietly leading the program and has since its inception. Her excitement about dance has afforded dance students to experience well-attended concerts, courses enriched with pedagogy, hands-on experience teaching children, and a strong sense of community among the dance students.

POSITIVE CHANGES AND ASSETS

Through my discussions with dance faculty and students, I found the following recent changes to have a positive impact on the Berry College Dance Program.

- **Dance became a stand-alone program within the Department of Fine Arts in 2010**
From its beginnings in 1995, Dance served two different departments, Physical Education and Theatre, causing complications during the registration process along with creating a bit of an identity crisis among the discipline. The changes made to the minor to create a more well-rounded approach to the study of dance closer aligned the program to similar private liberal arts institutions in the South.
- **The establishment of the *Jeanne Schul Endowed Dance Scholarship***
This scholarship, exclusively for dance minors, is the first of its kind at Berry College and was created in honor of its director, Jeanne Schul and her work building the dance

program and serving dance students for more than two decades. I encourage the college to continue to fundraise for further commitments, deepening the impact of this scholarship to use as a successful recruiting tool.

- **The Berry Dance Community and the Spring Dance Performance**

The students and faculty I spoke with at Berry offered copious observations about their participation in the program. A strong emphasis is placed on the spring concert and the collaborative work amongst faculty and students that make this production as successful as it has proven to be in years past. Both students and faculty contribute to the creative and marketing of the production, demonstrating a strong sense of ownership and pride. There seem to be lots of work and organization implemented in the rehearsal process hinging on tolerance, understanding, teamwork, and commitment, and these attributes can be applied in any setting.

CONCERNS, NEEDS, AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- **Streamlining the Dance Curriculum/The Dance Minor**

After careful consideration, I believe that the dance program is offering way too many courses for its physical presence on campus. This overload comes from a desire to give many experiences to the student dancer but unfortunately is stretching the single faculty member too thin. From my interactions with students, faculty and staff members it seems courses are offered based off of the expertise of who is available to teach at a moments notice on a small salary. This pattern has lead to inconsistent offerings, high turnover of faculty (and perhaps students) and instructors lacking credentials that will move the program forward.

The current dance minor has the following requirements (19 credit hours):

Required courses (13 credit hours):

Dan 202: Dance Performance

Dan 210: Dance Composition I: Improvisation

Dan 307: Dance Composition II: Choreography

Dan 410: History of Dance

Dance 420: Pedagogy

Technique Requirements (3 credit hours):

Students must complete 3 courses in 3 different areas (this includes modern, ballet, jazz, ballroom)

Elective (choice of 1) (3 credit hours):

Dan 220: Music for Dancers

Dan 228: Special Topics

Dan 306: Survey of Dance

Dan 308: Children's Creative Dance

The 261: Costuming and Makeup

Dan 498: Directed Study

I propose the following reorganization of the Dance Minor (20 credit hours):

Required courses (13 credit hours):

Dan 210: Dance Composition I: Improvisation
Dan 307: Dance Composition II: Choreography
Dan 410: History of Dance
Dance 420: Pedagogy
Dan 202: Dance Performance

Technique Requirements (4 credit hours):

Students must complete four courses and reach level II in two separate disciplines. This requirement includes Ballet, Modern, and Ballroom techniques.

Elective (choice of 1) (3 credit hours):

Mus ????: A music course selected from the Music Department's offerings. (to be chosen by the dance program)
Dan 308: Children's Creative Dance
The 261: Costuming and Makeup

In addition to changes to the dance minor, I would strongly consider abolishing the individualized major in dance. In conversation, I heard there is maybe one student who pursues this individualized dance major every six years. I feel the focus should be primarily on engaging the students to seek out a dance minor and then work towards a dance major in the future.

I suggest the following streamlining of the Dance Program course offerings:

Courses to continue offering each semester:

Ballroom I and Ballroom II (123, 143)
Ballet I and Ballet II (156, 157)
Modern I and Modern II (152, 153)

Courses to keep but offer on a scheduled rotation:

Dance Performance (202): offer each spring semester
Children's Creative Dance (308): offer once per academic year; possibly fall semester
History of Dance (410): offer each fall semester of an academic year beginning with an even number (For example 2016-2017 academic year)
Dance Pedagogy (420): offer each spring semester of an academic year beginning with an even number
Dance Composition I (210): offer each fall semester of an academic year beginning with an odd number (For example 2017-2018 academic year)
Dance Composition II (307): offer each spring semester of an academic year beginning with an odd number (For example 2017-2018 academic year)

Courses to strike from the curriculum (a recommendation made based off of enrollment, and lack of consistency in its offering since 2012):

Tap I and Tap II (158, 159)
Jazz I and Jazz II (167, 168)
Music for Dancers (220)
Survey of Dance (306)
Mid East I and Mid East II (228 a, b)

Explanation:

I have a great respect for all of the work Jeanne Schul has done creating such a varied course of study for the dance students at Berry College. It is a very daunting task to single-handedly build and run a program that includes diversity and variety of the student population. Because of staffing limitations in the area and the fact that she is teaching all of the other courses, she has not been able to offer courses in a consistent manner and enrollment is not significant enough to continue to provide *all* of these courses regardless of how rich and pertinent the courses prove to be.

In my offering of a streamlined dance minor and curriculum, I chose to keep the courses that would be most beneficial to a dance student progressing towards a possible career or side profession in the dance field. I also made decisions based off of my next recommendation for a new Full-Time position for Dance which you will read about below. In searching for an additional faculty member, I felt it would be important to look for a classically trained dancer/instructor which is why I chose to keep ballet and modern dance classes on the schedule each semester. This addition will help the dance students to progress their technique resulting in stronger, more versatile performers. While I highly value tap and jazz techniques, it seems these may be better accessible at local studios while properly informed ballet and modern classes may be harder to find off campus. I highly encourage the dance program to offer master classes in these techniques when the opportunities arise. Another possible solution would be to continue to provide a streamlined version of tap and jazz techniques (levels I and II combined) in alternating years to continue to have the techniques in the rotation. The Dance program will determine if this is necessary by demand, enrollment and of course the proper instructor availability. I also struck courses that showed very low enrollment and inconsistent patterns in when they were offered (220, 306, 228).

A question I still have is the need for Dan 308, Children's Creative Dance. I kept it on the rotating schedule and as a possible requirement for the minor, but I wonder if this may be fused with the Dance Pedagogy course since (at least during my visit) the course seemed to have a strong focus on teaching children.

• **New Full-Time Position for Dance**

Tenure track positions are vital to the health and evolution of departments and programs on many levels. These positions spawn professors who are committed to their work and the college. The possibility of longevity at the institution allows individuals to establish bonds, to plant roots, and build from a vision. Lack of these positions suggests that the college does not recognize the discipline, in this case, dance, as a viable option for scholarly study. Not having a tenure-track position in dance sends a message that dance

is not equivalent to the other arts, lacks permanence, and appears extra-curricular as opposed to a vital part of the liberal arts education. I know through my experience at Agnes Scott that students who are seeking a liberal arts setting who have participated in the arts before coming to college, look to colleges where they can continue these studies. They often make their final decision about choosing a school based on the availability of the discipline which has become an integral part of their development. Areas of study with no tenure lines are often not taken seriously by prospective students and their parents.

While I understand that the college may not be able to institute this recommendation until there is greater confidence in the consistency of enrollment and the program's course offerings, I offer an interim solution, but stress, the importance of creating a tenure-track line in dance.

• **Interim Solution**

Background: Fueled by the enthusiasm of her students, Schul proves to be energetic in her endeavors at Berry and has been operating as the only full-time faculty member in dance for 22 years. It is my opinion, however, that continuing to work in this same pattern of constant interaction will eventually lead to resentment, dissatisfaction, and burnout.

Recommendation for additional faculty:

- **Full-time faculty member to share programmatic teaching and administrative load as well as choreographic responsibilities for main stage productions**
- **1-2 adjuncts for specialty areas (as needed for specialty courses)**

To lessen the overload of teaching and administrative work that is currently being carried by one faculty member, I would recommend adding one full-time position. This individual should have strong teaching and robust choreographic skills so that the burden of instruction and creative work does not continue to fall on Jeanne Schul solely. I would also recommend that this individual has a terminal degree in dance as this would suggest further studies and exposure to the art form. This person could share some of the administrative tasks as well.

I also encourage the program to consider interdisciplinary collaborations when selecting this new faculty member. Could this faculty member serve to teach in another arts discipline, choreograph musicals for the Theatre program, have a background in lighting or costume design that could serve more than one program, etc.? The addition of this new position could be used to deepen collaborative encounters between arts programs within the Department of Fine Arts.

I also recommend one to two adjunct dance faculty members to teach in specialty areas like Jazz and Tap.

Choosing by Committee

Even though these recommended positions are not tenure track, I suggest that a committee is formed to make decisions about choosing faculty. Committees provide a mechanism for creating community as members' express opinions, share insights, and reach informed decisions through dialogue. This special committee could include Schul, a faculty member from one of the other disciplines in the Department of Fine Arts, and then augmented by another dance specialist - maybe a dance faculty member from another liberal arts college, or a dance professional from the Atlanta/Chattanooga area.

- **Enrollment in dance courses**

Challenges of enrollment and meeting standards for acceptable registration seemed to be a common theme in many of my meetings regarding the dance program. The chart below displays courses taught and the semesters each course has been taught since spring 2012. Courses shown in red are courses I have suggested removing from the curriculum due to low enrollment and lack of consistency in their offering.

Course	Spring '12	Fall '12	Spring '13	Fall '13	Spring '14	Fall '14	Spring '15	Fall '15	Spring '16	Fall '16	Spring '17
Ballroom I (123)	22		22		20		20	20	20		24
Ballroom II (143)	22		15		10		20	11	16		13
Dance Performance (202)	40	9	47	12	37	12	25	6+5?	28+14?	6+5?	20+8?
Child's Creative Dance (308)	8		10		9		8		6		
History of Dance (410)	10		12			7					5
Tap I (158)	19						20				
Tap II (159)	12						12				
Ballet I (156)		18	20	15	18	13	19	20		19	19
Ballet II (157)		17	10	12	11	7	10	13		6	8
Jazz I (167)		17		18		16					
Jazz II (168)		13		6		7					
Music for Dance (220)		2									
Survey of		16		8						5	

Dance (306)				+12 ?						
Composition II: Dance Co (307)		8		9		9		8		4
Dance Pedagogy (420)		2		7		8				5
Modern I (152)			20		18		9		15	17
Modern II (153)			12		10		7		5	8
Mid East I (228 A)				7		7		12		10
Mid East II (228 B)				4		5				
Composition I: Improv (210)					12		7		4	4

In addition to the goal of a streamlined curriculum and dance minor, I recommend that every student who performs in the spring concert be required to enrolled in 1 dance technique course during that semester. Not only will that serve to boost enrollment, but more importantly, adequately prepare the dancer's body for the vigor of rehearsal and performance.

- **Bring Dance Performances onto Campus**

Currently, the Dance Program is predominantly working towards one performance per year that happens off campus at the Rome City Auditorium in Rome, GA. While the student performers are benefitting from the experience of performing in a large venue, the dance program is not enhancing their footprint on campus by taking their one production per academic year off the premises. I would encourage the dance program to look into alternative spaces on campus, spaces not used as traditional performance venues, but spaces encouraging creativity and collaboration, heightening their presence on campus. An additional concert per academic year, perhaps in the fall semester held on campus, can lend itself to collaborative opportunities among other disciplines on campus.

- **Collaboration among other arts disciplines at Berry College and the surrounding community**

Liberal Arts education is so profound in its ability to create the "whole" student, fostering experiences in many disciplines. A well-roundedness in the various disciplines of study can lead to some thoughtful, collaborative exchanges amongst departments. Resembling a recent collaboration with the Berry singers, I encourage the dance program to strive for one interdisciplinary exchange per academic year to present on campus. Some possible suggestions include dance and science, dance and studio art, theatre and dance, dance and psychology, dance and creative writing, etc. The possibilities are endless, and the partnerships will fuel cutting edge scholarship for both students and faculty. Site-specific

locations to present this creativity will also help to increase the exposure of the dance program on campus as mentioned above.

In response to the successful collaboration recently displayed with the Rome Symphony, I would also recommend enhancing relationships with arts organizations and dance studios in the surrounding areas of the college. These exchanges can include experiences that lead to performance opportunities on and off campus as well as providing internship opportunities for students that can be done for credit towards the dance minor and potentially a dance major in the future.

- **Richards Gym studio space**

It is imperative for the dance program to have a space utilized only by the dance program without concern about scheduling and upkeep due to the demands of it being a public space. Correct flooring is essential for the well-being of dancers. Smooth, resilient floors reduce muscle, and especially joint injury for dancers, as well as alleviate general fatigue. Currently, dance courses are happening in the Cage Studio, the main Athletic facility on campus, and the Richards Gym studio.

After observing a ballroom dance class in the Cage, I found it to be rather unsuitable for most types of dance. There was a blown speaker in the sound unit, low ceilings making it impossible to perform any partnering work, a wood floor which I suspect isn't sprung to a dancers' needs and the students were complaining about the temperature even with the ceiling fans running. On a positive note, dance is present on campus in such a visible space. While I don't believe this studio will prove sufficient for classical techniques or concert dance rehearsals that require partnering, it does serve to connect with those who may not register for the traditional forms or pursue dance as a minor.

The Richards Studio presents a great opportunity for the dance program to set its roots for creative and scholarly research/study. During my visit to campus, great frustration about the football team using the space to analyze video footage and the negative impacts their use of the space imposes are of great concern to many. A dance student should not have to be concerned with the quality/cleanliness of the floor they are dancing on (which often includes dancing barefoot and rolling on the floor), nor should they feel their space has been negatively impacted (speakers, storage, etc.). The improper use of the space can lead to injuries, a lack of creativity, and overall disgust in a space that should feel like "home."

I suggest that Berry College enforce the rule that the Richards Studio is to be used *only* by the dance program for courses, rehearsals, office space, storage and collaborative meetings about the dance program. This charge will ensure a safe, creative space for both students and faculty. Also, I suggest upgrading the ballet barre's so that they are all the same consistent height. I also recommend looking into the extraction of the elevator. During my visit, dance faculty and students complained that the elevator is never used and just takes up quite a bit of space rather than used for movement.

- **Budget**

There is a significant imbalance of budget allocation in regards to Theatre and Dance. I saw a budget report for the Theatre program that had a starting balance of \$48,612 and a budget report for the Dance program that had a starting balance of \$2000. It was made very clear to me that all of the expenses of the spring concert are paid by the revenue made on the production as the budget only covers programmatic course needs. The college should not expect any standard for an active dance company without providing a budget to invest in the work. I highly recommend the college to make allocations to the dance program that will include but not be limited to funding guest artist residencies, costumes, lighting design, PR, etc. Dancers are often expected to make miracles happen, but the reality is that you can't expect growth without resources.

- **Membership in the American College Dance Association (ACDA)**

The American College Dance Association is a prestigious national organization divided into ten+ regions. Its “primary focus is to support and promote the wealth of talent and creativity that is prominent throughout college and university dance departments.” (www.acda.dance). The yearly conferences provide a richly diverse roster of classes and dance-related opportunities that tremendously broaden the scope and understanding of dance for the college faculty and students who attend. Participants also have the opportunity to adjudicate work before a panel of professionals who offer valuable critique and insight into the work.

I highly recommend that Berry College join the Southeastern Region of ACDA. Faculty and students will participate in the many classes, view numerous concerts, and can present work for adjudication. Membership in this organization will prove to be a step forward as it will provide regional visibility for the Berry College Dance program. Through participation in the conferences, students will witness the vastness of choreographic ideas and the many facets of studying dance, broadening and deepening their understanding of the form. Berry’s presence at the conference will extend the credibility of its program.

- **Guest Artists**

Even with a minuscule budget, it can be possible to bring a renowned guest artist to work with the dancers each year. I suggest that each spring semester, a guest artist from outside the region be brought in to work in an intensive way on a piece of repertory for the students to perform in the spring concert. The presence of guest artists allows students to experience different modes of the choreographic process including styles of moving and rehearsal methods. These experiences broaden their understanding of the inner workings of the creative process.

A week long intensive can include teaching master classes (in place of already scheduled technique classes) as well as present college-wide lectures and intensive rehearsals to stage a piece of choreography on members of the student company. I encourage Schul and the faculty at Berry to consider artists from surrounding areas as well as institutions and individuals that reconstruct the great works from dance history. These experiences will have a significant impact on the students and add a dynamic range to the spring performance.

- **A Scholarly Approach**

I recommend that most, if not all, studio dance classes at Berry include a history, analytical, or viewing component that encompasses attendance at dance concerts and response papers or research assignments. This component will be an asset of the curriculum as this approach allows for a broader look at the form. Students will not only experience the technical and physical attributes of dance but will also investigate other elements of the form, which inform their understanding of dance's powerful capabilities. This newfound knowledge will benefit the student in the technical execution of the techniques and also serve to inform their choreographic choices further when creating their work.

- **Strengthening the quality of the Program of the Spring Performance**

I want to begin by commending Jeanne Schul, artistic director, and all of the student and alumnae performers and choreographers on their passionate, dedicated work on "Wildest Dreams." While I feel the performance was well-rehearsed and very spirited, I have some feedback that may help enhance the quality of the choreography and its execution in performance.

As mentioned earlier when discussing enrollment, I strongly encourage the dance program to require all students performing in a concert to enroll in a dance technique course. This requirement can include ballet, modern, jazz, tap, and ballroom techniques. It is imperative that a dancer/performer train their body in technique class to be able to properly and without risk of injury, perform efficiently and with clarity.

I was impressed by the preparation and thought behind the video footage that introduced each work. I would encourage the choreographers to continue to build on the themes presented in the video through their movement vocabulary and musical selection. I noticed that approximately 90% or more of the work had lyrics that were making the dance very literal, rather than a driving movement vocabulary defining the work. When this happens, we are telling our audience what to feel rather than allowing them an experience that makes them feel something. This critique applies to the performers as well. How do their relationships and nuance of quality throughout the performance convey an emotion as opposed to relying on an embellished facial expression?

Earlier in the report, I recommend an additional faculty line as well as guest artist residencies. These professionals would be directly contributing to this performance, bringing a higher level of experience and sophistication of craft to the production. (Please note: this will require commitment from the college in regards to adding to the budget allocation of the dance program.) I think the opportunity for students and alumnae to present work is necessary and should remain. My recommendation would be that each student in the choreography II course still is required to create work, but only a select few chosen for the spring production by a panel of adjudicators. This group could include the dance faculty, current guest artists and a professor from a different art discipline on campus. This selection process would lend itself to a diverse range of work

presented in the concert in addition to varied experiences for both the performers and audience members.

Perception of Dance: Curriculum and Connections

During my conversations with students and faculty, it seems as if the dance program is isolated from the Berry community. Dance needs a clearer presence and could benefit from connections with college dance programs in Atlanta/Chattanooga and the surrounding vicinity. These outside connections would allow Berry to interface with the larger community, provide ways of embellishing its dance program and bring greater visibility to dance both within and outside the college.

• Making Dance Visible

Berry is not alone in the confusion and invisibility that seems to surround dance in colleges. Students ask: Does a dance class satisfy a college requirement? What is the basis of the program: modern, ballet, musical theater? Do I get credit for performing? Can I major or minor in dance? I would suggest creating a small brochure (could be a simple tri-fold), which would include all of the pertinent information about dance at Berry. Perhaps there is a student digital arts group that would be interested in working with the dance program in designing a piece of literature that offers to all students who are thinking of attending Berry, or who are already enrolled in the college, the facts about dance.

• Foundations Course

I strongly recommend that a foundations course in dance be designed and offered on a regular basis. This course is an excellent vehicle for increasing dance's viability as a course of study, equating dance with other disciplines, and giving students greater access to dance. A seminar setting allows for a deeper investigation of the expressivity of the form and provides a doorway for investigation of other facets of the form that cannot be addressed in the current studio courses. The reality of designing such a course would only be possible with an expanded dance faculty, as Schul's current teaching load could not include another course. The Dance self-study mentioned that Dan 206, Experiencing Dance, is being considered by the committee. I think this is a great step but would add yet another course to a very limited faculty base in dance. Another option/suggestion would be to consider/propose that Dan 410, History of Dance, be seen as a foundations course. It is already designed and being implemented and can be of interest across disciplines.

• Guest Artists

As I mentioned earlier in the report, the presence of guest artists in the dance program further fortifies the artistic integrity of the program. I encourage the college to expand this practice in any way possible. Master classes with professional dance companies that tour to Atlanta and Chattanooga, perhaps teaching residencies with guest teachers, and guest choreographers of national stature would be plausible ways to enhance this mode of instruction and learning.

- **Dance Library**

I regret that I did not have the opportunity to peruse the dance collection (books/videos) at Berry. I strongly recommend that funding is allocated to build a video collection. Because I am recommending that all courses have a history component or a viewing element, it is imperative that faculty have access to high-quality video dance selections that allow them to expose students to the best examples of a given dance genre or choreographic style. Such standards as *The Trailblazers*, *Making Dances – Seven Post Modern Choreographers*, *Post Modernism since 1980*, *Dance Black America* and *Free to Dance*, to mention a few, should be a part of every college library that has a dance program. *Insight Media* and *Dance Horizons* provide catalogs and websites that list and sell quality dance videos and dvds. I recommend that a substantial budget for video acquisitions be available for the next two to three years as Berry begins to build this permanent collection. Dance cannot be fully understood unless one sees it, and video is the best option for live viewing.

Also, I would recommend that Berry join the Congress on Research in Dance (CORD), and Society of Dance History Scholars (SDHS). These two organizations publish the highest quality of research in the dance field, and proceedings of their conferences should be part of the Berry Library collection. CORD and SDHS provide schools with the most current scholarly research and lists of publications in the field.

- **Dance Major**

As the dance program at Berry grows, the college should consider forming a dance major. In the future, with more dance faculty who possess different areas of expertise, specific dance courses would be designed to create the major. I would recommend that some time is spent researching current dance majors at comparable institutions, and I encourage discussion among Berry dance, theater, and another faculty concerning ideas about a dance major that can successfully tie into the curriculum at Berry College.

THE FUTURE

Dance at Berry College can enter a new and enlightened era that allows the college to look to its future with enthusiasm and a sense of adventure. The college can look forward to creating a faculty of committed dance professors who are interested in continuing the building and shaping of the dance program that is already underway. A program with two full-time faculty should most definitely be taken into consideration. The college may also be interested in seeking accreditation (or simply just guidance) through the National Organization of Schools of Dance (NASD), as accreditation provides an external professional recognition of excellence in dance programs. Referencing the NASD guidelines will provide a concrete roadmap for dance as it continues on its path of growth at the college.

Also to be considered in the very near future is connecting the dance program with programs abroad. The global nature of education is paramount at this time, and will only increase in importance in the future. Dance lends itself to exchanges with and study of

other cultures and looking into how Berry dance students might find these connections can only be beneficial.

I applaud Berry College's support of Jeanne Schul's efforts to establish and nurture dance as a viable course of study at the college. I suggest that the college continues to dialogue with her and future dance faculty about creative ways to build and embrace dance. I am honored to have been a member of the review team and look forward to the dance program's continued growth and successes.

Submitted by Bridget Roosa
Associate Professor, Chair of the Department of Theatre and Dance
Agnes Scott College
141 E. College Ave.
Decatur, GA 30030