COURSE OVERVIEW

This class is about exploring the act of original creation from multiple vantage points. Discovering and nurturing one’s own creative voice through boldly committing oneself to experimentation, students are freed from the constraints of producing fully choreographed dance works. Movement, music, words, objects, and environments of all kinds will be explored together in solo, duet, and group forms. In addition to practicing new approaches to choreographing and improvisational dancing, students will have the opportunity to experiment with lighting, costuming, sound scores, site-specific choreography, video dance making, and alternative performer/audience relationships.

Possessing improvisational and choreographic skills along with technical proficiency is of increasing importance when working with professional choreographers and companies. They are therefore an essential part of becoming a holistic dance artist. We will begin each class with an at least 30-minute improvisation session exploring various topics in-depth.

The semester will consist of a series of one to two week pods in which various aspects of the creative process will be explored through specific assignments, such as: purely abstract motional qualities, spatial awareness, shape and design, movement and text, object theater, video dance, dancing from feeling, music choices, and possibly lighting and costuming ideas.

In addition to exploring ideas through dancing, we will study various artists through books and video to connect our work in class to what has been/is happening in the dance and art world at large.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Accessing one’s creative voice.
Developing the skill of listening to an emerging idea and the direction it wants to take.
Opening to new possibilities of how something could be best expressed.
Creating beginnings and short weekly studies in response to specific assignments.
Experimenting with different kinds of qualities, media, and collaborative efforts.
Beginning to sense larger choreographic and content implications.

REQUIREMENTS:

Creative Space/Time
Each student is required to set aside time and space to explore their own creative process.
A minimum of 15 minutes per day on average (75 minutes per week) is to be dedicated to focus on creating work.
Rehearsal space at UMD can be booked through Virtual EMS: reservations.claricesmithcenter.umd.edu
It is also acceptable to use the time in any other space of your choosing, but you need to keep track of each session in your Sparks Log: how much time did you spend and what did you accomplish?
Attending and critiquing performances
In keeping with the premise of examining the creative process, you are encouraged to see as many live dance, theater, performance art, and music performances as well as experiencing art exhibits, movies, and books as possible. Go out! See stuff! Get inspired!

You are required to see at least FOUR live performances/artistic events throughout the semester, at least TWO of which must be in Dance. The remaining two may be in Dance, Theatre, Performance Art, Music, Visual Art, Literature, Film.

Any live production at CSPAC or other venues in the greater Washington, DC area is eligible.
For Dance performances, see the separate document: “Area Dance Performances Fall 2013”

You are required to submit (electronically, please) a bi-weekly SPARKS LOG containing the following:
— Short critiques on each of the four (or more!) performances/events you saw. Share your thoughts on these performances/events as they relate to the creative process and the deepening of your artistic awakening, development, passion (things you liked, things you hated – but always focus on WHY you had a particular reaction.)
— jot down notes for each event (if it is a live performance, please write after you’ve seen the show, not during it!) and then write the paper. Please use any of the course objectives listed above to inform how you see and think and write about your experience. See also: “Critiquing a Dance Concert” below.
— short reflections on your experiences in class, your “ahah!” and “wow!” moments in and out of class.
— short reflections on how much time you spent and what happened during your creative time/space.
— drawings, clippings, illustrations of any kind relating to any aspect of the creative process and the work you are doing for this class, especially your own ideas that came up during the day, the week, the semester.
— observations on the work of your classmates and how you are learning from them.

Length: each bi-weekly log portion should be at least two single-spaced pages in volume.

Due Dates: Fri, Sep 13+27 – Fri, Oct 11+25 – Fri, Nov 8+22 – Fri, Dec 6

Midterm and Finals Meetings
I will meet with each of you individually sometime during the week of October 22-26, and again just before the end of the semester, to discuss your progress in class.

I would like to begin each of these meetings with a statement of self-assessment by each of you relating to your experiences of and responses to the class practice, followed by me sharing with you my thoughts of what I see happening and what I think you need to focus on going forward. You may reflect on the impact of the topics explored in class on your technical strengths and weaknesses; what ideas and corrections were given to you or others that were significant in strengthening your skills and understanding of dance; and how you applied them in class and outside of class.

In addition to these formal meetings, please feel free to come see me at any time to discuss your work in class. We will occasionally videotape in class to aid your self-assessment.

ATTendance
Regular attendance is essential for your growth as a dancer – it can only take place if each individual is respectful, supportive and contributing to the class as a whole. It is therefore the most important determinant of your grade.

You must be in class On TIME and for the ENTIRE TIME.
Students are responsible for any material covered in missed classes.
If unable to participate due to injury or illness, attend and observe the class if possible to avoid an absence mark (unless you are contagious.)

You are allowed THREE absences over the course of the semester. Any more absences will inevitably, and noticeably, affect your level of achievement in class and thus lower your grade. Use your absences wisely! Lateness compromises the focused environment for you and your classmates. Understand that lateness will reflect in your grade as follows: three late arrivals equal one absence. For your own safety, you may not participate in class if you are more than 10 minutes late, unless the class has not begun warm-ups yet.

Grading
Your grade is based on your work in class and your ability to pursue, incorporate and demonstrate your ideas and skills. Only through presence, practice, and learning with and from each other will you grow as a dancer.

• Active personal engagement with class material + fulfillment of assignments 50%
• Improvement over the course of the semester 40%
• Sparks Log 10%

My understanding of letter grades is as follows:
A Exceptional, outstanding, inspired work with an element of risk and a deep understanding of class material
B Great work which clearly demonstrates a command of the material covered in class
C Average work which is in some way below both a class mean and what would be expected of the student
D You shouldn’t be reading this
F Something happened
SPARKS Pods

The Quality Pod
Exploring Dance as defined, conscious, purely abstract motion, contrasting movement qualities, spatial awareness, shape and design

The Voice & Text Pod
Exploring how breath, the voice and text can inform/affect one’s movement and enhance individual expression
Guest artist: Ashley Smith

The Autobiography Pod
Using one’s life experiences to create meaningful personal/universal work

The Object Theater Pod
Using everyday objects in unusual ways to inform/enhance expression
Create unison phrase with removing/putting on pieces of clothing

The Partnering Pod
Various explorations of touch and weight sharing to create interpersonal work

The Sound/Music Pod
How does sound/music add atmosphere and meaning to the choreography?
What happens when one choreographs to music? When one choreographs first and finds music to fit it later?

The Video/Dance Pod
Dance as visual art – choreographing dance/movement for video; creating video backgrounds for the dance

The Feeling Pod
Creating dance (= the art of motion) from emotion.
What is drama? Where is the drama in pure motion?

The Eye Pod
Exploring the eye focus in different ways (looking at different artists and how they use the power of the eyes: Ballet/playing to the balcony; Martha Graham/agony & ecstasy; Merce Cunningham/everything is equal; Twyla Tharp/relaxed, inwardly focused eyes in her early work; etc.)

The Scenic Pod
Exploring ideas for Set Design, Costume Design, Lighting Design

VERY IMPORTANT: ONLINE COURSE EVALUATION
"Your participation in the evaluation of courses through CourseEvalUM is a responsibility you hold as a student member of our academic community. Your feedback is confidential and important to the improvement of teaching and learning at the University as well as to the tenure and promotion process. You can go directly to the website (www.courseevalum.umd.edu) to complete your evaluations starting December 1."
Critiquing a Dance Concert: some pointers of what to look for

- Information on the performance (date, name of the theater, name of the artist/choreographer/company, collaborators, etc.)

- What did you see? Why?
  What piqued your interest? Why?
  What spoke to you/didn’t speak to you? Why?
  What did you/didn’t you like? Why?

- Describe the choreography:
  - what do you think was the artist’s intent?
  - how successful was the piece in your opinion?
  - was it a narrative piece?
  - was it abstract?
  - what was the clearest idea, image, moment of the piece?
  - what was unclear, confusing?

- How do you relate the work to life outside the theater, societally, politically, psychologically, historically, personally, universally (at the time it was created as well as in the present)?

- Describe the performance quality of the dancers (level of skills? presence?)

- Did the choreographer/performers take risks?

- Comment on music, lights, costumes, sets, use of media

- What did you feel or think about during or after the performance?

- What do you imagine the performers were feeling?

- Research history/background of the choreographer, comparisons to other works by same choreographer, to other choreographers, etc.)

- What did you learn from the concert for your own dance practice?
SYLLABI POLICY INFORMATION

SCHOOL OF THEATRE, DANCE, AND PERFORMANCE STUDIES

PLUS MINUS GRADES: The implementation of plus minus grade factoring will begin in fall 2012. Under the new policy, quality points for each letter grade from A through D will reflect plus and minus components of the grade, as shown below. The plus/minus system will apply to both undergraduate and graduate courses. 

- $A+ = 4.0$, $A = 4.0$, $A- = 3.7$, $B+ = 3.3$, $B = 3.0$, $B- = 2.7$, $C+ = 2.3$, $C = 2.0$, $C- = 1.7$, $D+ = 1.3$, $D = 1.0$, $D- = 0.7$, $F = 0$

- The University’s present marking system defining the standards for letter grades is retained under the new plus/minus policy. The present marking system is as follows:
  - A+, A, A- denotes excellent mastery of the subject and outstanding scholarship
  - B+, B, B- denotes good mastery of the subject and good scholarship
  - C+, C, C- denotes acceptable mastery of the subject
  - D+, D denotes borderline understanding of the subject, marginal performance, and unsatisfactory progress toward a degree
  - F denotes failure to understand the subject and unsatisfactory performance

Students are required to earn a grade of at least C-in their major and have a minimum 2.0 Cumulative GPA in their major in order to graduate.

http://www.testudo.umd.edu/plusminusimplementation.html

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE POLICY: University of Maryland Policies and Procedures Concerning Academic Assignments on Dates of Religious Observances provides that students should not be penalized because of observances of their religious beliefs; students shall be given an opportunity, whenever feasible, to make up within a reasonable time any academic assignment that is missed because of individual participation in religious observances. Students are responsible for obtaining material missed during their absences. Furthermore, students have the responsibility to inform the instructor of any intended absences for religious observances in advance. The student should provide written notification to the professor, by hand (not through email or mailbox delivery) within the first two weeks of the semester. The notification must identify holiday(s) and date(s).

http://www.president.umd.edu/policies/iii510a.html

ACCOMMODATING INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE DISABILITIES: The University is committed to making reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities that have been documented by Disability Support Services (0106 Shoemaker Building, 301-314-7682). A disability should be verified and discussed with Disability Support Services and the student should provide an “Accommodation Letter” to the professor or TA. If you wish to discuss academic accommodations for this class, please contact the professor or TA no later than the end of the schedule adjustment period. For more information: http://www.counseling.umd.edu/DSS/

HONOR CODE: The University has a nationally recognized Honor Code, proposed and administered by the Student Honor Council and approved by the University Senate. The University of Maryland Honor Pledge reads:

“I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this assignment/examination.”

Unless you are specifically advised to the contrary, the Pledge statement should be handwritten and signed on the front cover of all exams, papers, projects, or other academic assignments submitted for evaluation in this course. Students who fail to write and sign the Pledge will be asked to confer with the instructor. Please recognize that all students are subject to the requirements of the University’s Code of Academic Integrity whether or not they write and sign the Honor Pledge. For more information: http://www.orientation.umd.edu/VirtualFolder/academicintegrity.pdf

SEXUAL HARASSMENT POLICY: University of Maryland is committed to maintaining a working and learning environment in which students, faculty, and staff can develop intellectually, professionally, personally, and socially, free of intimidation, fear, coercion, and reprisal. The Campus prohibits sexual harassment which is a violation of law and University policy. Individuals who engage in sexual harassment will be subject to disciplinary action. The University has procedures in place to report sexual harassment and correct it when it occurs. Students who have questions may call the Campus Compliance Officer (301-405-2839), or the Legal Office (301-405-4945). To read the entire Policy see Appendix B in the Undergraduate Catalog. http://www.president.umd.edu/legal/policies/sh.html and http://www.umd.edu/catalog/index.cfm/show/content.section/c/52/s/943.

ATTENDANCE POLICY of the School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies: Regular attendance and in-class participation are integral components of all dance and theatre classes and seminars. Although instructors are responsible for informing each class of the nature of in-class participation and the effect of absences on the evaluation of a student’s work, the School’s general attendance policy on excused absences is consistent with the University’s policy, which allows students to be excused for the following causes:
1. Illness of the student* or illness of a dependent as defined by the Board of Regents policy on family medical leave
2. Religious observance
3. Participation in University activities at the request of University authorities
4. Compelling circumstances beyond the student’s control

*In May 2011, the University Senate and President passed a new policy for granting excused absences, which can be found at http://www.president.umd.edu/policies/v100g.html. A student may provide a self-signed note when missing a single lecture, recitation, or laboratory, with the understanding that providing false information is prohibited under Code of Student Conduct. Self-signed notes are not accepted during “Major Scheduled Grading Events.” Specific questions concerning the TDPS policy on non-consecutive medical absences should be addressed with the Head of the Cluster.

Students claiming an excused absence must apply in writing and furnish documentary evidence for their assertion that the absence resulted from one of these causes. (Undergraduate Catalog, pages 36 & 37 or go to: http://www.testudo.umd.edu/soc/atelas.html) Whenever possible, instructors will make a reasonable effort to re-schedule in-class presentations for students with an authorized excused absence. Students should check the specific requirements of their courses carefully, however, as such re-scheduling is not always possible.