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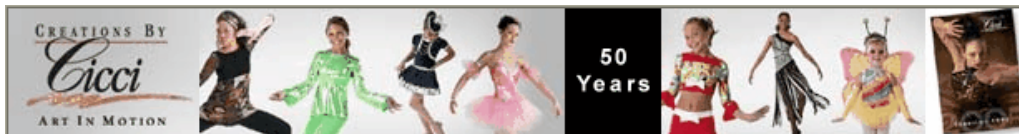
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## A Matter of Degree

By Elaina Loveland

*Guiding your students through the maze of college dance programs*

Dance teachers have a great influence on the path a teenage dancer chooses after high school. They can help steer students toward a professional career in dance immediately after high school, which is usually when ballet dancers start their careers, or help them find a college program that will meet their needs. Competition for performing jobs is fierce and only the most talented and driven dancers make it. But college dance programs can provide students with additional training for a performing career or performance opportunities for personal fulfillment should they choose not to dance professionally. And they can prepare students for dance-related careers other than performing.

### Types of Programs

Each dance program is different. Many emphasize modern technique, some have equal emphases on modern and ballet (and sometimes jazz), and a handful focus on ballet as the primary dance technique. Careful scrutiny is needed to cull out the differences between programs—although many offer excellent training and ample performance opportunities, some are geared toward students who intend to become professional dancers and others toward those who seek other kinds of dance-related careers.

Three kinds of degrees are possible with a dance major: bachelor of fine arts (BFA), bachelor of arts (BA), and bachelor of science (BS). Each requires a different number of dance credits for graduation. A BFA requires the most dance credits and is often focused on performance; it is usually the best option for a student who hopes to audition for professional dance companies after graduation. It offers the most dance technique classes and is often conservatory based. A BA is usually offered at liberal arts colleges and requires the same amount of credits as other disciplines, which makes it easier to double major. A BS is the least common dance degree and varies considerably from program to program—some are designed more like a BFA and others like a BA. In-depth research into these programs is recommended for students who are considering this type of degree.

### Auditions

Most conservatories or institutions that offer a BFA in dance require applicants to audition for the dance program and often it is the primary, if not the sole, determining factor of acceptance to the dance program. However, not all colleges require auditions for acceptance into their dance programs. Many notable colleges today offer dance majors that include many of the attributes of a highly competitive dance program in a less competitive fashion, such as Barnard College in New York City, Goucher College in Baltimore, MD, or Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, NY. They still offer daily technique classes, bring in guest artists, and have performing opportunities, yet the auditions for entering freshmen might be for scholarships only. Dance teachers can help students decide what their goals are for dancing in college, thus easing audition anxiety. However, students who want to study solely dance with an emphasis on performance can expect that an audition (and perhaps a solo) will be required.

Students may be anxious to know what schools are looking for, but there is no firm answer. "Different departments are looking for different skills and qualities in their students," notes Libby Patenaude, chair of the department of dance at Florida State University. "We are interested in students who are eager to train intensively in both ballet and modern dance and who will ultimately pursue careers in the professional dance world," she says. "We are also interested in the student who does original improvisational work during the auditions." She points out that several other schools do not require previous ballet training because "their programs may be exclusively focused on creative process and contemporary dance." A few well-known programs that focus on modern dance and choreography include those at the University of Utah; Middlebury College in Middlebury, VT; Mills College in Oakland, CA; and George Mason University in Fairfax, VA.



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Like many of the most competitive dance programs, the audition at Purchase College, State University of New York, determines whether students will be accepted as a dance major before they even apply for admission to the college. The program holds five auditions on campus each



spring and has four to eight off-campus regional auditions in California, Illinois, Florida, and Texas at the end of January each year. Regional auditions usually attract between 15 and 40 students; on-campus auditions usually include approximately 70 students. Purchase's dance auditions consist of classes in ballet and modern, after which some of the students are invited to present a solo. The average size of the freshman class in the Purchase dance program is 45 students, but it varies greatly. "We have had a class as small as 32 and as large as 67—there were a lot of talented

students auditioning that year," explains Carol K. Walker, dean of the School of the Arts and director of the Conservatory of Dance.

Researching dance programs can yield clues that might help determine if original choreography is appropriate for an audition. A program that emphasizes ballet might prefer something more traditional like a variation from a classical or contemporary ballet. However, when programs have a more experimental slant to their curriculum (usually those that offer courses in choreography and modern dance), the faculty may be more interested in seeing original work. This doesn't necessarily mean that ballet-based programs wouldn't be interested in seeing original choreography. The best thing to do is to call the department and ask which kinds of solo pieces they have seen students perform recently and whether they have any recommendations. If they don't mention original choreography, ask whether it is appropriate.

#### **Dance-Related Careers**

Even when promising students decide that a performance career isn't in their future, they can still pursue dance in college in preparation for another kind of dance-related career. Some of the most popular options include dance education, arts management, and dance therapy.

Students who are interested in becoming dance teachers need to decide if they are interested in becoming certified to teach in public schools. If so, they should consider dance programs that have a teacher-certification component. The National Dance Education Organization maintains a list of states that offer dance teacher certification; students should evaluate dance programs in those states and determine whether they include K-12 teacher certification. Private studios, however, do not require teacher certification.

Students who hope to open their own studios or work for a dance- or arts-related nonprofit organization might find that a dance program with a degree or concentration in arts management fits the bill. Arts management programs teach the business aspects of running businesses and nonprofit organizations geared specifically for the arts world.

Another option for dancers who want to integrate dance skills into a career is dance therapy. Dance therapists (sometimes called movement therapists) integrate creative movement in the treatment of developmental, medical, social, physical, and psychological impairments. They work with people of all ages—from children to the elderly—in medical and educational settings, including hospitals, nursing homes, and day care facilities, and in private practice. Becoming a dance therapist requires graduate study in the field, but undergraduate preparation in the sciences would be ideal; a college program that combines dance and science (for example, the dance science major that Goucher College offers) might be a good fit for a student interested in this career.

As a dance teacher, you can help your students realize their potential by working with them to make them the best dancers they can be. But you can also aid them in whichever path they pursue after high school by becoming knowledgeable about the educational options available to them and guiding them through the decision-making process.

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