Syllabus

DANCE COMPOSITION

“What if imagination and art are not frosting at all, but the fountainhead of human experience?”
-Rollo May

The creative art of choreography is the transformation of felt experience into externalized forms. The process of organizing movement and evaluating the choices made within that organization is the development of the craft of choreography, or composition.

We humans have highly formed brains, a trait that is valued greatly in our culture. We also have sensations, feelings, and a soul. It is our role as artists to first reach inside ourselves and find the intuitive aspect of our felt selves and then to communicate this wealth of kinesthetic sensation and deep knowledge to others.

Course Objectives - Through my guidance, support from your classmates and personal reflection, you will tap into your self knowledge and learn to communicate what you know, thus finding your individual choreographic voice. Yet, at the same time, you will be asked to explore ways of moving that are unfamiliar to you in an effort to broaden your movement vocabulary. You will develop your skills in observing dance, learning how to articulate your responses to what you see both verbally and in writing. You will become familiar with the meanings of space, time and energy, and comfortable in moving through all aspects of these dance elements. Opening yourselves to the possibility of new experiences will be encouraged. This might include watching a fellow student in class through a different lens or viewing a new style of dance in performance with an open mind. In addition to the above, intermediate students will; deepen your connection between improvisation and set movement patterns, become fluent in creating movement for groups, and learn the basics of collaboration with lighting designers and costumers.

This course will incorporate group improvisations, creating and performing dance studies, discussion, critical analysis, journal writing and developing a video portfolio. Students at the beginning level will primarily compose solos for themselves and take on the role of dancer for the larger compositions. The intermediate students will remain
active in the improvisational process and as observers, while creating both solos and
dances with 2 or more performers.

**Dance Studies** - Much time will be spent on composing dance studies, which will then
be performed in class and reviewed through group class discussion. I believe that much
of our understanding comes through the doing. I will give structured movement
assignments, or shells, and you will fill them in. We will engage in improvisations
during class, an activity that will help define assignments and stimulate creativity.
When evaluating your choreographic studies I will be looking for movement invention,
clarity of intention and depth of exploration.

When showing your dances in class, it is absolutely essential that you fully perform
your studies. Choreography is rich with nuances, and it is therefore impossible to
capture the clear intentions of your work without well rehearsed dancing. I am not
talking about extraordinary technique, but I am referring to a complete engagement
into the moment of each movement.

**Journal Writing** - At the end of each week make a journal entry recording reactions and
thoughts inspired by your creative process, your search in solving the assigned
problems. Record your responses to personal improvisations. What is re-occurring?
What feedback are you getting in terms of strong sensations or potent ideas? Observe
and note the insights you derive from viewing the work of your classmates. Journals
must be handed in before mid-semester break. Your writings during the second half of
the semester will be applied to your final paper.

**Viewing Dance on Video** - Dance videos will be assigned for viewing throughout the
semester. Initially, I will choose specific videos for each student in an effort to
supplement previous exposure to a variety of choreographic styles.

**Papers** - Three short papers on dance performances will be required: a descriptive
analysis of the first concert of the semester and critical reviews of the second off-campus
concert and the Macalester Fall Dance Concert. A final paper based on an evaluation of
your working process, as well as discoveries that you have made about yourself as an
artist will be due at the end of the semester. Elements of your journal may be used to
help formulate this essay.
Video Portfolio - Completed dances will be taped for the development of a video portfolio. Purchase a blank video tape to be used for this purpose alone.

Attendance and Participation - Attendance at all classes is extremely important, as support and feedback from the members becomes an integral part of this course. I will facilitate our discussions and at times, designate a final path for each choreographer to follow in reshaping your studies. You will be expected to search for your own creativity, maintaining self motivation and involvement. Respect, working together as a group, and self growth are crucial for this course.

Reading - I will distribute handouts throughout the semester. We will discuss the readings in class on the following day.

Choreographic Units - Elements of dance - Space, Time, and Energy (level 1)
   Elements of dance – Form and Abstraction (level 2)
   Music for dance
   Group Composition

Journals Due – March 11

3 Concerts & 1 Outing - We will attend 2 performances off campus as a group and take a trip to the zoo. Prepare to spend approximately $60 on tickets. Also, plan to see the Macalester Spring Dance Concert.

1) Dance Revolutions
   Feb. 8-10 $5 University of Minnesota
2) Macalester Spring Dance Concert
   April 4, 5 & 6 free
3) Minnesota Zoo
   April 19 (?) $14
4) Trisha Brown Dance Company or Zenon
   April 25 $30

Grading - Dance Studies 60%
   Journal & Papers 20%
   Attendance/participation 20%
   [after 2 unexcused absences, each additional absence will drop your grade by a point–from A to A- to B+ etc.

Instructor - Becky Heist
   #6329
“Dance, like any other art, comes from the eternal depths from being. Dancers, in touching into that place in themselves, release it in the souls of the audience. That place of being is populated with images. Images common to every culture in every period of history. The images differ depending on time and place. The magnetic force they carry does not. These images are called archetypes. They are the life blood of any culture. Dance is archetypal energy. Without words, without clay, without paint, the body becomes the image. Through the rhythm and glory of the music, the central nervous system is activated, the instinctual unconscious is released, accompanied by images that are the embodiment of energy.”

Marion Woodman

**Dance Composition - Suggested Reading**


