

RADFORD UNIVERSITY

Department of Dance

As I enter my eighth year of teaching in higher education, I can confidently say that my identity as an educator has become a central part of who I am as human being. Every day that I walk into the classroom I am excited about the ever-changing nature of teaching dance, and I constantly focus on how to give my students an engaging experience, all while continually developing my own pedagogical skills. My goal is to help mold the students into not only better dancers, but better artists, scholars, and humans. In order to sufficiently prepare students for the professional world my teaching philosophy focuses on the development of the whole dancer - not just technical skills, but anatomically sound movement practices, discipline and professionalism, collaboration tactics, and the ability to clearly and effectively communicate their knowledge. Another cornerstone of my teaching philosophy is the idea of versatility and the well-rounded dancer. I believe the dance degree should provide opportunities for students to become strong technicians in many styles, adaptable learners, lifelong artists, and champions for dance. My focus in and out of the classroom supports all of these goals, and with my diverse background and drive to remain current in the industry I am able to help students develop these skills. My overarching hope is for my students find success in the dance world, whether that be as a performer, an educator, a writer, or in any other dance related field. Being a dancer is a lifelong identity that doesn't stop after performing ends, and I want to support students and set them up for success with both their short-term and long-term goals as artists.

In order for students to work towards these goals, they have to be in an environment where they can thrive. My priority in the classroom is for students to feel challenged yet safe in their learning environment, enabling them to become stronger physically and mentally. It is important to create a place where students are not afraid to make mistakes or take risks, and in order for this environment to be established an open and inclusive tone must be set from the start. I make it a priority to personally connect with every student not just as a dancer, but as a person. With established trust, each student can be challenged to her or his full capacity, while feeling supported in the classroom by both students and faculty. I believe a large part of developing this trust is making it clear that you are "seeing" every single student. I employ many tactics in giving both group and individual feedback, whether it be through written feedback and rubrics, verbal or physical feedback in class, or meetings outside of class. I believe that the relationships of mutual trust I build with the students allow me to push them towards all of the aforementioned goals, going beyond just teaching dance movement. This approach builds skills that extend beyond the classroom and into the performance space, where the students are ready to handle new risks and challenges.

I build my classes around a student-centered approach, giving ownership of material and responsibility that prevents rote memorization and encourages higher-level learning, creative problem solving, and critical thinking. All students in my classroom are expected to be leaders, and each one arrives at that destination following a different path, which I support them in. I do this by creating various opportunities for interactions beyond the typical professor/student

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structure. Through partner work, workshops with guest speakers, improvisation exercises, and student-to-student peer feedback loops, I shift decision-making and responsibility onto the student. This skill is not only applicable and necessary in the arts field, but in any professional employment opportunity, further cementing the formation of the “dancer as a whole.” I reexamine these methods every semester and assess my course in concurrence with the department and university assessment schedule. Modalities of assessment include written work, choreographic work, self-reflections, group projects, and technical ability in the classroom. Rubrics support these lessons and align with the department goals, keeping the students on a clear four-year course and aligning with our national accrediting body.

Individuality as a dancer is essential, but by being able to adapt to different styles and disciplines the dancer can find success through versatility. By establishing proficiency in many disciplines, the dancer can create multiple skill sets that are transferable to the world of professional dance. I constantly push students to excel in not just one discipline, but in many. Although I am guided by the same philosophy in each course, I focus on honing each specific style in a focused and articulate way. I strive to promote this versatility- not diminishing the importance of any one style, but pushing students to excel in each. The more adaptable the artist, the more opportunities he/she will come across. I reflect on my own experiences and lead by example in showing the many different avenues I have been able to succeed in in the dance world because of my training and proficiency in many styles.

A large part of being ready for the current climate of the art world involves being able to successfully participate in interdisciplinary projects. This has been a cornerstone of my teaching and research throughout my career as an educator and every year I look for ways to further develop these rich relationships across boundaries. Providing students with opportunities across disciplines reinforces their adaptability and confidence in not only versatility in dance styles, but in research topics and subject matter. In my theory courses I constantly explore ways to facilitate student creative processes based on research, taking them through the process of bringing something from the page to the stage. While the exact process varies, students and I navigate together. We investigate all types of sources such as relevant texts, visual art, podcasts, primary accounts, film, and music. Students process this material through discussion, reflective writing, improvisations, numerous outside assignments, and group decision-making. Even for freshmen, I provide opportunities for students to find their creative voice through exploring topics they may not have ever considered linking with dance, such as historical events. By delving deeper into my personal research interests, I give the students the opportunity to be a part of this process and hopefully find research and collaborative interests of their own. My goal is not to *tell* students what they should be interested in, but to spark something in them that inspires the life long learning that goes along with creative research and finding one’s own creative voice.

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The dance world changes incredibly quickly and I believe it is my responsibility to stay current in terms of pedagogical practices, anatomy and movement research, current choreographic trends, and developing styles of movement. I do this by keeping up with my own personal research, attending and presenting at national conferences, taking classes, and attending a wide variety of performances. This evolving knowledge informs my teaching and inspires me to keep exploring and learning, and I try to express my own hunger for learning to my students. I bring genuine enthusiasm for the material I teach, and I think this is contagious. When an educator is excited about the material, it is much easier for the students to get on board. My goal is to incite a spark in each individual, and have the patience and drive to find that in every student in every course they take with me. Students should leave my courses with a sense of resilience, confidence, adaptability, historical knowledge, and anatomically sound technical proficiency. Most importantly, I hope my students leave the classroom prepared for a lifelong relationship with dance and a spark of excitement that creates the drive to come back and learn every day of the year.