

Wake Forest Department of Theatre and Dance: Fall 2013
Dance Composition- 3 credits, DCE 223/ Location: D101 Dance Studio

W/F 11-12:15

Prerequisite: DCE 221, DCE 229, or DCE 226 (Intermediate levels in Modern, Ballet or Jazz)

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Office Hours: during class lab time or by appointment

Course Description:

In *Dance Composition*, we will examine and practice many methods and creative processes associated with dance-making. The course will combine physical, creative and scholarly components connected to the art of choreography. The major focus of this course will be to:

- implement codified dance-making methods we'll borrow and shape from other artists
- invent our own dance-making methods *and*
- identify and understand which methods we favor and how or why each method jives with each of us.

Course Objectives:

- To implement a myriad of ways we can generate movement
- To translate movement ideas from our head into our bodies and other bodies in the studio
- To identify and challenge habits we fall into as choreographers and dancers
- To effectively get the dance "out there" in the space and trust the pace with which it happens
- To develop new methods of dance making and not rely on what we think choreography "should be"
- To trust our process, however messy it might seem
- To draw inspiration for our dances from various, disparate creative mediums such as poetry, prose, visual art, and architecture, among others.
- To hone critical response methods for discussion and feedback about dance
- To continue an active and willing practice of improvisational structures and methods
- To regularly practice the profound act of collaboration
- To watch as much dance as possible...watching is learning!

While investigating these objectives, students will create original movement studies on themselves and their peers as well as "try on" (or be introduced to) the creative processes of many successful contemporary choreographers.

Reading material:

Speaking of Dance: Twelve Contemporary Choreographers on Their Craft by Joyce Morgenroth
(available in the bookstore or on amazon)

All additional reading material for *Dance Composition* will be on SAKAI, accessible through <http://sakai.wfu.edu>.

This syllabus will break down weekly readings and writing assignments as well as movement study assignments and film watching. *Because of the nature of this course, some assignments may take longer than others. Thus, I ask that we treat this syllabus as a living, breathing document; one that may morph and change as we all embark on this semester's journey together.*

Course Absence Policy:

ANY absence in this class will affect your grade. Every class will feature choreographic work, which involves all of you as dancers and choreographers. If you are absent from a class, you jeopardize your class status as well as the choreographer you are dancing for that day. Please make every effort to be present in every class. Many class meetings will touch upon a specific choreographic theme or

discussion, supported by readings and/or films in accordance with your movement assignments. As the semester progresses, you will recognize a tight and cohesive community of dance artists forming in our class. **As a result, absence from this community affects your peers, not just yourself.** Stellar attendance, willingness, and your committed presence to me, yourself, and your peers are all required components in this class.

The following criteria makeup your grade:

- 1. Written Assignments (Including 3 journal collections (see below) and 1 concert response) 40%**
- 2. 7 Choreographic Studies (one which you may ‘throw away’): 60%**

1. Journal:

You are going to need to purchase a journal for this class **ASAP**. I recommend a large, spiral journal without lines or a three ring binder. Please have this purchased by next class.

I expect you will use your journal to:

- respond to weekly essay questions
- comment on the reading and how it relates to your choreographic process at the time, whether it is in response to a choreographer from Morgenroth or another topic we are reading
- recount class notes or discussion points
- document any and every choreographic idea as it emerges in your brain or body
- jot down dreams, doodles, images, etc

You should not use the pages sparingly; fill this depository with anything and everything whether you think it “belongs in a dance,” is *seemingly* dance-related, or not. The journal can be messy, sporadic, and non-circuitous. The journal should reflect your thought processes- which often are not neat, color coded, or concise, right? Please remember that it is important for it to be legible as I will be collecting them. Some students prefer to type material, print it, and then paste it. That’s fine too.

Furthermore, spatial patterns, poems, stories, maps, cut-out pictures from magazines, websites, postcards, letters, found text, and photographs *can and all should* live in your journal. Your journal should live with you at all times- as there is always a seed for a dance idea lurking around, often in the least likely of places. This journal will also be a reflection of who you are, as a choreographer, student, or otherwise. It will become a piece of art and a reflection of YOU, so cherish it, and add to it as you would something special to you.

I will collect these journals 3-4 times this semester, most likely *on a day when you are presenting a final movement study*. I will not reading your journals word for word but am looking to see if your journal is satisfactorily composed of, but not be limited to, the following:

A) Weekly Essay Questions

Each week I will ask you to comment (in a page or two) on various philosophical questions somehow regarding dance or dance-making. These essays will help you articulate some philosophical ideas behind your dance-making and help shape who you are as a choreographer. See breakdown for weekly questions. These I prefer to be typed, actually.

B) Class Summaries

After each class, I expect you to record events from that class. I recommend taking time immediately after class to jot down your experience from class that day, while the information is freshest. This is not merely you taking notes while they are happening but also synthesizing these notes for yourself as material that is relevant for you in your choreography assignments. These summaries will also reference you keeping track of choreographic choices you implemented in your rehearsals, comments you received

in class about your movement studies, and how any information from class is connected to your work. You might also think about the lab time as a time and space for this kind of work if you are not working physically, for instance.

C) Notes from Class Readings

Since this class only meets 2x/ week, it will be difficult to always review reading from that week in class. I ask that you use your journal to summarize your reactions the class readings and draw connections from them in your work.

D) Dance Concert Response Paper (See below)

Since we are actively making dance studies in this class, I'd also like you to see the work of other professional companies or student-choreographers who are laboring in the same endeavors. **You must attend at least one of the following off-campus performances this semester (The fall dance concert at Wake does not count) which I encourage you (we!) attend as a group and earlier in the semester rather than later:**

1. UNCG <http://www.uncg.edu/dce/calendar.html>
(note: Kyle Abraham on Oct. 23, which will follow with a two day residency on Oct. 24-26. HUGE!)
2. UNCSA : <http://www.uncsa.edu/performances/> (click on each month to view dance offerings)
3. Duke University: <https://dukeperformances.duke.edu/calendar/theater-dance>
4. UNC Chapel Hill: https://www.carolinaperformingarts.org/series_genre/dance/

Other venues/companies to consider are the Hanesbrands theatre, NC State, and NC Dance Theatre.

5. Salem College is featuring a performance and discussion with Twyla Tharp Oct. 18
<http://www.calameo.com/books/0036092712493f3e4f611>

Before attending any **one** of these concerts, I would like you to read UNCG Dance Professor Larry Lavender's essay *The Critical Appreciation of Dances* as a structural guideline for writing your response paper. (on our DCE 223 SAKAI site) as well as a writing "Pitfalls to Avoid" guideline from me (also on SAKAI). After witnessing the concert, you should write a thorough, exceptional **2-3 page** response paper on the performance, complete with specific details of the choreographic choices you witnessed, descriptive information about the work(s), and interpretative comments from the choreographer's perspective. **In other words: what do you think the choreographic process was like in the creation of this work. Go inside the choreographer's mind.**

The paper should be handed in within 7 days of the concert. Late papers will not be accepted.

Plagiarism of any kind will not be tolerated and will be grounds for failing this course.

2. SIX Choreographic Studies: (60%)

You will be required to present SIX movement studies in class at various times throughout the semester, based on compositional themes or ideas we will be studying together. *Most studies will have draft versions, with the final showing as the version I will grade.* See week by week plan below for a rough timeline of when I anticipate these will take place.

You will also be expected to have a FINAL DANCE SHOWING on Dec. 5 during class, WHICH will FEATURE A COLLECTION OF EDITED WORKS, AND WILL SERVE AS YOUR FINAL EXAM.

Lab Time:

Outside work for this class, in addition to your journal and paper writing, also includes the obvious: **dance composing/ creating time.** We will need to schedule the studio for one hour each week and you

might also plan to work on your movement studies during other free times. Please plan accordingly! Studio time is precious and sparse- being organized is key!

Color Key to Timeline Below:

BLUE- relates to any video documentation of work (dances we'll either see in class or outside of class)

RED- refers to your weekly essay question (usually assigned on Wednesdays, due on Mondays).

ORANGE- refers to reading assignments

PINK – refers to movement assignments/movement work

GREEN- refers to specific responses to include in your journal associated with the **movement assignments**.

BROWN – refers to special events to keep in your calendar.

Class Timeline/Breakdown:

Wednesday, Aug. 27: Syllabus Review and preliminary movement study sharing.

All due Friday, Aug. 29:

Essay question #1: Describe your goals for the course.

Reading: download and read link on Sakai called *Humphrey*: it contains Doris Humphrey's "Checklist" and other selected chapter excerpts from her book The Art of Making Dances and Marcia Siegel's review of the piece "Air for the G String" from her book Shapes of Change. Read NY Times article about Humphrey too, also on Sakai. Please comment on these readings in your journal.

Movement work: Continue with movement study within a group setting, thinking about Humphrey's theories about *space* and *shape* as well as any information you received in class about your work. Bring new movement studies to class next class, now within a group dynamic, (still no music accompaniment, please) but now closer to two minutes total.

Video: Watch Doris Humphrey excerpts on youtube links (also on Sakai site).

Journal response to Movement Study: Be sure to comment on the experience of sharing movement with the class. Further, comment on the Humphrey readings- how did some of her movement philosophies work (or not work) for you?

Friday, Aug. 29: Building on the Phrase

In class: Quickly review goals for course.

Movement Work: Bring a first draft of your trios or quartets for class, Again, no music. 2 mins total.

Due Wednesday, Sept. 3:

Essay question #2: Describe the sorts of dances you like. Identify specifics about these dances you've made, been part of as a dancer, or witnessed. You can also comment on the process of making these dances if you were involved in their creation.

Reading: Chapter 4 "Phrase" from The Intimate Act of Choreography, by Blom and Chaplin (on Sakai) and John Jasperse section in Morgenroth's book. Tie these readings into your journal writing.

Wednesday, Sept. 3: Nurturing the rehearsal process

In class: **continued work with movement studies #1**

Journal: Respond to the “I’m making a dance” fill in the blank question created by Larry Lavender. Are you within the “that/in which/by/or about” category? Is your movement study appropriate for more than one?

Journal: Comment on what it has been like to have rehearsal with your peers. How did you find the process of communicating your artistic visions and desires with words and movement? Was the act of collaboration easy? Challenging? Both?

Friday, Sept. 5: Movement Study 1 due

Due Wednesday Sept. 10:

Essay Question #3: From what other places in our natural world can the ideas for a dance emerge? Which are speaking to you and how might you use them?

Movement Work: Go to the [Reynolda Gardens in Reynolda Village](#) over the weekend and photograph the design, structure and growth of many plants, trees, shrubs, grasses, etc that are featured in the greenhouses and growing in the gardens. Collect these photographs in your journal. **Movement study two will emerge from one of these photographs.** The photograph you select and the plant itself will be your starting place for your next choreographic design. Once you decide on the plant, learn everything you can about it: its species, whether or not it is endemic to NC, whether or not it has a dormant period, its typical lifespan, if or how it is cared for/pruned, how it will change over time, etc. Take note of the color, shape, flow, movement, size and scope of your plant species, and take this information into account as you create the design of your movement study. What can you anticipate about how this plant (and, correspondingly, your dance) might change with the seasons, or with the deprivation of water or sunlight or other resources?

Journal: How are these and other questions emerging for you about this work?

Wednesday, Sept. 10: See Movement Study 2 in first draft form.

Read Anna Halprin in Morgenroth, p. 23-39.

Read Halprin in *Moving Toward Life: Five Decades of Transformational Dance* excerpt about the history and many iterative forms of her Planetary Dance (on sakai).

Begin to conceive of Halprin’s Planetary Dance as a group score, featuring your solo studies from the Reynolda Gardens in your class-organized Planetary Dance.

Special Event: *Wednesday, Sept. 10 in Brendle, 7pm: “Make Every Bite Count”*
Sponsored by the Office of Sustainability

<http://sustainability.wfu.edu/events/panel-make-every-bite-count-2/>

Friday, Sept. 12: Reynolda Garden/Planetary Dance work, cont.

See newest draft of movement study 2

Essay question #4: What does it mean for a dance to be sustainable? *Can* dance be sustainable since its very nature deems it an ephemeral, fleeting art form? Does a sustainable dance refer to the methods you employ in rehearsal and how you are integrating something from the natural world around you into your dance? Does it refer to responsible practices you take on as an artist in your rehearsal, being careful to not abuse valuable resources like water or electricity? What about time as a resource? How do sustainable practices as an artist also translate to mean efficient ones? What about sustainability in dance as a reference to how document (and thus preserve) the ongoing life of the dance?

Bring all of these ideas together into your essay question #4.

Special Event: *Sunday, Sept. 14 at 2:30: Dancing in Chairs at the Reynolda Museum, featuring members of my movement class for people with Parkinson’s Disease.*

Wednesday, Sept. 17: Reynolda Garden/Planetary Dance work, cont.

Consider outdoor location for space as well as indoor option for garden/planetary dances in case of weather.

Read: Chapter about Site specificity from Jo Butterworth book: “Experiencing Space” on Sakai.

Read Eiko Atake chapter in Morgenroth.

Friday, Sept 19: Movement Study #2 due, begin work on site-specific dances

Movement: In-class sharing of garden/planetary studies.

Movement Homework: From natural to human-made: *Create a solo site specific movement study inspired by an architectural place on campus. No music.*

Discuss site specificity and its tenants in performance.

Site specific studies due Wednesday, Sept. 24 or Friday, Sept. 26 in case of rain.

Wednesday, Sept. 24 and Friday Sept. 26: Movement study #3: Site Specificity and our peripatetic dance day.

Video: Show site specific video from “Traversing”.

Essay question #5: Define site-specificity and comment on your work within this genre. Reflect on this in comparison to your movement study 2. What similarities and differences did you encounter between these two creative processes?

Journal: What do we learn about our individual and collective relationships to the space we dance with/through?

DUE Friday, Sept. 26: JOURNAL COLLECTION #1.

Due Wednesday, Oct.1

Essay Question # 6: What does it mean to you to “abstract an idea in your dance making”? What does abstraction in relation to dance-making mean to you? What does it mean to you to “alter expectations” in our choreographic practice?

Video: See Martha Graham’s *Lamentation* on YouTube.

Read: Chapter 5 “The Heroines Within” from Deborah Jowitt’s *Time and the Dancing Image* p. 201-233 on SAKAI. (called “Graham in Jowitt’s book on SAKAI).

Read Siegel’s review of Graham’s works *Lamentation* and *Appalachian Spring* – on SAKAI

Journal: Did Graham’s work influence your thought process/choreographic choices? How? Were there other sources that fed your process? What was your process like? Comment on this.

Movement: Make some phrase material that features nothing *stolen*, nothing *stale*, nothing *schtick* (habit-free-movement). Come to class on Wednesday with this material. Don’t use music.

Theme for class is identifying habits in movement making, with accumulation-based generation. Point out frequent choices you encounter in your phrase-making endeavors. Why do you choose the movement you do? What do you find yourself avoiding?

Wednesday, Oct 1: Schtick busting.

Share study with new schtick-free phrase material; discuss personal authenticity. Continue to build schtick free study.

Discuss CHOREOGRAPHER’S TOOLBOX IDEA and “fill” our toolboxes with all the methods (or tools) we have so far and those we want to add.

Due Friday, Oct 3:

Read and comment on Susan Rethorst’s about dailiness- on Sakai.

Journal: What is relevant from Rethorst’s essay at this point in your dance making?

Read: Morris chapter in Morgenroth

Read: Chapter in Joan Acocella's book Mark Morris entitled "Music" - on Sakai.

Friday, Oct 3: More on schtick and now with music

Essay Question #7: Have you had any eureka moments lately-in your dance making life or otherwise? If so, how are they entering your choreographic-conscious mind?

Assign music pieces

*Due: Wednesday, Oct 8: **Music and schtick free movement assignment in draft***

Wednesday, Oct 8: What if music is imposed? How do I work with it?

Movement: See individual pieces in draft form; discuss movement's relationship to music, dance's relationship to silence. Keep working on pieces and music/movement scores.

Essay question #8: In the spirit of music's relationship with dance in post-modernism, choreographer Trisha Brown comments in Morgenroth: "There was a period as a young choreographer when I thought that dance alone was enough. My analogy was when you look at a piece of sculpture or a painting you don't need to hear music, do you?" Comment on this.

Read Trisha Brown chapter in Morgenroth.

Read Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process (on SAKAI) to use in class as guide for our feedback session.

Movement: *Keep working on music-inspired study- due Wednesday.*

Friday, Oct. 10: Is Dance "Music Visualization?"

Movement Study #4a due, *using CRP in class as model for feedback.*

Due Wednesday October 15:

Movement Study #4B: *new short solo from a piece of music YOU choose and set on another dancer in class – no lyrics please.*

Read

Wednesday, Oct. 15: Movement 4B due.

Essay Question #9: Is there such a thing as the "wrong choice" in your rehearsal process? If so, how do you know?

Friday, October 17: NO CLASS FALL BREAK.

Special Event: Saturday, Oct. 18- Twyla Tharp at Salem College- free!

Wednesday, October 22: Introduction to Chance, other Improvisational Score possibilities.

Essay Question #10: In your dance making practices, what is comfortable? What is cliché? How do you push beyond these places?

Read John Cage's and Merce Cunningham's essays from The 20th Century Performance Reader on sakai entitled "Four Statements on the dance" and "You Have to Love Dancing to Stick with it"

Read short review by Marcia Siegel of Merce's work titled "Siegel on Merce works".

Read Merce Cunningham chapter in Morgenroth book and go to www.merce.org to learn more about The Merce Cunningham dance company and its current status since Cunningham passed away in 2009.

Introduction to Chance Exercises in Dance Making.

Also, come to class with a chance-oriented improvisational score to share with on Friday, Oct. 24).

Friday, Oct 24:

Movement: *See chance –oriented scores in class. Group assignments determined in class.*

Video Assignment: See Cunningham video work *Points in Space* (on reserve in library).

Journal: Write a thoughtful, well written response to the work: both the creative process and collaborative nature of the work and your reaction to the work itself. How was the use of chance structures in music and dance evident to you in this made-for-the-camera dance work? Given the nature of film and editing, do you think the notion of chance can still be authentically preserved in the work?

Special Events: Kyle Abraham Oct. 25 and 26 master classes and panels tbd.

Wednesday, Oct. 29: Chance to Dance.

Movement: Continued work with group pairings

Due Friday, Oct. 31:

Essay Question #11: What, generally speaking, is your relationship to music when making a dance?

Read excerpted chapters from Stephen Nachmanovitch's book Free Play entitled "The Vehicle", "Form Unfolding" and "The Power of Mistakes"- on SAKAI.

Journal: How do Nachmanovitch's chapters on Improvisation in Life and Art provide insight to you as a choreographer?

Friday, October 31: Shaping Improvisation- Altering expectations and creating more than one version of the chance phrases.

Read David Gordon's chapter in Morgenroth

Read David Gordon's essay "It's About Time" in The Drama Review. On Sakai and called "Gordon_TDR_1975".

Read Sally Banes' chapter from her book Writing Dancing in the Age of Postmodernism- about Judson choreographic practices called "Choreographic Methods of Judson Dance Theater".

Summarize these articles in your journal – to be collected on Wednesday Nov. 5.

In class discussion: can the order of events in my choreographic change and not be absolute?

Due Wednesday, Nov. 5: Two possible versions of your movement study. Music unknown but time finalized...

Featured performance of movement study #5 on Wednesday in Hanes Gallery.

Journal: COLLECTION #1 DUE on Wednesday.

Wednesday, November 5: JOURNAL COLLECTION and gallery performance, movement study 5

(In class time to finalize two versions)

Special Event: Gallery performance, Hanes Gallery 5-6:30, honoring Black Mountain College collaborations.

Friday, November 7: Reflections, new directions

Poetry packets are distributed and journals are returned / poetry project description described.

Read Richard Bull letter on Sakai from the dance excerpt from book Dances that Describe Themselves

Read Streb chapter in Morgenroth.

See Streb Video on reserve in library.

Wednesday, November 12: Poetry work introduction

Read Monk chapter in Morgenroth

Read Lucinda Childs chapter in Morgenroth

Movement study 6 Draft DUE.

Essay Question# 12: Richard Bull letter exercise- write a letter to yourself from this dance study, another recent one, or a dance you may have created or are currently rehearsing in, etc from your movement study.

Friday, November 14: Poetry, cont.

See **Video selections** of Meredith MONK on reserve in library.

Poetry final due – Movement Study 6.

Wednesday, November 19: Air mail dances/ Remy Charlip- [movement study 7](#)

Review Charlip work.

https://www.google.com/search?q=air+mail+dances&tbm=isch&imgil=FPsMb0EG0huKiM%253A%253BnIL8MVo6QAV7jM%253Bhttp%25253A%25252F%25252Faxisdancecompany.wordpress.com%25252F&source=iu&usg=__tHkKQRXS5t3Wg-g0opIEBIDPZ4I%3D&sa=X&ei=bq38U-HoGormsATFjYLgCA&ved=0CGoQ9QEwCw&biw=1455&bih=705#facrc=__&imgdii=__&imgrc=9GfOe709uWw TM%253A%3BYsGmbQwUrGBI2M%3Bhttp%253A%252F%252F4.bp.blogspot.com%252F-n9AR0LqTIdw%252FUJzeQK6RyzI%252FAAAAAAAAAAHjI%252F 8zrNMyp5xQ%252Fs640%252FScreen%252Bshot%252B2012-11-09%252Bat%252B10.41.02.png%3Bhttp%253A%252F%252Ffrachel-and-yoga.blogspot.com%252F2012_11_01_archive.html%3B282%3B363

Essay Question #13: What are your boundaries/edges? How do you push beyond them?

Friday, Nov 21: [Movement Study 7 draft due](#)-Fall Dance Concert

Review guidelines for final project.

Essay Question # 13: Revisit goals from beginning of semester. Are you meeting your goals? Surpassed them? Fallen short? Where do you need to go next as a choreographer?

Read Bill T. Jones chapter in Morgenroth

Read Arlene Croce article from the New Yorker magazine, on e-reserve

Video: See “Still /Here” on reserve in library.

Wednesday, November 26/ Friday November 28: no classes/THANKSGIVING

Wednesday, December 3: ARE WE DONE YET?

Read Ann Carlson Chapter in Morgenroth

Movement 7 final showings (Remy Charlip Airmail dances) due.

Journal Collection #3 due next class!

Friday, December 5: Culmination.

Journal #3 DUE

Final Project due.

Post-class tea party – date / time during exam time

Journals returned.