A Written History of the Western Michigan University Department of Dance

Amy Russell
Project Development

• Conceptually developed by Wendy Cornish
• What happened vs. Why it happened
• First written documentation of the history of the Department of Dance
• Research evaluated through three lenses on the national level
  • Dance in higher education
  • Professional dance field
  • Social, political, cultural, and economic trends
Methodology

• Archival Research
  • Western Michigan University Zhang Legacy Collections Center: Archives and Regional History
  • ScholarWorks

• Literature Review
  • Trade journal articles
  • Scholarly texts

• Interviews
  • Personal Viewpoint
  • Department Development
  • Department Criteria & Influences
  • Community Relations
  • Industry Connections

Personal Viewpoint
1. How has evolving technology impacted the curriculum?
2. Who has influenced you as a dancer, and how have they influenced you?
3. In your teaching methods, who has influenced you stylistically?
4. How have current socio-political climates or events impacted the department?
5. Do you feel that the department’s geographic location in the Midwest has any significant influence on its ability to form a vast network of professional connections or on its curriculum?

Department Development
1. In forming the Department of Dance, were there any other university dance programs or leading educators that you used as a model or reference?
2. What lead to the development of the tri-focal program?
3. The BA and BFA programs at WMU include supplemental curriculum in dance history, writing, and production. Why has the department formed to provide this type of education, rather than a more conservatory-style technical training?
4. What dance-related research organizations have influenced the development of the department or its curriculum, and how have they influenced it?

Department Criteria and Influences
1. What does the department look for in students/faculty?
   a. How has the admission criteria evolved for incoming students?
   b. Faculty search information?
2. In choosing guest artists for the department, what do you look for?

Community Relations
1. In what ways did the department engage with the community prior to the 80’s?
2. The department had community classes and the annual Ballet Seminar in the 1980s and 90s. What was their relevance at the time and how did that relevance shift? What is the department doing for similar community involvement?

Industry Connections
1. How has the industry changed in significant ways? How has each genre changed?
2. How has the department adapted to the professional dance industry’s changing demands?
3. How has the department created professional connections to the dance industry?
4. Why did you start the Great Works program?
Physical Education Roots

• Department of Physical Education for Women at Western State Normal School
  • First dance classes offered in 1911

• Margaret H’Doubler
  • Developed first dance major at University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1926
  • Dance based on natural movement
  • Supplemental knowledge in a variety of subjects

East Hall Dance Class 1930s
Safe Approach to Training the Body & Training Versatile Dancers

- Erick Hawkins
  - Normative Theory of Movement
- Curriculum
  - Conditioning for Dancers
  - Bartenieff Fundamentals℠
  - Laban Movement Analysis
- Tri-focal Approach
  - Modern, Jazz, Ballet
- Supplemental Curriculum in Dance Theory
  - History, Production, Music, Science, Choreography
- Margaret H’Doubler & Liberal Arts University Setting

Erick Hawkins Master Class in Oakland Gym
Connections to the Community & Field

- Student Dance Companies
- Ballet Teaching Seminar
- Partners in Dance
  - Dancing with the WMU/Kazoo Stars
- International Outreach
- Great Works Dance Project & National Choreography Competition
- Immersion Trips
- Affiliation with External Dance Organizations
  - National Association of Schools of Dance
  - American College Dance Association
  - National Dance Education Organization
  - International Association for Dance Medicine & Science
  - CORPS de Ballet International
Collaboration & Technology

- Curriculum
- Interdepartmental Collaboration
  - *Proud Music of the Storm* (1976)
  - *Rituals and Dances* (1983)
- Intradepartmental Collaboration
- Alwin Nikolais
  - *Inner Sanctum* (1985)
- Curriculum
  - Choreographing for a New Millennium
  - Lighting and Staging for Dancers
  - Online Courses
- Production Technology

*Inner Sanctum* by Alwin Nikolais (1985)
Geography & Politics of Funding

- Department of Dance originally located on East Campus
  - Walwood Union
  - East Hall
  - Oakland Gym

- Dorothy U. Dalton Center opened in 1982

- Benefits of Kalamazoo Location
  - Central location to Chicago & Detroit allows for recruitment of high-caliber students and guest artists

- Primarily grant funded through the early 1980s
- AIDS epidemic reduced male presence within the Department of Dance
- Stigma surrounding AIDS reduced government arts funding
- Shift to donor funding
Future Work

• Examine lineage of the Department of Dance

• Evaluate development of the Department of Dance in relation to international dance and socio-political trends
Acknowledgements

• Lee Honors College
  • Research & Creative Activities Scholarship

• Office of the Vice President of Research
  • Undergraduate Research Excellence Award

• Western Michigan University Department of Dance
Bibliography

- Brochure for Dorothy U. Dalton Center building. "Dorothy U. Dalton Center." Western Michigan University. Kalamazoo, MI.
Bibliography

• Fuhrer, Margaret. "Not Your Average Residency." *Dance Magazine*. May 2014.
Bibliography


Western Michigan University. "Festival of Arts Chooses ‘Comic Spirit’ as ‘60 Theme." Western Newsletter 5, no. 4 (1960): 2.


Bibliography


