

How the strengths of an artist apply to the 21st century job search: The Dance Department's Senior Seminar



"My senior seminar on career preparation starts at 8:30 in the morning, and I can tell from the lack of absenteeism that the students want to get something out of it."

HANNAH WILEY
Professor, Dance

Graduates from the UW Dance department pursue careers in arts leadership, non-profits, teaching, medicine, movement therapy, and more. Since many students double or even triple major, Dance alumni enter the job market with a unique breadth of experience and a high level of self-awareness honed through years of coaching on personal reflection and giving and receiving feedback. Faculty also focus on cultivating creative problem solving, critical thinking, and a fearless willingness to try new things. Dance majors can then bring these attitudes to their job search, which gets a jump-start in the Dance 480 Senior Seminar.

The class guides students to analyze both what they want from a career and how their individual strengths as an artist will match their aspirations. In the dancer's tradition of experiential learning, they also go on a full day of job shadowing. As they summarize what they learned in the class, students practice verbalizing the meaning of their personal experience with dance, a critical but challenging skill for dancers.

Thinking critically about CVs and personal strengths: Dance professor Hannah Wiley teaches the department's senior seminar. She invites alumni and dance professionals to speak with her class about careers, and asks guests to make their CVs available ahead of time so that the class can analyze them. "They see how these professionals present themselves, and it helps the students shape how they will want to be presented," says Wiley. After a guest lecturer's visit, Wiley asks students to discuss what they learned both from the content of the presentation and the way the visitor described his or her knowledge and skills.

Through this exercise, "I figured out how to explain the ways my public health degree relates to my dance degree," says Sean O'Bryan, a senior double-majoring in Dance and Public Health. "At first I didn't think cover letters were that important, but now I see how I can represent my personality and accomplishments in them. I think it makes me stand out."

Job shadowing helps students find the right professional fit: After learning about different careers from guests, students in the senior seminar choose a job for a full-day shadow. This offers students more nuanced insight into fields they're interested in exploring. "I don't know any job where you'd get any real sense of what it's like in an hour," says Wiley. "If a job is boring to you, you're not going to figure that out in an hour, but you'll figure it out in six." Shadowing has helped Dance students discover what they like and, just as usefully, what they don't. "There have been some pretty amazing things that have happened," says Wiley. "Like, a student going to shadow a first grade



"If they fall on their face, we're there to help them figure out what to do next. It's so key to them feeling like they can make their way through the world."

JULIET MCMAINS
Associate Professor and Donald E. Petersen Endowed Fellow

How dancers cross disciplines with creative thinking:

Many Dance students double or even triple major and often discover meaningful ways in which the creative thinking learned from dance applies to their other fields. For example, teaching choreography develops adaptable communication techniques. This aids many students whether they are a TA or, like O'Bryan, volunteering with patients at a local hospital for his public health studies. "I have to describe how to do something, so I can help someone visualize their body, or show them myself," he explains.

Siena Dumas Ang, a senior working towards three degrees in dance, math and computer science, applies many techniques learned in dance to her other fields. "There's a lot of creativity and taking risks that I think has definitely influenced how I approach other coursework. It's made me more proactive," says Ang. "Like in Math, I ask about why a theorem works in one instance but not in another."

Lessons Learned

Learning to give and receive constructive feedback of oneself and others is a crucial skill to improving anything from a dance move to work performance.

When students are aware of their strengths and goals through practicing reflection, they are better equipped to pursue a fulfilling career and life.



"Often students who are double-majoring learn more about creativity here, then suddenly realize 'oh, I am creative in math, I just never thought of it that way.'"

JENNIFER SALK

Associate Professor and Dance Program Director

teacher and realizing, 'I could never do that.' But another student saw first graders using dance throughout their day and thought it was the most beautiful thing she'd ever seen!"

Meaningful reflection aids purposeful career decisions: Students give a final presentation in which they reflect on their professional skills, how they expect to apply their personal strengths to the career they plan to pursue, and how what they learned from their job shadow affected their career plans.

"I ask them 'why' a lot," says Wiley. "If they're applying to medical school, they present to us on why they chose one school over another one." Wiley says reflection helps students gain a sense of purpose and empowerment that they are in control of their own future, and to know that they have skills to accomplish their goals.

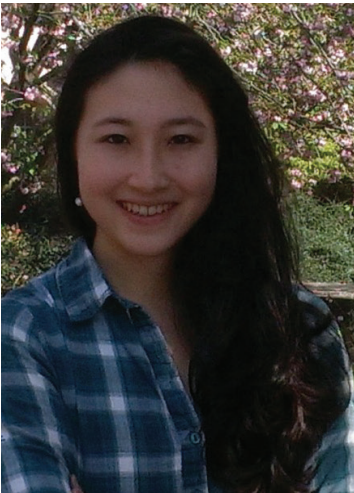
The presentation also forces students to verbalize why dance and artistry matter to them. "It's important that all of us in this field learn to talk about dance because talking isn't how we relate to it, but it's how we relate to other people about it," Wiley explains. "The idea is to practice that skill."

Pushing students to take risks can lead to surprising results: The dance faculty is constantly encouraging students to try something new, from a different shoulder movement to applying for a dream job. "You have to try things," Ang says about her enriched approach to computer science. "You might need to spend five hours working on a code to see if it works, and a lot of people don't want to spend that time, but in dance you have to try a lift to know if it works."

The results of trying something new or uncomfortable often surprises the students. Wiley pushes her seminar students by having them write a tailored a cover letter for their dream job, even if they feel it is too far out of reach and don't intend to send it in. One recent graduate took the chance to submit her application and was accepted for a year-long internship at the Kennedy Arts Center, which led to a position with the prestigious Dance USA. "It makes a difference to them to have someone say, 'yes, you can do that job, why wouldn't you apply?'" notes Wiley.

The confidence to know when to lead and when to follow: The collaborative, interdependent environment of Dance mirrors professional team settings in many ways. Both require a team player who knows her own strengths, how her performance fits in to the bigger picture, how other people rely on her, and when to step forward as a leader to give direction or even a solo performance. Moving between these roles requires a team member to be comfortable with giving and receiving objective feedback as well as a high level of self-awareness, all of which is nurtured through reflection and other exercises in the Dance department.

Ang summarizes her experiences learning these skills with Dance: "It's about discovering what kind of artist you are, from the theoretical side and the practical side, blending it all and becoming somebody who is confident in who you are."



"When you choreograph or dance, you have to be able to communicate corrections or changes - you have to do that in any subject you teach."

SIENA DUMAS ANG

Teaching Assistant, Computer Science; Senior triple majoring in Computer Science, Dance and Math



Dancer majors like Sean O'Bryan, pictured above, learn how to collaborate in exercises designed to practice giving others useful feedback and thinking critically about feedback they receive on a performance. Photo Credit: Tim Summers