

THE SWAN IN THE IVORY TOWER: A CASE STUDY OF
UNIVERSITY DANCE PROGRAMS OFFERING
BALLET-FOCUSED DEGREES

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DEDICATION

For my husband, Steve Murray, without your unyielding belief in me and your boundless encouragement, I might never have pursued doctoral work. Thank you for your endless patience, continued support, and love.

For the pioneers of dance and ballet in American higher education,
thank you for paving the way.

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ABSTRACT

MELONIE BUCHANAN MURRAY

THE SWAN IN THE IVORY TOWER: A CASE STUDY OF UNIVERSITY DANCE PROGRAMS OFFERING BALLET-FOCUSED DEGREES

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Across the United States, hundreds of universities house dance programs, and the vast majority of degrees offered through these programs focus on modern dance. Despite the mainstream popularity and cultural esteem of the dance genre of ballet, fewer than fifteen university programs offer ballet-focused degrees. From this relatively small number of ballet-focused programs, this study identifies six that do not self-identify as conservatories. The six academic units included in this study attempt to balance academic rigor with studio practice, rather than focusing exclusively on studio and performance coursework.

This qualitative, multi-site case study utilizes methodological practices including observation and interviews. Two-day site visits were completed at each institution, and twenty-eight fulltime faculty members were interviewed. This dissertation begins with a brief history of dance in American higher education, including discussion of the peculiar absence of ballet within this history, before introducing the six programs. The programs are discussed in terms of their unique histories, missions, and philosophies before curricular comparison and analysis is presented. Two major themes that emerged from interviews with faculty members are presented: 1) the ever-present negotiation of

balancing the artistic elements of pre-professional ballet training with the academic requirements of institutions of higher education and 2) how the programs strive for connection with the professional realm of ballet in a variety of ways. Each of these themes is multi-faceted, and the complexities are considered and analyzed.

This line of inquiry provides information about how ballet exists as a focus of study within the realm of higher education and how ballet and other, even more marginalized, dance forms might be welcomed into the curricula and conversations concerning dance in American higher education.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Dance history is not always made by glittering performers and choreographic innovators of the great stages of the world. Sometimes it is made behind ivied walls in administrative offices, in gymnasiums, in assembly halls on college campuses...¹

~Walter Terry, Dance Critic

The popularity of ballet as a genre of dance in the United States is apparent in a multiplicity of ways. The general public has the opportunity to experience ballet by taking lessons at private dance studios, which offer an ever-expanding range of courses promoting a variety of styles and embracing diverse ages and skill levels. Ballet performances are readily available for many Americans, given the proliferation of professional ballet companies across the country at both regional and national levels, alongside the assortment of amateur performance experiences accessible to the public. Additionally, the ongoing representations of ballet in American popular culture depict the dance form in an array of popular mediums, such as film, television, and social media. Yet, the prevalence of public interest in ballet is inadequately reflected in current systems of dance in higher education. Given this imbalance between popular attention and academic consideration, the limited focus on ballet in university programs is a compelling line of inquiry.

¹ Walter Terry's "New Spirit in the Colleges" published in the *New York Sunday Herald Tribune Magazine* on July 11, 1965. Quoted in Hagood, 194.

In the United States, numerous institutions of higher education house some sort of dance department or program, and each of these academic units is unique; however, the vast majority of dance programs currently promote a modern dance-based curriculum and mission.² In Thomas K. Hagood's *A History of Dance in American Higher Education: Dance and the American University* (2000), which traces the history of the development of dance as a discipline within higher education, there is little mention of ballet-based university dance programs.³ In response to the paucity of ballet-focused programs in the realm of American higher education, New York University's Center for Ballet and the Arts expressed the following sentiment on its website: "Universities, for their part, have given little recognition to ballet. Its history, skills, and practices have been marginal to the study of the life of the mind. This represents a significant gap in the history of culture."⁴

This brief statement succinctly encapsulates the notion that ballet is often underrepresented in academe, and this underrepresentation is somewhat myopic in nature and scope. Interestingly, the quote mentioned in the previous paragraph from New York University's Center for Ballet and the Arts was pulled from website copy in 2015, and a recent visit to the website shows the following updated statement: "The Center for Ballet and the Arts is designed to accomplish two things: first, to bring to the art of ballet new ideas and the full resources of a major research university; second, to bring ballet into the

² I make the argument in Chapter 3 that the accrediting body, National Associations of Schools of Dance reinforces a bias toward the philosophies of modern dance.

³ I analyze this issue further in Chapter 3.

⁴ <https://balletcenter.nyu.edu/about-the-center> (accessed Nov. 1, 2015).

university as a serious subject of study and research—to define it as a field in the history of culture.”⁵ While the statement has been altered in a way that subtly softens the assertion, the intention is still clear: ballet is under-represented as a discipline for serious academic study in American higher education.

Given the history of dance in American higher education, the current situation is not surprising. Modern dance found a home in university settings prior to ballet,⁶ and this is reflected in the way most university dance departments were shaped, incorporating philosophies from modern dance such as the fostering of creativity, individualism, and choreographic experimentation. Programs of study and departments focusing on ballet came later, and in some cases developed in entirely separate departments from modern dance programs, bringing a (sometimes oppositional) philosophical viewpoint from the world of ballet. Ballet programs brought a different perspective to the discipline of dance as a field for academic study—a perspective valuing tradition by perpetuating a classical canon of choreography and teaching methods based on a conservatory approach, thus promoting a specific, and often unforgiving, aesthetic. Although ballet was, and still is, usually included as a supplemental training technique within academic dance programs, it is not generally a primary focus.

Meanwhile, the climate of the field of professional ballet outside of academe has evolved significantly since the burgeoning of dance in American higher education and the

⁵ <http://balletcenter.nyu.edu/the-center/> (accessed January 29, 2018).

⁶ The first university dance major was offered in 1927 by the University of Wisconsin, Madison. The first ballet-specific major was not offered until 1949 by Texas Christian University. Additional history and context is provided in Chapter 3.

nascent American ballet of the 1930s. Present-day ballet company practices and programming often embrace the modern dance notions of choreographic experimentation and individual expression. Further, scientific developments have been incorporated within ballet training methods in an effort to enhance the physical technique while simultaneously expanding the understanding of safe practices that serve to extend the careers of ballet dancers, making ballet a more humane endeavor for its practitioners. Given the evolution of ballet as a creative and performance practice outside of academe, older paradigms for structuring university dance programs with a highly modern dance-based philosophy might be outdated in the sense that within these programs ballet is often valued simply as *supplemental* to modern dance or “contemporary dance” training.⁷

I argue there is a philosophical and epistemological difference between studying ballet as a means to its own end and studying ballet as a means to improve the physical practice of alternate dance forms, and this inherent difference tends to have a polarizing and divisive effect on those involved with dance in higher education settings. Although there are many departments in which ballet and modern dance coexist functionally, I find, from personal experience and in conversations with dance faculty members from academic institutions throughout the country, there is more often than not some level of friction between the two disciplines. The underlying philosophical differences between

⁷ I hesitatingly use the term “contemporary dance” because there is no common agreement on a definition. However, I believe this term most adequately reflects much of the dance training currently happening in American academic dance programs.

ballet and modern dance create an interesting situation for examining current conditions of dance in academe.

About the Researcher

As a young dancer, I trained in a variety of dance styles including ballet, tap, jazz, and flamenco; this diversity of influences and an appreciation for all forms of dance served me well as I worked professionally as a performer and choreographer in a variety of dance genres. The pursuit of a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Ballet focused my attention and fostered an affinity for ballet, as a technique and as what I now consider a living and evolving culture. Although I continue to hold a deep respect for all forms of dance, this affinity for ballet has followed me throughout my career.

In my role as a university professor, over time I began to realize I am somewhat of an enigma in academe. Often university professors who specialize in teaching ballet come from ballet conservatory and/or professional ballet company backgrounds; few have followed an academic path and few have in-depth training in other dance genres. In fact, from my experience on multiple university search committees, there seem to be very few specialized ballet instructors who hold masters-level or doctoral-level degrees.⁸ In contrast, I hold a Master of Fine Arts degree in Dance, and although my studio teaching practice currently focuses on ballet technique, my performance and choreography experience spans genres, and I am experienced teaching a range of dance styles in an array of environments. This multiplicity of experiences, both inside and outside of

⁸ This is also reflected in the population interviewed for this study.

academia, gives me an interesting perspective when investigating approaches to ballet pedagogy and the role of ballet in institutions of higher education.

Near the culmination of my doctoral coursework, I was pleased to accept a professorship at the University of Utah within the Department of Ballet, one of the oldest ballet-focused degree programs in the United States. When I began this position, the University of Utah was unique in that it was one of only two universities⁹ in the United States with two separate dance departments: a Department of Ballet and a Department of Modern Dance. For me, this dichotomy seemed antithetical in terms of the existing worlds of dance, both inside and outside of academe. I became fascinated by the history and potential future of the dance departments at the University of Utah and was involved in the process of these two long-established departments making the historic choice to become a School of Dance under one administrative structure, yet maintaining discrete degree offerings, in 2016. Additionally, I was involved in crafting a new MFA in Ballet degree, which is currently the only ballet-focused graduate degree offered in the United States. Given these experiences, my employment at the University of Utah during this particular point in time deepened my interest in the culture of ballet in higher education, including its connections and disconnections with the culture of modern dance, and also the professional realm of ballet outside of higher education.

⁹ Indiana University, Bloomington has two separate dance units, offering a Bachelor of Science degree in Ballet through the School of Music and a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Dance through the Department of Theatre, Drama, and Contemporary Dance.

Speaking from my own experience as a ballet-focused dance scholar who remembers vividly attempting to pursue higher degrees in dance, the dominant modern dance focus of most dance programs is not necessarily welcoming to those of us with primarily ballet-based backgrounds and interests. I remember clearly being told by a professor during my graduate studies: “Everyone knows that thinking, creative women don’t go into ballet.” In a separate, and painfully honest, conversation with one of the few ballet-focused professors I worked with during my graduate studies, I was encouraged to pursue doctoral work but warned I would struggle with faculty members who would never support my philosophical views or understand my perspective on dance. This warning, frankly, prevented me from pursuing doctoral work directly after completing my master’s degree. In fact, after finishing my MFA, I worked as a full-time faculty member in higher education for seven years before summoning the courage to apply for a PhD program. Sadly, many of the ballet faculty members interviewed for this study shared similar experiences about their graduate work in programs filled with faculty members whose backgrounds were primarily in modern dance. I surmise sentiments propagating a narrow view of dance, and the environment these opinions promote, perpetuates a recurring cycle limiting the number of ballet-focused MFA recipients to fill professor positions. These factors create a situation in which developing ballet scholars do not feel welcome or valued in academe, which further results in a lack of scholarly voices to champion ballet in higher education settings.

When assuming my role as a ballet scholar, I am at times dismayed by the fact that the bulk of the scholarly writing addressing ballet is either entirely scientific, based

solely on historical inquiry, or is exceptionally critical in nature. Ballet, as a topic of scholarly inquiry, often seems doomed to only be represented as elitist, hierarchical, sexist, and racist within scholarly literature. While I freely admit that, historically, ballet has exhibited *all* of these traits, and on some occasions still does display these qualities, I argue ballet should not be reduced to these negative attributes. Ballet is certainly fertile ground for scientific, historical, and critical inquiry, but it is also a dance form that may be investigated as a practice and a culture for its ability to empower, transform, and inspire. Ballet training, technique, performance, and choreography have evolved in fascinating ways in order to remain relevant in contemporary society. As a scholar, I continue to wonder: Where are the voices examining ballet as a valid means of contemporary artistic expression? They are there, but they are few.¹⁰ Thus, my research trajectory is due in part to a desire to expand contemporary dance scholarship within the realm of ballet-centric inquiry.

Overview of the Study

This dissertation is a multi-site case study focusing on six university dance programs offering ballet-focused degrees. I embarked on this study with a deep interest in how faculty members within these ballet-focused programs understand and discuss the histories, philosophies, and missions of their departments and degree programs; in how they foresee the future of their departments and the future of ballet within higher education

¹⁰ Contemporary scholars who have focused on ballet as a site of inquiry include Jennifer Fisher, Andrea Harris, Jill Nunes Jensen, Joellen Meglin, and Jessica Zeller. Their work has influenced my research immensely.

curricula; and how they understand their program's relationship to the broader field of ballet outside of academe. Since little has been written about ballet-focused programs in American higher education, my hope is that this line of inquiry will provide valuable information about how ballet exists as a focus of study within the realm of higher education and open insights into a broader value of ballet as a discipline of study at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

When considering the order of the chapters in this dissertation, I was thoughtful about the sequential nature of how information is presented to the reader. My goal is to provide the more fact-based information first and to introduce information that is mostly driven by my personal analysis later. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 focuses on the research methodology for this project. I include discussions of the methodological theories that shape my understanding of qualitative research and information about why I made certain choices, including how I decided which university programs to involve in this study. I explain the project design, describe the data collection and analysis process, and disclose ethical considerations and concerns.

In Chapter 3, I strive to create context for this study. I do so by providing an overview of the history of dance in American higher education while attempting to frame the discussion by focusing on the peculiar absence of ballet in the literature, offering my own thoughts on this absenteeism. I also consider two organizations which I believe are pertinent to the discussion: first, the National Association of Schools of Dance, which is the accrediting body for dance in American higher education; and second, CORPS de

Ballet International, the only professional academic organization with a mission explicitly focusing on ballet in higher education.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus specifically on the programs included in this study.

Chapter 4 provides an introduction to each of the university programs using information gathered from university websites, my observations during campus site visits, and interviews with faculty members. My attempt with this chapter is to piece together a mosaic-style representation of each program based on my experiences and research.

Chapter 5 is a comparative analysis of each program's curricular requirements, including my analysis in terms of what these findings tell about how each curriculum gives insights into the values of the programs. I also demonstrate that, despite a common focus on ballet, each program's curricular design is unique.

In Chapters 6 and 7, I focus on the themes that emerged from the data I collected through the interviews with faculty members at each site. My analysis of this data culminated with the emergence of two over-arching themes: 1) the ever-present negotiation of balancing the artistic elements of pre-professional ballet training with the academic requirements of institutions of higher education and the resulting transferable skills which are cultivated in university-trained ballet dancers (covered in Chapter 6), and 2) how the ballet-focused degree programs included in this study connect, or attempt to connect, with the professional realm of ballet in a variety of ways (addressed in Chapter 7). Each of these two themes is multi-faceted, and the complexities are considered and analyzed.

In the Chapter 8 conclusion, I describe my personal analysis of the current status of ballet in American higher education and assert how my findings with this research project might inform its evolution. I also include a discussion of how this line of inquiry has led me to questions worthy of further study. Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation is to expand dance scholarship within the realm of ballet-centric inquiry by providing information about how ballet currently exists as a focus of study within the realm of higher education, while also potentially opening opportunities within the field of dance in academe to other under-represented dance forms.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research process undertaken for this dissertation is a multi-site case study focusing on six university dance programs offering ballet-focused degrees. Prior to undertaking a qualitative research project of this nature, I required a fundamental understanding of qualitative research methodologies, including approaches to data collection and analysis, and an awareness of ethical concerns inherent within the research process. The methodological approach to this qualitative study includes research practices commonly utilized in the creation of a case study, while also incorporating ideas and processes from ethnographic and historiographic research approaches. My approach to this study is discussed in depth in this chapter, which I have opted to organize in several sections. First, I discuss the methodological theory and resources that influenced the design, development, and process of this study. Next, I explain and defend my rationale for selecting the programs I chose to include in this study. I then describe my data collection and data analysis processes. And lastly, I examine the ethical implications particular to this study.

Methodological Theory

Throughout the process of designing, developing, and conducting this study, I gleaned ideas concerning qualitative research methodologies primarily from three sources: John W. Creswell's *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design* (2012), Sharan B. Merriam's *Qualitative Research: a Guide to Design and Implementation* (2009), and *The*

Art and Science of Portraiture (1997) by Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica Hoffmann Davis. Combined, these resources offer comprehensive, and yet varied, approaches to qualitative research. While the texts by Creswell and Merriam provide a wealth of general information regarding research design and methodological approaches, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis promote a method they refer to as *portraiture* which embraces a more auto-ethnographic means of developing qualitative research, encouraging the researcher's voice to be present and frank. Additionally, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis emphasize seeking the good and positive within a given situation rather than initiating the research by defining a problem, while understanding imperfections will be discovered along the way. On a personal level, I am drawn to this more felicitous approach to research and incorporated this philosophy throughout the process of completing this study.

Traditional modes of quantitative research focus on statistics, numbers, and other measurable entities, establishing precise answers to questions asking *who*, *what*, *when*, and *where*; and there are portions of this study that utilize quantitative measures, particularly in Chapter 5, in which I analyze and compare the curricular requirements for each program's degree offerings. Qualitative research, on the other hand, might be described as an attempt to answer the *how* and *why* questions, and the bulk of this study is qualitative in nature. Merriam describes the primary goal of qualitative research as "*understanding the meaning people have constructed*, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (13, emphasis in original). Merriam's broadly stated *how* question is not one that can be answered simply through

quantitative measures and illustrates the necessity for, and value in, qualitative approaches to scholarly inquiry. Thus, this research reflects a qualitative approach as it seeks to understand the *how* and *why* questions, through the experiences of the participants.

In attempting to explain qualitative research succinctly, the following statement from Creswell neatly reflects how I approached this study:

. . . qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change. (44)

This excerpt concisely, yet thoroughly, addresses several tenets of qualitative research. In the following discussion, I unpack Creswell's definition as a means of explaining my own ideas concerning the principles of qualitative research and how these principles were adopted in this particular study.

An Emergent Approach to Inquiry

Although qualitative researchers might begin a research project with a tentative design plan, Creswell, Merriam, and Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis all argue that qualitative inquiry must allow for flexibility and improvisation within the actual research process. Creswell states that qualitative research procedures "are characterized as inductive, emerging, and shaped by the researcher's experience in collecting and analyzing the data" (22). Within their discussion of portraiture, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis also emphasize the importance of the "flexibility of research design" (188) and

state that “even in the writing stage, portraitists are open to changes in their plans that unexpected discoveries will suggest” (225). As one seeks to answer the *why* and *how* questions, qualitative researchers may not always begin with a prearranged design process or a proposed theory that needs proving; rather qualitative approaches allow for theories or hypotheses to emerge through the process of data collection and analysis.

To this end, for this study I engaged in an emerging approach to research design, which allowed flexibility in structuring and restructuring methods of data collection and analysis as the study unfolded. While I started the project with a vague idea of what the data collection process would entail, there were many iterations of the design prior to its realization. For example, out of necessity in terms of the limited resources of time and funding, my original plan to investigate a larger number of programs was adapted to a reduced number of institutions and site visits. (I discuss my decisions about which programs to study later in this chapter.) In terms of the malleability of crafting the final document, over the course of the data collection and analysis process my vision of the end product varied regularly. The original outline I created for this document underwent countless revisions and adaptations before arriving in its final iteration in the dissertation here. Moreover, I believe the end product is stronger for my willingness to remain flexible in how the process progressed and how the final study manifested.

Reflexivity on the Part of the Researcher

In my role as researcher, I bring beliefs, biases, assumptions, and philosophical attitudes along with me on every research journey. After all, even in quantitative approaches to research, biases shape choices regarding research design and practice, data

collection and analysis, and inform the manner in which I choose to present findings. Creswell argues ethically sound researchers “recognize that their own background shapes their interpretation, and they ‘position themselves’ in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their own personal, cultural, and historical experiences” (25). Further, Creswell argues reflexivity has two parts: first, the researcher discloses personal experiences with the topic; second, the researcher discusses how these experiences might shape their interpretation (216). Thus, I have made the choice to “introduce myself” to the reader in the introductory chapter as a means of exposing my personal biases, even those of which I might be unaware. Moreover, in later chapters, I make note of my personal background in relationship to the people and places included in this study.

Indirectly referring to the reflexivity of the researcher, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis write that, within portraiture, “the place and stance of the researcher are made visible and audible, written in as part of the story” (50). This perspective hints at auto-ethnographic methodologies without necessarily committing to an entire project with a strictly auto-ethnographic tone. In portraiture, the presence of the author is evident within the written report, in that “her observations and her text are shaped by the assumptions she brings to the inquiry, reflecting her disciplinary background, her theoretical perspectives, her intellectual interests, and her understanding of the relevant literature” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 93). In my own experience with this particular study, I have been (and am) acutely conscious of my positionality as I endeavor to analyze a culture of which I am a member. As I conduct research within the realm of ballet in

higher education, I continually question my intentions and endeavor to disclose the manner in which my own experiences and personal biases and assumptions have influenced my process and interpretation. Additionally, my self-reflexivity is interwoven throughout the content of each chapter as a means of transparently positioning myself squarely in the midst of this research topic.

Intentional Inclusion of Participant Voices

The notion of researcher reflexivity is closely linked to concerns about how the voices of participants are included within the final research project. As I disclose my own positionality, I continually strive to allow ample space for the honestly expressed voices of my research participants. Within the practice of creating portraiture, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis explain that “the portraitist is ever mindful of the intentions of the original storyteller and the responsibility of retelling another’s story” (118).

Thus, as a researcher, I remain mindful of allowing participants to speak for themselves rather than inadvertently permitting my personal biases to cloud how I represent the participants. For me, this mindfulness is linked to a sense of integrity, and is also indicative of my immense respect for the programs and people included in this study. Consequently, I have been diligent and thoughtful about how each participant and each site is represented. For example, in Chapters 6 and 7, which focus on themes that emerged from the data, I deal primarily with data collected through interviews. Throughout these two chapters, in an effort to clearly and honestly represent the voices of the participants, I incorporate direct quotations extensively and paraphrase only when absolutely necessary for coherency. My hope is this approach creates a sense that the

participants are speaking, and my voice enters only as a means of interpretation and analysis. Having said that, I am keenly aware of my personal responsibility in how each participant is represented. Additionally, I acknowledge my decisions regarding how each theme is presented frame the participants in ways that are incomplete, imperfect, and limited.

The Final Product as Description and Interpretation

The act of interpretation, an overriding characteristic of qualitative research, is closely tied to the notion of reflexivity, since an author's biases will inevitably shape how findings are interpreted. Interpretation is particularly valuable in qualitative research as a substantial tool in how qualitative researchers manage to get at *how* people construct meanings, in other words, the task of uncovering the *how* and *why*. Merriam links interpretation and description defining qualitative research as “an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate...” (13). In the process of data analysis and crafting this final document, I found the processes of interpretation and description to be inextricably interconnected.

Qualitative researchers often depend on rich description as an effective means of recording information and interpreting meaning, and ethnographers especially value rich description in their attempts to aptly represent through detailed accounts and colorful literary renderings of specific cultural entities. In this study, I incorporate description and interpretation throughout. Chapter 3 is perhaps the most descriptive as I provide an overview of each of the programs, including a description of my personal experience visiting each site. In terms of interpretation, this entire written study is an interpretation

of the data and my experience with the data throughout the collection and analysis process.

I am acutely aware that a researcher's portrayal of a culture always reflects the author's personal experience. Carolyn Ellis wrote,

I start with the assumption that language is not transparent, and there's no single standard of truth. . . . This premise questions the concept of descriptive validity—that researchers are 'not making up or distorting the things they saw and heard.' I would argue that all validity is interpretive and dependent on context and the understandings we bring to the observation. (123)

Thus, I openly acknowledge the limitations of my personal experience, reflections, descriptions, and interpretations.

Nonetheless, the over-arching tenets discussed here—the emerging approach to inquiry, the reflexivity of the researcher, the inclusion of participant voices, and the final product as description and interpretation—create a situation for this qualitative research study to address some *how* and *why* questions in a unique manner. The capacity to open possibilities for discovering and investigating how we create meaning is what makes qualitative research invaluable, and this study is but one approach to utilizing qualitative research methodologies to explore the topic of ballet in American higher education.

Case Study

This project is first and foremost a case study. Merriam described qualitative case studies as “an in depth description and analysis of a bounded system” with the fundamental goal of understanding the issue from the perspective of the participants (40). In the case of this particular study, the bounded system is comprised of six university programs. The analysis is an attempt to explore meaning through the experiences and

opinions expressed by those involved. For this study, the participants are full-time faculty members from each of the sites; and common case study methods—conducting interviews, observations, and analyzing the voice of participants—are incorporated. In a qualitative case study, inevitably the researcher's perceptions and interpretations are interwoven throughout the design, development, data collection and analysis, and the process of crafting the final written report (Creswell). This inquiry, therefore, is both subjective and interpretive.

Ethnographic and Historiographic Influences

In ethnographic studies, which focus on culture-sharing groups, the researcher is charged with describing and interpreting shared and learned patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, and language. I am drawn to Creswell's list of defining features of ethnographic studies: a complex and complete description of the culture of a group, research comprised of extensive fieldwork, and an analysis process that relies on the participants for cultural interpretation (91-93). This list most adequately represents my intentions concerning the ethnographic elements of this research design.

When considering specific methodologies and ethical considerations for ethnographic research, I draw primarily from two resources, Dwight Conquergood's "Rethinking Ethnography" (2013) and D. Soyini Madison's *Critical Ethnography* (2011). Conquergood argues that ethnography is an embodied practice, stating: "Ethnography's distinctive research method, participant-observation fieldwork, privileges the body as a site of knowing" (82). In support of this idea, Madison writes that Conquergood's work "dignifies the body by recognizing embodied practices as constituting knowledge,

emotion, and creation” (185). Conquergood’s belief in the value of the physical presence of the researcher is significant to the fieldwork I completed for this study, and perhaps it is this body-centric approach to ethnography that makes it appealing to a dancer. This point of view is one of the reasons I was compelled to actually visit each site, rather than conducting interviews via electronic medium, which would have required far less time and funding.

Madison echoes Conquergood’s philosophies on ethnographic practices; however, she tends to engage more deeply with ethical concerns and with the substantial responsibility of the researcher in representing others. Madison writes: “. . . with all the good intentions, excellent craftsmanship, and even with the reliability and eloquence of a particular story, representing Others is always going to be a complicated and contentious undertaking” (4). Acknowledging the contentiousness of this undertaking, I have made an effort to remain overtly reflexive throughout this study; therefore, this project includes some auto-ethnographic elements. Ellis eloquently states: “Autoethnography refers to writing about the personal and its relationship to culture” (37). I appreciate this open acceptance that the personal and cultural cannot truly be separate, and believe it reflects my situation within the culture of ballet in higher education. Although this study is certainly not an auto-ethnographic research project in a strict sense, I find there is sometimes a fine line between reflexivity and an insinuation of auto-ethnographic research methods.

Since I have a particular interest in the role of ballet as a discipline of study within institutions of higher education in the United States, this dissertation research looks

historically at how ballet developed as an area of study within academic institutions, ways in which academic departments that identify as ballet-based programs have developed, and how these departments express their missions and philosophies. To this end, this study has been influenced by some historiographic philosophies.

Historiography, as opposed to ethnography, traces events over a period of time and attempts to construct a meaningful interpretation concerning the *how* and *why* of said events. Alexandra Carter wrote insightfully: “history is not just a line from past to present; it is a web . . . ” (13). Embracing Carter’s suggestion that history is more suitably considered as a web-like configuration than a linear construct certainly problematizes the task of the historian. Rather than simply taking note of and analyzing a chronology of events, in the role of historian, I accept the chore of selecting an entry point for the narrative and choosing each turn and twist in the path along the way.

My approach to historical analysis is also greatly influenced by Keith Jenkins’s *Re-Thinking History* (1991). Jenkins’s text is foundational to my understanding of, and stance concerning, history and historiography—including the epistemological underpinnings that are troublesome and problematic within each. I am interested in Jenkins’s assertions that *history* and the *past* are not one and the same, that historiographies are multifarious in nature, and that our histories contribute to the ways we shape our identities. As my research interests lie in incorporating historiographical elements within a study concerning ballet in higher education, I am aware of how my research and my role in this particular culture continue to influence how my identity and my role in this dissertation over time is perpetually created and re-created. I am drawn to

the notion of looking at history in a less-than-straightforward nature, seeking out unexpected connections and unanticipated discovery, and then presenting the findings in a writing style that allows for interpretation and creative presentation. This is the approach I have taken in the writing of this study, particularly in Chapter 3, which provides a brief selective history of the progression of ballet programs in American higher education, a story not covered in many recorded histories of dance education in the United States.

Choosing the University Programs

To compile a list of programs offering ballet-focused degrees, I began by creating a short list of the programs of which I was already aware, either by personal experience or by the reputation of the university and/or program. A simple web search added only one program to my list, and I was frankly somewhat frustrated and surprised a consolidated list of university programs offering ballet-focused degrees did not seem to publicly exist. While some sources, such as *Dance Magazine*, publish college guides for high school students seeking dance programs, the information included in such lists was rarely sufficient enough for me to distinguish whether a program was ballet-focused. I next sought suggestions from colleagues nationwide and then reached out via informal email to the membership of CORPS de Ballet International.¹¹ Seeking the counsel of colleagues and professionals in the area of ballet in higher education proved the most

¹¹ CORPS de Ballet International is currently the only professional organization with a focus exclusively on ballet in higher education and is discussed further in Chapter 3.

fruitful means of expanding my list. At the end of this process, I had compiled a list of eleven university programs.

Since one of my primary interests lies in exploring how the conservatory art form of ballet fits into the constraints of American higher education, I decided to limit the list by excluding the universities self-identifying as conservatory programs. Given my interests in how programs grapple with balancing the philosophical tendencies of conservatory-training with the values and constraints of American higher education, the self-identified conservatory programs were less interesting to me for the purposes of this particular study. By excluding the conservatory programs, universities removed from my list of potential data collection sites included: Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, Indiana University, New York University, the University of Hartford, and the University of North Carolina School of the Arts.¹² The university programs remaining on the list included: Butler University, Friends University, Mercyhurst University, Texas Christian University, the University of Oklahoma, and the University of Utah.

Data Collection

Initial Steps in Data Collection

I began accumulating data via public information available on the internet. While I collected published articles from multiple sources regarding the programs, I primarily

¹² Another university program offering an arguably ballet-focused degree came to my attention after I had completed the data collection process and was already in the writing stages of this study. Point Park University's BFA in Dance offers a nascent concentration in Ballet. However, given the limited timeframe of this study, I was unable to pursue further research of this program.

focused my attention on university and program websites. While this was an ongoing process throughout the study, these initial forays provided meaningful information regarding curriculum, degree offerings, mission statements, faculty profiles, etc. As a means of implementing a system of organization, particularly keeping in mind how website information can change at any time without warning, I created digital files stored in cloud storage for protection. This provided me with a snapshot, so to speak, of each program at a particular moment in time, the academic year of 2015-2016. In dealing with these archived materials, I continually reminded myself that all archives are incomplete and biased—even my own. An awareness of not just what is represented, but what is missing or under-represented is equally significant, especially regarding the analysis and interpretation process.

The IRB Process

Given the design of this study, I was intent on conducting interviews with the faculty members of each program, thus this portion of the data collection process was preceded by a mandatory Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. Along with the required IRB proposal form, I submitted drafts of a consent form for participants, interview questions, a sample of initial email correspondence, and letters of consent from each of the organizations included in the study. The process of acquiring the consent letters from department heads fortuitously provided me an opportunity to introduce myself and the study to each program. While awaiting IRB approval, I continued investing time researching each program's internet presence so that, prior to each site visit, I was familiar with the mission, curriculum, admissions processes, and faculty

biographies for each program. Additionally, I began consolidating lists of potential interviewees from the information I could find online.

Site Visits

Once I received IRB approval, I contacted the chair/director of each program to schedule dates for the site visits. My goal was to spend two days on each campus, interview as many faculty members as were willing and available, and observe whatever activities were occurring and made available to me during my visit. Since my initial contact at each university was the department head, I initiated discussions with these individuals as to how they preferred I schedule the interviews. Some department heads preferred to schedule and arrange the interview times for me, while others desired I contact individual faculty members to make the arrangements myself. Each department head provided me with a list of current full-time faculty members.

Since one of the six schools included in this study is my own home university, I made travel arrangements for five different locations, and I was fortunate to receive a research grant from my home university to cover travel expenses. Scheduling the site visits was somewhat of a logistical puzzle given that I needed to work around the schedules of the programs I was visiting, while also attempting to miss as few days of my own full-time job as possible. Since many of the universities shared similar academic calendars with my home university, and I of course did not want to conduct a site visit during a holiday when my participants might not be available, this planning process was at times tricky.

In an effort to stay within my budget and also to be absent from work as little as possible, I managed to conduct all of the site visits in three different trips spread over three months. The first trip was a nine-day journey in February 2016 covering three different sites. I flew to Wichita, Kansas to visit Friends University and spent two days there. I then rented a car and drove to Oklahoma City for my site visit at the University of Oklahoma. Two days later, I drove to Fort Worth, Texas to visit Texas Christian University before flying back to my home city of Salt Lake City, Utah. My second trip was to Erie, Pennsylvania to visit Mercyhurst University in March, and I was fortunate to travel during my own spring break. My final trip was to Indianapolis, Indiana to visit Butler University in April. Later that month, I conducted the University of Utah interviews over a multi-week time span.

As expected, some programs were more accommodating or more welcoming than others, and the same might be said for individual faculty members. Some department heads graciously provided a meeting room where I could be centrally located, allowing faculty members could come in and out. At other universities, I moved from faculty office to faculty office, toting video camera and tripod, backpack, and notebooks from place to place. Throughout the visits, I was offered facility tours, given the opportunity to observe rehearsals and sit in on classes, and in one case I was even invited to dinner with a department head and senior faculty member (I elaborate further on these experiences in Chapter 4). Each site visit was a unique experience specific to the moment in time and provided a snapshot of sorts for me as a visitor. I make this point to clarify that I certainly do not presume I was able to understand or analyze each program in depth given the

limited amount of time I was on campus; therefore, I acknowledge the limitations of this study in that regard.

Observations

Observation, as a means of data collection, extends the everyday activity of observing others with a conscious effort of the researcher to meticulously record what is seen, heard, and experienced through extensive field notes. Of the difficulties inherent to my observation process, the most pressing for me was to acknowledge my own assumptions when observing and writing notes concerning my observations of the university programs visited, and when reflecting on my experiences in the field of ballet in general. In an effort to expose these assumptions, I implemented a process of reflexivity through memoing practices. Locating myself as an insider-outsider in the culture of ballet within a university, I had a familiarity with the culture in general, but I was also an outsider in terms of the culture in each ballet program. My familiarity gave me insights about what specific interview questions to ask and how to follow-up with further questions, while my outsider position allowed me to analyze at a distance responses that seemed similar and different between the programs visited. However, I am quite certain there are details that might be apparent to an outsider of the ballet field that I may have missed entirely. Attempting diligence in my observational practices, I consistently challenged my awareness of this sort of oversight.

Hebert and Irene Rubin recommend that participant/observation fieldwork should precede interviews, as this practice “sensitizes you to key issues, familiarizes you with the environment and the language, and allows future interviewees to get to know you a

bit before you start asking them questions” (26-27). I agree with the Rubins’ assertion in principle; however, while I attempted to complete observation fieldwork prior to interviewing, this was not always possible due to scheduling. Additionally, although I hoped to be unobtrusive and inconspicuous during the practice of observation, I am aware my presence might have altered the natural unfolding of any given situation. My sense was that the observation material I collected seemed imperfect and fractional; therefore, while reference to observational details are interwoven throughout this study, they are somewhat limited.

Interviews

Given the time limitations of each campus visit, by far the most valuable part of each site visit was the interview experience, and the vast majority of the most interesting data collected for this study was a result of the interviews. Successful interviews allow researchers to access personal, invaluable, and otherwise unavailable information concerning the observations and experiences of research participants. Herbert and Irene Rubin’s *Qualitative Interviewing: the Art of Hearing Data* (2011) and Robert S. Weiss’s *Learning From Strangers* (1995) served as my primary sources for the general qualitative research interview process, while Valerie Janesick’s *Oral History for the Qualitative Researcher* (2010) and Mary Kay Quinlan’s “The Dynamics of Interviewing” (2011) provide insight into dealing with oral history styled interviews. Although this study is not an oral history project, I find some of the interviewing methods attributed to oral history methodologies easily translate to case study and ethnographic research.

Each of the authors mentioned in the previous paragraph agree that preparation on the part of the researcher is key for a successful interview. My preparation included preliminary research, which supported the construction of effective questions, thus saving valuable one-on-one time with participants. Additionally, prior to conducting interviews, I gleaned information from other available sources, such as university promotional materials and websites; reviewed my previously prepared questions and prompts; and double-checked recording devices.

In constructing the interview questions, I crafted questions that are not inadvertently leading, or in which the participant might believe I was expecting or hoping for a certain answer. Open-ended questions resulted in the participants' ability to convey more accurate and deeply explanatory information, plus their answers might lead me into insights I had not anticipated. Holding to IRB requirements and expectations, I created a fixed set of questions for this study:

1. Did you go through a university dance program as a student? If so, can you talk about that experience?
2. Tell me about your experience as a faculty member at the university level?
3. Can you talk about what you know of the history of this department/program?
4. Can you talk about your department's/program's philosophy and mission?
5. How do you describe the role of this department/program in the field of ballet on a broad scale?
6. What do you foresee as the future of this department/program? How do you envision the future of ballet in higher education?

7. Looking to the future of ballet, what do you anticipate? And what do you most hope to see?

8. What does ballet mean to you?

While these questions were fixed, during the actual interview process I found it helpful to adjust my approach slightly. For example, I quickly realized it was helpful to start the interview by asking the participants about their career path and how they arrived in their current position. Since most were quite comfortable telling me about their backgrounds, this question served as an ice-breaker and seemed to put participants at ease. Additionally, I found it fruitful to ask primary questions (those included in the IRB proposal), then ask follow-up questions that might be created or adapted on the spot given the participants' answers. Further, throughout the interviews I found it productive to use prompts to encourage participants to continue talking, to clarify an answer, or to go back to a topic that was not covered sufficiently.

Herbert and Irene Rubin suggest a method they call *responsive interviewing*, in which the interviewer listens to answers and asks new questions prompted by the answer provided. Responsive interviewing “emphasizes flexibility of design and expects the interviewer to change questions in response to what he or she is learning” (7). Through this process new information might be brought to light allowing the interviewer to arrive at unanticipated interpretations, and I incorporated this style of interviewing within my data collection process. My goal was for participants to feel comfortable with my demeanor and intentions and free to speak openly and uninterrupted. Although much about the nature of each situation depended on intangible elements, social conventions,

and entities out of my control (scheduling, moods, life circumstances, etc.), I believe respect and compassion for participants promoted a cordial and relaxed environment. I found the most productive interviews were generally a result of an amiable relationship between myself and the participant, in which the participants trusted my research goals and my respect for their profession.

The interviews were video recorded, which permitted me the invaluable ability to relive each interview experience a multitude of times over the following year when preparing to finalize the dissertation. Each interview experience was as unique as the individuals themselves, providing a rich array of information. The vibe of the participants ranged from warm to icy, jovial to stoic, prideful to humble. There were tears, laughter, and a range of emotions in between. While some participants were surprisingly candid, others were more guarded. Most participants expressed interest in the impetus behind my study and were eager to share about their backgrounds, their programs and students, and their own personal experiences and feelings about ballet in higher education. And, of course, there were a few who were not so eager.

Of the thirty-one interviews I originally had scheduled, twenty-eight were completed. In one case, there was a medical emergency that prevented a faculty member from meeting the scheduled interview time. Two other individuals from two different programs, although initially agreeing to the interview and scheduling an appointment with me, once in the room refused to permit video-recording or sign the required IRB consent form. Interestingly, this did not stop them from wanting to have long conversations with me about their thoughts on ballet in higher education. However, since

there was no signed IRB, there was also no transcription for these discussions, and they were not included in the coding process. Despite this, I must admit some of the “off the record” sentiments stayed in my head throughout the data analysis process and inevitably affected my perspective and analysis.

All of the interviews were completed in spring 2016, and I spent the following summer transcribing the twenty-eight interviews. Since I had approximately fifty hours’ worth of interview material, for efficiency purposes, I opted to hire a transcription service to work on some of the files. It was a fairly simple process in which I uploaded a sound file, and within twenty-four hours, the service would provide the transcription in a word document format. While this certainly saved time, as might be expected the transcriptions were imperfect. Names and dance terms were consistently misspelled and other minor mistakes were prevalent. Additional aspects missing from the transcription were the gestures and emotive expressions that accompanied the participants’ comments. So, once I received the draft from the transcription service, I watched and listened to each interview recording while making edits and adding comments to the transcription files, to include descriptions of gestures, facial expressions, and nuance of speech. Once I had completed editing a transcription, I emailed the participants the transcription of their interview in a word document format. Each participant had the opportunity to edit their transcription, but surprisingly few requested any changes, and those that did were minor edits for clarity. Once the transcription had been approved by the participant, it was ready for coding.

Data Analysis

Merriam's opinion is that "data analysis is the most difficult part of the whole process. This is the point at which the tolerance for ambiguity is most critical..." (175). My data analysis process consisted of preparing and organizing the data, reducing the data into themes through a process of coding, and making informed decisions concerning how the data would be represented in a final written report. I reminded myself of Creswell's statement that "... data analysis is not off-the-shelf; rather, it is custom-built, revised ... The processes of data collection, data analysis, and report writing are not distinct steps in the process—they are interrelated and often go on simultaneously in a research project" (182). Remaining flexible was (at times frustratingly) essential, and "tolerance for ambiguity" became a personal mantra (Merriam, 175).

The Practice of Memoing

In *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers, 2nd Ed.* (2012), Johnny Saldaña writes: "Memos are sites of conversation with ourselves about our data" (41). Depending on the situation, memoing might be employed as a data collection method and/or a means of data analysis. I found memoing throughout the data collection process immensely helpful in clarifying my thoughts and attempting to define problems and develop interpretations, and I made a point to keep a notebook handy for this purpose. Additionally, I often used the voice-memo tool on my mobile phone for impromptu memoing. During document collection, I summarized findings at the close of a collection session and made notes of items or topics that I found particularly interesting. When conducting observations and interviews, I preferred to spend time journaling and

clarifying any field notes immediately following the observation or interview activity, and often thoughts or questions occurred spontaneously. Perhaps most importantly, memoing exercises provided a valuable opportunity for me to check my biases, assumptions, and positionality.

The Coding Process

Coding processes were the primary means of analysis for this study, and these processes were vital in determining how I structured the final document and chose to present research findings. In addition to Creswell's thoughts on the coding process, Saldaña (2012) served as a key source for informing my coding process for this study. Additionally, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis provide insight into the coding process, asserting that the portraitist "gathers, organizes, and scrutinizes the data, searching for convergent threads, illuminating metaphors, and overarching symbols, and often constructing a coherence out of themes that the actors might experience as unrelated or incoherent" (185). Referring to data as "scattered pieces" Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis also allude to the interpretative nature of the coding process and how, inevitably, the end product reveals "the interpretive reflections of the portraitist" (210). This notion of creating central ideas out of "scattered pieces" illustrates the challenge of constructing categories from recurring patterns running through the data and, thus, helped me develop what Merriam refers to as a "largely intuitive process" (184).

I was instinctively drawn to three different coding methods: descriptive coding, en vivo coding, and holistic coding. These three coding types provided an effective manner of developing central themes and ideas from the interview materials in which I could

analyze from differing points of view. I began the coding process through descriptive coding, tagging sections of interviews with a topic label such as *professional connections*, *ageism*, or *curriculum*. In the second round of coding, I used the en vivo method, highlighting and underlining exact quotes from the interviews that I found particularly compelling. Many of these quotes found their way into Chapters 6 and 7. Lastly, I incorporated holistic coding, which helped me establish broad themes and secondary themes. The themes that emerged through this process developed into the categories that make up the following dissertation chapters.

Ethical Concerns

As is the case with all research studies, there were multiple ethical concerns with this project. Since I, as the researcher, am the primary instrument for data collection, the data is filtered through my own theoretical and philosophical positions and assumptions. In an effort to create a system of checks and balances to assure that my own positionality, assumptions, and biases were disclosed and checked when possible, I selected a small group of peers to serve as a sounding board. This small circle was comprised of academics who are active researchers within the performing arts, but not specifically in the discipline of ballet in higher education. I requested that they engage in regular discussions throughout the data analysis and writing processes, providing an outside perspective to point out if my biases became presumptuous or unintentionally veiled. I requested that they pay special attention to the areas discussed in the following section, and I am grateful for their insights, which were invaluable to this process.

Given the focus of this study, I am what Creswell and Madison refer to as an “insider/outsider,” and one of my primary concerns throughout this study is finding the balance between insider-outsider/researcher-participant. I am an insider/outsider in a few distinct ways in this study. First, I am a professor in a university program offering a ballet-focused degree. Second, I am a researcher using my own home department as one of the sites included in this study. Additionally, I am an alumna from one of the programs in this study. Moreover, there are participants in this study with whom I have personal and professional relationships. My past and present experiences and affiliations with the programs and participants in this study create a situation in which bias is unavoidable. Creswell wrote that researchers must be aware of “ethical considerations involving our roles as insiders/outsiders” and encourages researchers to establish “supportive, respectful relationships” with participants while maintaining a sensitivity to “imbalanced power relations” (56).

I have attempted to maintain sensitivity to the issues mentioned in this section throughout the research and writing process. I consider all of the individuals included in this dissertation study to be valued colleagues, and I have great respect for each individual. My hope is that this respect was communicated to them during our time together and also when they read the final dissertation. I am also deeply thoughtful about power imbalances, particularly when interviewing junior faculty members in my own home institution and department. I made efforts to create a casual environment in which each participant felt comfortable. For example, when conducting interviews at my home institution, I made sure that each interview was held in the participant’s office rather than

my own, sensing that they would feel more at ease in a familiar environment. For this study, I consistently attempted to navigate this positionality with care and respect for all involved, acknowledging the issues of bias and power that are implicit.

My position as an insider/outsider also triggered concerns about my ability to truthfully and candidly portray a culture in which I am involved—a situation in which there is inherent bias. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis list three probable sources of researcher bias: holistic fallacy, elite bias, and going native. Holistic fallacy involves the researcher creating an interpretation that sees the data as “more patterned and congruent than they really are”—an act that disregards the messiness of reality. Elite bias occurs when researchers over-value data collected from “articulate, well-informed, usually high status informants” and under-represent or de-value data collected from “less articulate, lower-status” participants (184). The reference to “going native” is often heard in discussions of ethnography and points to the problem of researchers losing their objective perspective. These three potential sources of bias served as a continual reminder for checking myself throughout the research process.

Perhaps my greatest concern with this study is in how I am representing others. Madison cautioned “. . . we must still be accountable for the consequences of our representation and the implications of our message—because they matter” (5). This responsibility weighed heavily on me, particularly during the writing process, and remains a substantial personal concern. I grappled tortuously with how to present the data and the voices of participants adequately and clearly, but also with a sense of frank honesty that reveals sincere sentiments and human emotions and proclivities. I have taken

precautions to ensure that the participants of this study are represented accurately and in a manner in which they approve. To reiterate, the participants were provided the opportunity to review the transcript of their interview and edit at their discretion. Additionally, each participant mentioned or quoted directly has given permission specific to the exact usage. At times throughout this dissertation, the reader will notice quotes or statements that are cited in a footnote as *confidential*. This citation indicates that the participant agreed to my including the statement but asked that their identity remain confidential. My hope is that these steps ensure that all participants feel they are accurately represented without fear of repercussion. It is not my intention to represent anyone in a manner that might be damaging or embarrassing, but to explore the commonality and diversity of experiences, attitudes, and opinions that exist among this group of admirable artists and teachers committed to the continuation of the traditions of ballet in American higher education.

CHAPTER III
THE UNEASY, UNEXPLORED, AND UNDER-EXAMINED EXISTENCE
OF BALLET IN AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

*Arguably the first of the arts, dance was the last to find
acceptance and a place in our educational systems.¹³*

~Thomas K. Hagood, Dance Scholar and Historian

The goal of this chapter is to establish a historical context for this line of research. I include an overview of the history of dance in American higher education and attempt to frame the discussion by focusing on the peculiar absence of ballet in the literature, offering my own thoughts on this absenteeism. I then shift to focus on two organizations: first, the National Association of Schools of Dance (NASD), which is the accrediting body for dance in American higher education; and second, CORPS de Ballet International (CORPS), the only professional academic organization with a mission explicitly focusing on ballet in higher education.

I obtained much of the information presented here—particularly the information that is specific to NASD, CORPS, and the ballet programs I studied—by exploring university archives, interviewing faculty members, and scouring websites. Unfortunately, there is little published about the history of dance in higher education; nevertheless, Thomas K. Hagood’s *A History of Dance in American Higher Education* (2000) is an invaluable resource, and I lean heavily on Hagood’s meticulous research.

¹³ Hagood, 5.

The Peculiar Absence of Ballet

In 1940, dance critic Walter Terry conducted a survey of 120 colleges and universities and in an article for the *New York Times Herald* reported: “Fifty-three colleges offered the modern dance, forty-seven colleges gave folk dancing, thirty-four colleges presented ballroom, thirty-two taught tap, three presented Denishawn, two offered ballet, two gave Dalcroze Eurythmics, five taught clog...” (Hagood, 151). Given the nature of how we currently experience dance in higher education, I was somewhat startled by these findings. While I was not surprised to learn that more universities offered modern dance classes than ballet classes in 1940, the ratio of the difference is remarkable: fifty-three to two! Additionally, the fact that classes in clogging, tap, and folk dancing also outnumbered ballet classes was certainly unexpected. Terry’s survey, a simple snapshot of a particular time period, reveals how limited ballet offerings in higher education were during this time.

The low profile of ballet is also reflected in Hagood’s text. While the book is rife with detailed information about the early development of dance in higher education, it is notable that the focus is heavily on modern dance, and this is understandable given the context of the topic. Modern dance found a foothold in academe prior to ballet, and since modern dance educators were the voices involved in the early curricular development and evolution of dance as an academic discipline, it is logical that modern dance would figure prominently in any discussion of dance in higher education. Additionally, professional American modern dance was coming of age simultaneously with dance in American

higher education, and this parallel development, including occasional merging, creates an easily traceable lineage.

Although I find Hagood's text a seminal reference for understanding the history of dance in higher education, I suggest Hagood's writing and research is colored by his own bias and experiences with dance in higher education (as, admittedly, are mine). Despite the fact that ballet programs were established as early as 1949, and that ballet is generally considered a staple of Western dance training, Hagood's infrequent references to ballet are telling. When ballet is mentioned in his text, Hagood is generally referring to occurrences in popular or national culture, mentioning ballet in passing as a minor part of the curriculum, or expounding on the modern dance pioneers' and early dance educators' open disdain for ballet.

Hagood's possible bias aside, the text offers genuine insight into the evolution of dance in American higher education and has been tremendously helpful in my understanding of how ballet fits into this story. Although my research focuses on ballet, I acknowledge that any discussion of the history of dance in American higher education must include consideration of early American modern dance, and my comments concerning ballet are not meant to diminish the contributions of those early modern dance educators. *All* current dance in higher education, irrespective of genre, owes a great deal to those early modern dance educators who paved the way for dance as an academic discipline in American higher education.

Besides, there are several reasons that ballet might have a limited legacy in the story of dance in American higher education, particularly in terms of social, cultural, and

historical contexts. For starters, when dance was finding its way into higher education in the early part of the twentieth century, American ballet as we understand it today did not yet exist. At this time, ballet was primarily considered a foreign, un-American import. For decades prior to the 1913 establishment of formal dance curriculum in higher education, professional ballet companies from overseas had toured the United States, and variations of ballet training were offered, in some form or another, across the country. However, the Euro-Russian imported art form of ballet had not yet found its footing as an accepted American art form. Referring to the early twentieth century, ballet historian Jessica Zeller writes in *Shapes of American Ballet* (2016),

Upon arrival, the European and Russian teachers who sought to develop ballet in the United States encountered an American aversion to academic ballet in the Euro-Russian tradition. In addition to the challenge of navigating a new place with a new language and culture, they were faced with the public's devaluing of their life's work—ballet was viewed as light entertainment, with little, if any, artistic value. America's puritanical foundation, which distinguished the country from its European forerunners, gave rise to the public's perspective that ballet's participants were of a questionable moral standing. A decidedly European and thus suspicious art form, ballet was neither easily absorbed nor appreciated by American audiences. (22)

Given the cultural climate of the era, when nationalism as a philosophical tenet was taking hold in America, anything un-American would have been dubious. Additionally, following World War II there was an emphasis on creativity in higher education; and modern dance, as opposed to the Euro-Russian tradition of ballet, was viewed as innovative and American.

In reflecting on the absence of ballet in the story of dance in American higher education, another notion worth consideration is the generally inconsistent quality of

ballet instruction that was occurring across the country. As immigrants flooded into Ellis Island and began disseminating their own cultures, including ballet, into American culture, ballet training in the United States during the early twentieth century was not necessarily consistent in the quality of its content or delivery methods. While notable teachers from Russia, Italy, and other European countries were settling in the United States, they mostly remained in urban hubs such as New York City. Since there was not, and still is not, any sort of credential or licensure required to teach ballet, a range of approaches to teaching what may or may not be considered by some as “ballet” proliferated throughout the country. In this era, an abundance of ballet manuals was published in America authored and promoted by well-intentioned, although perhaps not always well-informed, self-proclaimed ballet teachers. This plethora of approaches to the teaching of ballet throughout the country was informed by a multitude of dance forms, including all manner of variety acts from Vaudeville and other popular forms of dance (Zeller, *Shapes of American Ballet*, 2016).

In a discussion of the profusion of dance styles, including versions of ballet, that emerged onstage during this era, ballet scholar Carrie Gaiser Casey notes that “in the early twentieth century, ballet lacked clear genre boundaries with what we would today consider other dance forms. . . . both the toe-tapping variety act and the tunic-clad ballerina performing a ‘Greek’ dance would have fallen under the rubric of ‘ballet’ (18). Zeller echoes the sentiment that ballet was a difficult genre to identify and pin down during this period:

Contrary to a contemporary understanding of the dichotomy between classical ballet and popular dance—or what has been termed ‘high’ and ‘low’ art—during the early twentieth century the two were indistinguishable. Rather, ballet absorbed the influence of popular dance, and vice versa, which contributed to its American identity. (*Shapes of American Ballet*, 57)

While these factors most certainly contributed to the American identity of ballet, they also contributed to the perception among many that ballet was not a serious art form. Zeller wrote that ballet “was considered morally dubious; its product was intangible, decorative, and in certain circles, lewd” (*Shapes of American Ballet*, 60). Given this sort of public perception, it is understandable that early dance educators striving to establish a place for “serious” dance in higher education hoped to distance their work from a seemingly frivolous dance form. Additionally, given the era’s movement among women striving for gender parity in education and in the workplace, the forward-thinking women involved with early dance in higher education were unlikely to embrace a dance form considered frivolous and effeminate.

Another factor limiting ballet’s presence in higher education may simply be a matter of economics. Early American ballet training did not require Marley floors (this was a relatively new technology in the 1960s and developed further in the 1970s), and the floor-to-ceiling mirrors that we see in dance studios today would have been an outrageous luxury in the early twentieth century. However, there was a need for a particular type of slippers, ballet barres, and specialized music. Whereas, modern dance could be performed on any gym floor in bare feet. Early dance educators surely faced budget constraints, and the cost of offering any new coursework would have been considered.

We also might consider the axiom that a career in ballet demands youth. In the years of early American ballet, when professional ballet companies were first formed in the 1930s and 1940s, professional ballet dancers' careers were generally over by the time they reached their late twenties. It is understandable that young ballet dancers would have felt that the university was not the right path for those choosing a professional career, believing they would be better served devoting their full attention to rigorous ballet training. Given contemporary knowledge and efforts concerning health, safe training practices, and efforts in career longevity for dancers, this notion now seems somewhat outdated as ballet dancers enjoy much longer careers. However, the view that the university is not a viable option for those seriously considering a career in ballet is still prevalent, despite the growing number of college graduates in the ranks of professional ballet companies.

In terms of artistry, Hagood remarked more than once that the ballet of the early twentieth century was "sterile and lifeless" (61) and noted that Isadora Duncan "panned" ballet in her writings and teachings (123). Gertrude Colby, who initiated dance as an academic subject, insisted that her "natural dancing" bore no resemblance to ballet technique (Hagood, 71). And Margaret H'Doubler, who spearheaded the first dance degree, disapproved of ballet as a means of dance education arguing that dance education was not meant for professional entertainment (Hagood, 98). This mindset would have been oppositional to the leanings of most ballet teachers and practitioners in the nascent realm of professional ballet in America at the time, and those in higher education made no attempt to temper their derision for ballet.

In what Hagood referred to as an “onslaught on the ballet,” physical educator E.S. Howe wrote in 1937,

...there now appears to have been no reason why the various ballet entertainment troupes which have toured the country from time to time should have ever strengthened the position of the dance as a form of art vital to us or as a part of physical education in the schools and colleges....Its growth has been that of a crystal; beautiful after a fashion, sharp edged, smooth-faceted, and self-limited. Nothing in its origins, its artifices, its snobbery, and its ballet-hoo allies it with democratic education, and the numerous reasons for its unsuitability as a part of physical training are too well known to need enumeration. In education, it remains only in a few finishing schools as an “extra” on a par with American French and drawing. (Hagood, 139)

While ballet may have been popular with the public during this time, as evidenced in Howe’s statement above it was considered by many educators as unworthy of serious academic study. So, it seems that the modern dance educators of the era, if for no other reason than self-preservation in academe, distanced themselves and their burgeoning art form of modern dance from ballet. “In fact,” Hagood wrote, “all the early modern dancers were fairly unanimous in their opposition to ballet, as art and as educational medium” (123). Meanwhile, the general American public viewed modern dance as a more-or-less serious artistic endeavor, even if at times it seemed somewhat self-indulgent.

One example of the American public’s perception of early modern dance as self-indulgent may be seen in the 1954 movie musical *White Christmas*, in which a tongue-in-cheek song and dance number titled *Choreography* satirizes the overly-serious Graham-like dances and dancers of the era. As female dancers in long dresses, reminiscent of

Martha Graham's famous period of long woollens, encircle him with exaggerated gestures and overly serious attitudes, Danny Kaye humorously mugs and sings these lyrics:

The theatre, the theatre, what's happened to the theatre,
especially where dancing is concerned?
Chaps who did taps aren't tapping anymore;
they're doing choreography.
Chics who did kicks aren't kicking anymore;
they're doing choreography.
Heps who did steps that would stop the show in days that used to be,
through the air they keep flying like a duck that is dying,
instead of dance, it's choreography!

While of course this example is specific to how certain entertainers of the era perceived the modern dance of the time, I argue that the manner in which popular culture references any art form can provide insight unavailable when only considering sources from within the discipline.

As dance in higher education developed, the ideals and philosophies of the early modern dance educators—from Colby to H'Doubler to Martha Hill and the Bennington group—continued and evolved, but the notion of ballet as an un-intellectual outlier was perpetuated through generations of dance educators. Hagood noted,

...dance evolves in the university in much the same way that the university has evolved in our culture: from the pioneer program or school emerges a network of similar and like-minded programs and schools, from the efforts of the early 'giants' in dance art and education, come perspectives and techniques used by many. Over time, dance, like other disciplines in education, became less the province of individual initiation and interpretation, and more the product of group consensus. (69)

Since the originators of dance in higher education did not believe in ballet as a beneficial means of education, those that emulated the early programs perpetuated, perhaps unwittingly, a de-valuing of ballet among dance education professionals.

Additionally, considering present-day iterations of dance in higher education, the common requirement for faculty members to hold terminal degrees, usually MFA degrees, has resulted in a plethora of modern dance-trained MFA-holders who continue to populate the majority of tenure-line faculty positions in higher education. One might argue that this serves to perpetuate a somewhat incestuous notion of dance in higher education.

Over time, ballet has evolved into a much different entity than that of early twentieth century Vaudeville stages and finishing schools. Now, in the early twenty-first century, large professional ballet companies and their affiliate schools are thriving. Ballet training has evolved to incorporate all manner of advances in technological, medical, and kinesiological research, and university programs offering ballet-focused degrees have grown. Additionally, academic programs that focus on ballet have adopted many of the philosophies of early modern dance educators, valuing notions of individual creative expression, the study of dance composition and pedagogy, and a more scientific approach to dancer health. However, in many pockets of dance in higher education there remains a deep-seated mistrust of ballet and a hesitancy to embrace ballet as a means of personal, physical, and artistic discovery. Fortunately, it seems that the long-held boundaries between dance forms are becoming permeable, and more and more dance educators bringing a variety of backgrounds and experiences are allowed into the upper-echelons of dance in higher education.

An Overview of the History of Dance in American Higher Education

One striking characteristic of dance, as an academic discipline, is that it is an incredibly young field, relatively speaking. The first formalized curriculum in dance was offered in 1913, spearheaded by Gertrude Colby at the Speyer School of Teachers College at Columbia University (Hagood, 56). It was not until 1927 that the first dance major was offered at the University of Wisconsin, Madison under the direction of Margaret H'Doubler. The early stages of dance in higher education originated with Colby's philosophies of dance as a means of physical education and developed through H'Doubler's keen ability to identify and communicate how dance might fit a university's criteria for consideration as an academic discipline (Hagood, 120). During its infancy, academic dance was housed within physical education programs, but eventually dance struggled to find its own identity as an academic discipline, and from the 1930s through the 1950s fought to become an independent area of study within the academy. As a part of this effort to disentangle from physical education, dance educators began to align themselves more closely with professional concert dance, often seeking the influence of professional modern dancers of the time.

In the 1930s and 1940s, this connection to professional modern dance was strengthened and developed by the advent of the Bennington Festival. A small Vermont school, Bennington College, was home to a series of dance festivals that continued from 1934 to 1942, and eventually evolved to become the American Dance Festival. The Bennington Festival, led by dance educator Martha Hill and her administrative colleague Mary Josephine Shelly, boasted a list of dance artists in residence that now read as a

who's who of early American modern dance: Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, Hanya Holm, composer Louis Horst, and critic John Martin. Although they likely did not realize it at the time, this cohort helped shape an academic, and modern dance-based, approach to dance in higher education that remains discernable in dance curricula today (Hagood, 105).

Despite the great strides made during this era in terms of dance curricula, the connection to the professional world of dance resulted in a continuing debate that pitted ideas about professionalism and vocationalism against notions of dance education as an aesthetic component of a liberal arts educational experience. Hagood remarked,

Dance educators struggled with their desire to have studies in dance emulate both the conservatory and the academy. The conservatory model was attractive as a reflection of the professional world. The academic model was attractive for its corresponding attention to the intellectual, physical, and creative development of all dance students. (168)

Interestingly, this debate still resurfaces regularly in discussions about dance in higher education and, regrettably, often creates unnecessary conflict between academics/scholars and practitioners/artists. Even within ballet programs, faculty express conflicts between balancing the desire for academic rigor and intellectual growth with the pursuit of technical proficiency at the level expected for professional employment.¹⁴

When considering the time period of the late-1930s into the 1940s, it is worth noting that three of the largest and most prestigious ballet companies in the United States were formed during this time: American Ballet Theatre was founded in 1939 by Lucia

¹⁴ This topic is discussed further in Chapter 6.

Chase and Oliver Smith, San Francisco Ballet was founded in 1942 by Willam Christensen, and the New York City Ballet was founded in 1948 by George Balanchine and Lincoln Kirstein. It seems that while modern dance was laying the ground work for dance in higher education, the nascent ballet community in the United States was focused on creating a professional company scene that continues to flourish today. Perhaps these distinctive approaches to dance informed, and possibly exacerbated, the debate concerning vocationalism in dance education.

During the 1950s, university dance programs across the country experienced varied patterns of growth and development. Many dance programs remained under the umbrella of physical education, while others developed in areas such as the fine arts or humanities (Hagood, 168). According to Hagood, during the 1950s “dance curricula developed haphazardly, without a nationally cohesive vision for content, standards, or disciplinary focus” (168). Notably, the 1950s is also the period when three of the oldest university ballet programs were started. Texas Christian University, the first university to place dance under the umbrella of fine arts rather than physical education, began offering the country’s first degree in ballet in 1949 under the direction of David Preston. In 1951, notable ballet choreographer and founder of the San Francisco Ballet, Willam Christensen, founded the ballet program at the University of Utah. And Butler University’s dance program began offering its ballet-focused degree in 1952. Each of these programs successfully continues to offer ballet-focused degrees today.

In the 1960s there was somewhat of a “dance boom” in which a multitude of dance programs emerged and enrollments increased significantly. Hagood reasoned this

boom was the result of social and political contexts of the time including: government-sponsored overseas tours for professional companies, President John F. Kennedy's overt support of the arts, the 1964 congressional establishment of the Federal Arts Advisory Board, and the significant financial support that the Ford Foundation began doling out to ballet companies in the late-1950s and early-1960s. These sorts of authoritative nods to the arts provided a sense of credibility and improved the reputation of the arts in higher education among the general public. It is notable that the hefty Ford Foundation grants were awarded exclusively to ballet companies, and this influx of financial support changed the course of history for ballet in the United States. Hagood speculated that the funds the Ford Foundation granted to professional ballet companies might have inadvertently had a negative effect on fledgling university ballet programs at the time by pulling young dancers toward professional schools affiliated with companies rather than toward university programs offering study in ballet (189).

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, there had also been a significant rise in regional dance that surely influenced the increasing interest and support for dance in higher education. By 1965 there were over 200 civic ballet companies across the United States, and in addressing how the increase in regional ballet companies benefitted dance in higher education, Hagood wrote,

Ballet appealed to the basically conservative tastes of American audiences. While the ballet absorbed many of the contemporary sensibilities that had previously been associated with modern dance, it kept enough of its tradition to appeal to white, middle, and upper-class values. Ballet was viewed as a dance art that reinforced community ideals of social order, power, beauty, and gender (particularly femininity). Ballet brought a sense of old world glamour for many of its supporters. With the ballet's popular acceptance as a serious art form in communities, dance educators and administrators found it easier to argue that dance in the colleges should be considered a fine art and not an aspect of physical education. (179-80)

Interestingly, while Hagood noted the positive effects of ballet's popularity on dance in higher education, he subtly insinuated that ballet was a popular entertainment that simply reinforced cultural expectations: ballet earned "popular acceptance as a serious art," rather than truly being a serious art form. Instead of acknowledging that perhaps the exposure to ballet performances was actually educating the public about the possibilities for physical expression through dance, Hagood simply speaks of ballet's popularity as yet another argument for moving academic dance away from physical education programs and into the realm of fine arts.

Overall, the 1960s spurred a significant amount of activity surrounding the organization and development of dance in higher education. For the first time, academic conferences focusing on dance occurred: one titled "Dance as a Discipline" was held in 1964 in Boulder, Colorado, and a two-part "Developmental Conference on Dance" was held at the University of California, Los Angeles in 1966 and 1967. Professional organizations for dance academics were formed: the Congress on Research in Dance (then titled the Committee on Research in Dance) was created in 1965, and the Council of Dance Administrators was founded in 1968. Also in the 1960s, the professional

degrees—Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) and Master of Fine Arts (MFA)—were developed as a result of the debate between those who argued that dance should be studied for vocational purposes and those who believed dance should be studied as an aesthetic arts experience as a part of a well-rounded liberal arts education (Hagood, 167). Professionals in the field of dance outside of academe began to acknowledge the relevance of dance as a field of study, and *Dance Magazine* even published a series of articles in 1964 titled “College or Career for Dancers?”

In terms of university dance program development during the 1960s, two notable programs began during this era. The University of California, Irvine (UCI) created a highly debated new model of a professionally focused dance program led by noted ballet choreographer Eugene Loring. While UCI’s dance program was not, and is still not, specifically ballet-focused, the fact that it was founded by Loring, a prominent figure in American ballet history, is noteworthy. Another remarkable element of UCI’s program was an original curricular approach in which studio coursework requirements balanced studies in ballet, jazz, and modern dance. The formula was certainly successful, as UCI has grown into one of the country’s largest dance programs and is often emulated as a curricular example.

Additionally, the University of Oklahoma’s ballet program was started in 1961 by former Ballets Russes dancers Miguel Terekhov and Yvonne Chouteau. This program offered training exclusively in ballet at the time and has now evolved into a large School of Dance, offering degrees in both ballet and modern dance. In 1962, the University of California, Los Angeles established the first autonomous dance department under the

leadership of Alma Hawkins, founder of the Council of Dance Administrators (CODA) (Dunning). Multiple conservatory dance programs housed within universities also sprung up during this period, including the ballet programs of the North Carolina School of the Arts and Cincinnati Conservatory of Music. North Carolina School of the Arts was established in 1963 as a professional training school for the arts offering instruction for both high school and college students and is now a part of the University of North Carolina system.¹⁵ The Cincinnati Conservatory of Music started its ballet-focused dance conservatory program in 1964 and began offering a BFA in 1965.¹⁶

Dance in higher education continued to develop and flourish throughout the 1970s, and in 1981 the National Association of Schools of Dance (NASD), a national accrediting body, was founded. Despite the incredible growth and development of the 1960s and 1970s, throughout the 1980s, dance education, along with many academic disciplines, struggled to survive in an increasingly corporate university model in which students were viewed as consumers/customers. According to Hagood,

The large, state flagship universities, and the prestigious four-year colleges would be least affected by declines in enrollment. . . . Denominationally oriented private colleges and public four-year colleges would be most affected by enrollment declines. Many of these would cease to operate or be forced to dramatically change their mission and goals. Private colleges would be more at risk than public institutions. (249)

¹⁵<http://www.uncsa.edu/archives/uncsa-history/index.aspx> (accessed June 22, 2017).

¹⁶ <http://ccm.uc.edu/about/villagenews/notations-ovations/dance-at-50.html> (accessed June 22, 2017).

Although Hagood's sentiments were specific to his discussion of the 1980s, they remain timely in the consumer driven era of higher education today and eerily reflect thoughts expressed by faculty members during my data collection process.

Regardless of the difficulties that dance has faced during its history in American higher education, as an academic discipline dance continues to exist, sometimes even thriving. I imagine that Colby and H'Doubler would be astonished if they could see how far dance has come in its evolution as an academic discipline and how broadly the areas of study within dance have expanded. Currently, there are literally hundreds of dance programs housed in colleges and universities across the United States, and fortunately, as a reflection of America's ever-changing population, areas of focus have expanded to include varieties of dance other than modern dance and ballet. Although, admittedly, the vast majority are still primarily modern dance driven. I argue that this reified notion of modern dance as the foremost academic dance form is partially perpetuated by the accrediting body, NASD.

NASD – The Accrediting Agency

The creation of NASD in 1981 is an important milestone in the history of dance in higher education. Discussions concerning the creation of standards had begun among members of the Council of Dance Administrators (CODA) years prior, and in 1980 CODA members met with the executive director of the Office of Arts Accreditation in Higher Education, Samuel Hope, to discuss options for creating accreditation processes for dance. At the time, there were two other accrediting agencies for the arts: National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) and National Association of Schools of Art

and Design (NASAD); these agencies were monitored by the Council on Post Secondary Accreditation (COPA), which in turn answered to the federal Office of Education. Hope's organization had created the Joint Commission for Dance and Theatre Accreditation (JCDTA) to explore options for establishing accrediting entities for the disciplines of dance and theatre.

Hagood reported that, during the 1980 meeting with CODA, Hope explained how "...accreditation was not envisioned as a means to standardize programs, but as a mechanism for reviewing program quality given each program's institutional goals" (239). With the intent of moving forward with the creation of an accrediting agency for dance, Hope charged CODA with the following: agreeing on "a core of schools, representing both degree and non-degree granting institutions to incorporate as a National Association of Schools of Dance;" developing a code of operations and standards for accreditation; agreeing on an administrative structure for the agency; and developing procedural documents, including a self-study outline, instructions for on-site review teams, and policies for selecting review teams (Hagood, 238-9). Additionally, CODA elected three representatives to attend the JCDTA meeting in Washington, DC the following October. The CODA membership elected Alma Hawkins, Elizabeth Hayes, and Helen Alkire, with Nancy Smith serving as an alternate. Hagood noted that the membership affectionately referred to this quartet as the "Big Four," a nod to the historic original "Big Four" of Graham, Humphrey, Weidman, and Holm of the Bennington era (239).

Brief biographies of the three representatives CODA selected as representatives to send to Washington, D.C. provide a glimpse of the profiles and values of the group. Alma Hawkins studied at Teachers College of Columbia University and at Bennington and was the founding director of the Dance Department of the University of California, Los Angeles. Elizabeth Hayes began the modern dance program at the University of Utah in 1940. According to her obituary, Hayes was “one of the five pioneers, fondly called the ‘Vintage Ladies’ who collaborated to develop modern dance departments throughout the U.S.”¹⁷ Helen Alkire studied at Bennington, Teachers College at Columbia University, and at the University of Wisconsin before beginning the dance program at Ohio State University, initially housed in the physical education area, and in 1968 Alkire became the founding chair of Ohio State University’s dance department.

At the October meeting, the CODA representatives merged their organization’s previously developed objectives into the working documents of JCDTA. In 1981 NASD was voted into existence and in 1983, was formally recognized by the Department of Education as the official accreditation agency for dance (Hagood, 240). Forty-eight institutions became charter members of NASD; ten of those were professional schools not affiliated with universities or colleges.¹⁸ As of early 2018, there were eighty-two member organizations listed on the NASD website, and only ten were non-degree

¹⁷ <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/saltlakatribune/obituary.aspx?pid=94456950> (accessed June 23, 2017).

¹⁸ <https://nasd.arts-accredit.org/about/history/> (accessed June 23, 2017).

granting, or professional, schools.¹⁹ Of the professional schools currently listed as members, only four are professional ballet schools. Interestingly, a participant in this study spoke about the early years of NASD during her interview with me.

Clara Cravey Stanley, who worked for many years as the director of the Houston Ballet Academy, spoke about her involvement with NASD during that time. Stanley mentioned that, early in the existence of NASD, more professional ballet schools were affiliated with the organization; however, Stanley remarked that, over the years, NASD seemed to develop into an organization focusing much more on supporting dance in higher education rather than professional schools. This observation points to a growing disconnect between professional ballet and ballet in higher education settings, which is discussed further in Chapter 7.

NASD's current materials do not refer to specific dance genres and seem to intentionally utilize language that broadly embraces dance as multi-faceted. However, the influence of early modern dance educators is still evident in places. Take for instance the required competencies for professional degrees as listed in the NASD Handbook. In "Competencies" there are four areas listed in the "Common Body of Knowledge and Skills": Performance, Choreography, Theoretical and Historical Studies, and Teaching. According to NASD the majority of coursework for a BFA degree falls in the category of Performance. Additionally, the requirement for two full years of Choreography is

¹⁹ <https://nasd.arts-accredit.org/directory-lists/accruited-institutions/search/?institutionname=&city=&state=&country=&search=true> (accessed January 29, 2018).

explicit, while coursework in the area of Theoretical and Historical Studies seems expected but is not explicitly required. It is particularly interesting to note that, while NASD lists Teaching as a competency, there is no requirement for coursework in Teaching.²⁰

While it would be hard to find a dance educator that would argue against the necessity of performance which, according to the NASD Handbook, includes studio technique courses and credit acquired for performances, I argue that not all dance forms value the study of individual choreographic practice in the way that modern dance values this particular element of a dancer's education. NASD's explicit requirement for four full semesters of coursework in choreography is certainly an influence of modern dance educators. Dance historian Jack Anderson noted that modern dance "is not so much a system or technique as an attitude toward dance, a point of view that encourages artistic individualism and the development of personal choreographic styles" (165). This emphasis on "personal choreographic styles" is not a characteristic of all dance forms, and yet choreography is listed as one of the primary competencies in NASD's "Common Body of Knowledge and Skills," listed second only to performance.

One might argue that this emphasis on choreographic practice forces a value of modern dance philosophies when developing curriculum. Thus, marginalizing dance programs that might wish to focus on any number of other dance-related subjects, such as music, kinesiology, pedagogy, etc. For example, in 2013 the BFA in Ballet degree at the

²⁰ This topic is discussed further in Chapter 5.

University of Utah underwent a major curricular overhaul in an effort to graft NASD requirements onto the degree. The faculty unanimously voted for only three semesters of required coursework in choreography, while providing opportunities for further choreographic coursework for those students that might be interested. The faculty argued this point for two reasons: 1) this would allow those students not interested in choreographic pursuits the opportunity to explore other areas of interest, and 2) the faculty did not want to lessen the significant coursework already in existence in terms of music, kinesiology, historical inquiry, etc. However, despite the wishes of the faculty members, the curriculum was changed to require four semesters of choreographic study so that the program was in compliance with NASD requirements. This is but one of many anecdotes concerning how NASD's expectations have altered curricular design despite the wishes of the faculty. In fact, some universities offering ballet-focused degrees, such as the prestigious program at Indiana University, have opted out of NASD accreditation entirely. This is perhaps due to a sentiment that the modern dance-influenced NASD requirements are not in alignment with their programs mission, vision, or philosophies.

Accreditation is technically a voluntary process; however, it often is sought as a result of university administration pressure and expectations. Seeking and maintaining NASD accreditation is incredibly time consuming and expensive for those institutions that participate. While the process is intended to ensure quality, and in many ways, is successful in doing so, I argue that it also has the tendency to limit academic freedom and create a somewhat homogenized situation for dance in higher education.

CORPS de Ballet International

CORPS de Ballet International's name is a play on words: the French ballet term *corps de ballet* refers to the members of a ballet company that dance together as a group; and the founders of CORPS wittily created the acronym for the Council of Organized Researchers for Pedagogical Studies. CORPS de Ballet International's mission statement is succinct: "CORPS de Ballet International is a professional organization dedicated to the development, exploration, and advancement of ballet in higher education."²¹ CORPS was founded in 1998 by a collective of ballet faculty from Canada and the United States, spearheaded by founding president Richard Sias.²² At the time, Sias was a Professor of Dance at Florida State University, where he is now a Professor Emeritus. In his online biography, Sias wrote "CORPS is the only forum and organization of its kind to serve ballet faculty and programs with professional goals and aspirations for students in higher education, universities and colleges, in the United States and around the world."²³ During the initial meetings of this organization in 1989, the founding members focused on the questions: How can ballet be taught effectively? What is its function in higher education?²⁴

²¹ <http://www.corps-de-ballet.org> (accessed June 17, 2017).

²² <http://www.corps-de-ballet.org/awards/lifetime-achievement-award/richard-sias/> (accessed June 17, 2017). Sias is a noted Canadian ballet pedagogue affiliated with Canada's National Ballet School.

²³ <http://www.corps-de-ballet.org/awards/lifetime-achievement-award/richard-sias/> (accessed June 17, 2017).

²⁴ <http://www.corps-de-ballet.org/history/> (accessed June 17, 2017).

The founding membership of CORPS was interested in creating an outlet for those interested in scholarly and pedagogical pursuits specific to ballet because they found the existing academic conferences for dance, such as the American College Dance Festival Association (ACDFA)²⁵ and the Congress on Research in Dance (CORD), more or less unwelcoming to their ballet interests. In comparison to larger academic dance organizations, such as the National Dance Educators Organization (NDEO) or CORD, CORPS's membership roster is quite small. This might be expected given that ballet is a sub-category of the larger subject of dance covered by most organizations. Currently, the full membership is less than 150, but the number of conference participants has remained consistent at around 75 for the past several years. There is a sense of loyalty among the members who are bonded by knowing they are a part of a relatively small group of ballet professionals working in higher education. CORPS members range from tenure-line to adjunct faculty members and include some professionals in the field of ballet that are not affiliated with a university. Some are faculty members at universities offering ballet specific programs, and others are the only ballet instructors at their institution.

CORPS's annual conferences are often co-hosted by an academic institution partnering with a professional ballet company and/or the company's affiliate school. This co-hosting reflects the nature of how ballet in higher education exhibits an eagerness to remain connected to the professional field of ballet.²⁶ For example, 2017's conference

²⁵ The organization's name has now changed to American College Dance Association (ACDA).

²⁶ This topic is discussed further in Chapter 7.

was co-hosted by Brigham Young University and Ballet West; 2015's conference was co-hosted by Towson University and the Washington Ballet; and in 2011 the conference was shared between the University of Missouri, Kansas City and the Kansas City Ballet.

Other companies involved with hosting or co-hosting conferences include: Aspen Santa Fe Ballet, National Ballet School of Canada, School of the Pacific Northwest Ballet, and the School of the San Francisco Ballet.

In speaking with CORPS members, time and again I hear two themes. Firstly, ballet faculty members often feel like outsiders in their home institution departments—often departments with a primarily modern dance-based approach to dance in higher education. These members find a sense of community at CORPS conferences, a place where like-minded individuals who value the art of ballet are permitted the space to learn, grow, and explore their areas of research away from what they describe as the constant sense of criticism they regularly experience at their home institutions. Secondly, scholars that present at CORPS have expressed that their research interests, if ballet-specific, are generally not welcome at conferences with broader dance themes. One ballet researcher I met through CORPS expressed that the larger organizations were simply not interested in any presentations associated with ballet. She admitted that at one CORD conference, when other participants realized that she was a ballet scholar, they treated her “like a leper.” Sentiments such as these, once again, demonstrate the ongoing negative perceptions of ballet that have existed in the discipline of American higher education since its inception. CORPS has provided a support-system for this small group of like-

minded educators to pursue their academic and pedagogical interests. In 2018, CORPS celebrates its twentieth anniversary.

Have the Pioneers become the Conservatives?

In closing this chapter, I would like to be clear that I am not attempting to cast blame on modern dance educators for ballet's lack of presence in higher education. I simply aim to point out the ingrained philosophies of modern dance that are interwoven in the history (and present state) of dance in higher education. There is no benefit in attempting to pit one dance form against another, when in reality there are a multitude of dance forms worth investigation and investment, and there is room for all dance forms within the realm of higher education if we are willing to make room. As educators, we must acknowledge our histories and heritages and accept that the manner in which dance in higher education developed has tipped the scales in favor of modern dance philosophies, values, and practices. While we are grateful to those that came before, we must also continue to question our practices and intentions, challenging our own personal agendas and our values. Perhaps there is wisdom in the words of dance educator Lucille Marsh, who wrote: "there is always danger that the pioneers of one generation may become the conservatives of the next" (22).

The point I wish to make is that dance forms other than modern dance are at times marginalized by the dominant philosophies of dance in higher education. Considering Hagood's text as the primary available source concerning dance in higher education, it is notable that there are omissions, and ballet is not the only neglected topic. For instance, Hagood also neglects to adequately excavate the history of dance in historically black

colleges and universities. Since much has changed from the twentieth to the twenty-first century in terms of the discipline of dance, it is time to understand and listen to the voices unheard from our collective past. Acknowledging marginalized voices opens the opportunity for the field of dance education to move more fully into the future.

CHAPTER IV

INTRODUCING THE PROGRAMS

In this chapter, I provide an introduction to the university programs included in this study. Each program has a unique personality, with varied faculty, distinct missions and philosophies, and often some sort of unique element that sets it apart. As I began organizing my thoughts about these programs, I found myself tempted to categorize them in one way or another, which I eventually realized was a futile and fruitless endeavor. At one point, I was convinced that they fell into three categories: large schools of dance at research universities, smaller academic units at private universities, and conservatory-style programs. But I soon realized that these categories, while in some ways appropriate, were overly simplistic and unnecessary. At a later juncture, I thought I might somehow place each program on a spectrum, with *conservatory* at one extreme and *traditional academic unit* at the other; however, I was unable to decide precisely what criteria would define each program's location on the spectrum. Additionally, the idea of creating a spectrum felt elitist, or in the very least, pejorative. So, for lack of a better way to introduce each program, they are listed here alphabetically.

Information in this section was gathered from university websites, my observations during campus site visits, and interviews with faculty members. I openly acknowledge that my brief campus visits permitted only a short and shallow glimpse of each program. Also, I was visiting some campuses for the first time, while I had prior experiences with others, and this certainly contributes to an imbalance in my

understanding of each program. Additionally, I have fairly intimate associations with two of the programs: I attended Friends University as a student and have periodically been a guest teacher and/or choreographer there; and I am currently employed as a tenure-line faculty member in the ballet program at the University of Utah. Additionally, I had prior relationships of varying degrees with some of the individuals that I interviewed—some were my teachers, others are colleagues, and by the end of my campus visits many new acquaintances had become friends.

My attempt in this chapter is to piece together a mosaic-style representation of each program based on my experiences and research. I present the following descriptions of each program as a sampling of factoids colored by my experiences during each campus visit, influenced by my interactions with faculty members, and likely washed with my own personal proclivities and disposition. In the following discussion of each university I attempt to give a concise description of the university, a brief introduction to each program, some insight into my experience visiting each campus, and point out elements of each program that I found particularly noteworthy. I do not elaborate on the curricular design of the programs in this chapter, as a comparison and analysis of curricula is covered in Chapter 5.

Butler University

Located five miles from downtown Indianapolis, Indiana, Butler University is a small, private, liberal arts university servicing a total student body of approximately 5,000 students. The university's website declares that the institution emphasizes "learning

by doing,”²⁷ which is particularly compelling for the dance reader since the active doing of dance is where learning occurs. Butler University’s Department of Dance, housed within the Jordan College of the Arts, holds a national reputation as one of the top ballet programs in the country. NASD-accredited, Butler University has been offering bachelors’ degrees in dance since 1951, and the Department of Dance has always been a ballet-focused program. The department’s mission statement refers to “a central but non-exclusive focus on classical ballet.”²⁸ The program currently offers three degree options: Bachelor of Fine Arts in Dance – Performance, Bachelor of Arts in Dance – Pedagogy, and Bachelor of Science in Dance – Arts Administration.

My site visit to Butler University, on April 11th and 12th of 2016, was the first time I had been on this campus or met any of the faculty who I interviewed. Over two beautiful blue-sky days, I interviewed faculty, wandered campus, observed snippets of rehearsals and classes, and gave myself a self-guided tour of the facilities—those with unlocked doors anyway. Although I did not have a formal tour of the facilities, I was encouraged to wander freely and graciously invited to observe rehearsals. Prior to my visit, I had scheduled interview times with six faculty members. However, one of the faculty members did not show up, and another, although willing to speak frankly with me off-the-record, declined to sign the IRB consent form or allow a recorded interview. Thus, I successfully completed official interviews with four of the six faculty members. Interviews were conducted in the offices of each individual faculty member.

²⁷ <https://www.butler.edu/admission/why-butler> (accessed May 17, 2017).

²⁸ <https://www.butler.edu/dance/about/mission> (accessed May 16, 2017).

Butler University's Department of Dance is physically located within Lilly Hall, home of the Jordan College of the Arts, and conveniently located next door to Clowes Memorial Hall's impressive 2200-seat theatre where the dance program holds its formal performances. The Department of Dance has five studio spaces, one of which can be transformed into an informal performance space. The program also provides a conditioning room with an elliptical trainer and Pilates reformer for student use.

Dance at Butler University has a long and rich history deserving of more in-depth research than feasible for this particular project, but I will point out a few interesting elements. First, dance at Butler University has a historical connection to the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo. One long-time department head, George Verdak, was a Ballets Russes alumna, and this heritage is still evident today in the Ballet Russes scenery and costume collections housed at the university. Current department chair, Larry Attaway, admits that these collections are both a blessing and a curse; while they are historical treasures, storage and maintenance has proven cumbersome and, due to a lack of resources, many of the artifacts are not yet appropriately archived.²⁹ (Additional information about these collections is available on the departmental website.³⁰)

Second, for years, Butler University's dance program supported a successful "pre-college" program called the Jordan Academy of Dance. The academy originated in the early 1900s as an etiquette school and evolved into a school offering pre-professional training to students from the community. Around the year 2000, for reasons unknown to

²⁹ Interview with Larry Attaway, Butler University.

³⁰ <https://www.butler.edu/dance/about/mission> (accessed May 17, 2017).

the faculty members I interviewed, the university's administration chose to discontinue this program. Attaway laments the loss of this program; in his opinion, the pre-college program served as a valuable link to the community and an irreplaceable laboratory for university students interested in dance pedagogy.³¹

Third, Butler's dance program has a historical connection to professional dance companies. Some of Butler's dance faculty members regularly choreograph for Dance Kaleidoscope, an Indianapolis-based professional contemporary dance company. And at one point, Butler's dance program fostered the birth of Indianapolis Ballet Theatre, a professional ballet company started by Verdak. Verdak eventually left Butler to focus exclusively on the company. However, he passed away in 1993, and this particular company is no longer in existence.³² Each of these historical components—the Ballets Russes connection, the pre-college program, and the connection to professional companies—are evidence of Butler's rich history worthy of further study, but again, comprehensive research in this area lies outside the scope of this project.

At the time of data collection, Butler University's Department of Dance claimed approximately 115 dance majors and employed six full-time faculty members. Of the full-time faculty members, only two did not teach ballet technique courses; one was a specialist in modern dance, and the other a specialist in jazz dance. However, notwithstanding their areas of expertise, both were intimately involved with restaging and rehearsing the classical repertoire presented by the department, which speaks to their

³¹ Interview with Larry Attaway, Butler University.

³² <https://www.butler.edu/dance/about/ballet-russe> (accessed May 16, 2017).

experience, understanding, and commitment to classical ballet. Some faculty members hold academic degrees, including graduate-level degrees, and each member of the faculty has impressive professional career experience in the field of dance. Also noteworthy is the fact that Butler's full-time faculty members are mostly long-serving; in fact, of the six faculty members on campus during my visit, the two most recently hired were in their twelfth year.

While the program is not technically a conservatory, the departmental website mentions "conservatory-level instruction,"³³ and faculty members indicate that the training is as rigorous as that offered in professional schools affiliated with major ballet companies. During my site visit, I had the opportunity to observe a rehearsal for an upcoming production of *Swan Lake*, and the quality of the dancing and choreography was indeed on par with a regional professional company.

The department's website states that the program is committed to producing full-length ballets, declaring these productions "the foundation of the department's philosophy and training."³⁴ Butler University's Department of Dance produces a full-length production of *The Nutcracker* each holiday season followed by an additional full-length ballet from a five-ballet rotation each Spring.³⁵ Butler's dance program was first housed within the School of Music, and this long-standing relationship between the music and dance programs ensures a live orchestra for all of their full-length ballet

³³ <https://www.butler.edu/dance> (accessed May 16, 2017).

³⁴ <https://www.butler.edu/dance> (accessed May 16, 2017).

³⁵ Interview with Larry Attaway, Butler University.

productions.³⁶ The notion of honoring full-length classical ballets was mentioned multiple times by various faculty members during my campus visit and is an obvious point of pride, and rightly so. Few university programs are capable of producing full-length classical ballets which require tremendous resources in terms of costumes, sets, number of dancers, and significant amounts of rehearsal time and space. I imagine that the program's ability to produce high-caliber full-length ballets with a live orchestra in a 2200-seat theatre is a major selling point in recruitment efforts.

The mission statement of Butler University's Department of Dance reads,

The mission of the Department of Dance is to seek committed and promising students of dance, to develop in them a foundation of a broadly-based dance training with a central but non-exclusive focus on classical ballet, and to integrate this training with a liberal arts education, in order to prepare students for future professions in dance and to contribute to their wider communities. Additionally, it is our mission to provide excellent quality dance to Butler University, to Indianapolis and to the region.³⁷

Friends University

Friends University, located in Wichita, Kansas, gets its unusual name from its Quaker heritage. Founded in 1898, Friends University is a small, private, liberal arts Christian university with an approximate total student population of fewer than 3,000. The Ballet Department at Friends University, housed within the Division of Fine Arts, was started in 1989 with funding support from the Koch Foundation³⁸ and has remained

³⁶ Interview with Larry Attaway, Butler University. This historic connection between the two departments also influences the curriculum, which is discussed in Chapter 5.

³⁷ <https://www.butler.edu/dance/about/mission> (accessed June 1, 2017).

³⁸ Koch Industries is located in Wichita, Kansas, and the Koch Foundation has invested tremendously in the arts in this region and nationally.

in existence primarily due to private funding and community backing, rather than institutional support. Stan Rogers, an alumnus of American Ballet Theatre, holds a Master of Arts in Dance from Columbia University, and is the founding department head remaining at the helm of the program today. It is noteworthy that this is the youngest program I studied and the only program where the founding director is still in place.

I visited Friends University on February 13th and 14th of 2016. This is a campus, faculty, and program with which I am familiar, as I was once a student, graduating with a BFA in Ballet in 1997. Subsequently, I have visited this program periodically as a guest teacher and choreographer. The two-day site visit was filled with nostalgia for me as I struggled to maintain the professional distance of a researcher observing the university, faculty, and program with fresh eyes. During my two-day visit, I had the opportunity to observe a portion of a ballet technique class, observe rehearsal for a new choreographic work, and conduct interviews with both full-time faculty members. Interestingly, both of these faculty members, given their level of comfort with me, chose to hold the interviews in their homes rather than on campus, despite my request to meet on campus in an effort to create a more formal setting.

The Friends University Department of Ballet is physically housed within the Riney Fine Arts Center, a building shared with the Music and Theatre programs. The Riney Fine Arts Center is home to a 450-seat theater, where the ballet program holds its performances, and two spacious dance studios (among other performing arts spaces shared with the theatre and music programs). With only two full-time faculty members, and adjuncts hired only rarely, the Friends University's Department of Ballet generally

services approximately twenty majors. Given the relatively small size of this program, there is a sense of community and closeness among the students and faculty. Friends University offers a BFA in Ballet and recently added a BA in Ballet with a choice of concentrations: studio operations, music and theatre, or sacred dance. It is interesting to note that the BFA in Ballet is the only BFA degree offered through Friends University, and both faculty members during our interviews mentioned historical issues defending this type of program within the academic culture of Friends University.

The Ballet Department's website states: "Friends University fosters excellence in preparation for a professional career in the world of ballet..."³⁹ and a major component of this preparation involves performance. The Ballet Department produces an annual *Nutcracker*, bringing in world-class dancers from companies such as the New York City Ballet as guest artists to perform leading roles (It is perhaps worth mentioning that these professional guests are usually funded by private donations). The Ballet Department also keeps one-act ballets and a repertoire of original works by Stan Rogers in rotation. Despite budget limitations and the isolated nature of a city without professional dance companies, the department strives to maintain a connection to the field of dance outside of higher education by bringing in guest choreographers at least once each year.

At one point during the history of this program, private funding supported Wichita Ballet Theatre, a professional wing of the Friends University Ballet Department. This entity was an attempt on the part of Stan Rogers to begin building a professional

³⁹ <https://www.friends.edu/undergraduate/fine-arts/ballet/> (accessed May 18, 2017).

ballet company in Wichita. The initial funding provided small stipends for graduates of the program and other professionals for their participation in departmental performances. However, the private funding support dwindled, and the Wichita Ballet Theatre wing no longer exists.

Another interesting characteristic of Friends University's Ballet Department is its Christian heritage and work in faith-based "sacred dance"⁴⁰ projects. For many years, the department's mid-Fall semester production was the so-called *Sacred Dance Concert*. Since the Ballet Department's founding at Friends University, interest in sacred dance concerts and repertoire has waxed and waned over the years, but sacred dance remains a piece of the program's heritage. While there is no formal coursework in the subject of sacred dance, all Friends University students, regardless of major, take required faith-based coursework, and the recently added optional sacred dance concentration for the BA in Ballet degree signifies a continued interest in the subject.

The mission statement of the Ballet Department at Friends University reads,

Our purpose is to offer a ballet education that creates talented performing artists so they may achieve their individual goals and become confident in their chosen professions.⁴¹

⁴⁰ The Sacred Dance Guild defines sacred dance as "any type of dance that is done with an intention to connect with or communicate something about the sacred, however that may be understood by the dancer or the choreographer."

<http://sacreddanceguild.org/about/about-sacred-dance/> (accessed, February 4, 2018). Friends University uses the term "sacred dance" in a context specific to Christianity.

⁴¹ <https://www.friends.edu/undergraduate/fine-arts/ballet/> (accessed June 1, 2017).

Mercyhurst University

Mercyhurst University, a private Catholic liberal arts university, is located in Erie, Pennsylvania. Founded in 1926 by the Sisters of Mercy, Mercyhurst services a total student population of approximately 4,500. Mercyhurst University's motto, *carpe diem*, is inscribed on the university crest and is displayed in numerous locations throughout campus and on the university's website. The dance program has offered a BA in Dance since 1974 and a BFA in Dance since 2014. The university has been NASD-accredited since 2009. The departmental website claims that Mercyhurst's Department of Dance is a "classical ballet program"⁴² and cites "the survival of high quality ballet and the building of future leaders for the arts" as primary goals.⁴³

I conducted a two-day site-visit to Mercyhurst University on March 15th and 16th of 2016, and this was my first visit to this campus. I arrived on campus on a misty and melancholy morning. As I drove along the winding road through campus to find the guest parking area, I was struck by the gothic architecture of the buildings at the heart of campus, which could have easily been the inspiration for Harry Potter's Hogwarts. During this visit, I had the opportunity to observe portions of ballet and pointe technique classes, observe students and faculty in the lounge/waiting areas, wander campus, and interview six of the seven faculty members (one was on leave). The interviews were conducted in the individual offices of each faculty member.

⁴² Tauna Hunter and other faculty members at Mercyhurst refer to the program as based in classical and *contemporary* ballet.

⁴³ <https://www.mercyhurst.edu/academics/academic-departments/dance> (accessed May 16, 2017).

Mercyhurst's Department of Dance was first housed in the historic Old Main building in a large top-story room with vaulted ceilings, vast arched windows, and the expanses of natural light provided by such windows. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to tour this space, which is now a library, during my visit. When the dance program outgrew this one studio space, renovations were made as a part of a larger campus-wide performing arts initiative, expanding Zurn Hall to include what is now the Mary D'Angelo Performing Arts Center. This space includes a nearly 800-seat theatre where the dance program holds performances. The home of the Dance Department, housed within the attached Zurn Hall and referred to as danceSpace, is only footsteps away from the theatre. The danceSpace includes two large dance studios, faculty and staff offices, dressing rooms, and a quaint student lounge.

At the time of data collection, the department employed seven full-time faculty members (although those numbers have since decreased) and claimed approximately 60 majors. Of these faculty members, two specialize in modern dance and do not teach ballet technique; and many of the faculty members hold graduate degrees in addition to their professional backgrounds. Tauna Hunter, hired as chair of the Dance Department in 1994, is still serving as the chair 24 years later with the intention of retiring in 2019. Hunter was a principle dancer with Ballet West and earned both a BFA in Ballet and MFA in Ballet from the University of Utah. Given that Hunter has been serving in a leadership role for such a significant amount of time, her vision is infused in the mission of the program. Hunter strives to embolden Mercyhurst dance students to become leaders

in the field of dance and in their communities, often encouraging students to participate in the university's organizational leadership and arts administration programs.

I visited Mercyhurst at an unfortunate time in the Dance Department's history. Extreme university-wide budget cuts resulted in the loss of two of the department's full-time faculty positions—one tenure-track faculty member who had been at Mercyhurst for four years and one artist-in-residence who had been on faculty for twelve years.⁴⁴ Both had recently been notified that their positions would not exist the following year. These faculty members had been integral to the fabric of dance on this campus, and the small dance community at the university was clearly shaken by this news and still in a bit of shock when I arrived. During our interviews, most faculty members, in one way or another, tentatively broached the subject. There were tears, stiff upper lips, feigned optimism, and a bit of thinly-veiled dismay at their helplessness in the situation. It was horribly depressing, and I could not help but feel I was intruding on what should have been a more private time of quiet grieving.

Perhaps it was due to this difficult time and situation that I was drawn to their stories about community engagement projects. One faculty member spoke passionately about the program's liturgical dance ensemble, her pet project, and voiced her hopes that this area might eventually develop into a degree. Other faculty members spoke in a heartfelt manner about a memorial scholarship fund honoring a former dance major and

⁴⁴ I was informed by Tauna Hunter in 2017 that there was an additional blow to the department when a long-serving faculty member retired and the university's administration did not replace the line.

victim of domestic violence.⁴⁵ Each of the faculty members seemed passionately invested in student-success through personal engagement and dedicated to keeping the program afloat despite the recent devastating news.

The mission statement for Mercyhurst University's Dance Department reads,

The Dance Department's mission is to generate leadership for the dance field, through rigorous B.A. and B.F.A. programs emphasizing the development of professional dancers, teachers, choreographers and scholars through cognitive, affective, and psychomotor taxonomies. The Dance Department's vision is to proliferate the art of dance while promoting excellence in leadership for the field.⁴⁶

Texas Christian University

I conducted my official site-visit of Texas Christian University on February 18th and 19th of 2016, with this being my second visit to this campus. In Fall 2015, I had been on campus briefly for one afternoon as an invited guest instructor to teach a ballet technique class. During this first visit, director of the school Elizabeth Gillaspy generously provided me with a full tour of the dance facilities, so I was already somewhat familiar with the campus and dance facilities prior to my official site-visit. I was also previously familiar with two of the ballet faculty members that I interviewed, as they are active members of CORPS de Ballet International,⁴⁷ and we had met beforehand at a conference. During my formal site-visit in February, I took the time to wander campus, had the opportunity to interview all three of the full-time ballet faculty, and observed

⁴⁵ <http://www.jenni-lyn-watson.com> (accessed June 1, 2017).

⁴⁶ <http://www.mercyhurst.edu/academics/academic-departments/dance> (accessed June 1, 2017).

⁴⁷ See Chapter 3 for a discussion of CORPS de Ballet International.

snippets of three different live studio ballet classes—one taught by each of the individuals I had interviewed.

Founded in 1873, Texas Christian University is located in Fort Worth, Texas and is affiliated with, but not governed by, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Categorized as a Doctoral University: Higher Research Activity (also known as R2) in the Carnegie Classifications, Texas Christian University services a total student population of approximately 10,000. The School for Classical & Contemporary Dance at Texas Christian University offers degrees in both ballet and modern dance, and for those students who wish to study ballet and modern dance equally, the program offers a double major. Notably, Texas Christian University was the first university in the United States to offer a BFA degree in Ballet in 1949. A BFA in Modern Dance was added in 1968, and by 1976 MFA degrees in both ballet and modern dance were offered.⁴⁸ Neither master's degrees are currently offered; according to Gillaspy, these programs' needs became an unsustainable drain on departmental resources.⁴⁹

At the time of data collection, Texas Christian University's School for Classical & Contemporary Dance employed a total of eight full-time faculty members, and three of these are distinctly considered ballet faculty. Of the three ballet faculty members, two hold master's degrees, and one of these two also holds a doctoral degree. The total number of majors estimated at this time was 60, with half of those students being ballet majors. The university has been NASD-accredited since 2006.

⁴⁸ <http://www.dance.tcu.edu/history.asp> (accessed June 1, 2017).

⁴⁹ Interview with Elizabeth Gillaspy, Texas Christian University.

Previously labeled the Department of Ballet and Modern Dance, around the year 2000 the name was changed to the School for Classical & Contemporary Dance to reflect the continual evolution of the ballet and modern dance programs. Gillaspy noted that while ballet is generally fairly easily defined, modern dance tends to elicit notions of codified historical modern dance forms. The faculty chose the school's name with the understanding that both terms, *classical* and *contemporary*, may be used to refer to both ballet and modern dance. Gillaspy refers to the "traditional" version of considering ballet and modern as two separate tracks, however, also points out how they had begun to converge and overlap in many ways over time. She remarked that the school's faculty discussions consistently include negotiating how the curriculum for each degree can continue to overlap.⁵⁰

The physical home of the school is Erma Lowe Hall. Originally built in 1921 and renovated to house the ballet program in 1973, Erma Lowe Hall was most recently renovated in 2011. The renovations were masterful in maintaining some of the history—the exposed brick, natural light, and studio footprints—while updating the buildings appearance and accessibility. The building feels at once traditional and up-to-date—a fitting metaphor for the classical and contemporary nature of the school. Erma Lowe Hall is the exclusive home of the School for Classical & Contemporary Dance, providing three spacious dance studios, one of which can be converted into a theatre. In addition, the building houses a wellness/physical therapy space and an abundant costume shop.

⁵⁰ Interview with Elizabeth Gillaspy, Texas Christian University.

One of the unique characteristics of this program is the explicit conviction concerning academic rigor in partnership with the physical and creative studio practice. The school's website claims that the department's founding mission is "to balance dance training with academic achievement."⁵¹ Unlike most of the programs that I researched, Texas Christian University's website openly proclaims the academic expectations within the program's curriculum:

Scholarship combines theory and practice as students hone their dance research and writing skills. History comes alive in the classical variations course; theory meets practice as students hone their abilities to analyze their own choreographic work and that of others; and dancers integrate the design skills they acquire across the curriculum when lighting their own choreographies. And, with an understanding of body mechanics, dancers learn to turn their knowledge both inward – as they work toward performance – and outward – as they begin to communicate as teachers themselves.⁵²

Another unique element of Texas Christian University's dance program is the sense of global outlook and engagement. Each faculty member I interviewed, in one way or another, touched on this topic, and the departmental website also highlights international experiences. While there have been a variety of international experiences for students over the years, there is a new study abroad program, which offers students the opportunity to continue their dance studies at the University of Roehampton's dance department in the United Kingdom through the TCU-in-London: Roehampton Program.⁵³

⁵¹ <http://www.dance.tcu.edu/history.asp> (accessed June 1, 2017).

⁵² <https://finearts.tcu.edu/dance/academics/areas-of-study/> (accessed June 1, 2017).

⁵³ <http://www.theudancer.com/universities/texas-christian-university> (accessed May 16, 2017).

The mission statement for Texas Christian University's School for Classical & Contemporary Dance reads:

The School for Classical & Contemporary Dance's mission is to develop educated dance artists who are prepared to become professionals and leaders in the global dance community.⁵⁴

University of Oklahoma

I visited the University of Oklahoma on February 16th and 17th of 2016. This was my first visit to this campus, and I knew none of the faculty other than by reputation. If I had to use one word to describe my feelings about this site visit, it would be *hospitality*. I was honestly a bit overwhelmed by the generosity and thoughtfulness of Dean Mary Margaret Holt and Director of the School of Dance Clara Cravey Stanley. They treated me like an important guest and seemed far more open and trusting than other programs I visited. Dean Holt even arranged for me to use a formal conference room for all of the interviews so that I did not have to schlep my belongings—bag, video camera, notebooks, etc.—around unnecessarily. During my visit, Holt and Stanley provided tours of the facilities, offered water, and went out of their way to make me feel welcome. There were six full-time ballet faculty members at the time of data collection. I was unable to schedule an interview with one who was out of town, and another faculty member cancelled due to an unexpected illness. A third faculty member, while willing to speak with me off-the-record, was unwilling to sign the IRB form or have a recorded

⁵⁴ <http://catalog.tcu.edu/2011-2012/undergraduate/1698.htm> (accessed June 1, 2017).

conversation. This faculty member was also adamant that I did not have permission to use their name in print. All said, I completed three formal interviews.

The University of Oklahoma, located in Norman, Oklahoma, is a public research institution categorized as a Doctoral University: Highest Research Activity (also known as R1) in the Carnegie Classification system. Founded in 1890, the university is the state's largest, enrolling over 30,000 students in 2016. Dance at the University of Oklahoma began in 1961 when Miguel Terekhov and Yvonne Chouteau, both former dancers with Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo, began teaching ballet classes on campus. This duo developed the curriculum for a dance program, which later became a Department of Dance, under the umbrella of the School of Drama. In 1998, the Department of Dance became a free-standing School of Dance housed within the College of Fine Arts.

Much like Texas Christian University, the University of Oklahoma offers degrees in both ballet and modern dance, currently offering a BFA in Ballet Pedagogy, a BFA in Ballet Performance, a BFA in Modern Dance, a MFA in Dance, and a Dance History minor. At the time of data collection, the estimated number of enrolled majors was 75, with approximately 35 of those pursuing the ballet degree. Of the programs that I researched, the School of Dance at the University of Oklahoma is one of only two⁵⁵ that awards graduate degrees, and most of the ballet faculty members hold graduate degrees in addition to their extensive professional performance backgrounds.

⁵⁵ The University of Utah also offers graduate degrees in dance.

The University of Oklahoma's dance program has benefitted from strong, long-term leadership in the person of Mary Margaret Holt. Holt has been at the University of Oklahoma for thirty years, working her way from adjunct faculty, to full-time faculty member, to director of the school, and she is currently serving as the Dean of the College of Fine Arts. Even in her role as Dean, she remains influential in the School of Dance, continuing to teach dance courses each semester and working closely with the School of Dance director. During my site visit, Holt was a gracious host, generous with her time and willing to escort me on a tour of the dance facilities. In my time with Holt, it was apparent that she is deeply invested in the history and future of the program, and her endeavors in fundraising and administration have had—and will continue to have—a positive impact on the School of Dance.

The dance facilities at the University of Oklahoma are some of the most impressive I have seen. The School of Dance is physically housed within the Donald W. Reynolds Performing Arts Center, built in 2005, and utilizes additional spaces in the adjoining Rupel J. Jones Fine Arts Center. The School of Dance has access to two theatres, three large dance studios, a spacious conditioning/Pilates space, and ample dressing room facilities. Due to Holt's savviness, when the endowment was planned for the new facilities a portion was set aside for maintenance and upkeep. So, despite the fact that the space is now over ten years old, it has been so beautifully maintained that it still seems brand new. The School of Dance also benefits from an endowment that funds the Brackett Distinguished Visiting Artist Chair. In effect since 2005, this endowment has

funded such distinguished guests as Donald McKayle, Violette Verdy, Frederic Franklin, and Carla Maxwell, to name just a few.⁵⁶

Like Butler University, the University of Oklahoma honors its Ballets Russes heritage. During my visit, I was fortunate enough to see some of the Ballets Russes Archive collection housed within the School of Dance. The collection includes contracts, correspondence, programs, newspaper clippings, diaries, scrapbooks, photographs—all manner of ephemera—and also includes costumes.⁵⁷ I must admit that one of the highlights of my visit was seeing a pair of Tamara Karsavina's pointe shoes, probably dated around 1915, somewhat disintegrated and nestled in a tissue-paper-cushioned box. During my visit, Holt also mentioned that the school was in the planning stages for the following year's production of a Ballets Russes retrospective concert, which would include a reproduction of Michel Fokine's *Firebird*, originally choreographed for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes in 1910.

The mission of the School of Dance is three-pronged: to prepare students for "careers as performing artists, choreographers and teachers," to "provide high quality dance performances," and to "be a positive force in the cultural climate" throughout the state and region.⁵⁸ Clearly, performance is paramount and this sentiment is echoed when visiting the school's website where the home page announces the season's repertoire and

⁵⁶ <http://dance.ou.edu/guest-artists/> (accessed June 1, 2017).

⁵⁷ <http://www.ou.edu/brarchive/about.html> (accessed June 1, 2017).

⁵⁸ <http://dance.ou.edu/about/school-of-dance/> (accessed June 1, 2017).

links directly to options for ticket sales. The school advertises two resident performing groups: Oklahoma Festival Ballet and Contemporary Dance Oklahoma.

The mission statement for the University of Oklahoma's School of Dance reads,

As the only School of Dance in the state of Oklahoma, our Mission is to provide professionally oriented students in classical ballet and modern dance with a thorough experiential base of artistic and academic programs designed to prepare them for careers as performing artists, choreographers and teachers; to provide high quality dance performances locally, regionally, and internationally stimulating interest in and appreciation for dance as a performing art; to be a positive force in the cultural climate in the state of Oklahoma and the region, interacting with and supporting all art forms.⁵⁹

University of Utah

Given my current employment, this is the trickiest program for me to write about analytically. I am painfully aware of how impossible it is for me to be completely without bias. Since I work daily at the University of Utah, I did not do a formal site-visit as with the other sites. The interviews were scheduled over the span of several weeks at times that were convenient for participating faculty members. Given this luxury of time, I conducted interviews with all eight full-time faculty members, excepting myself of course. In an effort to make these faculty members feel most comfortable, I conducted the interviews in their individual offices rather than in mine. I am aware that, given our relationships, these colleagues may have felt uncomfortable speaking freely, but I believe many of them did.

Established in 1850, the University of Utah is the state's oldest and largest public university. Located in Salt Lake City, on the slopes of the foothills of the Wasatch

⁵⁹ <http://dance.ou.edu/about/> (accessed June 1, 2017).

mountain range, the university is known as much for its panoramic views as for its academics and athletics. Categorized as a Doctoral University: Highest Research Activity (also known as R1) in the Carnegie Classifications, the University of Utah services a total student population of over 30,000 and is affectionately referred to by locals and the university community as “the U.” Historically, the University of Utah has been home to two separate dance departments, the Department of Ballet and the Department of Modern Dance, each with its own rich and distinct history. In Fall of 2016 the School of Dance was formed, joining the two programs under one administrative umbrella. However, given the focus of this research and the timing and nature of this union, I will focus on the former Department of Ballet, as this was the structure during the time of my data collection.

In 1951, noted American dancer and ballet teacher Willam F. Christensen returned to his home state of Utah and founded the Department of Ballet at the University of Utah. As the founder and long-serving director of the San Francisco Ballet, Christensen brought his professional experience and expectations to a university setting and—with urging from students, graduates, and faculty—was prompted to form the professional company now known as Ballet West. Although Ballet West and the university’s ballet program have gone through varying levels of integration over the years, there is still a strong connection through the Ballet West alumni on faculty at the university and through the joint trainee program. The joint trainee program is a partnership between Ballet West and the University of Utah ballet program which provides ballet majors who have been selected as Ballet West trainees an opportunity to

continue pursuing a degree while upholding their class, rehearsal, and performance commitments to Ballet West.

The University of Utah's ballet program services approximately 120 BFA in Ballet majors, recruiting students both nationally and internationally. At the time of data collection, there were eight full-time faculty members. Of the eight full-time faculty members, four held master's degrees, and one (me) was working toward a doctoral degree. All of the faculty members have professional performance experience on a national or international level. The university is NASD-accredited, and the program offers a BFA in Ballet with an optional studio teaching certificate.⁶⁰ The program has recently re-instated the MFA in Ballet, which had been on hiatus for six years due to a lack of resources, and the first cohort of the newly re-envisioned graduate program joined the department in Fall of 2017. This new graduate program was in the planning stages during the time of my data collection.

The School of Dance is physically housed in the Alice Sheets Marriott Center for Dance on the university's main campus. Constructed in 1989, this facility was designed especially with dance in mind. The three-story building contains a 333-seat dance theatre, six large studios—one of which can transform into a black box theatre, two smaller studios, a Pilates room, spacious dressing rooms, and a sizable costume shop.

⁶⁰ This optional certificate is geared toward preparing those interested in working in private studios or professional ballet academies. It requires additional coursework in ballet pedagogy, human development, and stagecraft/production.

While the ballet program strives to produce a full-length ballet every other year, in recent years limitations in faculty and financial resources have been prohibitive. Although, during interviews several faculty members mentioned plans for a full-length production the following year. Each year the ballet program brings in at least two guest master teachers and at least two guest choreographers or répétiteurs to restage masterworks, demonstrating a commitment to remain connected to the field of ballet outside of academe. While this program offers conservatory-quality studio training, multiple faculty members spoke of their investment in upholding the academic rigor expected in R1 universities. A major curricular revision in 2015 demonstrates this commitment by increased requirements in degree-specific theory coursework.

The mission statement of the Department of Ballet (now Ballet Program) at the University of Utah reads,

The Mission of the Ballet Program is to prepare students for a variety of professional opportunities in the field of Ballet and related dance forms. The Ballet Program provides a comprehensive curriculum with training in technique, performance, pedagogy, critical thinking, creative process, and creative and scholarly research culminating in a Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) Degree. The Ballet Program offers a wide array of performance opportunities for our students while honoring the academic rigor of a Research I university.⁶¹

Chapter Conclusion

Each of these programs expresses a mission that supports the continuation and longevity of ballet as a historic dance technique, performance practice, and discipline of study in higher education. Each faculty member I interviewed expressed pride in their

⁶¹ http://www.dance.utah.edu/images/pdfs-doc/Ballet_Program_Overview_16-17.pdf (accessed June 1, 2017).

institution and art, while admitting, in one way or another, to grappling with the inherent issues of housing a performing art as a discipline of study within an academic unit in a university setting. While there are variations within the missions and philosophies, faculty and student numbers and profiles, geography, history, and evolution, there are also commonalities among the programs, which are discussed in the following chapters.

CHAPTER V

THE CURRICULUM: A COMPARISON AND ANALYSIS

*For the curriculum has been an arena in which the dimensions of American culture have been measured, an environment for certifying an elite at one time and for facilitating the mobility of an emerging middle class at another. It has been one of those places where we have told ourselves who we are. It is important territory.*⁶²

~Frederick Rudolph, Education Scholar

I once heard a colleague declare a belief in “conquering the world through curriculum.” While partially intended as sarcastic humor, this comment, as with most effective humor, contained an element of sincerity. For this colleague, the intention was to share a belief in the potential impact of curriculum and engender among faculty members a genuine interest in the crafting of quality curricula. While the pronouncement seemed a bit eccentric at the time, it made quite an impact on me. It is a phrase I now recite to myself when dealing with curricular issues, especially when my mind wanders into the often-dull dealings with assessment, objectives, learning outcomes, and any other number of curricular buzzwords. This simple statement, “conquering the world through curriculum,” caused me to reconsider my understanding of curriculum and how the curriculum itself makes meanings as a representation of the values of faculty members, disciplines, and institutions. If one looks closely at curriculum, it is revealing. Curriculum tells us something about an institution’s values, what the faculty believe, and how they

⁶² Rudolph, 1.

make meaning through the sharing of knowledge. Curricular design can also expose how we, as dance educators, craft, innovate, justify, and maintain what we deem important.

Early dance educator Margaret H'Doubler deserves a nod of appreciation in this discussion of dance curricula. For, as dance historian Thomas Hagood wrote,

H'Doubler's legacy is in the idea that dance, as a field of study, included course work in the science of movement (kinesiology), practice in developing fundamental movement skills (technique), understanding historical perspectives (dance history), manipulating movement creatively (rhythmic analysis), how to teach the body to move (teaching methods), and developing an understanding of classic and contemporary thinking on the moving body (dance philosophy). (99)

H'Doubler's ideas about crafting curricula, ideas that reflected her opinion of the essence of dance while simultaneously attempting to fit into a mold previously established by other disciplines in higher education, remain evident today in the general structure and course offerings of most university dance curricula.

In this chapter, I analyze the curricular design of six different ballet-focused BFA degrees: Butler University's BFA in Ballet Performance, Friends University's BFA in Ballet, Mercyhurst University's BFA in Dance, Texas Christian University's BFA in Ballet, the University of Oklahoma's BFA in Ballet Performance, and the University of Utah's BFA in Ballet. While some of these university programs offer additional degrees⁶³, in this analysis of curricula I focus explicitly on the ballet-specific performance-based BFA degrees. Much curricular information about each of these degrees is available through the degree plans available on each university's website. As I perused course offerings, there were instances in which I was unsure about the content of

⁶³ See Chapter 4.

specific courses given only the course title. In these cases, I searched university course catalogs for full course descriptions and/or consulted with faculty members within the programs for clarity. This process enabled me to assign each specific course to an appropriate category.

As a value measurement, I look primarily at credit⁶⁴ requirements. Admittedly, this is an imperfect system of measurement since there is often inaccuracy in terms of equating actual time invested with the credit values assigned to courses, and the manner of assigning credit values may vary among institutions. For example, at the University of Utah ballet technique courses meet ten hours per week for a value of three credits, while at Friends University ballet technique courses meet seven and a half hours per week for a value of three credits. This is but one example of many demonstrating how each university varies in its manner of assigning credit value to courses. Additionally, while each of the degrees that I study here requires between 122 and 131 total credits, the actual BFA credit requirements range from 50 to 88. This type of significant discrepancy makes it difficult to construct hard comparisons about value placed on differing types of courses; however, by taking a broad view and considering percentages, the information is still informative.

For simplicity in categorizing the curricular course offerings, I have opted to utilize identifiers from the NASD Handbook. (Though, I should note that not all the universities included here are NASD-accredited; Friends University and the University of

⁶⁴ Universities vary in the usage of the terms “credit hours,” “credits,” “hours,” and “units.” For consistency, I use the term credit.

Oklahoma are currently not NASD-accredited, but the other four institutions are.) Within the NASD Handbook, the “Common Body of Knowledge and Skills” is defined by four categories: 1) Performance, 2) Choreography, 3) Theoretical and Historical Studies, and 4) Teaching. To be clear, this is by no means a perfect system. One issue that makes this system of categorization difficult for in-depth analysis is the broad nature of the Theoretical and Historical Studies category, which might include courses ranging in topics from kinesiology to music to costume design. So, for this analysis, I have created sub-categories within the Theoretical and Historical Studies category, which I explain further in the following discussion of the categories.

Another issue arises when attempting to categorize a course that might include content that overlaps differing categories. For example, might a Pilates course (Performance) offer content that overlaps with a kinesiology course (Theoretical and Historical Studies)? Further, does kinesiology really fit into a category labeled as “theoretical” and “historical” when it is actually more of a scientific approach to the dancing body? With these questions in mind, I attempt to point out problematic variables and curricular anomalies. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this analysis the NASD system of categorization, while imperfect, provides an interesting means of comparing the programs.

In the following sections, I report my findings through a comparison of the 2016-2017 degree plans for each of the six schools. The first four sections below address the four NASD categories—Performance, Choreography, Historical & Theoretical Studies, and Teaching—using a brief description of my findings and figures to illustrate those

findings. The final section of this chapter culminates with an analytical discussion of those findings, including my thoughts on what these findings tell about how each curriculum gives insights into what these programs value in terms of ballet knowledge.

Performance

The Performance category of coursework includes studio-based physical practice courses, which encompasses a variety of technique courses—ballet, modern dance, jazz dance, improvisation, etc.—and also includes courses in which repertoire is learned, such as pointe variations courses.⁶⁵ Additionally, this category includes performance courses connected to how students receive credit for their participation as performers in concerts/productions. For this study, I chose to think of the Performance category as any coursework that is primarily based in physical practice. So, I have also included in the Performance category other physical practice courses such as Pilates and physical conditioning, which are generally a very small component of degree requirements. The following breakdown reflects the amount of physical practice requirements for each program.

Butler University: Performance Coursework

Butler University's BFA in Dance requires a total of 128 credits, with 71 of those credits being specific to the dance degree. Of the 71 degree-specific credits, 50 credits are in the Performance category. The 50 credits in the Performance category may be broken down further as follows: 14 credits for ballet specific technique courses, including men's

⁶⁵ Pointe variations courses consist of general technique focusing on pointe work and learning solos from classical repertoire.

class, pointe, and pas de deux; 12 credits for other genres of dance technique, including modern dance, jazz dance, improvisation, and character dance; 8 credits for “advanced technique” in either ballet, jazz dance, or modern dance; 2 credits for conditioning courses titled “Body Placement 1 & 2;” and 14 credits for concert-related courses titled “Masterworks of Dance” and “Butler Ballet.”

Friends University: Performance Coursework

Friends University’s BFA in Ballet requires a total of 124 credits, with 50 of those credits being specific to the dance degree. Of those 50 degree-specific credits, 36 are in the category of Performance. The 36 credits in the Performance category may be broken down further as follows: 6 credits are for “Repertoire,” which are credits awarded for rehearsals and performances; 8 are for “Related Dance Forms,” a class that alternates each semester between the practice of jazz dance, tap dance, and modern dance; and the remaining 22 credits are for ballet technique courses.

Mercyhurst University: Performance Coursework

Mercyhurst University’s BFA in Dance requires a total of 131 credits, with 80 of those credits being specific to the dance degree. Of those 80 degree-specific credits, 54 credits are in the category of Performance. The 54 credits in the Performance category may be broken down further as follows: 24 are for ballet technique courses, 13 are for other genres of technique, including modern dance, jazz dance, tap dance, and musical theatre dance; 9 are for elective studio courses; 6 are for rehearsals and performances; and 1 is for “Dance Conditioning.”

Texas Christian University: Performance Coursework

Texas Christian University's BFA in Ballet requires a total of 127 credits, with 88 of those credits being specific to the dance degree. Of those 88 degree-specific credits, 38.5 are in the category of Performance. The 38.5 credits in the Performance category may be broken down further as follows: 21 credits are for ballet technique courses, including pointe; 10.5 credits are technique courses in other genres, including modern dance, improvisation, and "International Dance Forms"; 4 credits are for conditioning and body work courses; and 1 credit is for rehearsal and performance.

University of Oklahoma: Performance Coursework

The University of Oklahoma's BFA in Ballet requires a total of 124-128 credits, with 70-71 of those credits being specific to the dance degree.⁶⁶ Of those 70-71 degree-specific credits, 52 are in the category of Performance. The 52 credits in the Performance category may be broken down further as follows: 38 credits are for ballet technique courses, including pointe, variations, and pas de deux; 4 credits are for modern dance, the only other genre required; and 14 credits are for rehearsals and performances.

University of Utah: Performance Coursework

The University of Utah's BFA in Ballet requires a total of 122 credits, with 82 of those credits being specific to the dance degree. Of those 82 degree-specific credits, 40 credits are in the category of Performance. The 40 credits in the Performance category may be broken down further as follows: 27 credits are for ballet technique courses,

⁶⁶ The varying credit totals are reflective of elective options.

including men's class, pointe, and pas de deux; 6 credits are for other genres of technique, including modern dance, jazz dance, and character dance; 6 credits are for rehearsals and performance; and 1 credit is for Pilates.

Figure 1 demonstrates each university's Performance coursework requirements by percentages in four different sub-categories:

1. *Ballet technique* coursework is by far the largest percentage of coursework in this category, and includes pointe, men's class, and pas de deux courses. Ballet technique coursework is represented on the pie charts in purple.
2. *Other technique* coursework includes modern dance, jazz dance, musical theatre dance, etc. Other technique coursework is represented on the pie charts in blue.
3. *Bodywork* courses include conditioning practices, such as Pilates. Bodywork courses are represented on the pie charts in green.
4. *Performance* coursework includes credits earned for rehearsals and performances. Performance coursework is represented on the pie charts in orange.

Performance Coursework Requirements by University

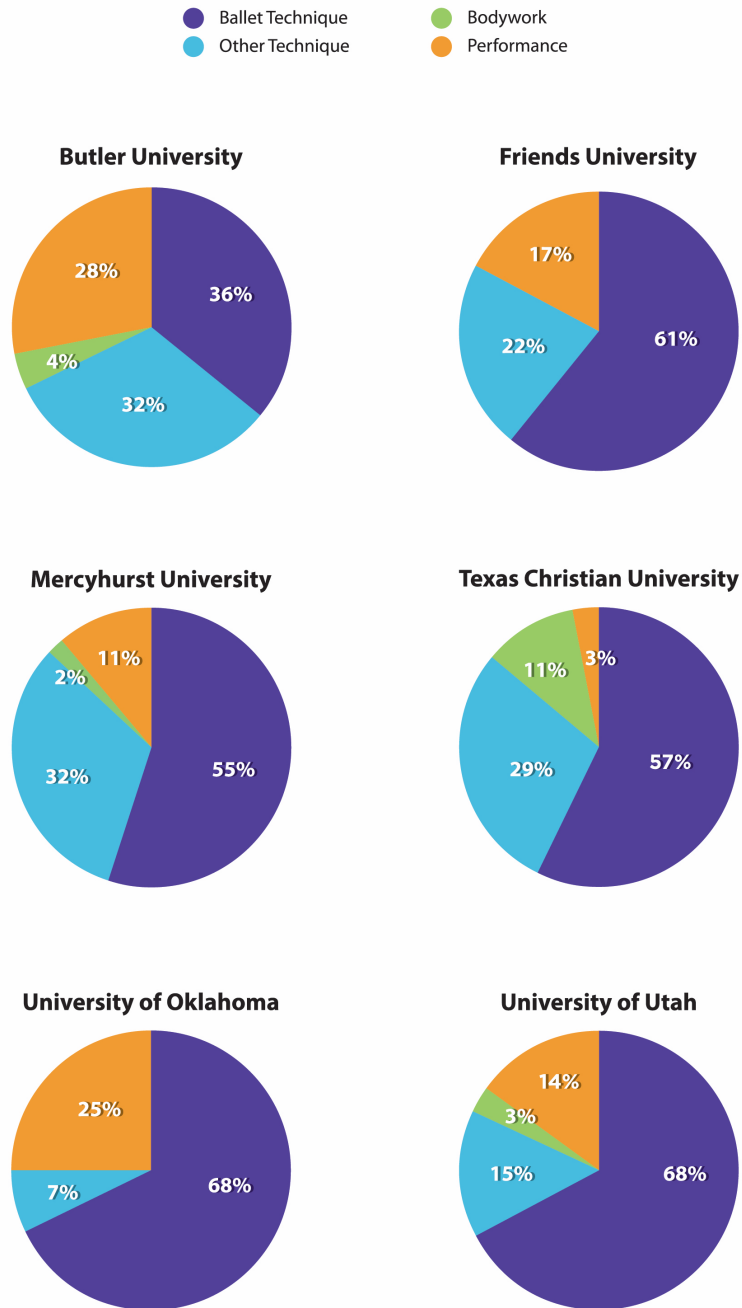


Figure 1. Performance Coursework Requirements by University.

Choreography

The Choreography category includes coursework in the creative practice of generating and structuring movement. As mentioned in Chapter 3, NASD accreditation standards require four semesters of coursework in choreography for BFA degrees. The NASD Handbook reads: “Students must develop basic knowledge and skills in choreography and have opportunities to develop their choreographic potential in studies that include traditional and/or experimental approaches. A minimum of two years of coursework in choreography is required” (98). Of the programs studied here, three of the six adhere to the “minimum of two years” mandate, but it is not necessarily common practice. Although four of the six universities investigated here are currently NASD-accredited, even those accredited institutions do not all adhere to this mandate. For example, Butler University only requires two semesters of choreography, yet this university is currently NASD-accredited. The following breakdown reflects the choreography coursework requirements for each program.

Butler University: Choreography Coursework

Butler University’s BFA in Dance requires two semesters of choreography totaling 4 credits.

Friends University: Choreography Coursework

Friends University’s BFA in Ballet requires two semesters of choreography totaling 5 credits.

Mercyhurst University: Choreography Coursework

Mercyhurst University's BFA in Dance requires a four-semester sequence of choreography courses totaling 12 credits. The sequence culminates with "Senior Seminar: Choreography IV Project," thus connecting choreography to the students' senior capstone course.

Texas Christian University: Choreography Coursework

Texas Christian University's BFA in Ballet requires a four-semester sequence of choreography courses totaling 10 credits. The courses are labeled with detailed titles: "Choreography I: Elements of Dance Composition," "Choreography II: Intermediate Dance Composition," "Choreography III: Advanced Dance Composition," and "Choreography IV: Senior Capstone." Like Mercyhurst University, Texas Christian University connects the final semester of the choreography coursework sequence to the senior capstone.

University of Oklahoma: Choreography Coursework

The University of Oklahoma's BFA in Ballet requires a one-semester 2-credit course, titled "Ballet Choreography."

University of Utah: Choreography Coursework

The University of Utah's BFA in Ballet requires a four-semester sequence of "Creative Process/Choreography Classes" totaling 10-11 credits. The first semester is "Improvisation to Choreography," followed by "Choreography I" and "Choreography II." The fourth semester, the student may choose between two options: "Choreography III & Production" or "Advanced Choreography."

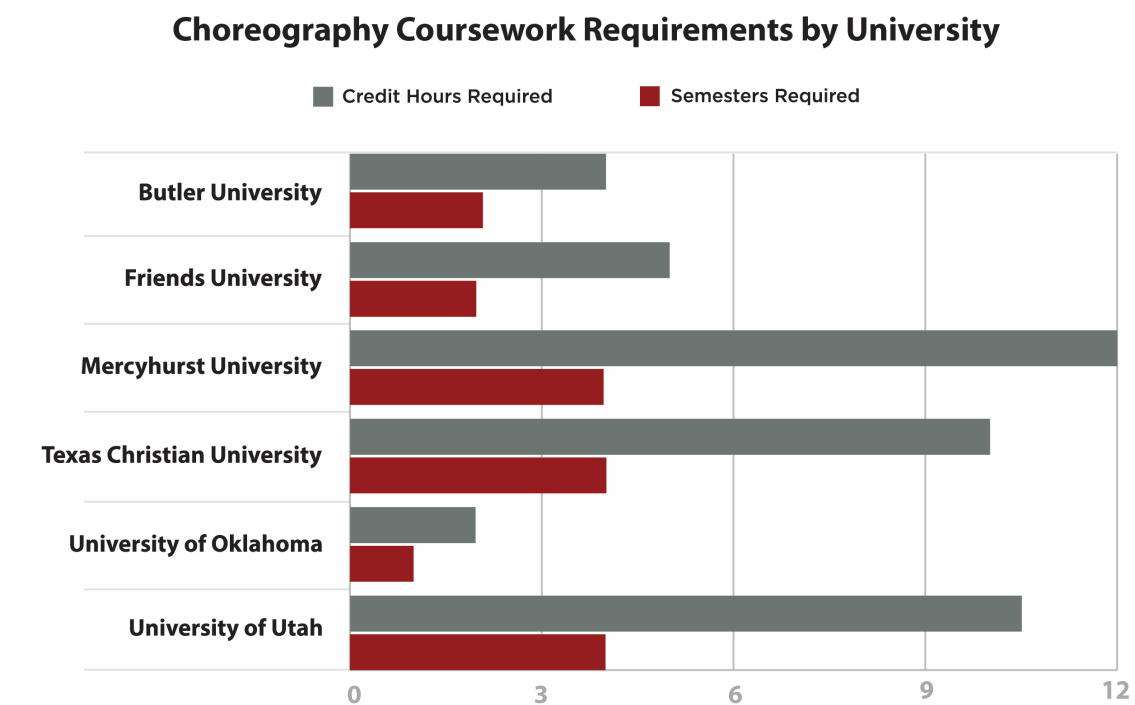


Figure 2. Choreography Coursework Requirements by University.

Figure 2 illustrates a comparison of each university's choreography coursework requirements in terms of both credits and semesters.

Theoretical and Historical Studies

Theoretical and Historical Studies is by far the broadest of NASD's curricular categories. It encompasses coursework in such diverse areas as history, music, kinesiology, health and wellness, stagecraft, career preparation courses, etc. Because this category is somewhat of a catch-all, for this study I have broken it into sub-categories as follows:

1. *History/Theory* coursework includes course requirements in the areas of historical and theoretical studies.

2. *Scientific* coursework encompasses courses with a scientific basis, such as kinesiology, anatomy, and wellness courses.
3. *Music* coursework encompasses any courses in which music is the primary element of study.
4. *Movement Analysis* coursework includes courses specifically described as movement analysis.
5. *Production* coursework includes courses encompassing elements of production, such as stagecraft, lighting design, costume design, stage make-up, etc.
6. *Career preparation* coursework encompasses courses that focus on preparing for professional aspirations with assignments such as audition preparation, crafting resumes, creating video reels, etc.

The following breakdown reflects the amount of Theoretical and Historical Studies requirements for each program.

Butler University: Coursework in Theoretical and Historical Studies

Butler University's BFA in Dance requires a total of 19 credits in the NASD category of Theoretical and Historical Studies. At Butler, a significant amount of this coursework is in music, which is perhaps a remnant from when the dance program was formerly housed in the School of Music. There are two required music courses offered in the dance program as a part of the BFA requirements—"Music for Dance 1 & 2"—totaling 2 credits. In addition to these departmental courses, under a section titled "Related Area Requirements" on the degree plan, there are two additional required music

courses totaling 5 credits. In addition to the music courses, Butler requires two semesters (6 credits' worth) of dance history, a course titled "Theory & Philosophy of Dance" worth 2 credits, a 2-credit "Introduction to Acting" course, and a 2-credit Laban Movement Analysis course.

Friends University: Coursework in Theoretical and Historical Studies

Friends University's BFA in Ballet degree requires 9 credits in the NASD category of Theoretical and Historical Studies—two semesters (6 credits' worth) of dance history and a senior capstone course worth 3 credits. (The faculty defines this program's senior capstone course explicitly as a career preparation course.)

Mercyhurst University: Coursework in Theoretical and Historical Studies

Mercyhurst University's BFA in Dance requires 15 credits in the NASD category of Theoretical and Historical Studies. This degree requires 3 credits of dance history, 3 credits of music, 3 credits of kinesiology, and 1 credit of production. Additionally, there is a course titled "Dance Essentials" worth 1 credit, which department chair Tauna Hunter defines as a freshman seminar and career preparation course. Additionally, there is a 1-credit course titled "Senior Pro-Seminar," which Hunter defines as a career preparation course. Mercyhurst also requires 3 credits from a list of electives including courses such as "Introduction to Arts Management" and "Introduction to Labanotation."

Texas Christian University: Coursework in Theoretical and Historical Studies

Texas Christian University's BFA in Ballet degree requires 21 credits in the NASD category of Theoretical and Historical Studies—4 credits of coursework in stage production, 9 credits of dance history and theory, and 2 credits of coursework in music.

There are also requirements for science-based courses, such as “The Working Body” and “Functional Anatomy,” totaling 4 credits, and two courses in career preparation for a total of 2 credits.

University of Oklahoma: Coursework in Theoretical and Historical Studies

The University of Oklahoma’s BFA in Ballet degree requires 10-11 credits in the NASD category of Theoretical and Historical Studies. The degree requires coursework in production, including the 1-credit “Stage Makeup for the Dancer” course. There is also a list of electives for additional production coursework. Each student must choose a total of 3-4 credits from the following: “Costume Construction,” “Stagecraft,” and “Basic Lighting.” Additionally, while it is not represented in the total number of credits required for the BFA, students are required to take two semesters—6 credits’ worth—of dance history as part of their core (general education) curriculum. I have opted to include these numbers in the required dance credits analysis rather than leaving them within the core curriculum.

University of Utah: Coursework in Theoretical and Historical Studies

The University of Utah’s BFA in Ballet degree requires 24 credits in the NASD category of Theoretical and Historical Studies—four courses in dance history and theory totaling 12 credits, 4 credits of music coursework, 4 credits of kinesiology courses, and a 1-credit production course “Stagecraft & Lighting.” There are also required career preparation courses: “Freshman Seminar” for 1-credit and a “Senior Capstone” course for 2 credits. The faculty of this program specifically describe these courses as career preparation courses.

Figure 3 illustrates how each university's course requirements in the category of Historical and Theoretical coursework breaks down in sub-categories by percentages.

The sub-categories are represented by colors as follows:

1. *History/Theory* coursework is in blue;
2. *Scientific* coursework is in green;
3. *Music* coursework is in yellow;
4. *Production* coursework is in orange;
5. *Career preparation* coursework is in red;
6. *Movement Analysis* coursework is in gray;
7. And *Other* coursework is in purple.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ It is notable that the only courses that fall into the "other" category are a course in acting required by Butler University's BFA program, and the optional coursework available in an elective category in Mercyhurst University's program.

Theoretical and Historical Coursework Requirements by University

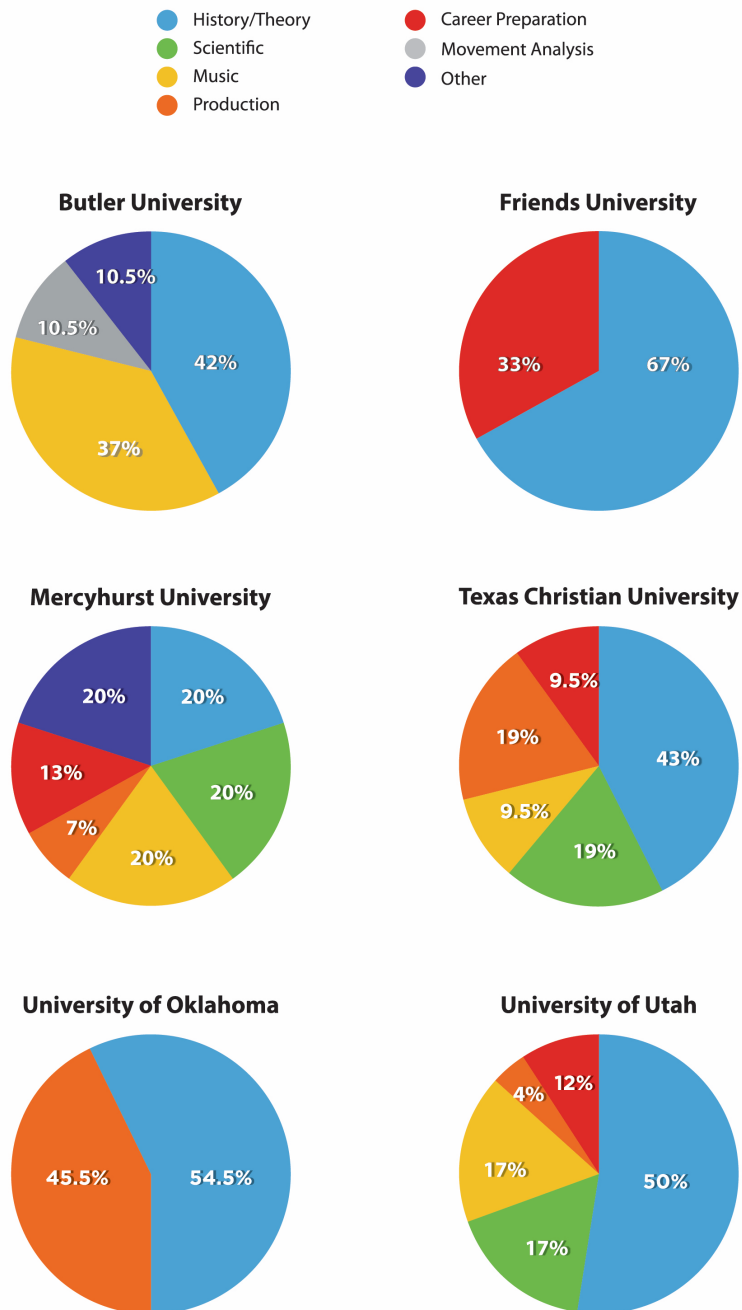


Figure 3. Theoretical and Historical Coursework Requirements by University.

Teaching

In addressing the coursework category of Teaching, the NASD Handbook reads: “Students must develop basic knowledge and skills in dance pedagogy. The program should include the equivalent of at least one course in pedagogy and teaching experience” (99). So, while NASD does not require pedagogy coursework for accreditation, it is highly recommended. It is worth noting that three of the programs—Butler University, the University of Oklahoma, and the University of Utah—also offer distinctive degrees focusing on pedagogy. While those degrees are not considered in this chapter’s analysis, it is noteworthy that this seems to be a popular area of study at each of these universities.

Butler University: Teaching Coursework

Butler University’s BFA in Dance degree requires two pedagogy courses totaling 4 credits: “Teaching Analysis of Classical Techniques” (a ballet pedagogy course) and “Teaching Analysis – Advanced Classical or Modern or Jazz.”⁶⁸ Butler University also offers a distinct degree focused on teaching, a BA in Dance Pedagogy.

Friends University: Teaching Coursework

Friends University’s BFA in Ballet does not require, nor offer, any pedagogy coursework. This is interesting given that the program has recently advertised an optional degree emphasis in teaching.

⁶⁸ This course, “Advanced Analysis – Advanced Classical or Modern or Jazz,” permits students to choose which the genre of dance upon which they will focus. *Classical* refers to ballet.

Mercyhurst University: Teaching Coursework

Mercyhurst University's BFA in Dance requires one 3-credit dance pedagogy course.

Texas Christian University: Teaching Coursework

Texas Christian University's BFA in Ballet requires one 2-credit course titled "Teaching Methods – Ballet."

University of Oklahoma: Teaching Coursework

The University of Oklahoma's BFA in Ballet requires a 2-credit course titled "Teaching of Ballet Technique." Additionally, this program offers a distinct degree option with a teaching emphasis, a BFA in Ballet Pedagogy.

University of Utah: Teaching Coursework

The University of Utah's BFA in Ballet requires, according to the degree plan, a four-semester sequence of "Teaching Classes" as follows: "Elements of Music," "Ballet Class Music: A Tutorial," "Ballet Pedagogy I," and "Ballet Pedagogy II." This is one of those instances when categorizing courses becomes problematic. I would argue that the first two courses are music courses rather than outright pedagogy courses and have categorized them as such for this analysis. So, for this study, I consider the program as offering two pedagogy courses for a total of 6 credits. It is also notable that this program offers the option to take additional coursework to earn a Studio Teaching Certificate.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ This optional certificate is geared toward preparing those interested in working in private studios or professional ballet academies. It requires additional coursework in ballet pedagogy, human development, and stagecraft/production.

Figure 4 illustrates a comparison of each universities Teaching coursework requirements in terms of both credits and semesters.

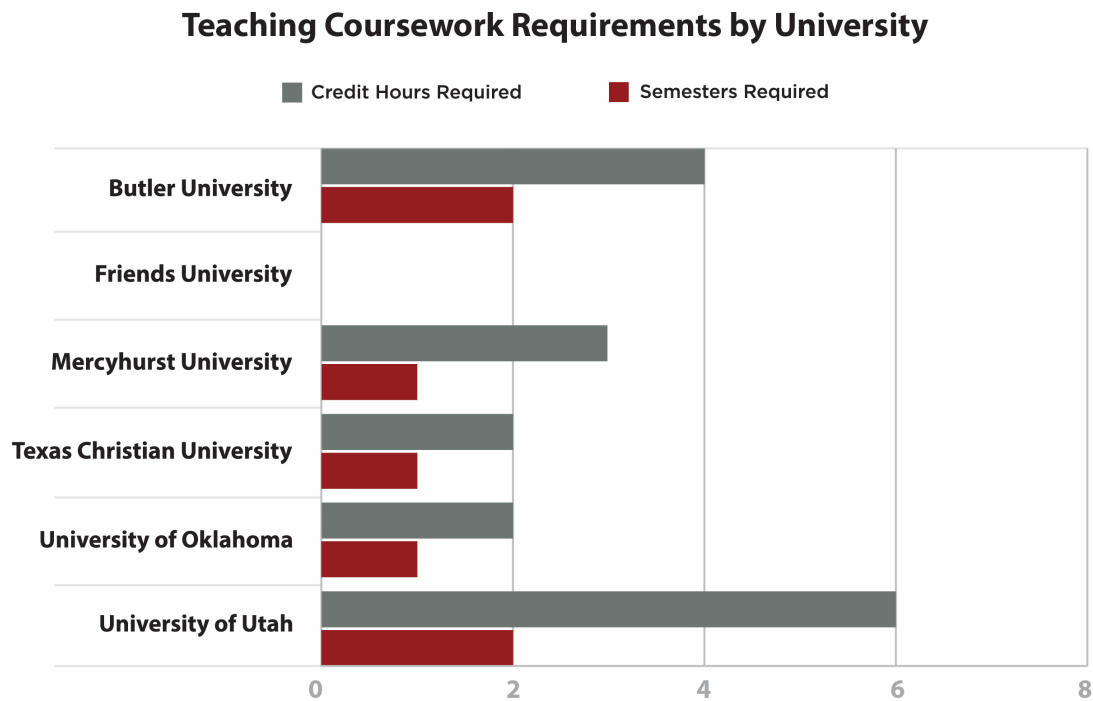


Figure 4. Teaching Coursework Requirements by University

Analytical Discussion of Curricular Comparison

While each program has varying course offerings and requirements, there are consistent themes and surprising differences (See Figure 5 for a pie chart comparison of each program's required curriculum in the four NASD categories; they are represented as percentages of the total degree requirements, excluding general education courses).

Curricular Comparison of the NASD Categories by University

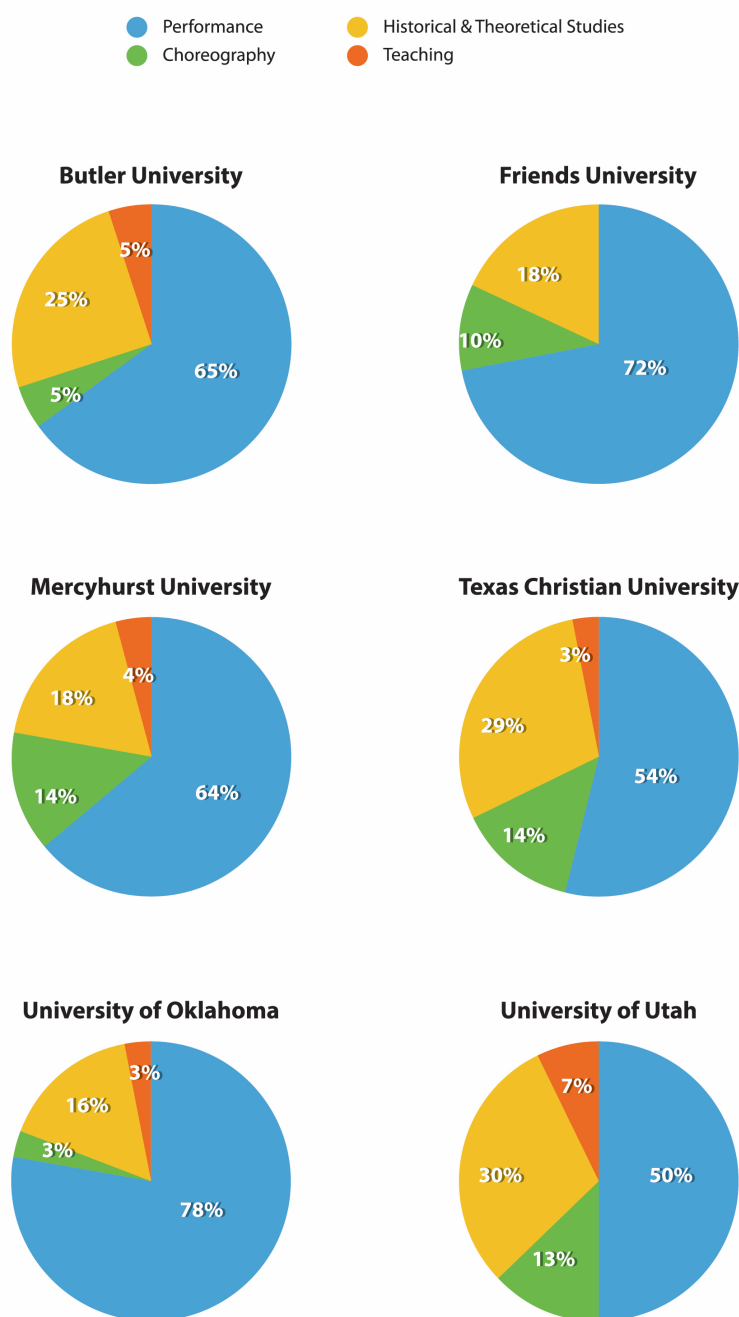


Figure 5. Curricular Comparison of NASD Categories by University.

In comparing credits dedicated to each category, Performance is by far the heaviest component for all the curricula. Given the nature of the BFA degree, this is expected. This valuing of performance-based coursework is also reflected in the NASD Handbook, which states that 65% of BFA coursework must be “in studio work and related areas” (87). For the six programs studied here, an average of 64% of required coursework is dedicated to performance and physical practice courses. However, it is worth mentioning that there is a significant range within this average. For instance, the University of Utah’s requirement for performance coursework makes up 50% of the total BFA requirements, and the University of Oklahoma’s requirement for the same type of coursework is significantly higher at 78%. Regardless of this discrepancy, the importance of performance-based coursework is evident.

In looking at the sub-categories within the Performance category—*Ballet Technique*, *Other Technique*, *Bodywork*, and *Performance*—it is interesting to note that all but one of the programs invests over half of the Performance coursework requirements to ballet-specific technique courses, 58% on average. Beyond this large portion of the category, the amount of coursework dedicated to other areas varies broadly from program to program. Course requirements for technique styles other than ballet range from 7% at the University of Oklahoma to 32% at both Butler University and Mercyhurst University, but across the programs offerings of other styles averages around 23%. Further, even though each program requires coursework in other dance genres, most focus on modern dance as a secondary genre. All of the programs, except Friends University, require modern dance as an additional genre of study. Additionally, all of the programs, except

the University of Oklahoma, also require jazz dance as an additional genre of study. In most programs, the *Bodywork* requirement is the lowest in terms of credit requirements, with no requirements in this sub-category at Friends University or at the University of Oklahoma. However, the exception here is Texas Christian University, which requires more credits of *Bodywork* (11%) than *Performance* (3%). In the *Performance* sub-category, there is also quite a range in the dedicated credits: as noted, only 3% at Texas Christian University, while 28% of Butler's Performance category credits fall into the *Performance* sub-category.

I find the range in credits required by program in the area of production courses (e.g., costuming, lighting design, stagecraft, etc.) particularly interesting in this comparison, as it might be indicative of a number of factors. One of these factors is the availability of theatre spaces. While each of the programs has access to a theatre space, all the programs except the University of Utah share the theatre space with other academic programs in the arts. Additionally, it is likely that production *and* performance requirements are tied to program budgets. If a program has difficulty financially supporting concert productions, the program is less likely to require extensive performance experiences, which in turn might limit the opportunities for coursework in the area of production. It is also logical that programs with a closer connection with a Theatre Department would offer, and or require, more coursework in production areas such as lighting design, technical theatre, costume design, etc.

Historical and Theoretical Studies is the second heaviest credit requirement for the BFA across the six programs, averaging 23%. Although at Mercyhurst University, the

requirements for this category are equal in percentage to the choreography requirements.

While Historical and Theoretical Studies is a broad category, I believe the emphasis in coursework in this area expresses how faculty members value an understanding of dance that goes beyond physical practice and performance. Given the broad nature of this category, as mentioned previously, I have broken it down into six sub-categories:

History/Theory, Scientific, Music, Movement Analysis, Production, and Career Preparation. Also reflected in the pie charts of Figure 3 is the *Other* sub-category.

However, the only courses that fell into the *Other* sub-category were an acting course required at Butler University and elective options at Mercyhurst University. Most of the programs dedicate a significant amount of their Historical and Theoretical coursework to traditional history and theory courses; however, again, there is great variance from program to program. Four of the six programs require coursework in music and in career preparation courses. Only three of the six programs require coursework in science-based areas, such as kinesiology and anatomy. And only three of the six programs require coursework in areas of production, such as lighting design and costuming.

In comparing all six programs, there is a range in requirements for choreography coursework. While the programs on average commit 9% of the total program requirements to choreography, this amount ranges from 3% at the University of Oklahoma to 14% at Mercyhurst University and Texas Christian University. Despite the range, each program requires at least one semester of choreography. It is also noteworthy that two of the universities, Mercyhurst University and Texas Christian University, explicitly connect the final semester of choreographic study to a senior capstone

course/project, demonstrating a valuing of choreography as a culminating project of four years of study. To be clear, in my analysis, I read course descriptions and had discussions with faculty members to ensure that the senior capstone courses were placed in the correct category. In some instances, the senior capstone course is more of a career preparation course, and in others it is primarily a choreography course.

Unfortunately, the Teaching category is the lowest required percentage across the board, except Butler University where Choreography and Teaching are tied at the lowest. Excepting Friends University, all the programs require coursework focusing on pedagogy, but the requirements are not extensive, usually only one course. I find this imbalance in the expectation between the study of pedagogy and the study of choreography interesting, particularly considering the job market. In my experience, graduating dance majors are far more likely to find jobs teaching dance than choreographing or even performing for a living wage. I acknowledge here that this is a philosophical dispute among many faculty, both those teaching in ballet and modern-dance based programs. The dispute concerns whether a dance degree program should be creating workers to fill an existing job market, especially one that shifts over time. Nevertheless, as I noted in Chapter 3, today's students are often viewed as consumers or customers that are keenly aware of the necessity for marketable skills upon graduation.

This notion of how a degree program prepares a student for having marketable skills is another area where NASD requirements seem somewhat outdated and out of touch with student demands and the exponentially quick-changing field of dance outside of higher education. It is noteworthy that three of the universities studied here offer a

distinct degree, emphasis, or certificate focusing specifically on pedagogy, and the success of these degree programs demonstrates an interest and demand for this area of study. However, it also implies that those choosing to focus on more performative skills will not be required to teach. I believe that most faculty in any dance genre would argue that knowing how to teach effectively, how to run workshops for differing age groups, and how to coach dancers in performance is often required of all dance performers and choreographers, even those working within professional dance companies.

Another interesting component of this analysis is the overall lack of electives or choice allowed students within the BFA degree plans. Most of the degree plans are fairly dogmatic in terms of courses required and the sequence in which courses should be taken. While three universities list elective options on their degree plans, electives are generally not necessary to meet the minimum requirements for the degree. I argue that this lack of freedom and choice is not reflective of the “real world” outside of academe. Students must be given the opportunity to choose a path of pursuing the areas of dance that interest them most. My fear is that a dogmatic approach to the discipline of ballet (and dance) within higher education will be detrimental not only to ballet-focused programs, but also to students and to the field at large.

Career options in dance have expanded over the years, but the curriculum of many dance programs has not evolved as quickly as the field of dance outside of academe. It is difficult to tell how much of this inertia is a reflection of NASD standards, which are slow to change, and how much is a result of the inherent bureaucracy of higher education, which can also move at a glacial pace. Dance in higher education is simply not as nimble,

in terms of changing direction quickly, as is dance in the professional and commercial realm.

Regardless, one realization from this curricular analysis is that, while these six programs share a narrow degree focus on one dance style, they demonstrate significant variations in what they choose to require in their degrees. These variations are often dependent on their choice to receive accreditation or not, their histories of connection with other departments, and their current and past faculty members.

CHAPTER VI

STRUGGLING TO BALANCE THE ACADEMIC WITH THE ARTISTIC WHILE CULTIVATING TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

The goal of chapters six and seven is to identify and discuss the major themes that emerged from the interviewing, data collection, and coding processes. The data analysis process culminated with the emergence of two over-arching themes: 1) the ever-present negotiation of balancing the artistic elements of pre-professional ballet training with the academic requirements of institutions of higher education and the resulting transferable skills which are cultivated in university-trained ballet dancers (covered in this chapter) and 2) how the ballet-focused degree programs included in this study connect with the professional realm of ballet in a variety of ways (addressed in Chapter 7). Each of these themes is multi-faceted, and the complexities are considered and analyzed.

In this chapter, I focus on three main ideas that arose from the interview transcriptions concerning the first theme: 1) the academic versus the artistic, particularly as it relates to curricular design, university and accrediting body standards, scheduling, and double major options; 2) transferable skills as valuable assets that are cultivated within the degree programs; and 3) the notion of the critically thinking dancer. Since these themes are specific to the interview process, rather than other data sources, I lean heavily on the language of the participants and include many verbatim quotes since it is critical that the voices of the participants are expressed clearly and accurately. When I include longer quotes, I identify the participant by name. In shorter phrases that are direct

quotes but inserted into the body of my personal analysis, the participant may not be named in the text, but is cited in footnotes. Also, some quotations are cited in footnotes as *confidential*, indicating that participants approved of the use of the quotation, but asked that their name be removed.

Academic vs. Artistic

*I think dance in higher education is like putting a round peg in a square hole. I'm not really sure that it belongs here . . . some things just don't resonate with academicians very well. They don't understand what we do.*⁷⁰

~Tauna Hunter, Dance Department Chair, Mercyhurst University

A perceived inherent conflict between the philosophies of conservatory-level ballet training and the academic expectations of the universities housing the ballet programs arose in almost every interview. This theme emerged during conversations covering a range of subjects, including curricular design, scheduling issues, and student options for double majoring. I realize now that the mere title of my IRB study—*Ballet in Higher Education*—which all participants read on the forms they were required to sign, perhaps established this idea of a binary between ballet and higher education right away, even if subconsciously. Regardless, there seemed within every program to be tension between what the faculty felt the students needed for their dance education and future success in the ballet field as opposed to what the university, and sometimes even the accrediting body, NASD, required in terms of course requirements. And, even within the

⁷⁰ Interview with Tauna Hunter, Mercyhurst University.

requirements specific to the ballet-focused degrees, faculty expressed concerns about balancing academic coursework with more artistic, or practice-based, coursework.

Despite the underlying incongruity between the conservatory aspects of ballet training and the expectations of institutions of higher education, many faculty members made statements celebrating ballet as a discipline of study within higher education, affirming that this route was appropriate for dancers interested in pursuing academic interests while also honing their skills as dance artists through pre-professional ballet training. For example, one professor remarked: “Here they can get the best of both worlds,”⁷¹ referring to how students could pursue academic interests and high-level dance training simultaneously. Another professor affirmed the value placed on academic pursuits, stating: “We're about excellence within this field [of ballet], but we're also about overall excellence in terms of academics...”⁷²

In support of balancing academic rigor with artistic endeavors, many faculty members spoke to the importance of an academic degree as a means of cultivating “well-rounded” individuals. To this effect, Jessica Zeller stated,

We are preparing students who are really well rounded. Our mission is to bring forward students who are steeped in the history and the theoretical implications of their work and various choreographic approaches, knowing what’s out there and what the field currently has to offer, having a breadth of information and ways to approach style and technique.⁷³

⁷¹ Interview with Clara Cravey Stanley, University of Oklahoma.

⁷² Interview with Derek Reid, Butler University.

⁷³ Interview with Jessica Zeller, Texas Christian University.

Zeller's statement connects the notion of well-roundedness directly to some of the curricular components within her program's ballet-focused degree requirements by referring to history, theory, choreographic approaches, and explicitly referencing "the field." In much the same vein, another participant commented on how students should graduate not only with solid ballet technique, but also "a broad understanding of the field."⁷⁴

Rik Wacko spoke about ballet training as a path, saying that it is a "narrow road, which is so hard to travel over." Wacko mentioned critics who argue that young ballet dancers should go directly from early conservatory training into company apprenticeships and, therefore, believe that university training interrupts that path. In answer to these critics, Wacko rationalized that "the beauty of a university ballet program" lies not in interrupting that path, but in "expanding the path" by providing young dancers with "tools, skills, outlooks, and interpretations" that will benefit them when they begin to pursue professional careers.⁷⁵ To this effect, Noelle Partusch stated: "We're teaching them how to navigate the world of ballet, not just jump in to a company with blinders on. They're not *just* dancers. *That's* the role of the university."⁷⁶

Other participants spoke more broadly about how the liberal arts degree fosters well-rounded individuals. For example, Jennifer Weber said,

⁷⁴ Interview with Mark Santillano, Mercyhurst University.

⁷⁵ Interview with Rik Wacko, University of Utah.

⁷⁶ Interview with Noelle Partusch, Mercyhurst University.

We have a great tradition in studio practice, and the performance aspect of our BFA prepares students for life in a professional company, but we also emphasize and highlight the other parts of a liberal arts degree, the academic classes. We honor that students are taking general education requirements outside of this department and becoming more well-rounded people. And hopefully, these experiences are preparing our students for things that can go alongside a professional dance career.⁷⁷

Nevertheless, these statements of support for ballet as a discipline within a university setting were often contradicted by inconsistent and sometimes conflicting perspectives. While some faculty members spoke eloquently about their programs as places for developing young artists both physically and intellectually, their perspectives were at times challenged by other faculty members, sometimes from within the same program, demonstrating that not all faculty members were entirely in agreement about the suitability of pre-professional ballet training within higher education. In fact, two of the faculty members that agreed to speak with me but refused to sign the required IRB forms or permit their names to be included in this document, challenged the place of professional level ballet training in higher education. Another participant expressed similar concerns in the original interview, and then redacted the statement later in fear of retaliation from colleagues. Even Tauna Hunter, who has been a proponent of dance in higher education for over twenty years, acknowledged the difficulty of placing serious dance training in higher education by referring, as previously mentioned, to ballet in higher education as a “round peg in a square hole.” Hunter’s statement continues: “I’m not really sure that it [ballet] belongs here [in higher education]. I’m glad that I have a job

⁷⁷ Interview with Jennifer Weber, University of Utah.

here, but it is an ongoing battle of education- every time any kind of administration rolls over, you start all over again, and some things just don't resonate with academicians very well. They don't understand what we do."⁷⁸

Interestingly, there was another subset of interviewees who admitted to having feelings of doubt about ballet in higher education when they first began working in academe, but then acknowledged how their opinions had changed over a period of time.⁷⁹ This group, all of whom had come from conservatory/professional backgrounds rather than academic backgrounds, spoke to how their experiences since beginning to work within the environment of higher education had transformed their perspective about the possibilities for training professional-level dancers in a university setting. James Ady, who had been working in higher education for less than a year at the time of his interview, said,

I came into this department with a narrow mindset, believing that if you weren't hired as a dancer in a professional ballet company by the time you were 18 you would not be successful as a professional dancer. And my mind has been completely re-arranged after coming here because I see all the beautiful dancers that go on to do choreography, dance professionally, open their own studios, and teach ballet. So, I really think that we have an incredibly important role in higher education as contributors to the field of ballet. My eyes were opened in a great way because I was sort of ignorant to the fact that you could go to college for ballet and still dance professionally.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Interview with Tauna Hunter, Mercyhurst University.

⁷⁹ Interviews with James Ady, University of Utah; Lesley Bories Scalise, Mercyhurst University; Clara Cravey Stanley, University of Oklahoma; Ilya Kozadayev, University of Oklahoma; and Maggie Tesch, University of Utah.

⁸⁰ Interview with James Ady, University of Utah.

Nevertheless, even among faculty members who support the place of pre-professional ballet training in higher education, there were persistent concerns about the burden of attempting to balance academic coursework requirements (required by either NASD, the university, or sometimes both) with the more artistic and practice-based (often studio work) courses, including rehearsal and performance which are indispensable for pre-professional ballet training. In this vein, many faculty members spoke about the curricular design of their degrees, expressing concerns about the adequacy of the curriculum as preparatory for a professional performance career.

A few long-serving faculty members, those who had been involved in curricular discussions over a period of several years, spoke to the restrictions of NASD accreditation standards and lamented that curricular changes made in an effort to meet NASD standards resulted in degree programs that, these faculty members believe, do not adequately prepare students for the field as elite performance artists. One participant spoke about the challenges of “broadening the education” to meet NASD standards “without watering down the rigors of the discipline.”⁸¹ Echoing this sentiment, another professor asserted that increasing the academic rigor negatively affected the programs recruiting efforts, stating: “Several times they [the faculty] have had to change the program to fit into university policy, to fit into higher education, but every time they do that our rate of attracting students has dropped down.”⁸²

⁸¹ Interview with Brent Schneider, University of Utah.

⁸² Interview with Jay Kim, University of Utah.

Sentiments that challenged the favoring of academic coursework at the expense of time spent in the studio reflect the long-standing and ongoing debate in dance programs across the country concerning professionalism and anti-intellectualism.⁸³ One faculty member, echoing many other participants, stated frankly that it was common for ballet-focused programs to be “short on the philosophical and theoretical side.”⁸⁴ Resonating this sentiment, other participants spoke to the narrow focus of students within these programs. One referred to ballet students as “blinkered,” using her hands to form blinders at her temples,⁸⁵ and another referred to the study of ballet as “a narrowly defined road.”⁸⁶

One participant troubled the idea that academic assignments might “detract from their [students] studio work.” Reflecting on how one program had attempted to comply with NASD standards, a faculty member noted that, since the degree program was now “more in line with other universities...[with] more focus on theoretical and research” coursework, the students might be better prepared for “life in general.” However, this faculty member also surmised that students might not be as “prepared technically and physically for professional dancing.”⁸⁷

Regardless of one’s opinion on balancing academic coursework with practice-based coursework, there can be no frank discussion concerning curricular design issues without addressing the inherent temporal limitation of what is accomplishable within a

⁸³ See Chapter 3.

⁸⁴ Interview with Brent Schneider, University of Utah.

⁸⁵ Interview with Clara Cravey Stanley, University of Oklahoma.

⁸⁶ Interview with Rik Wacko, University of Utah.

⁸⁷ Confidential.

four-year period. It is one thing to applaud a balance of academic and studio rigor, but in reality, there are only so many hours in a day and limited resources with which to structure the degree. Reflective of this issue, scheduling conflicts were mentioned as a consistent topic of concern. In addition to the requirements for the ballet-focused degrees, the university requirements for general education courses were regarded as somewhat of an inconvenience by some faculty members. One participant, in a statement that seemed particularly dismissive of coursework occurring outside of the degree, stated: “The kids also have their academics, so sometimes we have to accommodate for those classes.”⁸⁸ Participants spoke of scheduling difficulties and how conflicts unfailingly arose when trying to balance academics with the time-intensive activities of studio courses, rehearsals, and performances. Some expressed the desire to expand the curriculum to include additional coursework, but lamented that there was no time, space, or leeway in credits to offer anything additional.

Compounding the issue of balancing the academic with the artistic, another topic for consideration is the option for students to pursue secondary majors and/or minors. All of the programs included in this study permit students to pursue minors and a second major, and many faculty members spoke about how this option might be appealing, particularly to the parents of their students. However, at one of the schools, Friends University, it is almost impossible to complete a double major due to scheduling conflicts. In consideration of this problem, faculty members at Friends University said

⁸⁸ Confidential.

they encourage students to pursue a minor, which is more manageable in terms of time investment and scheduling.⁸⁹ At the other universities, while students have permission to double major, some opt out because of the time commitment, particularly those students interested in pursuing a performance career. Given the weight and importance of age in terms of hire-ability as a professional ballet dancer, for many students the time commitment for a second major, often an additional year or two, is simply not worth the time it might detract from an already short-lived performance career.

The faculty members I interviewed held varying opinions about the option for students to double major. At one of the larger programs, the University of Utah, a faculty member boasted that over fifty percent of the ballet majors were double majors.⁹⁰ Two of the faculty members from the University of Oklahoma mentioned that double majors were encouraged, but one casually referred to the double major as a “back-up plan” rather than, as others might think of double majors, an option in which one degree may inform the other. While several faculty members at Mercyhurst University mentioned the tendency for their students to double major or add a minor, and seemed to encourage it, there were also statements that echoed the idea that these additional pursuits are simply back-up plans, something to “fall back on.” One faculty member mentioned that these pursuits were “key to moving forward practically,”⁹¹ while another faculty member said that she encouraged students to pursue other degrees because of a shortage of “arts

⁸⁹ Interview with Sharon Rogers, Friends University.

⁹⁰ Interview with Brent Schneider, University of Utah.

⁹¹ Interview with Melissa Bobick, Mercyhurst University.

funding and lack of jobs out there.”⁹² An interview participant from another institution remarked that often students would end up deciding to pursue their secondary academic interest as a career path, rather than pursuing a career in ballet.⁹³

Taken as a whole, the individual opinions of the interview participants overwhelmingly expressed the difficulty of placing the “square peg” of ballet into the “round hole” of academe. Whether in dealing with curricular structure and priorities, dealing with scheduling conflicts, or coping with students’ (and their parents’) desires for the pursuit of minors and secondary majors, the sense that ballet is a not-quite-comfortable fit for higher education was apparent and pervasive. However, many commented on how the university-trained dancer does gain transferable skills during their years of collegiate study.

Transferable Skills

*We value students’ ability to be facile in those conversations that step outside of dance, but also hope that they have enough breadth of knowledge to look for linkages and connections and bridges to other disciplines . . . that’s an artistic education, it’s a rigorous education, it’s a creative, collaborative, problem-solving kind of education—skills that speak both to the discipline itself and beyond the discipline.*⁹⁴

~Elizabeth Gillaspay, Department Chair, Texas Christian University

I was initially hesitant to use the term *transferable skills* in this study because it is, frankly, a somewhat trendy buzzword in academe, particularly among disciplines—such as dance and other arts—that are frequently placed in the unfortunate position of needing

⁹² Confidential.

⁹³ Interview with Sharon Rogers, Friends University.

⁹⁴ Interview with Elizabeth Gillaspay, Texas Christian University.

to prove the value of their degrees within a skills-based and capitalist society. A quick Google-search of the phrase “transferable skills” displays a slew of webpages, mostly from universities and career service websites, expounding the importance of transferable skills. Princeton University’s career services program defines transferable skills as “the skills you acquire and transfer to future employment settings,” and encourages the reader to hone in on the transferable skills acquired during university studies so that these skills might be highlighted for potential employers.⁹⁵ This simple definition and its emphasis on “employment” read as an affirmation of the belief that the end-goal of a university degree is employment. While I do not hold this philosophical perspective, in recent years I have witnessed the increasing need to justify degree programs in the arts by touting the transferable skills that are attainable within a dance degree setting.

Despite the currently fashionable nature of the term, the notion of transferable skills was certainly a topic that arose repeatedly during the interviews. While I can only assume that this is a result of the conversations currently occurring in academe regarding employment after graduation, I cannot link them directly. Tauna Hunter referred explicitly to how she uses transferable skills within her program’s recruiting and admissions processes:

⁹⁵ <https://careerservices.princeton.edu/undergraduate-students/resumes-letters-online-profiles/resumes/transferable-skills> (accessed November 22, 2017).

I'm always pushing transferable skills. I talk about it a lot when I'm recruiting. I talk about that to my current students, to the administration, to the parents. Parents say, "well, what are they going to do with the dance degree?" I say, "they will be successful, and this is why." I count them off; it's a very, very long list. And my essay requirement for entrance into this program is about transferable skills. "What do you see dance giving you as far as transferable skills?" So, the students, even coming in from the get go, are already thinking about that. It helps them to be successful at whatever they want to do.⁹⁶

Many faculty members referred to how the skills gained through the ballet-focused degree could be incorporated in other career paths, usually without actually using the phrase "transferable skills." Multi-tasking,⁹⁷ collaboration and improvisation,⁹⁸ open-mindedness,⁹⁹ problem-solving,¹⁰⁰ responsible citizenship,¹⁰¹ and discipline¹⁰² were a few of the many transferable skills mentioned by participants. One participant eloquently described how a simple pirouette was "the ultimate multi-task,"¹⁰³ while another pointed out how the ballet-focused degree could serve to cultivate responsible citizens,¹⁰⁴ and yet another claimed the discipline of ballet training develops character and self-awareness.¹⁰⁵ Among the numerous transferable skills that were mentioned throughout the interviews,

⁹⁶ Interview with Tauna Hunter, Mercyhurst University.

⁹⁷ Interview with Tauna Hunter, Mercyhurst University.

⁹⁸ Interview with Cynthia Pratt, Butler University.

⁹⁹ Interview with Ilya Kozadeyev, University of Oklahoma.

¹⁰⁰ Interviews with Elizabeth Gillaspay, Texas Christian University; and Maggie Tesch, University of Utah.

¹⁰¹ Interviews with Tauna Hunter, Mercyhurst University; and Derek Reid, Butler University.

¹⁰² Interviews with Jay Kim, University of Utah; and James Ady, University of Utah.

¹⁰³ Interview with Tauna Hunter, Mercyhurst University.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Derek Reid, Butler University.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Jay Kim, University of Utah.

those most commonly and compellingly discussed were leadership and advocacy skills and the notion of performance as a metaphor for general life skills.

Leadership and Advocacy

The topic of leadership was most frequently, albeit not exclusively, expressed by the faculty members at Mercyhurst University,¹⁰⁶ where Hunter encourages this trait among faculty and students. In our interview, Hunter stated,

My personal philosophy is to develop leaders for the dance field; so that's the philosophy and the mission of the department. I'm committed because I feel that college graduates are the leaders in our industry and the leaders of the world. I tell my students from the get go, even in recruiting them, that I expect them to graduate and become leaders, in one way or another, and use dance as a vehicle for improving their communities.¹⁰⁷

Hunter continues explaining that she expects students to be “articulate in the spoken word and written word [and] find their voices to be representatives of the field,” and she even took the time to brag about some of her former students (currently leaders) of whom she is understandably proud.¹⁰⁸

Other faculty members echoed this sentiment when discussing how the current generation of students will be the dance leaders and arts advocates of the future.¹⁰⁹ One faculty member mentioned the importance of students' ability to “speak well about the

¹⁰⁶ Interviews with Melissa Bobick, Mercyhurst University; Noelle Partusch, Mercyhurst University; Mark Santillano, Mercyhurst University; and Solveig Santillano, Mercyhurst University.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Tauna Hunter, Mercyhurst University.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Tauna Hunter, Mercyhurst University.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Melissa Bobick, Mercyhurst University; Mary Margaret Holt, University of Oklahoma; Noelle Partusch, Mercyhurst University.

arts” without timidity.¹¹⁰ Mary Margaret Holt echoed this sentiment as she spoke about the value of training dancers, who are often accustomed to remaining silent, to speak as advocates:

I hope we can help them learn to be articulate advocates for the art form, through what they do and by how they represent themselves and their art form. When I was growing up, and until pretty recently, I think, dancers were quiet. We are supposed to be quiet—quiet in class, of course, I agree with that. Quiet in rehearsal, I also agree with that. But when we have the opportunity to advocate for the art of dance, it is extremely important that we are prepared to do that. Whether it is in a social setting, whether it's in an arts council type setting, or whether it's as a guest lecturer or as a teacher. I think it is very important that students learn to do that.¹¹¹

Clearly, there is a sentiment among some faculty members that teaching students to be leaders, both within and outside of the field of dance, and providing them with the tools to become arts advocates, are valuable transferable skills attainable through a university dance program.

Performance as Metaphor

Ballet is, first and foremost, a performing art, and in one particularly compelling moment during the interview process, Cynthia Pratt expounded on the notion of *performance as a metaphor*. While this concept was introduced by Pratt, other interviewees reiterated this idea, and it recurred in multiple interviews in a variety of deliveries. Pratt stated: “We're very much about personal virtuosity through performance, and we feel that performance is really the apex of a student's ballet experience Performance reflects and informs all the other work, even the academic work. The

¹¹⁰ Interview with Noelle Partusch, Mercyhurst University.

¹¹¹ Interview with Mary Margaret Holt, University of Oklahoma.

performance is a metaphor for everything else.”¹¹² Derek Reid echoed this idea when speaking about the notion of excellence: “For me, excellence is not only about getting jobs. I want that, but I want them [students] to position themselves to do good work and to do *excellent* work. Sometimes that means onstage, sometimes that means backstage, sometimes that means in the offices that are running the program.”¹¹³

Similarly, Michael Bearden pointed out that teaching “professionalism” throughout the process of rehearsals and performance provides students with an understanding of professional behaviors and expectations that might serve them well in a variety of circumstances.¹¹⁴ Envisioning the journey from classroom training, through a rehearsal process, culminating in the act of a theatrical performance—all with the ambition of exhibiting excellence and reaching near perfection—might be seen as a fitting metaphor for working toward goals in any area of one’s life. Thus, using excellence in performance as a metaphor for how one undertakes excellence in a multitude of life experiences is clearly an aspect of dance training that is considered a transferable skill for these ballet faculty members. In the next section, however, the participants discuss how excellence in performance must also be matched with creativity through critical thinking.

¹¹² Interview with Cynthia Pratt, Butler University.

¹¹³ Interview with Derek Reid, Butler University.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Michael Bearden, University of Utah.

Critical Thinking and The *Thinking Dancer*

*We want them to be thinking dancers and to have very solid creative experiences so they are not coming out just as performers.*¹¹⁵

~Larry Attaway, Department Chair, Butler University

The concepts of critical thinking and the “thinking dancer” surfaced in multiple interviews.¹¹⁶ Critical thinking was addressed by faculty members as a skill that is essential within the field of dance and beyond, and also vital for each individual’s life experience.¹¹⁷ In addressing how critical thinking skills matter specifically for the field of ballet, one interview participant spoke of encouraging students to investigate this “500-year tradition, asking what should be reexamined.”¹¹⁸ Another spoke about how the ballet degree “can be instrumental in developing artists that are going to be critical in helping dance continue to develop and exist,” while also noting how the discipline of dance is “in need of people who can think critically about our field.”¹¹⁹ Maggie Tesch, further spoke of critical thinking as one of the valuable traits of dancers coming out of university programs: “We teach them [students] how to think. Think. Don't just do what I say; think about why I am telling you to do this. Sometimes I don't think they knew that they could.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Larry Attaway, Butler University.

¹¹⁶ Interviews with Larry Attaway, Butler University; Michael Bearden, University of Utah; Tauna Hunter, Mercyhurst University; Susan McGuire, Butler University; Maggie Tesch, University of Utah; Rik Wacko, University of Utah.

¹¹⁷ Interviews with Noelle Partusch, Mercyhurst University; Derek Reid, Butler University; Sharon Rogers, Friends University; Brent Schneider, University of Utah; and Jessica Zeller, Texas Christian University.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Brent Schneider, University of Utah.

¹¹⁹ Interview with Derek Reid, Butler University.

In a university, we provide them with exceptional training, diverse training, *and* we make them use their brains.”¹²⁰

While one might assume all dancers are actively thinking, many of the interview participants spoke of “thinking dancers” as a certain type of dancer that is capable of bringing a sense of maturity, critical thinking skills, and personal responsibility to their approach to classes, performances, and rehearsals. There was a sense among many of the interview participants that a university education, rather than conservatory or pre-professional training, provides experiences that encourage this characteristic. Larry Attaway elaborated on how a university program cultivates thinking dancers:

They [students] are also, now, much more well versed in different avenues of performing, certainly different ballet approaches and styles, by the time they have graduated. And they’ve had to be savvy enough to be able to critique work and to be able to see themselves inside of that and critique themselves. I think the kind of peer-level conversations that can happen in the university setting prepares you in ways that nothing else can. Dancers that come out of this program have real specific, and yet kind of general, information that they can use in whatever direction they want. They’ve been taught how to take that information and make something out of it.¹²¹

In addition to the idea that thinking dancers are cultivated in university dance programs, many interviewees reasoned that, from the perspective of present-day company directors, the *thinking dancer* is more desirable as a prospective company member.¹²² Supporting this idea, Attaway continued,

¹²⁰ Interview with Maggie Tesch, University of Utah.

¹²¹ Interview with Larry Attaway, Butler University.

¹²² Interviews with Larry Attaway, Butler University; Susan McGuire, Butler University; and Maggie Tesch, University of Utah.

More and more and more we are hearing from directors that they really like this *thinking dancer*. It's interesting, because these dancers are not disrespectful on any level, but they will question you, and often will help you question what you are doing, maybe question you from a standpoint of trying to figure out *why* you're doing what you're doing. More and more directors seem to be more interested in that, rather than a dancer that just repeats what you tell them to do.¹²³

Moreover, Susan McGuire argues that university-trained thinking dancers have more to offer professional companies by hinting at a nascent change in the historic age-ism in the field of professional ballet. McGuire states: "So, in a way, they [university-trained dancers] have an advantage over many of those who go right into trainee positions, and I think that company directors are beginning to realize that there's a whole pool of really well-educated, experienced dancers out there in their early 20s who still have long careers ahead of them."¹²⁴ Another faculty member further elaborated on one program's mission by speaking of dancers with critical thinking skills as instruments for improving the art form of ballet on a broad scale:

Our role is to produce high caliber dancers, but I think beyond that, it's to hopefully send people out into the field who are critical thinkers and see the big picture. There are a lot of dancers in companies who don't see the big picture and don't care about the big picture. The art form of ballet can be a very narcissistic, selfish, and cold place for those people who that's all they care about. But our department and departments like ours are sending out critical thinkers that think in the big picture way, that view the art form from many different perspectives and angles. What we're doing is making the art form healthier, person by person, by those that we send out there.¹²⁵

However, shortly after this idealistic statement, this participant made the following humorous quip about critical thinking and the "real world" of professional

¹²³ Interview with Larry Attaway, Butler University.

¹²⁴ Interview with Susan McGuire, Butler University.

¹²⁵ Confidential.

dance: “You're there to do the job that they want you to do. You're an instrument. Yes, they're happy if you're a critical thinker, just not critical of them.”¹²⁶ While this statement was followed by laughter, this participant was perhaps only half-joking. As is illustrated in the following chapter, perhaps the critically-thinking university-trained dancer is not as ideal as some might like to believe.

Chapter Conclusion

In closing this chapter, I am somewhat self-reflective. Among the differences of opinions regarding these philosophical divergences of a conservatory art from nestled in academe, one thing I noticed consistently, even within myself, is the impulsive tendency to categorize coursework into one of two areas: either as “academic” or “artistic” (performance/practice-based). I realize that I have an inclination to categorize curriculum in this binary fashion, as is evidenced in how I chose to title this chapter, and I am eager to challenge the common usage of this binary categorization. Faculty members fighting to defend ballet and dance as academic subjects often fall into this habit/trap of instinctively dividing and labeling the curriculum as *either academic or performance-based* coursework. Perhaps this is a part of our difficulty in situating a performance-based art form in higher education since, frankly, these two categories do not always seem entirely appropriate when considering contemporary notions of education. In order for ballet, and dance for that matter, to move forward and evolve, it is imperative that we try to breakdown this outdated, binary way of thinking about the curriculum. After all, there is

¹²⁶ Confidential.

certainly something intellectual about the practice of dance as it occurs in a university setting, and I view the academic process of writing to be very much practice-based. It gives me hope to hear those who abandon this binary notion, realizing it does nothing to move the field forward. Inadvertently addressing this idea as it pertains to the mission of TCU's program, Elizabeth Gillaspy stated eloquently,

We value the rigorous work . . . that happens within the studio, as part of reflective process, as part of embodied research, as part of historical practice and traditional research—all through the lens of dance *and* we don't think that it's either/or—*either* your performance and studio practice *or* your education—we value these as a linked journey.¹²⁷

Additionally, despite the balancing act that ballet-focused degree programs accomplish in terms of curricular design, scheduling, and the option for double majors, many argue the transferable skills students gain make the degree programs viable and even valuable. Most of the interview participants expressed, in one way or another, that university trained dancers were capable of providing the field of professional ballet with critical thinkers who were prepared to challenge the status quo; thus changing the conversation about adhering obediently to traditional practices without question in professional ballet companies. However, as may be seen in the following chapter, while most of the faculty members I interviewed agree with the idea that a university education provides dancers with unique skills, not all faculty members believe university-trained dancers are actually marketable in the professional arena of ballet companies.

¹²⁷ Interview with Elizabeth Gillaspy, Texas Christian University.

CHAPTER VII

PROFESSIONAL CONNECTIONS

Over the course of the data analysis process, ideas about how the university programs understood their connection to the professional realm of ballet was a major theme. I should point out that this idea is a particular point of interest for me, so it was somewhat of a targeted theme (even if initially unintentionally) given the crafting of the interview questions. Two of the interview questions resulted in the mining of much of the information in this chapter. The first of those questions/prompts, “Tell me about your career prior to your current position,” naturally resulted in interviewees speaking about their backgrounds, and the majority of these backgrounds included professional performance careers. However, even after this question had been answered and the interview had moved on to other subjects, often interviewees returned to the topic of faculty members with professional performance backgrounds. And these consistent returns to the topic emerged as a noteworthy theme for discussion.

A second question that prompted interviewees in this direction was: “How do you describe the role of this department/program in terms of the field of ballet as a whole?” This query openly directed the interviewees to connect their program to “the field of ballet” outside of higher education and thus positioned the conversation in a way that inadvertently created a dichotomy between ballet in higher education and ballet in the realm of professional companies. Mid-way through the coding process, I realized I had unconsciously created this distinction. However, while I freely admit my own perspective

and, as a result, the way my questions were crafted perhaps actually prompted this separation between ballet in higher education and ballet in the professional realm within the minds of my interviewees, I do believe such a separation exists; further, I believe the data collected from the interviews supports this argument.

This chapter, with its focus on how the university programs connect to the profession of ballet, has four sections. Each section represents one of the ways the interviewees referred to professional connections. In the first section, I focus on the professional performance careers of faculty members and how this experience is valued collectively by the faculty members. In the next section, I analyze how the faculty members spoke about professional performance careers as the ideal end-goal for their university students. Next, I examine how the programs bring professionals to campus to bridge the gap between academe and the profession. And I conclude this section with a description of how each program has attempted to connect directly with professional ballet companies.

The Professional Performance Backgrounds of Faculty Members

At the time of the interview process, there were a total of thirty-one full-time faculty members employed within the university ballet programs included in this study. Of these thirty-one individuals, only three do not have backgrounds that include professional performance experience in regional, national, and/or international ballet or modern dance companies. And twenty of these individuals had significant, impressive national and/or international performance careers. During the interview process, many faculty members, prompted by my interview questions, commented on their own

performance careers and those of their peers. They often subtly (and sometimes not so subtly) boasted about the caliber of their program's faculty in these terms. For example, one interviewee said proudly: "My faculty is wonderful. You know, they were all professionals. They all had professional careers. They understand the professional world."¹²⁸

The value of significant professional performance experience recurred in many interviews, ranging from comments about how a program's ability to advertise the professional performance careers of the faculty could be used as a recruiting tool, to individual faculty members speaking about how their own professional performance career informs their approach to teaching and opinions about ballet in higher education.¹²⁹

In this vein, Maggie Tesch stated,

Almost all of our professors—and I say professors loosely, not just professors but all of the people that teach here—they have had professional careers. That really sets us apart or did at one point. Even in the hiring process, it is interesting how much that [the candidate's professional background] comes up in conversation. It's interesting because we always settle on candidates that have had professional performance careers and bring that quality to their teaching and their lives. In a way, we sort of understand the business at a level that people who have never worked in it will never understand. They just won't. It's not about making a 90% on your quiz; it's about getting the job done on stage. It's a different mindset.¹³⁰

Tesch's sentiment was echoed by other participants. For instance, Cynthia Pratt stated that faculty members with professional performance backgrounds "understand

¹²⁸ Interview with Cynthia Pratt, Butler University.

¹²⁹ Interviews with Larry Attaway, Butler University; Mary Margaret Holt, University of Oklahoma; Ilya Kozadayev, University of Oklahoma; and Maggie Tesch, University of Utah.

¹³⁰ Interview with Maggie Tesch, University of Utah.

what it is like to be in a company and to really devote your life to something,” and continued by remarking: “I don't know that all modern programs would have that same understanding.”¹³¹ James Ady, speaking candidly about his relatively short tenure with an internationally regarded ballet company, surmised that the only reason he was hired in his current position and other teaching positions was his ability to include his brief stint with American Ballet Theatre on his resume.¹³²

In a particularly telling moment during an interview with Jessica Zeller, she supported the notion that university ballet programs value significant professional performance backgrounds when hiring new faculty members. Zeller spoke about how she suspected her desire to teach ballet in higher education would be thwarted by her shortage of significant performance experience:

It started to occur to me, as I was looking for jobs in higher ed, that my lack of notable company experience was going to be a problem. So, I wanted to get the PhD to have the credential to say “look, I am viable; even though I don’t have company experience, I have this other experience.” . . . being I think one of the rare-er faculty members that hasn’t had a substantial professional career with a company, I would be interested to see how many of us there are.¹³³

Zeller continued this line of thought, making a persuasive point about how conservatory-trained faculty members with non-academic backgrounds might not always be the best fit for higher education curriculum: “The people that are coming in from the profession . . . most of them, I would argue, are not going to be prepared to teach classroom material; they’re going to be able to teach studio material. So then how do you

¹³¹ Interview with Cynthia Pratt, Butler University.

¹³² Interview with James Ady, University of Utah.

¹³³ Interview with Jessica Zeller, Texas Christian University.

bring them into a curriculum like ours? A curriculum that is broad in an academic way.”¹³⁴ Although I would argue that Zeller makes a strong point, particularly given that all of the programs included in this study offer and require coursework in theoretical subjects such as history and aesthetics, she was the only person I interviewed that gave this particular insight into how a variety of faculty members with differing backgrounds and experiences might enhance a program’s curricular offerings.

Given the weight and value placed on professional performance experience by the vast majority of participants in this study, it was refreshing to hear Larry Attaway’s perspective as he discussed the qualities of what he considered valuable colleagues: “I think to be successful [as a professor of dance], at some point you have to have a good solid professional career to bring with you. But once you get here, it can’t be about you anymore. It has to be about the students. That’s hard. It’s hard when the caliber of person we’re looking for has to have everything except an ego.”¹³⁵ Attaway’s perspective reassured me that, although professional experience might be valuable, it is not the only trait that a faculty member should hold.

Professional Performance Careers as the Mission of the Degree

Another interesting connection to the topic of professionalism is the manner in which faculty members spoke about professional performance careers as the ideal end-goals for their degree-seeking students. One of the interview questions inquired about the mission of the programs, and the vast majority of interviewees initially responded that the

¹³⁴ Interview with Jessica Zeller, Texas Christian University.

¹³⁵ Interview with Larry Attaway, Butler University.

goal is for graduates to successfully audition and gain employment as performers with professional companies. For example, one interviewee stated: “We’re very well aware of our responsibility to get these kids moving into companies.”¹³⁶ Despite the fact that two of the programs offer degree options focusing on pedagogy, the interviewees in this study emphasized the mission of preparing students for professional performance careers. In fact, more than one faculty member pointed out that the degree-tracks focusing on pedagogy were options for those who were perhaps incapable of developing the technical skill to pursue a performance career. This perspective places the performance-focused degrees on a more respected level and the pedagogy-focused degree as somewhat of a “fall back” option. In fact, some interviewees actually seemed to think that university dance training in itself was somewhat of a fall back option. One stated bluntly that university dance programs could be “a great outlet for those that don’t get into companies out of high school.”¹³⁷

Despite this underlying notion that university dance training might be simply considered as a backup plan for dancers who have not secured company positions by the age of eighteen, many interviewees spoke about how their programs prepare dancers for regional-level professional work. One interviewee remarked that the program’s “mission is to prepare students for the profession,” but then clarified by adding that he believed the goal is “to supply smaller regional companies with dancers who are at a certain technical

¹³⁶ Interview with Susan McGuire, Butler University.

¹³⁷ Confidential.

level.”¹³⁸ Interestingly, while many interviewees spoke about how their programs intended to prepare students for professional performance careers, often they added statements such as the one above, explaining they did not mean their graduates would be hireable at national-level ballet companies, such as American Ballet Theatre or New York City Ballet.¹³⁹ For example, Sharon Rogers spoke about the goal of preparing students for the professional world, but acknowledged the reality that most dancers would not be capable of attaining employment at top-tier national level ballet companies:

It’s really important to us to be able to train marketable dancers, dancers who would not necessarily dance at PNB [Pacific Northwest Ballet] or [New York] City Ballet or whatever, but would be able to go into smaller companies, well-rounded and prepared. We run the program just like a company. Students leave prepared because we give them opportunities to perform...¹⁴⁰

Echoing Rogers’ opinion that university-trained dancers are more likely to work in smaller, regional ballet companies, Tauna Hunter stated: “I have no illusions about my students from higher ed going into American Ballet Theater or San Francisco Ballet or Houston Ballet. So ethically, for me, to be located in higher ed, I think that we have to be realistic about those things. We have to guide the students in the direction that they *can* be successful...”¹⁴¹ Taking this point of view one step further, one interviewee commented on her program’s goal for students to be trained in a manner in which they

¹³⁸ Interview with Larry Attaway, Butler University.

¹³⁹ Interviews with Tauna Hunter, Mercyhurst University; Larry Attaway, Butler University; Sharon Rogers, Friends University; and Rik Wacko, University of Utah.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Sharon Rogers, Friends University.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Tauna Hunter, Mercyhurst University.

would “have the option to be professionals,” while acknowledging that the greater goal “is to create capable students in whatever way they want to be capable.”¹⁴²

While none of the programs appeared to keep records that might offer precise statistics about how many of their graduates were/are successful in pursuing professional performance careers, some referred to estimated numbers during their interviews. For example, Mary Margaret Holt stated that her program’s degree was geared toward “professional preparation” and bragged that “at least 80 percent” of graduates from her program go on to dance professionally. Holt even stated: “A couple of years ago 100 percent of them [that year’s graduating class] made contracts by June first.”¹⁴³ Holt was one of many faculty members who spoke confidently about how their degree programs prepared students for professional performance careers.¹⁴⁴ Another example, Maggie Tesch, commented on how her program prepares professional dancers: “I think it [the degree program] sends them out ready to be professional dancers—you know, the 15 or 20 or so that we have that get jobs each year—they are ready and prepared. We are serving them by getting them prepared to be hireable artists.”¹⁴⁵

While it is apparent some faculty members are confident their degree programs adequately prepare students for professional performance careers, some¹⁴⁶ worried there

¹⁴² Interview with Jessica Zeller, Texas Christian University.

¹⁴³ Interview with Mary Margaret Holt, University of Oklahoma.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Clara Cravey Stanley, University of Oklahoma; Ilya Kozadeyev, University of Oklahoma; Brent Schneider, University of Utah; Maggie Tesch, University of Utah; Stan Rogers, Friends University; and Sharon Rogers, Friends University.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Maggie Tesch, University of Utah.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with James Ady, University of Utah; Tauna Hunter, Mercyhurst University; and Melissa Bobick, Mercyhurst University.

were just too few jobs for all of the students graduating with degrees from their programs.

In this vein, Hunter said,

We are producing so many dancers, most of whom are not going to be able to work because there is limited work in the field. So, I encourage my students to go from being a ballet bun-head to auditioning for everything. If you want to dance, and you actually want to make money, you better think about the commercial field and not the concert field. However, our dancers are successful in pursuing a wide range of career opportunities in the dance field.¹⁴⁷

Other interviewees troubled the idea that university-level training was necessary for dancers who might only be interested in dancing professionally. One stated frankly: “Not every student is going to end up in a professional company,”¹⁴⁸ and another echoed “it is not our goal to turn each and every one of them into a professional ballerina.”¹⁴⁹

Brent Schneider stated proudly that the majority of his program’s graduates “find jobs in the field,” but he continued to clarify he was not referring only to performance careers, but also to the professions of teaching and choreography. Schneider elucidated on the problem of university dancers training with the intention of performing in professional ballet companies:

Companies will survive because they hire their own students. I mean, all of the larger ballet companies have their own schools, and they bring in students when they're 13 or 14 years old, and then those students train in the philosophy of that ballet company. So, by the time the company needs another second company member, they're right there. The company creates its own steady supply of dancers. The reason I mention this is to point out that companies are not as reliant on our graduates as they are on students from their own individual schools.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Tauna Hunter, Mercyhurst University.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Melissa Bobick, Mercyhurst University.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Mark Santillano, Mercyhurst University.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Brent Schneider, University of Utah.

Ilya Kozadeyev reinforced this point when speaking about a “system” in which companies bring in young dancers as apprentices before hiring them into the company. He recalls: “I got an apprenticeship when I was 16 years old. I didn’t need a college education for what I wanted to do as a job.” Kozadeyev continued this line of thought, speculating: “Since the system has been set up that way, the majority of the classically-trained dancers and the majority of the talent is interested in going that route.”¹⁵¹

In addition to the companies’ expectations for traditional conservatory training and company apprenticeship paths, some interviewees spoke about the bias many professionals have against university-trained dancers. Clara Cravey Stanley remarked that, traditionally, university-trained dancers are not highly regarded “in the ballet world.” She continued: “it’s so difficult because I think, sometimes in the [professional] ballet world, people will say- this is terrible to say, but they’ll say ‘oh, you’re a college graduate dancer,’ and they brush you off.”¹⁵² Further, another participant stated: “There aren’t many directors that want a kid out of college, a kid that’s been in a [university] dance program.”¹⁵³ Illustrating the perception that collegiate dancers are often not up-to-par for professional work, Kozadeyev spoke about his own experience working with collegiate ballet dancers, stating “there’s almost a lack of knowledge about how to apply oneself and what is going to be expected once they [students] are in the real world.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Interview with Ilya Kozadeyev, University of Oklahoma.

¹⁵² Interview with Clara Cravey Stanley, University of Oklahoma.

¹⁵³ Confidential.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Ilya Kozadeyev, University of Oklahoma.

Kozadayev's, among others', comments reveal a perception that university-trained dancers might not be physically or mentally prepared for the rigors of the professional realm of ballet companies. One participant, who at the time of the interview was not only a university faculty member but was also simultaneously serving in a leadership capacity with a professional regional ballet company, had a unique perspective on collegiate dancers and the world of professional ballet companies. This participant pointed out the only company members that had ever been problematic in terms of unprofessional behavior were those that had been through a university program. This faculty member argued that in a university environment the student is viewed as a paying customer, which in turn fosters a sense of entitlement. This participant stated: "it's a drawback to the collegiate environment really; it fosters entitlement a little bit. Because students are increasingly viewed as consumers, on some levels it encourages that, unfortunately."¹⁵⁵

Some faculty members¹⁵⁶ noted that, given the traditional conservatory-model of ballet training, in which students train from a very young age for approximately eight years before beginning a professional career as a teenager, collegiate ballet dancers are spending prime performance years still in training. One participant stated frankly,

¹⁵⁵ Confidential.

¹⁵⁶ Interviews with Ilya Kozadeyev, University of Oklahoma; Li Chou Cheng, Texas Christian University; Lesley Bories-Scalise, Mercyhurst University; and Stan Rogers, Friends University.

Somebody asked me if colleges should have ballet degrees. I said “ballet is for the young.” I mean that technically; a nineteen-year-old should already be physically capable to be a soloist. So why, at nineteen, are they just starting to train seriously? I cannot answer. What do they learn in these four years? I always wonder about the future of our students. Do they have a very good future in ballet? How many students can really get into a company from a university? Not many. So, I’m always asking “what are we doing here?” . . . I feel like I’m cheating them [the students], holding a big apple, but the apple doesn’t belong to them; it belongs to a seventeen-year-old.¹⁵⁷

In contrast to this opinion, other interviewees argued that the time their students spend in university programs supports their performance careers in ways that might be unavailable in a conservatory setting. Tesch, who went through a university program as a student before dancing professionally, spoke about how a university setting offers dancers who are not quite ready for the professional world an opportunity to mature:

I think things click around college age. You don’t have to be 18 to get into a company. If I had joined a company at 18, I would have self-destructed by age 20. I hadn’t grown up yet. I needed the umbrella of the university for a couple of years to grow into myself as a human. It helped immensely. And we are kind of—we’re not their parents, but we hold them to standards. And isn’t that kind of what parents do, too? We hold our kids to certain standards, and even though we don’t discipline them, there are consequences if they drop below those standards—meaning grades, or not getting cast in ballets, and things like that. I needed that, and it was good for me.¹⁵⁸

Other interviewees echoed Tesch’s statement. For example, Holt argued,

¹⁵⁷ Confidential.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Maggie Tesch, University of Utah.

While it's the choice of some young dancers to go through a professional school, and that certainly is an option, we believe that we are a stepping stone and can give them some additional life experience, valuable dance experience, training experience, performance experience, etc. We can produce dancers who are 21 or 22 years old, but they have a couple of extra years of life experience behind them. So, they are not going immediately from secondary school, or earlier, into a professional environment. That can work really well; some dancers succeed brilliantly that way. But for others, I think the life experience of higher education can be valuable to them.¹⁵⁹

Following this line of thought, Susan McGuire spoke about how her opinion had changed in terms of how graduates' ages might affect their chances of pursuing professional performance careers. Commenting on how the professional realm of ballet is perhaps evolving beyond its historic issue with ageism, McGuire stated,

One of the dilemmas that I think we've always had in the university is we keep these dancers for an extra four years out of high school. What are we giving them that will really prepare them for the profession when they have to wait four years more than their counterparts to start auditioning for companies? And that used to bother me more than it does now. I think now choreographers and company directors are more willing to look at older dancers. In some cases, they make a point of that. So that whereas I thought that some of our dancers might be at a disadvantage in the short term because they delayed their professional life another four years. Now I don't worry about that so much because of what we give them in terms of their training and their exposure, but also in terms of just the fact that they're getting older and more experienced. So, in a way, they have an advantage over many of those who go right into trainee positions. And I think that company directors are beginning to realize that there's a whole pool of really well-educated, experienced dancers out there in their early 20s who still have long careers ahead of them.¹⁶⁰

Jessica Zeller's comments on this topic reiterate the idea that university-educated dancers have much to offer professional companies. Zeller spoke about how she believed her students, as they were entering the professional audition process, were bringing a

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Mary Margaret Holt, University of Oklahoma.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Susan McGuire, Butler University.

mature perspective to their experience because they were more informed and critical of the field than conservatory-trained dancers might be. And there were other interviewees¹⁶¹ who spoke about how these qualities of college-educated professional dancers might influence the field in a positive way. For example, Rik Wacko spoke about the value of ballet-focused degree programs to the field in a broad sense, stating: “The beauty of a ballet-centric program, especially one that will hopefully expand on the academic side of what ballet offers, is that there are a whole range of things that haven’t been tapped yet, and those ideas will also lead back to dancers in the professional world.”¹⁶² And McGuire stated: “I’m wondering if maybe this development—that more and more company directors are seeing the value of having a dancer with a college education and has this kind of really, really first-rate training—might generate a little bit more energy in terms of ballet in higher education.”¹⁶³

Others seemed to agree with the sentiment that the field as a whole is evolving, and dancers graduating out of university dance programs are perhaps not viewed as disdainfully as they may have been in the past. In this respect, Tesch remarked: “I see us turning out dancers that are hireable dancers, choreographers, and teachers. People in the profession are noticing us. All the sudden, people are getting it. I think companies are

¹⁶¹ Interviews with Derek Reid, Butler University; Rik Wacko, University of Utah; Susan McGuire, Butler University; and Elizabeth Gillaspay, Texas Christian University.

¹⁶² Interview with Rik Wacko, University of Utah.

¹⁶³ Interview with Susan McGuire, Butler University.

starting to look at us, not so much as the ugly step-sister anymore, but more of something that can really work.”¹⁶⁴

Professional Guests on Campus

To bridge the gap between ballet in higher education and ballet in the “real world,” all of the university programs included in this study make an effort to bring professionals to campus as guest performers, guest teachers, guest choreographers, and/or guest répétiteurs (who come to campus to re-stage notable choreographic work). These efforts provide challenging opportunities for students to work at the level expected by professionals and also create networking connections for students preparing to enter the audition scene. One interviewee iterated the value of these connections, remarking that her program had “gotten more kids jobs” because of “networking them with guest artists.”¹⁶⁵ Some faculty members spoke about how they favored bringing in artistic directors from smaller companies in the hopes the guests would consider hiring their students. For example, Jessica Zeller stated: “We’ve made a real push recently to get artistic directors, who have hiring capacities, in to do residencies, and it’s been promising. We’ve had some nice regional company directors looking at our dancers and saying ‘we would like to work with you down the road.’”¹⁶⁶

Even the smallest program included in this study, Friends University, manages to bring in guest performers from the New York City Ballet yearly for their annual

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Maggie Tesch, University of Utah.

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Noelle Partusch, Mercyhurst University.

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Jessica Zeller, Texas Christian University.

production of *The Nutcracker*. However, most of the professional guests that visit the programs included in this study are either teacher/choreographers or répétiteurs. All of the programs attempt to double-up by bringing in guest choreographers who are also willing to teach some classes, thereby providing opportunities for more students to interact with the guests in classes as well as rehearsals while also providing repertoire for upcoming performances. These guest teachers/choreographers range from alumnae of the programs, to friends of faculty who are willing to do some sort of trade to cut costs, to guests with national and international reputations.

During the interview process, there was a noticeable sense of pride among those programs capable of gaining permission to perform copyrighted works such as those by George Balanchine or Antony Tudor. It is no simple feat to obtain permission to perform these works. Programs must first prove their students are capable of performing the work at a level acceptable to the licensing organization; sometimes this may be accomplished via video, but it often requires a campus visit by a representative of the licensing organization (at the expense of the university program). Once the licensing organization grants permission, there is still the cost of the licensing fee and répétiteur expenses, which can be exorbitant considering the limited budgets of academic programs. For example, Friends University's program has been approved by the Balanchine Trust to perform more than one Balanchine ballet over the past several years, but they have never been able to procure the funding. Sharon Rogers stated in frustration: "We have the dancers to do it. We have everything else we need to do it. We just don't have the funds

to do it.”¹⁶⁷ Multiple faculty members spoke about fundraising and writing grants to cover these costs. While many agreed that these works were difficult to produce in terms of licensing and fees, the consensus was that it was worth it in terms of student experience and the prestige that comes with producing such works.

However, even when funding is minimal, it seems faculty are thoughtful about how to make the most out of any potential opportunities. Mark Santillano spoke about how eager and cost-conscious his program is concerning guests:

We mix it up; it depends on funding and calendars and all that other stuff. Even if we don't have choreography created for us, we get in guest teachers whenever we can get our hands on them. When there are dance companies that come to the performing art center here in the city, we'll try to grab master classes from them as well. Anybody we can get our hands on, we'll bring them in and supplement our students' education.¹⁶⁸

In reality, guest artist opportunities have become a necessary marketing and recruiting tool for most programs. In fact, every single program I visited, even those struggling with significant budget issues, is consistently bringing in outside guests to teach, choreograph, and/or re-stage notable repertoire. Discussing this issue as a recruiting tool, one interviewee stated matter-of-factly: “the students come here for our rep.”¹⁶⁹ Meaning, the ballet repertoire offered in terms of prestige and challenge are often a significant part of what draws students to the program.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Sharon Rogers, Friends University.

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Mark Santillano, Mercyhurst University.

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Cynthia Pratt, Butler University.

Company Connections

As has been pointed out already, there is a peculiar separation between ballet in higher education and the realm of professional ballet companies. Each university ballet program in this study addresses this issue in one way or another with varying levels of success, including attempts to create new companies and efforts in connecting university programs with local professional companies already in existence. Friends University is one of the programs in which a faculty member attempted to create a company to bridge the gap between the university program and the professional world of ballet. Stan Rogers remarked on the disconnect between academe and the profession of ballet while speaking about his impetus for creating the ballet program at Friends University:

I realized that the university dance programs and the professional world had very little to do with each other. There's a disconnect because by the time a kid gets into a university program, they should be in a company already, and most of the university programs that were offered were modern dance-based. After being around for a while, I saw that almost every midsize city has a ballet company, not a modern dance company. There's no real place for those modern dancers to go after they get a degree. A university is supposed to give you the skills and everything you need to get a job, and that doesn't happen in most dance programs. Rarely are students prepared to get a good job.¹⁷⁰

In response to what Rogers perceived as the disconnect between ballet in academe and the ballet profession and his desire to adequately prepare students for professional ballet company work, Rogers created a “professional wing” of the ballet program at Friends University. As mentioned in chapter 4, this professional wing, Wichita Ballet Theatre, was Rogers’s attempt to begin building a professional ballet company in

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Stan Rogers, Friends University.

Wichita. The initial funding provided small stipends for professionals and some graduates of the program for their participation in departmental performances. However, the funding amount was too inadequate to attract and retain high-caliber performers, and the Wichita Ballet Theatre professional wing no longer exists.

As might be expected, location has a significant effect on how the programs connect, or do not connect, with professional companies. Mercyhurst University's program, located in Erie, Pennsylvania, at one time had a connection with Lake Erie Ballet, a regional semi-professional ballet company. This mutually beneficial relationship permitted dance majors from the university to perform in the company's annual production of *The Nutcracker*. The arrangement not only provided additional performance opportunities for the university students, but consequently assisted a small regional ballet company in supplementing its ranks with the number of dancers needed for a full-length ballet. However, for undisclosed reasons, this relationship no longer exists.

Indianapolis, Indiana, home to Butler University, has fostered a few iterations of professional dance companies. Some of Butler's dance faculty members regularly choreograph for Dance Kaleidoscope, an Indianapolis-based professional contemporary dance company. Further, at one point, Butler's dance program fostered the birth of Indianapolis Ballet Theatre, a professional ballet company started by George Verdak, who was a former chair of the dance program at Butler. Verdak eventually left Butler to focus exclusively on the company. However, Verdak passed away in 1993, and the

Indianapolis Ballet Theatre is no longer in existence.¹⁷¹ Recently, a new ballet company, Indianapolis Ballet, announced a 2018 debut season, but this company currently has no formal connection to Butler's ballet program.

While there is not a professional ballet company in Norman, Oklahoma, home of the University of Oklahoma, there are two professional ballet companies in the region: Oklahoma City Ballet and Tulsa Ballet Theatre. While Tulsa is an inconvenient 120 miles from campus, Oklahoma City is only twenty miles from Norman. Yet, when I asked the faculty about any connection with this company, there seemed to be only a casual acquaintance. A former university faculty member is currently a ballet master with Oklahoma City Ballet, and a few of the current university faculty members have been invited as guest instructors from time to time.¹⁷² Sadly, this seems a missed opportunity considering the proximity of this professional, nationally recognized company to the University of Oklahoma campus. Since the time of my data collection process, the University of Oklahoma's School of Dance has hired a new director¹⁷³, and my understanding is that creating a relationship with the professional ballet companies in the region is one of his priorities.

The University of Utah is the one program included in this study that has a long-standing and still active connection to a professional ballet company, Ballet West. This is

¹⁷¹ <https://www.butler.edu/dance/about/ballet-russe> (accessed May 16, 2017).

¹⁷² Interview with Clara Cravey Stanley, University of Oklahoma.

¹⁷³ At the time of data collection for this study, Michael Bearden was a faculty member within the ballet program at the University of Utah. In Fall 2017, Bearden assumed the role of Director of the School of Dance at the University of Oklahoma.

not surprising given the history; Ballet West grew out of the ballet program at the university, and the two entities share a founder, Willam Christensen. At the time of data collection, two of the university's full-time ballet faculty members were Ballet West alumnae, and many of the part-time faculty were current or former dancers for Ballet West. The university program and Ballet West also support a "joint trainee program," which offers students selected as Ballet West trainees university credit for their experience dancing with Ballet West. Additionally, the university works with current Ballet West dancers interested in pursuing degrees, making accommodations for professional experience. This connection between Ballet West and the ballet program at the University of Utah was mentioned in every interview conducted with university faculty members and is obviously a source of pride. University faculty member, and former Ballet West principle dancer, Tesch said: "The history with Ballet West is huge and can never be ignored. I think we need to stay true to our roots, which means moving forward with our relationship with Ballet West. . . . it's something that sets us apart."¹⁷⁴

While there is currently no connection with a professional ballet company at Texas Christian University, during the interview process a couple of faculty members expressed the desire to create some sort of relationship with a local company. In this spirit, Jessica Zeller said,

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Maggie Tesch, University of Utah.

I would like to see us have a pipeline with a company with a trainee program. I would like to see dance in higher ed go that way, where we are able to, as companies evolve, link up with them and find ways to affect the field a little bit more consistently. Because I do feel that we have been, for so long, really two entirely separate entities. The concept that there is dance research going on in academia about the professional field, and that the professional field has absolutely no clue that it exists, is astonishing and sad to me. These things could not be more similar and yet exist on opposite sides of the moon. I would like to see that become much more of a feedback loop where we can draw from them, because we need to in order to go forward, and where they can draw from us because they need to in order to- well, they don't need us as much as we need them, which is probably the issue.¹⁷⁵

Zeller's musings are interesting. While she makes a compelling argument for why there should be more of a connection between ballet in higher education and ballet in the professional realm, at the end of her statement she comes to a sudden realization that perhaps the disconnect is indeed based on need. While university ballet programs can benefit—in terms of marketing, recruiting, and viability—by partnering with a professional ballet company, the benefit for the professional ballet company is perhaps not so obvious, at least not from the perspective of the company. If this is true, then I would argue the responsibility is on us, those of us currently housed in higher education, to reach out to the professional world to foster relationships that might be mutually beneficial in areas such as audience-building, grant procurement, and placing college graduates within professional companies.

Throughout the data collection process, the emphasis faculty members consistently placed on connecting to the professional realm of ballet companies was overwhelming. The way that interviewees spoke with reverence about faculty members'

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Jessica Zeller, Texas Christian University.

professional performance careers was telling. And the manner in which interviewees spoke about the missions of their programs revealed that, even though employment prospects might be limited, the goal is still to prepare students for professional performance careers. The valuing of this goal is illustrated by how each program supplements what they are capable of offering students, in terms of current curriculum and faculty, with guest teachers, choreographers, and répétiteurs. The professional performance career goal is also supported by how each program is attempting, and has attempted in the past, to connect with the professional realm of ballet in a variety of ways.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

Variations and Themes

In looking closely at the six ballet-focused programs included in this case study, it becomes apparent that, while they all focus on the same dance genre, they differ in a multiplicity of ways, such as their individual histories, their curricula, and their missions and values. Missions and values, as intangible philosophical tenets, are far more than words and phrases mandated by accrediting bodies. Rather, missions and values are at the heart of the choices we make and are indelibly expressed through the curricular structure of each program. A curricular comparison and analysis reveals distinctions in the values of each program in terms of performance, choreography, theoretical and historical studies, and teaching; further, these variations within each program are often reflections of institutional histories, the perspectives and values of current and past faculty members, and also of each program's stance on the pursuit of NASD-accreditation.

Additional aspects that differentiate these six ballet-focused programs include geographic location and support from their home institution and donors. Each program's location has a significant impact on the ability to connect with professional companies and other professional entities outside the home institutions. This issue was apparent in considering each of these programs and their geographic proximity to professional ballet companies. Further, each program's status, in terms of support and respect from its home

campus, university administration, and donors, effects recruitment efforts, the ability to establish relationships with professional companies, and the capacity to bring in professional guests and stage prestigious repertoire. Ultimately, each of the six programs included in this study is a unique vessel communicating distinct values reflecting their past and present realities.

While each program included in this study is unique, interviews with faculty members revealed common themes highlighting shared beliefs and mutual issues of concern. While each participant held their own individual philosophies and beliefs about ballet and higher education, listening to these voices—some who echoed my own sentiments and ideas, and others who held opposing views to my own—was enlightening. Overriding themes emerged as faculty members spoke about how they understand the missions and values of their home departments, how they struggle to provide pre-professional training in a conservatory art form within a higher education setting and framework, and how they believe their degrees provide transferable skills that will support student success regardless of actual career paths.

There was also a significant focus within the interviews on each individual's and each program's connections and disconnections to the professional realm of ballet outside of higher education. The professional performance careers of faculty members were noted; professional performance vocations were spoken of as the end-goal for BFA students; and connections to the professional realm were either points of pride or mentioned as aspirations for the future. Throughout the interview process, notions of

balancing the academic with the artistic, while simultaneously attempting to establish or maintain a connection to the profession, recurred, becoming a powerful common theme.

As I reflect on the interviews and the themes that emerged from these invaluable conversations, several ideas for future research surface. For example, given the recurring subject of valuing professional performance careers, a future study exploring how professional connections are successfully developed and maintained seems pertinent. Are there best practices for creating a pipeline for college students into professional companies? If so, what do those look like, and how might this information be shared across programs as a means to support the discipline? Further, how might we establish relationships with professional companies in a scenario in which the companies understand the potential mutual benefits of such partnerships? This subject indicates a necessity on the part of university programs to reach out to companies and other professional entities to explore potential opportunities.

In addition to the recurring theme of preparing students for professional performance careers, ideas for other lines of inquiry arose from the analysis of the curriculum in terms of NASD-accreditation standards. It would be telling, given the emphasis on performance within the curricula represented in this study, to investigate what kinds of employment the majority of students are attaining post-graduation. This information might help us develop curriculum in a way that better serves students and the field of dance. For example, if a study shows the majority of graduates are teaching, might it be worth reconsidering the requirements for coursework in pedagogy? Further, given the numerous allusions to transferable skills during the interviews, I am curious if

graduates from these programs actually feel prepared for their careers, whatever those careers might be, in terms of transferable skills such as critical thinking and leadership? And how are these skills actually supported through the existing curriculum? Considering the curriculum (at least in theory) reflects our values, how might we evaluate and re-evaluate curricula with a more critical eye toward ensuring the curriculum does indeed exemplify our true values, while simultaneously supporting the needs of our students, who are in fact the future of dance?

It is notable that, within the interviews, there was a sense that the knowledge and skill production occurring within ballet programs housed in higher education was not necessarily effectively disseminated throughout the field of ballet outside of academe. While there was a significant focus on individual students/graduates achieving success through employment as professional performers, there was little mention of how these programs or their graduates might influence the field in terms of teaching and perhaps moving the realm of ballet education forward in a positive way. For me, this matter highlights the general separation between the university and the rest of society—a disconnect between the ivory tower and ivied walls of academe from the reality of the everyday and how ballet manifests in our culture outside of the university setting. How might we better cultivate these connections?

Historical Context and the Pervasive Binary

In analyzing the twentieth century history of dance in American higher education, there is a peculiar absence of ballet (or, in fact, of any dance form other than modern dance). Close scrutiny reveals a historic inherent bias against ballet stemming from a

range of cultural, social, and political concerns, including nationalism, elitism, and feminism. Given these circumstances among others, modern dance became the dominant dance form housed within American higher education, and the development of the accrediting agency for dance was deeply influenced by modern dance philosophies. In reviewing the literature, it is arguable that some of the modern dance philosophies developed during this time grew out of a desire to fulfill the standards of higher education. Regardless, the philosophical influence of modern dance remains apparent in how most dance programs are structured and in current standards and requirements for accreditation. Further, the development of professional organizations that focus on dance in higher education also reflect a heavily modern dance-based focus, at times excluding other dance forms. Combined, these factors result in a somewhat narrow definition of what dance is, does, and can be in American higher education.

Of hundreds of dance programs across the United States, few offer a curriculum that emphasizes dance forms other than modern dance, and this research uncovers there are currently fewer than fifteen university programs offering ballet-focused degrees. Since most of these ballet-focused programs indicate no major issues when recruiting students, the small number of ballet-focused degree programs does not seem to be the result of a lack of public awareness or a shortage of student interest, but rather a scarcity of ballet voices within faculty positions in academe. As noted in previous chapters, scholarly voices examining ballet as a valid means of contemporary artistic expression and cultural value are few, as are ballet-focused departments where these voices are welcome.

It is interesting to note that, over the two years that have passed since the majority of these interviews were held, four of the participants have shifted employment from one university to another, and three of those four moved from one ballet-based degree program to another program offering a ballet-focused curriculum.¹⁷⁶ Additionally, eight of the faculty members interviewed here hold degrees from ballet-focused programs mentioned within this study.¹⁷⁷ Further, some faculty members interviewed in this study, at one point in their career, had been employed by another program mentioned in this study. Rather than coincidental, these internal shifts within a limited circle of programs, an orbiting of faculty members between a relatively small number of schools, simply reflects the reality that there are few faculty members and degree programs focusing on ballet in higher education.

As mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation, I believe the shortage of ballet voices in higher education is due partially to the unwelcoming nature of many current graduate programs in dance when it comes to prospective students with ballet interests. One participant in this study spoke about the overt disrespect for ballet among her graduate school faculty, stating that it was “a really difficult journey for me because

¹⁷⁶ Michael Bearden was a faculty member at the University of Utah when these interviews occurred, and he is now the Director of the School of Dance at the University of Oklahoma. Ilya Kozadayeva was a faculty member at the University of Oklahoma at the time of our interview, and he is currently on faculty at University of North Carolina School of the Arts. Melissa Bobick was a faculty member at Mercyhurst University at the time of our interview, and she is now employed at the University of Utah.

¹⁷⁷ Michael Bearden, Tauna Hunter, Maggie Tesch, and Rik Wacko earned ballet degrees from the University of Utah. Melissa Bobick earned one of her degrees from Indiana University. Mary Margaret Holt earned her degrees from the University of Oklahoma. Derek Reid and Jessica Zeller earned degrees from Butler University.

they vilified everything I revered.”¹⁷⁸ Another participant spoke about how “there was sort of a prejudice where modern dancers really looked down on ballet dancers.”¹⁷⁹ Yet another participant stated “ballet is not seen as equal to modern dance in most university settings.”¹⁸⁰ These types of sentiments recurred throughout multiple interviews, and I argue these opinions of bias against ballet (along with other dance forms) remains in many dance departments within American higher education. I do not highlight these examples to lament the status of ballet in higher education, nor am I intending to criticize those who champion modern dance. From personal experience, I am keenly aware there are also ballet-focused faculty members who believe other dance forms are inferior, and I certainly do not endorse these views. I merely hope to make the point that, for all of the rhetoric about how academe welcomes a diversity of perspectives, perhaps we should check our verbally-expressed philosophies against our actions. Further, I argue that some of these biases against ballet are simply reflections of the inherent philosophical differences between conservatory training and American higher education.

In fact, the conservatory foundation of traditional ballet training and the inherent ideological framework of such systems is perhaps the dominant reason for the continued bias and the resulting scarcity of ballet voices in academe. All traditional conservatory training, regardless of the subject of study, preserves notions of the unquestioned

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Cynthia Pratt, Butler University.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with Susan McGuire, Butler University.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Brent Schneider, University of Utah. This statement is particularly interesting coming from Schneider since he has taught primarily modern dance in the Department of Modern Dance (now School of Dance) at the University of Utah throughout his career.

authority of “masters” and the unchallenged continuation of customary practices, which serves to perpetuate a certain hierarchy and ideology. Conversely, notions of unchecked authority and unchallenged customs, traditions, and practices are somewhat antithetical to the philosophies of American higher education. Considering that ballet dancers with the intention of performing professionally often begin training quite young, they are also most likely to be indoctrinated in these philosophies. Further, these are likely the individuals who remain in the field long enough to become teachers, meaning ballet faculty members generally enter the realm of higher education already infused with certain ideological and philosophical tendencies that are fundamentally oppositional to those of American higher education. This line of thinking leads me to suggest two plans for action.

First, any significant change in the culture of ballet education requires a significant foundational shift in approaches to the early stages of ballet training. Fortunately, some ballet scholars have already begun this conversation (Alterowitz, BenZion, Johnston, Lakes, Morris, Zeller, among others), challenging traditional authoritarian teaching practices and calling for significant re-thinking of ballet training approaches and methods. However, these conversations concerning progressive ballet pedagogy have yet to permeate mainstream primary ballet instruction, and meaningful transformation in the culture of ballet will only occur when those teachers who are working with children in the early stages of their ballet education are informed, educated, and committed to an evolution of tradition practices. Thus, it is the responsibility of

contemporary ballet scholars to explore ways to disseminate these ideas, and this situation creates an additional area for potential research.

Second, in addition to reaching out to the communities that focus on early ballet education, ballet scholars must be vocal and engaged in conversation with colleagues in higher education about the academic potential for ballet as a site of inquiry, discovery, creativity, and research. Ballet scholars (and I include myself in this group) must be willing to investigate, understand, and accept ballet's negative history in terms of race and gender issues, its perpetuation of hierarchy, and its authoritarian practices in an effort to promote a philosophical transformation that pushes approaches to ballet into the twenty-first century as a relevant art form. Additional dialogue about progressive ways of thinking about ballet pedagogy among colleagues with differing interests will serve to enlighten others about possibilities for ballet as a site for academic and creative exploration and research. Additionally, these connections might result in a seat at the table for ballet faculty members so their voices are included in discussions concerning the future of dance in higher education, including curricular revision and ideas about accreditation.

Meanwhile, the ubiquity and proliferation of modern dance focused degree programs, and the significant influence of modern dance pioneers on how dance degree programs are structured and accredited, tends to (even if unintentionally) marginalize other dance forms from establishing a foothold in higher education. After all, if ballet, which is historically established and well-respected culturally, has difficulty creating and maintaining a place in higher education, what does this mean for other dance forms-

particularly those that might represent marginalized populations? Given the scaffolding and limitations of accreditation standards, how might we push the boundaries of what our curriculum can do? In considering the multitude of dance genres worthy of study in an academic setting, how do we make room for the *other* voices of dance within American higher education without homogenizing opportunities for dance in the academy? How might we better exemplify the valuing of inclusion in our curriculum and accreditation standards?

I am certainly not suggesting all dance programs should offer study in a multitude of dance forms, as this is simply unsustainable in terms of faculty expertise and resources. I do believe, however, there is tremendous value in programs that specialize in one dance form—whether that form be modern dance or ballet or hip hop or Bharatanatyam. For without specialized programs as entities with the capacity for deep inquiry in one specific genre of dance, I fear dance programs across the country will become homogenous, only representing certain types of dance representing particular groups or cultures. This type of homogenized degree offering seems outdated, rather than reflective of our current cultural and social situation. Additionally, encouraging multiple dance forms to claim their place in higher education would eliminate the binary status quo of ballet-versus-modern dance rhetoric that has permeated my experience with dance in higher education.

Onward

I end this dissertation journey with more questions than answers and numerous ideas for continued inquiry—not the least of which pertains to exploring ways for

expanding existing ways of thinking about curricula beyond binaries, boundaries, and the limitations of accreditation standards. Additionally, I am intensely interested in exploring ways in which the conversations concerning progressive ballet pedagogy that are occurring in higher education might move up into the professional realm, disseminate down a level into the primary training entities, while continuing to percolate in conversations across dance genres in higher education.

Moving forward, I carry this sentiment from Lucile Marsh: “there is always danger that the pioneers of one generation may become the conservatives of the next” (22). How might we move forward into a future where individual dance programs are encouraged to establish distinct identities, craft new ways for learning, and promote deep investigation in the specificity of a range of dance forms, rather than expecting all programs to fit into a predetermined curricular model? This type of thinking requires a philosophical change in how we think about dance in higher education, our histories, and our existing power structures, which serve to self-perpetuate. Rather than simply adding seats to a pre-designed and pre-existing table, perhaps we need to build a new scaffolding with room for innovative expansion and growth in an array of unforeseen and wonderfully unpredictable directions.

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APPENDIX
IRB APPROVAL LETTER



Institutional Review Board
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
P.O. Box 425619, Denton, TX 76204-5619
940-898-3378
email: IRB@twu.edu
<http://www.twu.edu/irb.html>

DATE: October 23, 2015

TO: Ms. Melonie Buchanan|Murray
Dance

FROM: Institutional Review Board (IRB) - Denton

Re: *Approval for Ballet in Higher Education: Exploring the Culture within Higher Education
Departments Offering Ballet-focused Degree Programs (Protocol #: 18563)*

The above referenced study has been reviewed and approved by the Denton IRB (operating under FWA00000178) on 10/23/2015 using an expedited review procedure. This approval is valid for one year and expires on 10/22/2016. The IRB will send an email notification 45 days prior to the expiration date with instructions to extend or close the study. It is your responsibility to request an extension for the study if it is not yet complete, to close the protocol file when the study is complete, and to make certain that the study is not conducted beyond the expiration date.

If applicable, agency approval letters must be submitted to the IRB upon receipt prior to any data collection at that agency. A copy of the approved consent form with the IRB approval stamp is enclosed. Please use the consent form with the most recent approval date stamp when obtaining consent from your participants. A copy of the signed consent forms must be submitted with the request to close the study file at the completion of the study.

Any modifications to this study must be submitted for review to the IRB using the Modification Request Form. Additionally, the IRB must be notified immediately of any adverse events or unanticipated problems. All forms are located on the IRB website. If you have any questions, please contact the TWU IRB.

cc. Dr. Mary Williford-Shade, Dance
Dr. Linda Caldwell, Dance
Graduate School