DANCE 256: Improvisation II  M/W 1-2:50PM  ENS 380  Spring 2014

Instructor: Jess Humphrey (jess@jesshumphrey.com)  Office hours: by appointment

Texts: Composing While Dancing by Melinda Buckwalter

“The dancing does the teaching, the teacher points to that.”            -Steve Paxton

Course Objectives:

1. Practice improvisation as
   - a complete performance work
   - a contemplative practice
   - a source to mine for ideas that inspire your own creative processes
   - a context where we can practice a state of consciousness from which we can perform “set” material
   - an opportunity to practice being in the present moment
   - a way to practice relationships
   - a choreographic practice
   - a tool for embodying theoretical ideas
   - an opportunity to experience choreography as existing on a continuum from specifically set to barely scored.

2. Practice spontaneous performance making. Use this practice, along with observation of others’ as ways to keep its definition alive in your body-mind.

3. Engage in somatic and contemplative practices to access multiple ways of knowing.

4. Investigate, track, and cultivate relationships, specifically self-self, self-other, and self-ensemble/community/world/universe.

5. Notice your body-mind as it changes each day, track those shifts, and allow them to influence your dancing.

6. Practice communicating verbally, orally, and in writing about what we see in class, in made-in-the-moment performances, our experience within such performances, and what we see as audience members.

7. Recognize that we are learning as a community and consider how dancing in relationship affects your own process.

8. Allow class experiences to influence life outside the dance studio.

9. Experience stillness and consider its role in improvisation and life outside the studio.

10. Disconnect from the internet, your cell phone, and other technology so you can focus on your physical experience in the present moment.

11. Take risks and be willing to do things that you might feel are awkward, ugly, or outside of the art of dance.

12. Expand your range as a dancer, both qualitatively and quantitatively.

13. Learn to soften into moments of discomfort with equanimity, but do not hurt or abuse yourself.

14. ———————————————————————————————————————————————————

(We will create this one as a class during the first week.)
Course Description:
This course is a context where you can continue your practice of improvisation. Classes will consist of somatic explorations, meditations, scores (both poetic and procedural), performances, writing, and discussions designed to keep us engaged in our questions around improvisation. We will use material from Deborah Hay’s theories of practice, Laban Movement Analysis (LMA), contemplative practices, classical compositional structures, and ideas from other sources that we find along the way, to expand our capacities as dance makers and technicians. We will also make time to let all of our work with the theory support us in the expression of ourselves as unique individuals coming together as a company of performers. Writing will be approached as a somatic process so that the relationship between theory and practice remains fluid and the lenses through which you view the performing arts can develop further.

Open Door Policy:
Please do not hesitate to contact me or set up a time during my office hours to discuss any of your inspirations, questions, or concerns.

Evaluation Criteria:
1. Participation (50 points, 30 for physical participation & 20 for oral participation):
   Please be on time to class. If you are more than 15 minutes late, you will have missed too much to safely participate and must observe and take notes.
   These points are awarded based on students’:
   ● willingness to engage, physically and verbally
   ● attitude toward moments of perceived failure
   ● level of respect toward other students’ processes and progress
   ● safely “trying on” certain concepts physically before fully understanding them mentally
   ● remaining curious and interested in physical explorations
   ● attentiveness to others when they speak and dance
   ● attempt to articulate their physical experience before it is totally understood
   ● ability to articulate how experience in class affects or relates to their life outside of class
   ● willingness to ask questions

2. Proficiency (20 points):
   Evaluation will be of students’ improvement in the areas described in the Course Objectives. You will receive all 20 points if you take risks. I will take video at the beginning and end of the semester and I am looking for change. If you are committed to recognizing your habitual ways of moving, making them intentional, and moving in ways that are new for you, then change will happen.

3. Score/Libretto (15 points):
   Create a score. It can be as simple or complex as you wish and must include both poetic and procedural details. You may choose the dancers you wish to perform your work, take volunteers, or use the whole class. Your score must include at least two people. The score must take no longer than 10 minutes to complete. Please turn in your first draft of this score by Monday, March 24th.
4. Score Bank (15 points):
Please keep an ongoing list of scores. You can list those we practice in class, create variations, and include scores you read about or learn in other classes or rehearsal processes. Be sure to include both poetic and procedural scores. You must have at least 100 scores by the end of the semester! Drawings are also acceptable. Due on Monday, May 5th.

Attendance Policy
Absences: You are allowed 3 absences. Each absence beyond the 3, no matter what the excuse, will result in lowering of final grade 1/3 of step, i.e., A to A-. Situations such as serious illness, long-term injury, or family emergencies may be dealt with immediately on an individual basis. In some cases, students will be given an Incomplete to be made up within the next semester. In other cases, I may recommend withdrawal from the course. If you stop attending the course without following procedure you will receive a “U” which calculates as an “F”. Lastly, you are expected to be present in both mind and body. If you are physically present, but your attention is elsewhere in a way that affects the class, I may mark you absent.

Tardies: Please be on time to class. 3 tardies equals 1 absence! If you are more than 10 minutes late, you will have missed too much of the warmup to safely participate and must observe and take notes.

Observation: If you are ill or injured, you may observe class two times with instructor’s consent. See me prior to class if possible. Detailed notes (typed) about the class and your observations must be submitted at the next class or you will be marked absent!

Important considerations for those observing:
● Notes should go beyond listing class activities. Pay attention to what the students are doing in relation to the instructor’s directions. Make correlations between what you see, what you hear, and what you personally experience when you are physically participating in the class. How does observing class further enrich your kinesthetic and cognitive understanding of dance?
● Please be aware that your presence as a witness greatly influences the class. How can you observe in a way that contributes rather than detracts from what’s happening in the room? Observe from different locations in the room, paying attention with respect and generosity. It’s a great opportunity to practice these qualities of mind. How does this kind of attention influence what you notice?
● Participate in class discussions. What is your experience?
● Important: If you check your phone or open your computer or tablet, you will be asked to leave and you will be marked absent. In rare occasions, I may ask you to take a photo or video and upload it. These are the only exceptions to this rule!

Grading
Definition of Grades for Undergraduate Students at SDSU:
● Grade of A (outstanding achievement; available only for the highest accomplishment), 4 points;
● B (praiseworthy performance; definitely above average), 3 points;
● C (average; awarded for satisfactory performance; the most common undergraduate grade), 2 points;
● D (minimally passing; less than the typical undergraduate achievement), 1 point;
● F (failing), 0 points;

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University Policies

Please check the Class Schedule for add and drop deadlines! This class may be taken for Pass/No Pass. Check with your counselor first; then fill out the proper form. To Pass, a student must earn at least 70% of the points possible in the class.

If you have a hidden or visible disability, which may require classroom or test accommodations, please see me as soon as possible during a scheduled office hour. This must happen at the beginning of the semester! If you have not already done so, please visit Student Disability Services, http://www.sa.sdsu.edu/sds/.

Expectations

This list is meant to give you a better idea of what I expect from each of you.

● Get the amount of rest, eat the kind of foods, wear the type of clothes and fix your hair in ways that will allow you to fully participate in class.
● Begin “tuning” promptly at 3PM. You all must start class, regardless of what I am doing.
● Check the syllabus before you email me! If the answer is in the syllabus, I won’t respond to your email.
● Check the syllabus for due dates. I will not remind you when assignments are due but I encourage you to remind each other.
● Keep an electronic copy of everything you turn in.
● If you are absent, check in with your fellow students about what you missed before the next class.
● If I give you something to work on in class, keep practicing, even if you feel you have it down. There is always more to find in any given movement or exploration! You also have the option of offering support to other students who might need a witness.
● Take responsibility for your own education. Be curious, look things up on your own time, and ask questions.
Please sign/date below, print your goals below, and bring this page to the next class meeting.

I, ______________________________, have read the syllabus for DANCE 256 and understand the course requirements.

___________________________________________________________________________________

Date

Signature