Dance and Culture: Dancing Values

Syllabus

Queens College

Spring 2011

Dance 151, Dance and Culture: Dancing Values

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**COURSE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

This course is designed to fulfill the Culture and Values requirement within the Perspectives on the Liberal Arts and Sciences area of the General Curriculum. In this course we will be comparing various world dance forms with some contemporary and historical dances in the United States. The aim of this course is to bring the field of dance to life on a variety of levels. The course is designed to help students grasp a wide range of cultural, aesthetic, and historical worlds from which dance is born and which are created by dance. The goal of this course is to provide students with keys to a fuller understanding of the field of dance and its relationship to other areas of the humanities and social sciences. In this course we will be investigating how dance is a carrier of cultural and aesthetic values across a wide spectrum of forms from around the globe and throughout history. Utilizing observation, discussions, participation in dance classes and writing about a variety of dance forms, the instructor will guide the students to a deeper understanding of dance as a cultural act.

This course is divided into three sections:

1. Dance as an Expression of Culture and Community

2. Dance as an Artistic Expression: History and Contexts of Theatrical Dance

3. Dance Making: Collaborating and Negotiating with our Values

Section 1 explores the meanings of dance in a variety of cultural settings and the ways in which the interactions of cultures have engendered new dance forms. Particular attention is given to the part African and African-American dance forms have played in shaping contemporary theatrical and social dances as we know them today. Issues of cultural hierarchy, stereotyping, appropriation and marginalization will be addressed. In this section, the field of Dance intersects with Sociology, Cultural Anthropology, Ethnomusicology and issues of race, ethnicity and gender and sexuality.

Section 2 takes a look at Western concert dance forms. Starting with some of the European roots of western theatre dance in court dances and ballet, we will examine a number of important figures of dance history. Ballet, modern dance, avant-garde movements of the 1960’s and 70’s, and contemporary choreographers will be discussed in the context of the cultural zeitgeist of the times. Students will be required to see a professional dance performance in Manhattan. This will be scheduled within the first two weeks of class.

Section 3 is an exploration of various approaches and techniques employed in the choreographic process. Students will learn to use improvisation as a tool for discovering movement that expresses specific ideas and values. Students will complete the section by collaborating in small groups to choreograph a final project: a dance they will work on, addressing “shared culture and values” of the students within their group.

Throughout the class, students will participate in a wide variety of activities that will enable the student to demonstrate their growing understanding of dance as a cultural and social activity steeped in the expression of values. Video viewings and participation in different dance forms will occur throughout the semester and the instructor will urge students to “try on” new ways of thinking about dance and culture in discussions with classmates. In-class choreographic projects will challenge students to create dances that speak about personal values and culture, and will allow students to apply new ideas about dance, culture and values in a concrete way. And, the ongoing journaling process will provide students primary source material to write their final synthesis paper integrating material presented and discussed in class with their own experience and understanding of a dance form they are personally familiar with.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS and GRADING PROCEDURES:**

Participation 30%

Daily Journal Entries 10%

Final Synthesis Paper 40%

Final Project 20%

Total 100%

**Attendance**

This is a participation and discussion centered class and attendance is crucial. The activities and discussions missed cannot be made up. Two absences are allowed and will not affect the final grade. Additional absences and tardiness WILL affect the final grade as follows:

After two absences your grade will be automatically lowered, as follows:

2 absences: A = highest possible grade;

3 absences: B+ = h.p.g.

4 absences: C+ = h.p.g.

5 absences: D = h.p.g.

6 absences: F = h.p.g.

Absence resulting from serious, contagious illness IS an absence. However, if non-contagious illness or serious injury prevents you from participating in class, you may observe the class without incurring an absence. During your observation you will take notes and then write a short, reflective response to the class. NO MAKE-UP CLASSES.

**Tardiness**

Two tardies are permissible and additional tardiness will affect the participation grade. Each additional tardy equals one half an absence.

**Participation**

Participation includes

- full physical involvement in movement experiences;

- informed engagement in discussions and daily writing assignments;

- concentration in class;

- willingness to try new experiences;

- respect for the ideas and values of fellow students and instructor;

- intellectual curiosity.

NOTE: lateness and absences affect your participation grade.

**Written Assignments**

Written assignments are to be handed in on the day indicated and late submission will affect your grade. Papers must be typed, double-spaced, 12 pt. Times New Roman font, in black ink, and pages must be stapled. You will be given specific guidelines and criteria for each assignment. For your own insurance, please keep copies of all papers. Please don’t forget to include your name on the title page.

**General Guidelines for Final Paper**

A 7-page synthesis paper drawing on class experiences, video observations, readings and class discussions is required. This paper will address dance as a carrier of cultural values. Students will be asked to analyze a dance form familiar to them, relating it to class experiences and reflecting on it’s aesthetic value system, comparing and contrasting it with forms studied in class. This analysis must consider the dance form’s functions in society. The students will be asked to provide full descriptive information about the dance forms, and to speculate about what information the dances being discussed provide about the values, concerns and culture of the choreographer and/or dancers. As a part of this discussion students will be asked to articulate a working definition of dance derived from class experience, viewings, readings, viewing a live performance, and their own prior knowledge.

**Journal Entries**

Your journal entries should be made as soon as possible after class so that ideas that come up in class can be recorded. If you keep up with your journal throughout the course it can become excellent source material for your paper. It is a way of processing what we experience and discuss in class and can make the process for your final paper considerably easier. I recommend writing at least a half page in your journal for each class session or activity. I will collect the journals at mid-term to check in on your progress with recording and processing what you are learning, and to see that you are building connections between the many different experiences we are having.

**Final Project**

Students will be divided into small groups of 3 to 5 students and each group will have discussions about what values they share as a group. From this initial research/discussion, students will create a 3-4 minute dance that explores the shared culture of the group. The dance must have a title and some attention must be paid to costuming. The music, poetry or prose that accompanies the dance should have a meaningful relationship to the group’s value system, however no pop music with lyrics will be allowed. I will be looking for some basic elements of dance discussed in class such as Time, Space and Movement Qualities. The class should be able to identify, by watching the movement and dancer’s relationship to one another, the shared values the group is trying to express. The class will discuss each piece after it is performed, and look at it in the context of the many different dances we have studied over the semester.