

Choreography I

DNC 276 – 3 semester credit hours
Tuesday, Thursday 11:00-12:20 am
Academic Building III, studio 101

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Office hours: Monday & Friday, 12:30-2:30 pm
Tuesday & Thursday 10-11 am

Overview

Choreography I is a beginning level composition course designed to introduce emerging artists to the craft of making dances. We will honor the 20th Century tradition of innovation in human movement as art by using its iconic text *The Art of Making Dances* by American master choreographer Doris Humphrey (1895-1958), published the year after she died. We will also filter our movement explorations through the language of Laban Movement Analysis (LMA), originated by another bright light of the 20th Century, Rudolf Laban (1879-1958). Laban was a visionary, humanist, director, choreographer, and theoretician, whose revolutionary ideas bridged the gap between the performing arts and science. Known historically as the father of Modern European Dance, Laban gathered a devoted group of movement students to begin the huge job of elaborating his theories of movement, work which continues to evolve and to excite the creative mind-body today.

This is a movement class. Arrive each day fully prepared to move.

Learning objectives

- To improve improvisational skills
- To grasp basic components of movement: Body, Effort, Shape, Space, & Phrasing.
- To practice and develop skills in generating and developing movement
- To practice and develop skills in empathetic observation
- To practice and develop skills in translating movement into articulate verbal description
- To cultivate the artist within each of us

Evaluation

20% – Class participation (including attendance, active curiosity, lively group participation, etc.)
20% – Journal
20% – Major assignments
20% – Final project
10% – Homework assignments
10% – Mid-term exam

Attendance

You are expected to arrive on time, dressed & ready to move. A student will be allowed three absences – including illness/injury – before the grade is affected. There are no “excused absences.” If you miss material, it adversely impacts the whole class. Your class participation grade will be reduced by 1/3rd grade for each absence beyond three, i.e., from A to A-, from B+ to B.

Late arrivals. Late arrival is inappropriate. It betrays your lack of respect for the class and is dangerous to your health. Three late arrivals/early departures count as an absence.

Injury/Illness. A student who is injured is expected to observe class and take notes. These notes are then made available to the group to expand everyone’s understanding of material covered. *A student whose illness may be contagious is expected to be at home recuperating.*

Make-up Policy. There are no make-ups for missed class.

Dance Majors’ Workshop. Attendance is also mandatory at the Dance Majors’ Workshop, Wednesday, December 6, 7-9 pm. This event serves as our final exam.

Flow Exchange

We want to engage your whole being, so each day as you enter the space do whatever you personally need to get your flow going and be fully present with the group.

Some suggestions:

- Raise your body temperature (run, jump, twist and shout, etc.)
- Stretch to bring flow to different parts of your body
- Wake up your breath support
- Wake up your Effort life, your expressive self
- Experiment for yourself with what you need to be fully present on any given day.

By the start of class: – Books on the side of the room,
– Activated flow in the space (dressed and mobilizing for movement).
– *No Passive Weight Effort parked in the bleachers* (I find it hugely depressing to greet a room full of couch potatoes ☺).

Basic Assignments

- *Class Attendance* – Two weekly movement classes.
- *Discussion Prep* – In response to any and all readings, write 3 observations & 3 questions.
- *Mid-term exams* – Covering verbal sharing of body knowledge based on class exercises and readings.
- *Journal* – Bring to every class. Record specific in-class writing assignments, movement observation homework, personal flights of fancy, movement ideas that catch your attention. These will be turned in periodically.
- *Major Assignments* – Observe, notate, and analyze a movement event. Then present to class.
- *Final Project* – to be presented in the Dance Majors’ Workshop, Wednesday, December 6, 7-9 pm.

Required Texts

1. *Journal* – see above.
2. *The Art of Making Dances* by Doris Humphrey (1959), any edition
3. *The Artists Way* by Julia Cameron (1992), any edition
4. Additional readings as assigned. These will likely be combined into a photocopied reader for purchase at the bookstore.

Recommended Texts

- *The Intimate Act of Choreography* by Lynne Anne Blom and Tarin Chapman (1982).
- *Choreography and the Specific Image: 19 essays and a workbook* by Daniel Nagrin (2001)
- *Form without Formula: a concise guide to the choreographic process* by Patricia Beatty (1985)
- *New Dance: approaches to nonliteral choreography* by Margery Turner (1971)
- *A Primer for Choreographers* by Lois Ellfeldt (1967, 1988)
- *Body Space Image Notes Towards Improvisation and Performance* by Miranda Tufnell and Chris Crickmay Dance Books, U.K.
- *The Knowing Body The Artist as Storyteller in Contemporary Performance* by Louise Steinman North Atlantic Books.
- *Laban for All* by Jean Newlove and John Dalby (2004)
- *Laban for Actors and Dancers: Putting Laban's Movement Theory into Practice, a Step-by-step Guide* by Jean Newlove and John Dalby (1993)
- *Your Move: A New Approach to the Study of Movement and Dance* by Ann Hutchinson Guest
- *Modern Educational Dance* by Rudolf Laban
- *Mastery of Movement* by Rudolf Laban
- *Choreutics* by Rudolf Laban

Preparation – Soma and Psyche

This is a movement class. Come prepared to move. Suggestions: empty bladder, open mind, active curiosity, generosity toward self and others, willingness to learn by doing. Feeling stupid is part of it. Not knowing is part of it. Feeling like the only one who doesn't get it is part of it. The unknown is where all things are possible. Park your critic outside the door.

Attire

Comfy, stretchy dance, yoga or sport-wear for running, jumping, twisting, rolling, sliding on the floor (no jeans, skirts, shorts, or zippers). Bare feet. No street shoes on dance floor. No food or drink except water. No cell phones. Hair tied up and away from your face.

Touch

Movement is a physical language and often includes communication through touch and weight. Students will be expected to engage physically with other students, from holding hands to participating in hands-on exercises. Also, the instructor, in the practice of professional movement training, will occasionally touch students to demonstrate specific positions or principles. Please speak to the instructor about any concerns you might have in this regard.

Academic Dishonesty

Students are expected to withhold Academic Policy Statement 810213 of the SHSU Faculty Handbook:

All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials.

Classroom Rules of Conduct

According to Section 5 of the Student Handbook, students are expected to assist in maintaining a classroom environment that is conducive to learning:

Students will refrain from behavior in the classroom that intentionally or unintentionally disrupts the learning process and, thus, impedes the mission of the university. Cellular telephones and pagers must be turned off before class begins. Students are prohibited from eating in class, using tobacco products, making offensive remarks, reading newspapers, sleeping, talking at inappropriate times, wearing inappropriate clothing, or engaging in any other form of distraction. Inappropriate behavior in the classroom shall result in a directive to leave class. Students who are especially disruptive also may be reported to the Dean of Students for disciplinary action in accordance with university policy.

Visitors in the Classroom

According to the Faculty Handbook, the following is recommended concerning visitors to the classroom:

Unannounced visitors to class must present a current, official SHSU identification card to be permitted in the classroom. They must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. If the visitor is not a registered student, it is at the instructor's discretion whether the visitor will be allowed to remain in the classroom.

Americans with Disabilities Act

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that no otherwise qualified disabled individual shall, solely by reason of his/her disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any academic, Student Life program or activity. Disabled students may request academic assistance when needed from a committee of Continuing Academic Assistance for Disabled Students by visiting the Director of the Counseling Center, located in the Lee Drain Annex. Phone 936 294 1720.

Religious Holidays

Students who are absent from class for observance for a religious holy day will be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment scheduled for that day within one week of returning to class. The student, not later than the 15th calendar day after the first day of the semester, must notify the instructor of each scheduled class day that s/he would be absent for a religious holy day. Refer to the Academic Calendar for the deadline for notification by students to the faculty of the student's intent to be absent on religious days and those days needed for travel.

Assignment #1

Create a study for one body (one minute or less) using 2-4 Still Form images from class for inspiration. Consider the various elements we have discussed in class so far:

Symmetry/asymmetry

Phrasing.

What creates the emphasis in the phrasing (see dynamics below)?

Accented (beginning, middle, end) or even phrasing

Use sound to help you find your phrasing – keep it in the phrase if you wish

Dynamics:

Strong/Light and Active/Passive Weight

Attention to Space: Direct / Indirect

Intention relative to Time: Quick / Sustained (or even)

Tension (we haven't talked about this much, but do consider how and where you use tension in your body)

Shape.

Doris Humphrey's "oppositional" vs. "successive" shapes

Still Forms (Wall Ball Pin Screw Tetrahedron)

Staging.

Where on the stage do you want us to see/experience your movement?

Spend time in the studio work-playing with your movement, unmaking and remaking it various ways so it really feels alive to you. Document your process in your journal. Make sure your process involves PLAY!!

We will watch these in class next week, October 2 and 4.

JOURNALS: Please be ready to hand in your journals so I can see the process that went into creating your study.

Choreography Midterm

Our midterm will take place next week on Tues and Thursday, October 9 and 11 and will have 2 parts: movement research presentation and movement research essay. Both of these are based on the phrase you presented in class this week.

1. Movement Research Presentation

Take the phrase you developed for Assignment #1 and conduct as many different experiments as you can think of considering the aspects of choreography that we have discussed so far in class. Go back to your notes. Go back to the reading. Go back to the list we created together (and which I typed up) for Assignment #1. **You are conducting movement research and the studio is your movement laboratory.** Challenge yourself to render this phrase completely unrecognizable, not by starting from someplace new, but by subjecting your original phrase (and/or your original images) to exhaustive experimentation. Try out all the possibilities you can think of. And then invent more possibilities.

On Tuesday and Thursday we will see 3 different phrases from each person – one of these can closely resemble your original that we saw in class this week. Please do not simply add new material to what you already have. Each of these phrases must be one minute or less.

2. Movement Research Essay

Please document your research with a written analysis of your research according to the aspects of choreography we have studied. Please use this analysis to show yourself and me that you understand all the various theoretical aspects we have discussed so far, and that you know how to apply them in practice.

500 words (include word count at end of paper)

Double-spaced

Double-sided paper (to conserve paper and minimize weight in my carry-on bag)

If you wish you may include up to 2 pages (double-sided) of supplemental material (photocopies from journal, images, drawings, lists you wrote, whatever).

The written midterm is due in class on Thursday, October 11, 2007. I am leaving for the airport directly from our class, so I must have your midterm in hand at that time.

Choreography Final Project – MOVEMENT

10 points

Go into the studio at least 3 times (for one hour each). Play. Try weaving together your phrases from earlier in the semester. Play. Do something new. Continue running experiments on something old. Play. Keep inventing new experiments to run on your old material. Run old experiments on new material. Play. Do nothing. Make a plan. Do something else. Make another plan. Stick to it. Or not. Try some more of Doris Humphrey’s suggested studies. Or start over on one you already did. Remember some flash of inspiration you had while daydreaming. Recreate it in movement. Remember your wildest dreams from the beginning of the semester. Realize them!

At least one of these dates should be completely planned out with experiments from the course of the semester. At least one of these should be completely unplanned. Open space. Blank canvas.

Document this workplaytime in your journal. Write out each plan in advance. Notate what actually happened. We’ll see the results the last week of class. Journals due the last day of class.

Choreography Final Project – WRITTEN

10 points

See *Spectrum* dance concert. See it as many times as you can. Take notes during the show.

Select three moments that were important, meaningful, touching for you, moments when you felt something happening in your own empathetic audience body.

- Describe each of these favorite moments using your evocative, poetic, experiential voice. “It was like... It made me think of... I saw... I got an image of...”
You should be really good at this by now!
- Describe what was happening on stage (assume you’re describing this to a friend who missed the show – bummer for them). What were the bodies doing? Running, jumping, etc. Where? How? Be specific. Be descriptive. Pretend I’m your friend who’s really sorry I missed the show and I want you to tell me exactly what happened.
- Describe how it affected you (empathetic audience experience). “It made me feel... I flinched when... I felt my body tense up when...” etc.
- Analyze the choreographic strategies used by the artists to create these feelings/experiences for the audience. Go back to your notes and to Doris Humphrey and imagine how she’d analyze the choreographic strategies.
- You may describe production elements (music, costumes, lighting, sets...) if you wish, but only as they relate to choreographic strategy.

This is not a review of the show. You are not evaluating the performance or the work itself. This is a paper about choreographic strategies and how they worked to affect you. It’s ok to write about my piece if you want (but only if you want – no need to try and flatter me. really).

400-500 words typed, double-spaced, *double-sided*.

Include word count at end of paper.

Include notes you took during the show (stapled to the back of the paper – ok if illegible)

Due Monday, Dec 10, 10 am.

I’ll have a box outside my office door just for your papers.

\You may involve a trusted friend for feedback only after considerable work on your own, and remembering, of course, that **you are the director with your own unique artistic vision**. When working with such an “outside eye,” please use the feedback structure we have been using this week. Share the handout with your trusted friend. Witnesses must ask permission to make suggestions, and **only after** (1) sharing what they saw/felt/experienced/imagined/enjoyed, (2) hearing your artistic concerns, and (3) framing their responses to your questions as more questions so as to get inside the artist’s (your) process.