

Dance at the Ivies



New respect for dance, and new opportunities, draw students to non-arts-focused schools

By Lisa Okuhn

Where do dancers go for training at the college level? In the past, they have typically chosen to attend conservatories like The Juilliard School, or colleges and universities known for their dance departments. Rarely would they choose Ivy League

schools or universities like Stanford (called by some an "Ivy of the West"), which have not accorded dance much esteem. On these campuses, dance typically has been limited in terms of class offerings, performance opportunities, and funding.

All that is changing. Now students can choose to immerse themselves in dance—as well as philosophy, quantum mechanics, and comparative literature—at Harvard, Stanford, and Yale.

Until 2006 Yale had no formal

dance curriculum. Now dance faculty reviews dance portfolios as part of prospective students' admissions evaluations and is building the university's dance curriculum, offering eight credited dance courses through the theater studies program; and the university has added to its Office of Career Strategy staff an advisor who focuses on arts-related professions, including dance.

At Harvard, many dance courses for credit are offered, and this year the school began offering a concentration (major) in theater, dance, and media. "With this exciting development we expect that the dance faculty and dance curriculum will expand," says Jill Johnson, director of Harvard's dance program since 2011.

Stanford's dance division has grown steadily. When dance was introduced on campus in the 1930s, it was housed in the athletic department; now the school offers a minor

in theater and performance studies with a dance specialization. All three universities have glittering rosters of faculty, guest faculty, and visiting artists.

At these schools, increased funding, new opportunities and initiatives, and direction from leading dance artists are making dance available as an integral part of any interested student's education. Professionally oriented dancers' needs are met through technique and performance- and project-based classes, plus theory, history, and other courses.

Why the change?

Why is dance being embraced on these campuses? Harvard's Johnson cites a report by a 2007 task force on the arts, which called on the institution to make the arts "an integral part of the cognitive life of the University." She credits the task force with driving the emergence of a robust dance

culture on campus. Johnson echoes the task force report in saying—as do an increasing number of voices in academia—that arts practices develop imagination, inventiveness, mastery of technique, and boldness of conviction, all attributes that are needed to navigate a complex society.

"If an education can provide students with a dexterity in thinking and the courage of artistry," Johnson says, "then we're preparing citizens who can negotiate our complex world and make it a better place." And, she adds, there is recognition that offering the new concentration will diversify and add vibrancy to Harvard's student body, attracting "students who might have chosen other universities because of their offerings in the arts."

Dance in a liberal arts context

Stanford, Yale, and Harvard don't offer dance majors per se; Columbia



Matthew Rushing, rehearsal director at Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, is one of the many guest artists who have set work on Yale Dance Theater. OPPOSITE: Stanford graduate Katharine Hawthorne (in Diane Frank's *Construction Site* at Stanford's Cantor Art Center) says her college experience led her to take an experimental tack when choreographing.

Photo by Elena Zhukova

Photo by Michael Marsland



Yale Dance Theater performed Trisha Brown's *Group Primary Accumulation* at Yale University Art Gallery last year.

is the only Ivy that does, through the Barnard College Department of Dance. This hearkens back to a longstanding mutual mistrust: of the intellect by some in the pure dance field, and of the body by many in academia. Successfully presenting dance as a real and legitimate area of study to a sometimes contemptuous academy has required patience and long-term strategic thinking. But a burgeoning recognition on liberal arts campuses that arts practices are valuable is producing a cadre of dance scholars, choreographers, and performers who bring context, consideration, and rigor to their work.

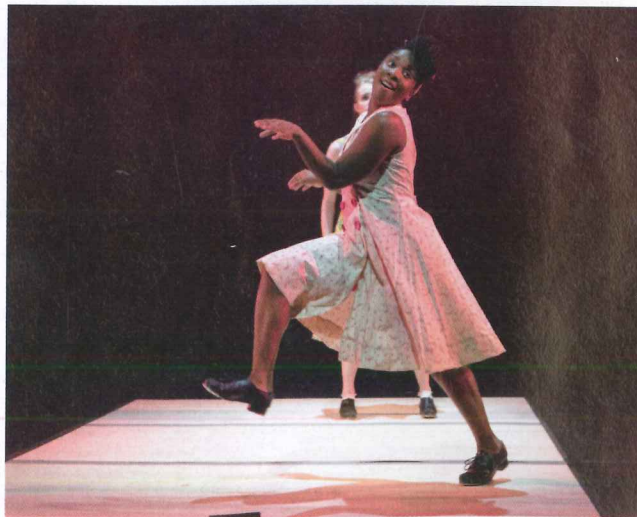
"Situating dance studies within the liberal arts curriculum," says Emily Coates, director of dance studies at Yale, "cultivates artist citizens whose medium is dance. The students have plenty to say in relation to and through their dance practice, a model in which they write, make work, understand historical context. They're well equipped to ask a lot of ques-

tions and to think about dance as a form of research and inquiry."

At Stanford, says Diane Frank, lecturer in the university's division of dance, this has been true for some time. "Since the 1940s there was a group of people who framed dance as a research investigation in addition to technical training and in addition to being an art form. Dance is simultaneously a studio practice and a cultural critique or carrier of culture." There is, she says, "a reaching from

our department toward an engagement with large questions about history or politics or medicine." Dance theory, history, and criticism courses complement and illuminate studio work, a kind of layered inquiry much valued at Stanford. Studio practice at the school, Frank adds, always "shares this investigative view of embodied practice; in fact most performance projects can be characterized as investigations with performance outcomes."

(Continued on page 140)



Two Harvard students had a world premiere work, *I Raise Hell*, set on them by Michelle Dorrance and Melinda Sullivan.

Top photo by Michael Marsland; bottom photo by Liza Voll

2
 Atl
 Cou
 Aus
 Bill
 Det
 Elm
 Bilox
 Rock
 John
 Tuls
 Des
 India
 Minn
 Bridg
 Norfa
 Supp
 Phila
 Gran
 Jack
 Gree
 Texar
 Chatt
 Roan
 Amar
 Phoen
 Corpu
 DO
 Visit o