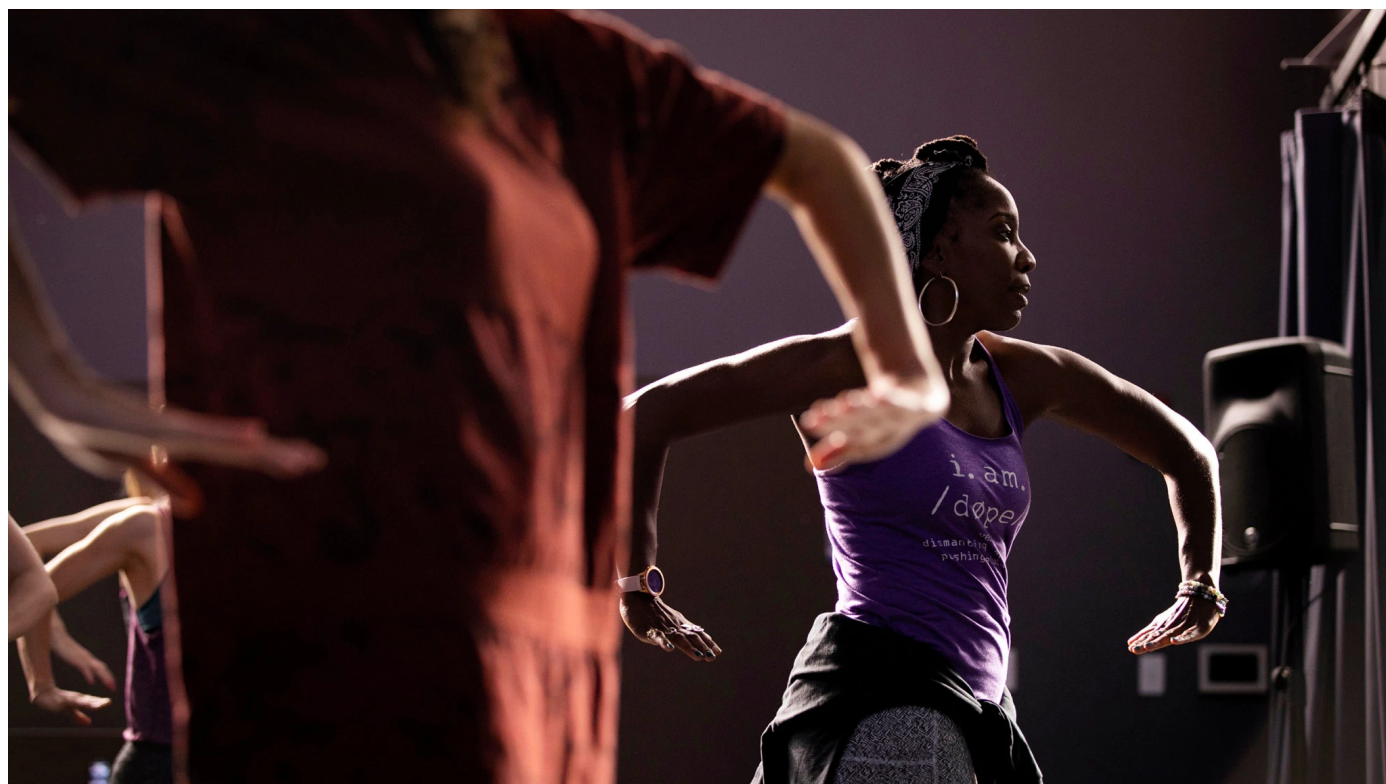


**ARTS & HUMANITIES**

# Hip-hop steps up



Aysha Upchurch (right) teaches “Hip Hop Dance: Exploring the Groove and the Movement Beneath and Beyond the Beat” in Farkas Hall. Photos by Stephanie Mitchell/Harvard Staff Photographer

## Combining dance with a look at the social and cultural history of the genre

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In Aysha Upchurch’s new course, “Hip Hop Dance: Exploring the Groove and the Movement Beneath and Beyond the Beat,” students learn the histories behind some of their favorite moves.

“Hip-hop dance has been seen in a variety of spaces, from dance studios to commercials to competitions to TV programs. The exposure is beautiful, but there’s so much exposure to just the form that people are missing the context,” said Upchurch, Ed.M. ’15, a visiting lecturer in Theater, Dance & Media and instructor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

In addition to choreography and movement instruction at weekly class meetings, students watch and discuss documentaries about hip-hop culture, including “Paris Is Burning,” about drag ball culture in 1980s New York, and “From Mambo to Hip-Hop: A South Bronx Tale,” on the socioeconomic history of the borough.

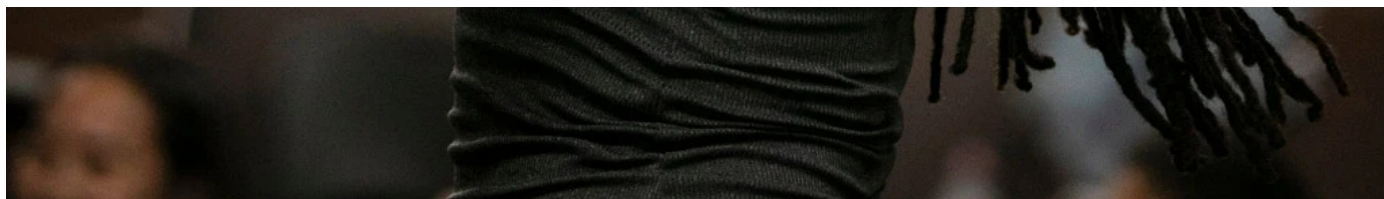
“I really love dancing, and I thought this would be an interesting class, to combine dance with an academic setting and to learn more about the history and foundations of hip-hop, which I didn’t know much about,” said Courtney Rabb ’22, an applied math concentrator. “This class is so fun and welcoming for all skill levels and anyone interested in learning.”

At the end of the semester, students write about the evolution of their views of the genre, paying particular attention to the contextual lessons of geography, history, race, gender, and culture present in the learning materials.

“Knowledge is power, and actually having a space to get knowledge, develop knowledge, and hold knowledge in the body could be hopefully liberating for folks, to know that it doesn’t decrease your love for dance to get to know a little bit deeper about it,” said Upchurch. “Seeking out the ‘why’ of dance doesn’t have to displace the fun of it. If anything, it enhances it. I’m hoping the more that students know about hip-hop, the more they can love it and hold it and care for it and appreciate it.”







Margaret Canady '20 (from left), Rachel Kang '20, Trancy Zhu '22, and Meredith Pong '20 listen to instruction during class.

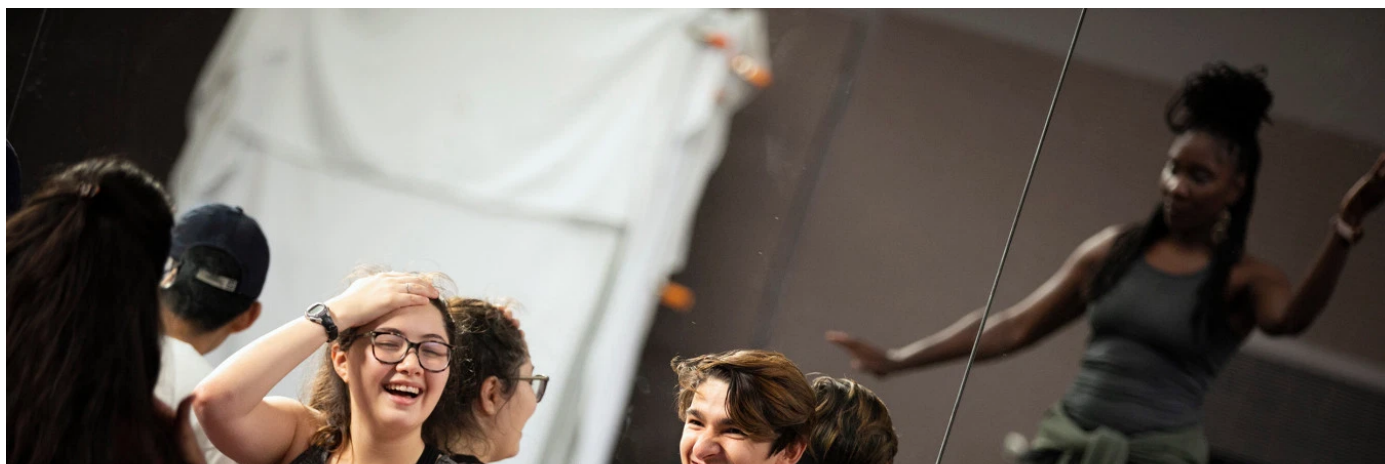


Margaret Canady '20 (center) dances during class.



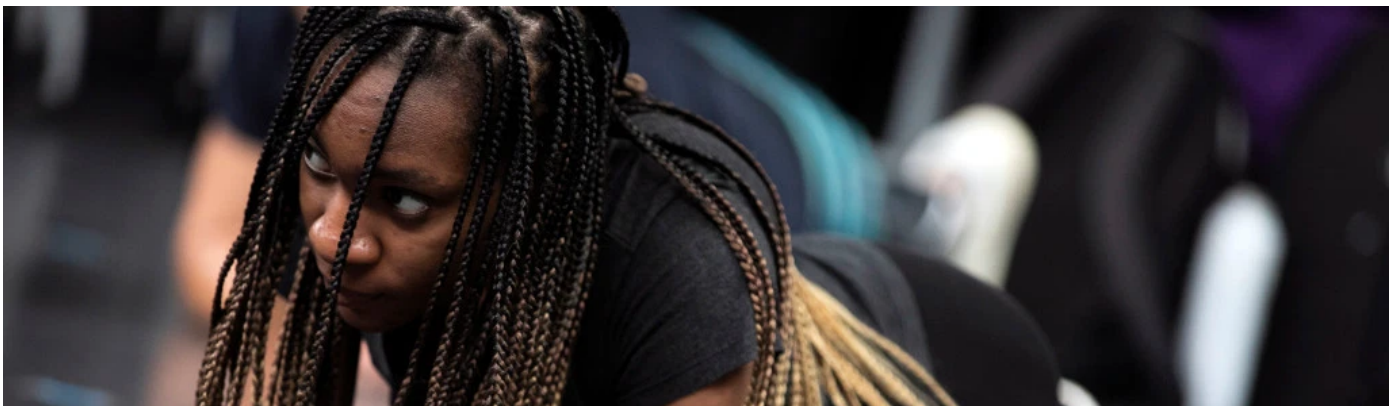


Marie Alejandra Konopacki '21 (left) and Jeremy Perry, a grad student at the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE), hold their balance, while Rene Martin of HGSE and Noah Ramos '21 dance.





Cassandra Kane '21, Daniel Rivera '20, and Rebecca You '20 react during class.





Marie Alejandra Konopacki '21 (left) stretches, while Jordan Lawanson '22 holds a plank.

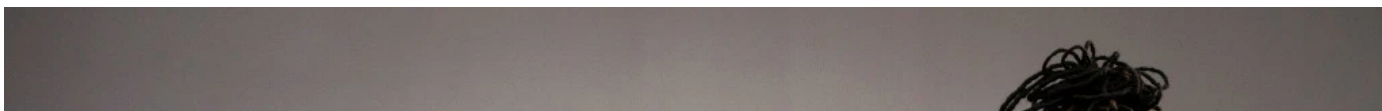


Ashley LaLonde '20 (right) strikes a pose.





"Hip-hop has been at Harvard since hip-hop started," said Upchurch. "Two Harvard students started The Source magazine in 1988, The Hip-hop Archive and Research Institute is here, I teach a graduate course on hip-hop education, there are hip-hop dance crews. It has always existed here. So, it's not about hip-hop needing academia's stamp, it's about academia realizing that hip-hop is going to exist wherever it wants."





Dara Badon '22 (center) dances during class; Meghan Tveit '20 (left) and Aysha Upchurch join in. "The title I give myself first is the Dancing Diplomat," said Upchurch, Ed.M. '15. "I try to be an ambassador for dance and movement and to rep hip-hop culture beyond what folks know on the surface."



"It's the best class I've taken so far. It's my first time learning hip-hop, and there are a lot of people who are really good, but everyone supports each other," said Aleeza Shakeel '20 (center).



Adiah Price-Tucker '22 (left) and Jordan Lawson '22 share a moment. The students worked together to develop choreography and give feedback on each other's work, in keeping with hip-hop customs of immediate feedback and cyphers. At the end of the semester, the groups performed their pieces for each other.





Daniel Rivera '20 (center) feels the beat.