

**Skidmore College Dance Department
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility
Year One Progress Report**

BACKGROUND

The Skidmore College Dance Department recognizes the need for change within our community. With a primarily Eurocentric focus of training and goals within the department, now is the time to make considerable changes to improve our department and curriculum to be more inclusive to the Skidmore student body. Therefore, in Academic Year (AY) 2020-2021, the dance department began the important work of incorporating diversity, equity, and inclusion as a central focus of the program. This ongoing work will be an evolving journey for our department and community for the foreseeable future. This year, the department hired Kasey Catlett, Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at the College of the Holy Cross to implement an anti-racism program and training for department faculty and staff. This work continued throughout the Spring 2021 semester and informed the actions and plans presented in the Year 1 Progress Report and Action Plan. We are committed to improving the climate of this department and creating a welcoming and equitable community for all.

OVERARCHING DEPARTMENTAL GOALS

Based on the education and training completed in AY '20-21 the following goals will guide the work of the dance department moving into the future:

- 1. Create a more welcoming & inclusive departmental climate for all students**
- 2. Develop more diverse course offerings taught by a diverse faculty/staff**
- 3. Invest in more inclusive curriculum that will help support and develop more inclusive student scholarship**
- 4. Actively engage in continued anti-racist and DEIA education**

DEPARTMENTAL ACTIONS

Improved communication and listening to student voices

Progress to Date: In February and March of 2021, the dance department held two community forums which were moderated by Kasey Catlett, Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at the College of the Holy Cross. The goal of these forums was to create a more inclusive department culture by opening a dialogue within the department community. Each forum hosted over 40 Skidmore Students who engaged in a dialogue of a variety of topics which helped to inform action items such as the implementation of a monthly departmental newsletter, enhanced social media presence to share news and events with the student body, and inform the decisions to revise the Fall curriculum to include a diversified offering of studio based courses.

In March 2021 we welcomed the Brooklyn based dance company, Urban Bush Women (UBW) to engage the department in a virtual BOLD workshop. Seventy members of the dance community attended this event. BOLD is Urban Bush Women's unique approach to facilitating a dialogue within an organization. Leveraging dance as a catalyst for social change and consistently seeking the broadest range of engagement possible has led UBW to train rigorously in dialogue facilitation, analyzation of racism and its manifestations in group dynamics, and in the field of brain compatible dance education (a holistic practice rather than dance instruction as mimicry)—in addition to concert dance technique & performance. This was another moment to engage in a physical and verbal dialogue in efforts to improve the climate of the department.

This year the Skidmore Dance Department implemented a new set of policies and procedures for the Student Committee. These policies and procedures were adopted by the Student Committee on 3/12/21 and are attached in the appendix. These policies will help to improve and streamline communication

between the student body and faculty/staff. Additionally, the department worked with the Student Committee to appoint two new members at the end of the Spring Semester.

As previously mentioned, the Skidmore Dance Department started a new monthly Newsletter in February of 2021 in response to students sharing the need for improved communication within the department. This newsletter included a section written by the Student Committee and the Senior Capstone class. The Newsletter is now archived on the department website for reference and is also linked in the bio of the departmental Instagram page to students to access.

Diversified Course Offerings

Progress to Date: In Spring 2021 the Skidmore Dance Department offered Jazz 2 taught virtually by guest artist Katiti King, which has been a resounding success. For the Fall of 2021, course offerings have been expanded further to incorporate African Diasporic traditions including Tap 2, Hip/Hop & Urban Dance Styles, as well as another semester of Jazz 2. Furthermore, in the Spring of 2021 the department offered its first virtual guest artist workshop series. This master class series engaged students in exciting movement experiences within a variety of dance disciplines, ranging from varied approaches to contemporary dance practices to hip hop and street styles. Artists presenting master classes in this workshop series included Shakia Barron, formerly of Rennie Harris PureMovement; Doug Varone of Doug Varone and Dancers; Wendell Gray II, sponsored through Ensemble Connect; Peter Chu, formerly of Crystal Pite's Kidd Pivot; Antonio Brown, formerly of Bill T. Jones/Artie Zane Dance Company; and Ephrat Asherie, New York City based and award-winning B-Girl.

Diversified New Faculty Hires

Progress to Date: The Skidmore Dance Department is currently finalizing the new contingent faculty hires for the 2021-22 academic year. The interview committee for these hires included Jason Ohlberg, Sarah DiPasquale, and Erika Pujic. Candidates participated in interviews and were invited to teach a workshop for Skidmore students to allow for a transparent hiring process. We will announce the new faculty teaching for Fall 2021 as soon as possible. We anticipate this happening in early summer. While filling our current openings will help to expand course offerings and diversify the current faculty, we have applied for a new initiative from the College to fill the retirements of Mary DiSanto Rose and Debra Fernandez which will be a toward diversifying offerings and faculty in a more permanent position.

Course Curricular Revisions

Progress to Date: The Dance & Society courses (DA 230 & DA 335), which have traditionally covered the origins of Western concert dance, have effectively served as courses in the history of ballet and modern dance from a Eurocentric lens. Over the past five years, the Dance Department has engaged in ongoing conversation about how focusing both courses exclusively on Western forms—specifically DA 230, which is an introductory course for all majors and minors—is problematic in that it emphasizes an exclusively Eurocentric perspective. This can often have an alienating effect on students for whom Western forms are neither their primary training nor interest.

In response to current discourse in the fields of dance history and dance studies, as well as feedback from student course evaluations, the Dance Department implemented strategic changes to the Dance & Society curriculum, beginning in the fall of 2020. DA 230, the introductory course and requirement for all dance majors and minors, has shifted focus to be inclusive of myriad traditions that demonstrate dance's relevance as a theatrical art, a social practice, and a cultural mirror. Covering topics from Powwow and Hula to how African Diasporic forms have shaped and informed all forms of American dance, this shift has disrupted a centralized and hegemonic narrative, and allowed students space to focus their research on traditions and practices that are of personal relevance and interest.

Since DA 335 is a requirement for dance majors in the Performance/Choreography track, the syllabus still focuses on concert dance. However, the course now emphasizes marginalized voices that have typically been omitted from the historic dance canon, and challenges students with critical analysis of how socioeconomic, sociopolitical, and hegemonic dominance have shaped the Western artistic landscape in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These changes to both courses have greatly diversified our curriculum in positive ways and provided students, from all backgrounds, a means with which to engage with dance and its many diverse histories.

Faculty/Staff DEIA Education and Training

Progress to Date: Beginning in January 2021, the department began working with Kasey Catlett, Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at the College of the Holy Cross to engage in ongoing training in diversity, equity and inclusion. Through the initial training sessions, it became clear that a better understanding of both the student and faculty/staff lived experience within the department was essential in determining the direction of the training and education moving forward. Therefore, in March of 2021 a unique set of survey questions was developed by Kasey Catlett for the Skidmore Dance Department and the climate survey was sent to students to help inform the direction and action plans in future semesters. We anticipate analyzing and reporting on survey findings to the dance department community in Fall 2021.

Unfortunately, Kasey Catlett had a serious health emergency and training for the second half of the Spring semester was postponed, including the faculty/staff survey process. We anticipate resuming training and further departmental climate assessment in Fall 2021.

The faculty and staff in the Skidmore Dance Department are committed to continued anti-racism education and training. We are also committed to learning what we can do better to create a more equitable and inclusive department. We recognize that actively engaging in anti-racism work is an ongoing practice. We thank Kasey for his expertise and guidance throughout the beginning of the Spring semester and look forward to continuing this work as we move forward.

Collaboration with the Student Committee

Progress to Date: During the Fall semester of 2020 issues arose within our department which made it clear that we did not have the written policies and procedures necessary in order to foster a collaborative and productive space for the Student Committee to function within the department. Working in tandem with the committee to develop and clarify procedures, we have since implemented a standard operating code for the student committee which provides the framework to work collectively and collaboratively as a team (See Appendix I attached). Furthermore, the department created a new shared filing system between faculty/students on box.com to assist with organization and transparency.

In Spring of 2021 the Student Committee assisted the department with a number of agenda items. These included promoting new course offerings for Fall 2021 through the creation of marketing posters and social media posts. They also assisted in promoting the departmental Climate Survey and promoting the Department Community Forum. Additionally, they worked to solidify a nomination process for new committee members, wrote committee summaries for the departmental newsletter, and held committee meetings to hear from the student body. We are thankful for the work of the Student Committee and look forward to a continued collaboration with its members and the student body as a whole.

Diversifying Performance Workshops

Progress to Date: Performance workshops in the Skidmore Dance Department have been historically Eurocentric in focus. The department is committed to presenting a diversified performance experience for both students and audiences moving forward. We are in the process of solidifying a guest artist to create a Hip Hop dance workshop for the Fall semester of 2021. The artist's name will be announced in

the department summer newsletter once confirmed. Additionally, Tina Baird will be conducting a Tap performance workshop in Spring 2022. Furthermore, there are plans to bring a guest artist to set a new work during the Spring semester (discipline and artist TBD).

Student Teaching Assistant Hiring Process

Progress to Date: In Fall 2020 a new system for hiring student workers was implemented to support a more inclusive hiring process for student employees within the department. Teaching Assistant positions are now posted through the student employment system and all interested students may apply accordingly. The department plans to permanently adopt this new hiring procedure.

New Faculty Mentorship Program

Progress to Date: We are currently working on devising a faculty mentorship program for new faculty joining the department. This program will be implemented in the Fall of 2021. Additionally, the department faculty and staff have been revising departmental policies and procedures and updating the current handbook which will be shared with all new faculty alongside institutional orientation/onboarding materials.

Community Outreach

Progress to Date: We aim to serve the students of Skidmore College and recognize the importance of connecting and engaging with the community of Saratoga Springs at large. The Bridges to Skidmore program offers dance classes twice per week to individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities. While this program and subsequent course is planned to run once per year, with COVID restrictions we were not able to invite community dancers onto campus. Therefore, a virtual version of the course was offered and run as an independent study by a Skidmore dance major. This program offered a 60-minute virtual dance class to the community at Saratoga Bridges throughout the Spring 2021 semester.

In addition to the Bridges to Skidmore program, for the past two years the Skidmore dance department has offered a series of community classes for older adults, taught by Skidmore dance majors and minors. As with the Bridges program, this on campus offering was compromised due to COVID restrictions, however, a virtual class was offered to the community in Spring 2021. This 60-minute free virtual dance class, taught by a Skidmore dance major, engaged community members 55+ throughout the semester.

ACTION PLAN -- YEAR 2

Course Revisions

In AY'21-22 the dance department anticipates moving forward with a substantial revision of the Dance Experience course – a popular course that fulfills the all-college requirement of Artistic Inquiry Through Practice. We recognize that the current course structure, including only ballet and modern dance, does not constitute a 'dance experience' and instead only further deepens the disproportionate Eurocentric focus of dance in the department. We plan to significantly revise this course to incorporate movement practices and styles that engage students with dance from diverse perspectives.

Assessment (D&S)

In AY'21-22 the dance department plans to conduct our annual departmental direct assessment on Dance and Society Curriculum. We hope to better understand the impact of, and the student experience in these courses, which will ultimately inform more revisions to create inclusive course curriculum in the future.

Diversify New Faculty Hires

In AY'21-22 the dance department plans to continue diversifying the faculty if given the ability to hire from the institution. Any positions offering non-contingent contracts, longer than one year, will include a hiring committee with an external committee member to assist in addressing inherent "blind spots" and biases, as well as 1-2 student representatives to assure that the student voice is represented in the hiring process.

Continue Faculty/Staff education and training

In AY'21-22 the dance department anticipates continuing with faculty/staff DEIA education and training. We aim to continue the work started in AY '20-21 with Kasey Catlett and engage in training and continued education on an individual and department level.

Community Forums/Chat with the Chair

In AY'21-22 the dance department will hold bi-monthly 'Chat with the Chair' sessions in an effort to support an open dialogue with students. These forums will be advertised on social media, through the department newsletter, and via the dancelist email server.

Communication

In AY'21-22 the dance department will continue with the monthly department newsletters initiated in Spring of 2021. These newsletters will continue to be posted on the department website and shared on social media as a means to reach the broader student community and improve communication. The departments ongoing relationship with the student committee will aid in developing a greater understanding of student needs while at the same time, provide the platform for clear and efficient communication.

Collaboration with the Student Committee

The Skidmore Dance Department is committed to a continued collaborative relationship with the student committee and looks forward to this work in AY '21-22. As stated in the student committee policies and procedures, Committee representatives will be invited to join the departmental meeting once per month and additionally, work alongside the Chair on departmental agenda items.

Community Outreach

As mentioned above in the Year 1 actions, students have been engaging in virtual community dance classes through independent studies this year. It is unclear if we will be able to open the Bridges to Skidmore course for adults with disabilities and 55+ Adult dance courses as in-person experiences throughout AY '21-22 due to COVID restriction. Currently, Prof. DiPasquale is talking with students about continuing the virtual experiences and/or determining if limited in-person classes can be offered next year.

Accessibility

We have requested through the Skidmore institutional Capital Budget to hire an outside contractor to obtain construction drawings and estimates from an architect to renovate the dance theater and studios. These renovations would increase accessibility, including in the theater restroom space. Furthermore, examples of specific accessibility issues that are of primary concern are the lack of accessible entrances to studio space in DS1 and DS2 (step up with no ramp), the lack of access to restrooms on the first floor (must climb a flight of stairs to access restrooms with no elevator), and the small step up into the IM Gym space from the studio hallway which can be a tripping hazard. We await the response to our proposal and aim to move forward in this planning in AY '21-22 if approved.