Bodies, Movement and Queer Meaning in Contemporary Dance

DANCE 395V-01 & WGSS 395V-01
Monday/Wednesday 2:30-3:45, Totman 204
Erin Kouwe, ekouwe@umass.edu
Office hours by appointment

Course Description

What do we learn from the way we move through the world?
What can movement teach us about relationship and identity?
How can dance function as a realm to practice new ways of relating or building alternative futures?

This class poses an inquiry into queer and feminist thought through the lens of dance. We recognize the body as a site of knowledge production and investigate how movement and performance can highlight the intersection of theory and lived experience.

Class has a regular movement component: students will be guided through improvisational practices to develop their own methods of inquiry through movement. No previous experience with dance is necessary and dancers from all traditions are encouraged to join. Our practice will be in conversation with authors including adrienne marie brown, Audre Lorde, Ann Cooper Albright, Petra Kuppers, José Muñoz, Fiona Buckland, and others. We will watch and be in conversation about performances by choreographers like Rosie Herrera, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, Ananya Chatterjea, Miguel Guitierrez, and Ralph Lemon.

In this course we will:
- Read from scholars in queer and feminist theory as well as dance and performance studies.
- Watch performances, often an hour to 90-minutes long, which may include nudity, sexual themes, and culturally challenging content. They also may be funny, poignant, and joyful. They will often be both.
- Have open and productive conversations about what we read and watch. We will ask questions about what we don't understand, think critically about what we're taking in, and consider where ideas might go from here.
- Propose and practice improvisational dance scores and choreograph movement material.
- Warm up our bodies, get our heart rates up, sweat, lie on the floor, and move slowly.
- Perform with and for one another.
- Witness each other with generosity.
- Collaborate.
Articulate our ideas through physical practice, performance, and writing, not privileging one format over the other, but working intentionally with the strengths of each to express the complexity of our ideas.

Course Objectives

After completion of this course, students will
1. Devise, collect, and regularly exercise their own creative practices.
2. Engage an interdisciplinary approach to research, both creative and textual.
3. Perform their own creation-research project.
4. Articulate their research process and artistic inquiry through language.
5. Display confident artistic choice-making in movement practices.

Evaluation and Assignments

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Participation and Attendance

Dance is experiential, therefore attendance and open, intentional contribution in class is paramount to success in this course. A movement class is rigorous fun: taking creative risks and engaging with physical challenges reveals the joy of the work. My goal is to facilitate a space where we support ourselves and our colleagues in constant inquiry. **Attendance is extremely important, both to your learning and to your contribution to the culture of our class.**

- Your attendance is required for all of our scheduled meetings so that our collective practice can evolve. Absences beyond two are cause for concern as they significantly decrease your learning and your contribution to class.
  - **Every absence beyond 2 will lower your grade by half a letter.**
  - **3 tardies equals an absence.**
  - **More than 2 observation days will affect your participation grade.**

When observing, take notes on class and use your time to observe and learn from your peers. Notes must be emailed to me by the end of the day (a picture of handwritten notes is acceptable).

Absences are intended to help you navigate unexpected situations that inevitably arise: illness, emergencies, etc. There is no excused or unexcused absence: you do not owe
me an explanation when you miss class. I encourage you to keep me in the loop if something is disrupting your participation.

- **Participation Rubric**
  The invitation is for each of you to be in class, to be on time, and to participate fully. Our in-person practice is the heart of the class. It offers us a chance to build community and allows me to see your growth and give feedback.
  - It is your responsibility to be in communication with me if you are navigating extenuating circumstances that affect your attendance.

### Weekly Reflection

Each week, students will write a reflection by Sunday evening. This reflection should detail the curiosities that emerge from the week’s material and discuss the connections you draw between the reading, watching, and practice we do. The purpose of the reflection is to help you track and articulate developing ideas and interests that might support your final creative project. They do not have to take a particular format: I am the audience for these reflections, but they are intended to support your process and the synthesizing of your ideas. You might cite your experience in class, assigned readings and viewings, performances you witnessed, rehearsal processes you are involved in, something that sparked your interest in another class, or even everyday observations that speak to creative process and research.

- 500-700 words each week
- Turned in on Moodle by end of day on Sundays.
- Thoughtfully composed and well-written.

### Group Project

Students will collaborate to choreograph a short performance by generating their own scores and movement and by synthesizing, arranging, and editing scores and practices from class. You will also speak about your process to the class after your performance. You will have an in-class work day and a weekend to meet with your group.

**Group project workday and performance: 3/27 & 3/29**

### Final Creative Project

Students will make a performance project that engages creative process as inquiry to explore a topic of their choice. Your performance will be informed by movement studies and readings that we have touched on in class. You might start with a creative research question that speaks to your area of expertise or a specific curiosity, or you might start with creative process and follow up on the inquiries that emerge with textual research. I encourage you to take our classwork as a launching point for your own methods and curiosities: dive into polydisciplinamory as it suits your work. **Drafts will be shared in class the week of April 24 & 26. Final projects will be performed live the last week of class, 5/15 and 5/17.**
Process Paper

Students will detail their research and synthesize their learning in a process paper. This paper will be held to high academic standards (MLA or Chicago guidelines). In the paper, you will articulate your artistic inquiry, values, methods, and reflect upon the outcome of your work. The paper will address the following:

Scholarly Research

Give a brief summary of the textual research that supports your work. This might be research on a certain topic or object of study that you are approaching with your creative work, and/or resources that support your approach to creative inquiry.

**Draft due 4/7** (500-600 words)

Creative Process

What methods did you use to build your piece? How do they relate to your research? What did the creative process reveal to you about your research?

**Draft due 5/5** (500-600 words)

Evaluation

In what ways do your creative process and final work reflect the evolution of your ideas?

- 1750-2000 words
- Size 12 Times New Roman font
- Double spaced, 1” margins
- Page numbers
- Bibliography

**Final papers are due within a week of your final performance: 5/22 or 5/24 respectively**

Communication

Moodle

[https://umass.moonami.com](https://umass.moonami.com)

Moodle will be the home base for all our course information. Assignments, syllabus, and other resources will be posted there. If you’re looking for something, check Moodle first.

Email

Please email me at ekouwe@umass.edu with questions or concerns about class.

Recording

I may video record parts of our class to share only with members of the class in case of absences or for the purpose of assignments. For example, we may record a score we’re
working on and refer back to it later to reflect on the changes we’ve made. If you access a recording, I ask that you do not share it with anyone else, out of respect for the privacy of our group.

**It will never be required that you participate in an in-class video. If you have concerns or questions about recording, please let me know either in person or via email as soon as possible.**

Note
This document is a living document, subject to change as necessary to accommodate the needs of our class.