MISSION

The mission of the Department of Dance is to provide an environment conducive to comprehensive training in performance, choreography, and theoretical studies within the framework of a liberal arts education. The Dance program is based upon the central premise that both art and education are extensions of the total humanistic endeavor, and that by developing creative artists and nurturing the art of dance in higher education, individuals may be empowered to enrich and further the arts in our society in relevant, diverse and meaningful ways. The goals of the graduate program are:

- To educate dance artists for the professional and/or academic world.
- To foster in each individual an intellectual as well as artistic approach to professional goals.
- To develop the creative individual as a maker, a doer and a solver.
- To develop the ability to communicate well in verbal, written and movement forms.
- To challenge students to see, interpret, analyze and evaluate works of art from various fields, times and points of view.
- To instill in each student a clear and personal aesthetic of his or her artistic work and to provide the skills necessary to articulate those ideas.
- To nurture the wholeness of the individual, body, mind and spirit, and to be free to challenge the borders of what has come before.

ADMISSION PROCESSES AND CRITERIA

Students who demonstrate accomplishment in dance performance and/or choreography may apply for admission to the M.F.A. program. Before they are admitted, applicants select either the choreography or the performance track. Those with a college degree normally must have achieved a 3.0 minimum G.P.A. Those without a college degree are considered if they have a minimum of 10 years professional dance experience. Admission is based on a committee review of videotaped choreographic and performance work, detailed biographical information, statements of intent, and three letters of recommendation. If selected, applicants come to campus for a visit that includes an interview, teaching and technique auditions, and the performance of a solo dance. We receive 20 to 30 applications each year. From these, we invite 8 to 12 candidates for an on-campus audition and admit 4 to 6.

Applicants come from the dance profession and undergraduate dance programs. In the first case, candidates have been active and successful in the professional realm as dancers and choreographers. Typically they have been in professional companies, have founded their own companies, or have produced original choreographic works in various concert venues. In the second case, candidates are completing their undergraduate education and
demonstrate early artistic talent and academic skills. In recent years we have received applications through the Fulbright Program and admitted qualified candidates from Latin America. The department has a good record of enrolling a diverse student body.

The department supports graduate students though 6 HTE’s from CLAS and 1 from the Division of Performing Arts; it has no scholarship funds of its own but receives three Iowa Arts Fellowships and for the past five years has received Deans Fellowships for minority candidates. All graduate students either teach, receive Iowa Arts Fellowships, or both. Including salaries and scholarships, students receive between $12,000 and $18,000 per year.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

Nearly all Dance students complete their degree within two years and financial support is limited to three years. Students have received numerous awards including the UI Teaching Assistant Award, Zeta Phi Eta Award, Regional Dance America Choreography Award, and the Capezio Award. They have received disciplinary recognition by being invited to present their choreographic works at regional and national levels through the American College Dance Festival and other professional venues. The department has an excellent record of placing MFA graduates. Nearly all obtain teaching positions in colleges and universities or work in professional dance companies.

PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS

Size. Given the size of the dance faculty and resources for production, the number of graduate students (11-14) is about right. Fewer students would result in fewer undergraduate dance courses, and these courses always fill to capacity. Fewer graduate students would also limit the creative work of the faculty. This creative work – normally choreography presented at campus concerts – is important to the faculty, to students who see the skills of those with more training, and to the dance community. On the other hand, additional students would require more financial support, as well as additional production opportunities and mentoring. Without an increase in faculty and budgetary support the department could not substantially increase the number of students.

Comparisons. There are no formal comparisons among dance departments. Our department recently completed the process for accreditation by the National Association of Schools of Dance and we anticipate an affirmative response. Informally, we are confident in saying that while we are not among the elite dance departments (NYU, for example), we fit easily in the next tier, and hold a place in the top twenty or so in the country.

Strengths and weaknesses. The M.F.A. program possesses many strengths. They include (1) The large number of opportunities for graduate students to perform or to show their works of choreography. (2) The program's flexibility. Although students designate one track of study (choreography or performance) they may present work in the other track as well. (3) The interdisciplinary nature of the program. All graduate students are required
to take courses outside of the department. This allows them to make use of the University’s resources and tailor their plan of study to suit their needs and interests. Moreover, each year the department offers "Collaborative Performance," a course which draws students from Dance, Music, Theatre, Writer's Workshop, Intermedia, and other disciplines. They participate in a collaborative process that culminates in a fully produced concert. (4) Careful mentoring of student artistic work and teaching. Students receive extensive individual advising throughout every substantial creative process, teaching or research assignment. (5) The diversity of work assignments. These range from teaching in the studio or academic classroom to marketing, production and arts administration. (6) A strong production unit which supports numerous concerts a year. (7) A diverse faculty drawn from many areas of the profession (studio, performance and academic), that brings years of experience in the field to bear on their teaching and mentoring of grad students.

The department’s weaknesses are (1) There is difficulty keeping up with the demands of the contemporary performing arts world, especially those relating to purchase and maintenance of state-of-the-art audio and video technology; it is also difficult to afford staff who can teach faculty and students how to use it. (2) Performance facilities are relatively weak. The department has only one theatre (Space Place) which requires new air handling and other equipment. A study has been completed which details necessary improvements. (3) Halsey Hall has many strengths, including outstanding studios, but (a) it is not air conditioned, (b) rehearsal and classroom space is limited, and (c) many faculty offices are tiny. It is our hope that Dance will be included in the planning and fund raising for new arts facilities. (4) We hope to increase and diversify our applicant pool by improving recruitment methods.

CONCLUSIONS

The MFA Dance program is relatively small but excellent. Students are highly talented and motivated, and each year they present a wide range of outstanding work. All faculty members are engaged professionally and are dedicated to their students – and the students appreciate the attention they are given. The department is part of the Division of Performing Arts and works closely with the School of Music and the Department of Theatre Arts on cutting-edge interdisciplinary projects. As facilities improve – something we expect will happen over the next few years – the department will gain additional national attention and take its place among the nation’s very best dance programs.