

# National Association of Schools of Dance

## ADVISORY

### Transitions from High School to Undergraduate Degree Programs

#### Definition of an Undergraduate Degree Program

Undergraduate degree programs in dance develop dance knowledge and skills in a program of study at the collegiate level. Normally, these programs require four years of full-time study, longer if students attend part-time. There are different types of undergraduate degrees, each serving different purposes. Some, but not all dance degrees are intended to prepare for career entry as a performing professional or dance teacher. Programs also may prepare students for entry into graduate school in dance or in other subjects or professions.

#### Making a Fundamental Choice of Degree Type

There are two basic types of undergraduate degrees.

**“Liberal Arts” Degrees.** Degrees in this category include the Associate of Arts or Bachelor of Arts with a major in dance, and Associate of Science or Bachelor of Science with a major in dance. These degrees require that 30% to 45% of the total program be in dance. Normally, more than 50% of the total program is in the humanities, languages, sciences, and social sciences. The liberal arts degree is the most typical degree earned by undergraduates in the United States.

*Please Note:* Associate degrees are offered by community/junior colleges and normally require two years of full-time study. Students may then transfer to a four-year institution to complete the baccalaureate degree.

**“Professional” Degrees.** Degrees in this category include the Associate of Fine Arts and the Bachelor of Fine Arts with a major in dance. These degrees require that at least 65% of the total program be in dance, including studies in performance, choreography, and theory. The remainder is in general studies requirements in the humanities, sciences, and social sciences.

#### Preparation for Teaching

Some institutions offer degree programs specifically designed to prepare students to become certified dance specialist teachers in the public schools. Both the “liberal arts” and “professional” formats can be the bases for these degrees. Normally, 15% to 20% of the total program is devoted to studies in education.

#### Minors in Dance

An institution may offer a minor in dance for students majoring in another subject. To obtain a minor, 12% to 20% of the total curriculum will be devoted to requirements in dance.

## **Double Majors and Special Majors**

Double majors involve meeting the requirements for a major in two subject areas, normally within the liberal arts degree type—for example, a Bachelor of Arts with a double major in dance and psychology.

Special majors are offered by some institutions and involve individually designed majors, honors programs, tutorial approaches, and so forth, each with dance as a major or minor component.

### ***Remember:***

No degree program can guarantee future placement in graduate school or career. Outstanding professionals have graduated with all types of degrees. Preference and choice are personal matters.

Here are some questions to help you consider degree type. This consideration is important because not every institution offers every degree type.

- What are your goals for your educational development in dance during the next few years? How do these goals relate to the basic types of degree programs previously described and to the specific programs offered by individual institutions? For example: Who am I, how do I think, what do I want to know and be able to do? How can a specific program help me to grow artistically and intellectually?
- How much time do you want to devote to studies in dance and to studies in other subjects? Do you want to be a specialist dance teacher in the public schools?
- What do you want to do in dance after graduation? For example: start working in dance or in another field, or go to graduate school in dance or in another field.
- To what extent are you oriented toward a career in dance performance and choreography, or teaching, or research and scholarship? A career means interest enough to support full-time, lifetime engagement.
- To what extent are you oriented toward a career for which dance studies provide a foundation or starting point such as medicine, performing arts law or management, cultural history, media, and so forth?
- What is the usual time to graduation from specific programs? Some programs have more requirements than others.
- What specific institutions offer undergraduate degree programs that seem consistent with your goals and expectations? Use your answers as the basis for answering the following questions and for talking with your present teachers and advisors.

## **Considering and Choosing an Undergraduate Degree Program and Institution**

You have many choices among undergraduate degree programs. Your task is to find the best institution and program for you. This requires matching your talents, needs, personality, and goals with the degree program that can help you fulfill your aspirations. Then it takes effort to accomplish this task effectively, but the right match is worth the effort. Here are some important questions to get you started.

- What do dance professionals in your area think about various institutions and their degree programs? Ask your own teachers and other respected teachers and dancers. These professionals may be found in local dance companies, performance-oriented high school programs, private studios, and institutions of higher education. When seeking advice about dance programs in colleges, conservatories, schools, and universities, ask for more than one recommendation.
- What does your study of published materials from a variety of institutions tell you about possibilities? As early as possible, you need to obtain a package of admission information from a sufficient number of institutions to make comparisons. A thorough study of materials will enable you to ask good questions.
- What is the program focus—ballet, modern, general, etc.? Does the dance program have a performance “style”? If so, what is it?
- What does your review of dance publications and web sites tell you about possibilities? Magazines, journals, web sites, the Internet, and other publications focused on dance can provide important information. If you don’t know how to start, find a dance professional who can guide you.
- What can you learn from an on-site visit or participation in a summer program at one or more institutions? Personal experience is the best way to get a sense of what a particular school is like. Many institutions provide summer programs. These are an excellent introduction to the dance program. If possible, an on-site visit during the regular school year is advisable. Try to be on campus when there are public performances by students and faculty.
- What are the reputations of various dance degree programs? Reputation is more than a list of successful or famous graduates or rankings. You should focus on the institution’s reputation for teaching, its fairness and integrity, and its approach to the individual student and his or her development of dance skills. When seeking information from individuals about reputation, ask for how long and in what ways the individual has known the institution.
- How prepared are you to enter and sustain work at the level a particular institution requires? You may have to make a transition from being the “best dancer” in your local situation to being a “dance beginner” in a difficult and highly disciplined program intended to hone your skills to the highest level. You will also be challenged intellectually in dance history and theory and in other subjects. It is best to talk to current students or recent graduates to gain an understanding of what is expected. Be sure you are ready to study dance with the breadth of coverage and effort the program requires.
- What are the retention policies of the institution and the dance program? More specifically, what competencies must you meet during any academic year, in order to remain in the program? Most schools will require a minimum G.P.A. in your dance courses in order to remain a dance major or minor; however, other schools may base their policy on other criteria. It is a good idea to have an understanding of these criteria before entering into an undergraduate dance program.
- Who are the faculty and which faculty members are most likely to be your teachers? The faculty will be the leaders of your educational experience. It is important to know who they are and how they teach. Focus on the teaching ability of the faculty and specifically on their ability, collectively and individually, to work with individual dance students. Know the artistic and educational backgrounds of the faculty. If you need help in interpreting credentials, ask your local advisors.

- What facilities does the institution offer? An on-site visit is the best way to make this determination. Is the dance rehearsal and performance space safe, well ventilated, and equipped with proper flooring? Does the institution provide, or assist students in finding, a place to live? Is your maturity level sufficient to live alone or, if necessary, are you ready to live with others in a setting with no affiliation to the school? What about food services?
- To what extent are support staff associated with the dance program and curriculum present and active in the school? Is there a counseling program? How does the school address and monitor nutrition? What is its approach to the body sciences, medical services, and physical therapy?
- What are the curriculum and graduation requirements? The curriculum is the course of study that you must follow; graduation requirements include completing the curriculum but also reaching a certain level of proficiency. It is extremely important to understand all of the requirements for being successful in the dance degree program. For example, what are the expectations regarding students' responsibilities for learning? What achievement levels are expected in comparison to what you have been used to in high school? What time management skills must you have to be successful in dance and with other required subjects?
- To what extent does the institution provide continuous evaluation and feedback about your progress through the program? To what extent is there a competitive or nurturing philosophy or atmosphere? How does the answer relate to the way you learn?
- How does the dance program place students in technique classes, for example, by level of proficiency, or by year?
- What performance and choreographic opportunities will you have? Is there a student company? Schools differ with regard to their approaches to these questions. Be sure you know in advance the approach a particular school takes. If there is a student company, what is required to obtain a place in it? To what extent are you guaranteed performance experience?
- Are there performance opportunities with a professional company? If so, what is the frequency of these opportunities and the level of proficiency necessary to be considered?
- What opportunities will you have to develop teaching skills or scholarly techniques?
- What is the institution's record for placement of graduates? What percentage of the institution's graduates go into dance companies, into teaching, or on to more advanced study? If you are attending an institution hoping for a specific result after graduation, what is the complete set of qualifications necessary to achieve that result? Do you have a chance of meeting all of these qualifications after completing a degree in the institution?

### **The Application and Audition Process**

You will want to apply to and audition for the degree programs that most interest you. It is wise to consider the application and audition as two evaluations in one: the school's assessment of your candidacy, and your assessment of the suitability of the school.

- What kinds of auditions are acceptable to the institution? The dance community is unanimous in agreeing that an on-site audition is preferable. However, off-site auditions or audition through electronic means may be necessary. Information you obtain from the institution should provide the schedule of entrance auditions and what kinds of presentations are

expected. Be sure that you obtain such a schedule and a set of requirements well in advance of any audition. Obtaining such information in your junior year of high school is advisable.

- What is the entire application process and what will it cost? Institutions require more than an audition. Paperwork is associated with every application. Know what the institution requires in terms of high school transcripts, recommendations, test scores, medical examinations, and so forth. If application fees are a hardship, determine whether the institution has a program to waive these fees for qualified students.
- How does the admission process work? What is the schedule? What are the deadlines?
- Where will the admission decision be made? For example, in the dance program, in the institution as a whole, or both?
- What requirements must you meet if you are an international student? You must have a proper visa and otherwise meet all foreign student requirements of the government of the United States. In addition, the institution may have specific requirements for international students such as language proficiency, assurance of continuous financial support, and so forth.
- Does the institution have a set of orientation instructions or a student handbook? If you are serious enough about an institution to apply and audition, you should obtain published information about what is expected of students beyond artistic and curricular requirements. Obtaining and considering such information is an important part of your evaluation of the institution.
- If you are transferring from another institution or from an Associate degree program, what are the institutional and dance program's policies on transfers of credit for courses you have already taken?
- What environment does the school provide—urban, town, rural, large, small, college, university, conservatory, and so forth? How compatible do you expect this environment to be? What adjustments might you have to make from what you are accustomed to?

### **Long-Term Artistic and Survival Goals**

While you are gathering information and scheduling and taking auditions, it is increasingly important to begin establishing a set of goals for the development of your knowledge and skills and for your survival in a competitive and difficult field.

- What training and technical abilities will you gain through the institution's program? What style will you learn? What about preparation for teaching, opportunities to do research, technological applications? How much opportunity is there to develop repertory? How do the answers to all of these relate to what you want to do and what you think you need to be successful?
- Who will be your peers in the dance program? What do you expect to learn from them?
- What is the nature of affiliations or connections with the profession—choreographers, companies, other educational institutions, research efforts, and so forth?
- How movable are the knowledge and skills that you will acquire, and how much does the answer matter to you at this particular time?

- Are there opportunities to gain experience or credentials beyond the dance program? Are there cooperative or joint programs with other institutions? Are there study abroad opportunities? How much do these things matter to you at this particular time?
- Does the dance degree program offer opportunities to gain certification in any particular professional area? For example, CMA Pilates, K–12 Dance Education, Laban Notation and so forth? Does it offer internships or other competency development opportunities?
- Is there counseling associated with career development? To what extent does the institution and its personnel engage in mentoring associated with helping students reach their goals and preparing overall for professional achievement?

## **Financial Considerations**

It is important to have a clear understanding of what completion of your degree program will cost. This means considering and combining a number of issues.

- What are the elements in calculating the overall cost to attend a particular institution? These include, but are not limited to, tuition and fees, housing and food, transportation, books and materials, clothing and shoes, insurance, medical and other maintenance costs, and so forth. Many schools provide an estimate of the annual attendance cost in their published materials. If this information is not readily available, ask about it. Some locations are much more expensive than others.
- To what extent can scholarships, grants and financial aid, or loans assist with the cost? Each of these areas is extremely complex. It is critically important to learn at the outset the extent to which the institution itself is able to offer scholarships or other aid programs. It is equally important to know whether the school participates in federal student financial aid programs. Some schools have work-study programs and other means of assisting students. It is important to remember that professional dance study requires significant amounts of time and expenditure of energy. Careful considerations should be given to expectations that students will be able to maintain a significant job and pursue their education at the same time.
- Does the institution offer talent-based scholarships, or academic scholarships, or need-based scholarships? Are you eligible for any of these scholarships? Try to obtain the criteria for selection as early as possible so that you can be prepared in advance to compete for talent-based or academic scholarships.
- What are the specific arrangements and costs of housing? Are there requirements for all students? Is off-site housing necessary or available? What about safety, convenience, and all necessary utilities and services? What is the cost of living in the location of the institution?
- What is your projected ultimate indebtedness at the end of the program? If you must borrow money to pay for your education, is the amount reasonable for you to pay back within the time stipulated in the loan? Although the answer may be a difficult one, it is wise to compare indebtedness with projected earning power after completion of the degree program.