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Do Student Athletes Get All the Advantages?

Dance majors have coursework and performances as physically demanding as sports, but they don't receive special resources the university routinely supplies to its student athletes

by Tara Aftahi

It is no surprise that athletes get special treatment around university campuses. Throughout America's history, sports and athletes have always had priority because they are the ones that bring in the revenue. Growing up, I cross-trained in numerous sports, dance always remaining a consistent practice in my life. I believe that dance is a sport, and a very difficult sport, because it is physically exhausting, yet it is an art at the same time. Because of the art form aspect, many people seem to ignore or forget the physical aspect. At the University of California, Irvine, for instance, athletes get a lot of extra attention for their physical exertions, but dance majors are not provided with the appropriate care. If UCI cannot provide the necessary funding for the dance department, I think the major requirements need to be less physically demanding.

From the start of my time at UCI, I became very close friends with a group of athletes here, specifically female volleyball players. Almost instantly, I started noticing the differences between our daily lives. UCI athletes are provided with private locker rooms with individual lockers for each athlete. They have private, fully staffed training rooms with physical therapists, trainers and sports masseuses. If injured, all doctor costs are covered. Each year the athletes receive new gear, free of charge, including shoes, ankle braces, kneepads, backpacks, duffle bags, practice shirts, jerseys, and socks customized for each athlete. Before games, the athletes are always fed with catered meals, and after games their laundry is done.

All UCI athletes also have access to the academic building where they have personal counselors who get them into any class they need, where they go to finish their homework during their mandatory study hours, where they can print for free, and where they attend different seminars. In addition to all that, the majority of all UCI athletes attend college for free on scholarship. The most a dance major can hope for is to apply for a scholarship or grant, and at most receive a few hundred dollars.

As a dance major at UCI, you get close to no support from the university. While my peers and I struggle to attend all of our mandatory graded technique classes, we still have to balance our other UCI courses, along with trying to take care of our bodies. At UCI, a two-unit technique class can take up to 8 hours per week. In order to meet the units required, I always had to take double the amount of courses as my friends. Dance majors don't have private lockers, private gyms or weight facilities. We are not provided with free jazz shoes, tap shoes, pointe shoes, leotards, duffel bags, or ankle braces. When a dancer is injured, he or she is lucky if their professor allows them to sit out and observe class.

Dancers have to pay for all doctor visits, sports masseuses, chiropractor appointments, on top of daily living expenses. Because many students cannot afford to see all these specialists, they often end up dancing while injured. The dance department only has one physical therapist that is onsite twice a week for a few hours. With the plethora of injured dancers, it's sometimes hard to be seen. Visits typically last for 5 minutes. As a UCI dance major there is great deal that is required of us, yet there is little provided to help support us. Although there is only ten minutes

to change from studio shoes and clothes, for instance, and to get to the next class, sometimes across campus, we are expected to be prompt, no exceptions. We, like UCI athletes have similar expectations from the university, yet the university provides the dance department with close to no resources and amenities to help us succeed.

Unfortunately in today's society the arts are losing their value. The President of the United States of America, "in his first federal budget plan, proposed eliminating the National Endowment for the Arts," and what is scariest about this is the number of people supporting him (Feb 2017). Many may argue that sports produce the most revenue for the University. And while that may be true, it still doesn't mean that the arts can't bring in money for the University, or help the school get on the map. While UCI's athletics are still new and not as well known, UCI's Claire Trevor School of the Arts is ranked one of the best Fine Arts schools in the U.S. Instead of trying to popularize UCI just by their athletics, UCI should capitalize on Claire Trevor's high rankings to continue gaining recognition. Universities throughout the nation are opening competitive arts schools that have exceptional staff and facilities, including USC's new Glorja Kaufman School of Dance. UCI has to compete with top in order to stay at the top. It would be a shame for UCI's arts to fade after all the progress that has made over time. UCI needs to focus more energy on the arts school and recognize the revenue the arts could bring to the school in addition to athletics.

It is no secret that UCI prioritizes the promotion of athletics. There are advertisements for UCI athletes all across Orange County, from Newport Beach to Santa Ana, at every mall and shopping center, on every bus, and at every bus stop. Their efforts to promote the sports are honorable and respected, yet couldn't the same be done for the arts school? It is up to the dance majors to market their own shows here; we put up posters and utilize social media, but personal advertisement typically leads only to family and friends attending. This is not to say that is bad, but it could be better. Each dance show at UCI has 4 showings and we are lucky if we sell out just one night. If theatre performances, art shows, or dance concerts were advertised as much as UCI athletics are throughout Orange County, I'm confident that more people would attend, producing more attention and revenue for the university.

Overall UCI's treatment of their athletes versus their dancers is both unfair and morally incorrect. If the university is going to demand as much as they are from dance majors, they should be able to offer the necessary care. Dance majors lack funding, access to counselors, access to facilities, access to physical therapists, and marketing from the university. The arts are just as important, if not more than the athletics. Dee Dickinson, author and CEO of New Horizons for Learning, listed on the John Hopkins School of Education website emphasizes the importance of the arts. My favorite reason for *Why Are the Arts Important* is, "They Provide the means for **every** student to learn."

The arts are imperative because they provide a source for dialogue about our history and our present. The arts allow for transformation and growth within various communities and societies. In a growing technological society in which jobs are increasingly being taken over by robots and computers, humans will be left to do what computers cannot, express themselves creatively and individually. Eventually the arts will be the most valuable degree. As a community, UCI needs to support and value the arts. It is time for UCI to recognize the talent that lies in that place called the Claire Trevor School of the Arts.

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Tara Aftahi received her Bachelor of Arts degree in 2017. She looks forward to moving back to San Diego to pursue her career in real estate and to begin teaching at North County Dance Arts. She hopes to spend her weekends auditioning for different talent agencies and working towards certifications of various disciplines.
