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Dance Major Journal

Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3xp0f4sp>

Journal

Dance Major Journal, 9(1)

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Publication Date

2021

DOI

10.5070/D59154697

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Your Dance Major is Never a Waste

How to respond when someone dares to question your choice of major

by Marina Hartogs

Those of us who have chosen to major in dance are quite familiar with the experience of getting asked about our choice of major. People will say it is not a useful major, it is a waste of time, and other negative comments that serve to delegitimize our decision to major in dance. Many of us are so familiar with these conversations that we have a variety of prepared responses as to why it is completely possible to have a career in dance and why it's a legitimate choice of major. And now that I'm graduating and don't necessarily plan to pursue a dance career, I predict this question will once again arise. I, and others in my position, may be made to feel like we "wasted" four years and that it was not worth the amount of time and effort we put into it.

Though you may already be able to predict my response to such a statement, I am here to explain why, no matter what one may plan to do after graduation, a dance major is a legitimate, rigorous, and worthwhile choice of major.

To begin with, almost every person who chooses to pursue a dance major does so because they have a strong passion for the art form. This was most definitely the case for me. I could not imagine finishing high school and then not continuing on my journey with dance. Since I was about ten years old, it has been a large part of my life and one of my greatest joys. It always kept me active and moving, and gave me an outlet both physically and mentally whenever I was going through a hard time. For this reason alone, I knew that when I took the intimidating next step of going to college, I could not do it without dance being a part of it. Because I chose to major in dance, I had the privilege of spending the last four years pursuing my passions and doing what I love. For me, that reason alone is enough to show why my choice to major in dance was not a waste of time.

Although the pure enjoyment and passion is reason enough for me, I know there are still people out there who may be harder to convince. They might say something like, "That's great, you got to have fun for four years, but how does that have anything to do with preparing you for a successful future?" To that question, I still have many answers. Many people may just see the dance major as "fun" and not realize just how much work goes into it, both physically and academically. In other majors, physical fitness gets pushed to the side a bit, especially in the beginning of college, so their overall health may decline. For dance majors, this is simply not an option. We all have to remain at our peak physical fitness throughout the college, which isn't hard when we are dancing for so many hours each day. Exercise has been shown to improve cognitive function as well, which is necessary for any major.

What may come as a surprise to many non-dance majors is that our major consists of more than technique classes. We have to take music theory, kinesiology to learn about how our bodies work, dance history, a writing class, and many electives. I have learned so much interesting information and so many skills that I may not have learned in any other major.

The knowledge and skills I learned as a dance major are transferrable far beyond a career in dance. Physical fitness is something that is important throughout one's whole life. I have learned how to stay in shape and fuel myself properly to remain healthy. Learning about different cultures is also important to being a well-rounded and knowledgeable person and we learned about these cultures through the lens of dance, which gave an incredible insight into their values and how they developed. The dance major also teaches how to be incredibly disciplined and to work on time management skills. Between technique classes, academic classes, rehearsals, and performances, many dance majors end up spending their days on campus from morning until night. We have to prioritize getting homework done and any other work we need to do in the small breaks we have in the day. Time management is a skill that is necessary in almost any job one could apply for.

Another thing that dance major have is an ample amount of creativity. In most jobs, creativity is important to have in order to solve problems and create a positive work environment. The skills and knowledge one gains while completing a dance major are incredibly useful in the grand scheme of life. Already having these skills when you apply for any kind of job gives you an advantage that may stand out in an interview.

Now that I have shown all the benefits that come from majoring in dance, there is one more thing that I think is important to touch on. Just because one chooses to major in dance, it does not mean they cannot pursue other interests. You can join a club or other group, or even major or minor in a completely different subject. As stated in an article by Lauren Wingenroth for *Dance Magazine*, "If you've already been balancing your school work with your dance classes and rehearsals for years, trust that you have the ability to keep doing so on a larger scale in college." For example, another passion of mine has always been education, so when I began college, I decided to add it as a second major.

Majoring in dance did not prevent me from pursuing my other interests, and I believe it even enriched the experience. It's amazing how much crossover I was able to find between dance and education. I plan to become a teacher in the future and I know that creativity learned in the dance world will transfer over into teaching. I will also be able to use my discipline and time management skills to make sure I can get through lesson plans and assist the students in learning efficiently and effectively. I believe dance also teaches one about communication and empathy, which are necessary traits for a teacher to have. Though these examples are specific to my future career path, I could easily make the same kinds of connections with any career.

For the last four years of my life, I have had the opportunity to pursue my passions, gain useful knowledge, and learn many transferrable skills. Though I may not be going into a professional dance career after college, I will in no way look back at my decision to major in dance as a waste

of time. Just the opposite. In the future, if anyone ever questions me about this decision or even just wonders how it helped shaped me as a person, I know I will have a strong, legitimate answer to give.



Marina Hartogs graduated from the University of California, Irvine in June 2021 with a B.A. in Dance and a B.A. in Education Sciences. Next year she will be working as an Instructional Assistant in Special Education at Canyon View Elementary and then plans to obtain a Masters in Teaching and single subject credential in mathematics.

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