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# How Zoom University made me a better dancer

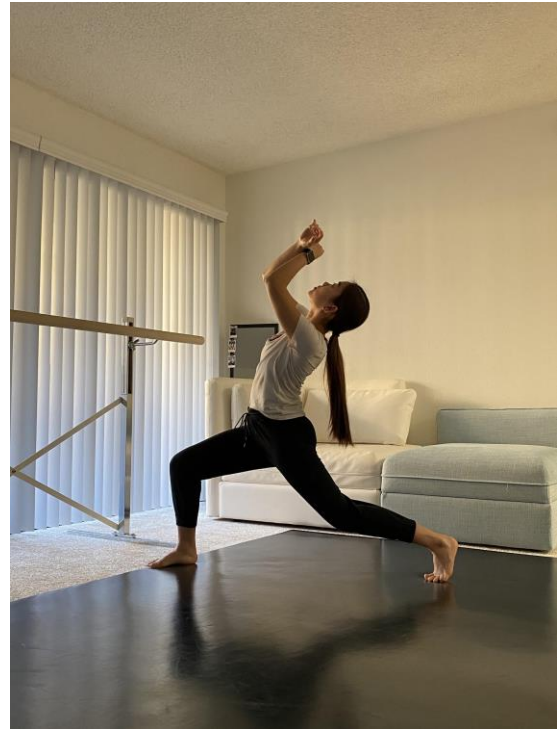
## *The joys and stresses of pandemic isolation for a dance major*

by Michaela Wong

A pandemic is defined as a viral infection that has spread to an entire country or the world. Currently, the world is in a global pandemic because of the Coronavirus. I refer to it as the virus that kicked me off campus and forced me to adopt a new way of learning dance, which was dancing from home through what some refer to as “Zoom University”: “The term ‘Zoom University’ was frequently used by college students to refer to the fact that, for most, college was now taking place in their childhood bedrooms” (Aratani). This is a historic moment in history as I am experiencing a worldwide pandemic. Little did I know that the pandemic would uproot life as I knew it.

When UCI notified all students that classes were moving online during the winter quarter, I had mixed feelings about the big change. I was excited to go home and see my family but sad to leave the friends I made during my first year of college and leave the beautiful studios I was starting to call home. As a student who had taken many online academic courses, I had never attempted online dance classes but I was determined to make the most out of dancing at home for Zoom University.

In order to make Zoom University work for me as a dance major, I had to create a home studio. I never intended to transform my home into a dance studio and therefore had to figure something out before the next quarter started. It was time to get crafty and resourceful! I was used to having an unlimited amount of room to move with safe flooring that could cushion my landing. It was not until I tried a class at home when it



hit me (literally!) that dancing at home is very restrictive in terms of space. Finding the perfect spot was tough but by applying some creativity, I created the perfect place to dance. I transformed our dining room into a small studio I could dance in.

I should say that I would not have been able to accomplish this task without the help of my parents. I looked up how to make a portable barre out of PVC pipe and then my dad went shopping with me at Home Depot to purchase the necessary materials. After we put it together, I found that it was not sturdy enough (despite the testimonial of the girl who posted the YouTube video). But then a friend of my dad bought a professionally manufactured barre for me. My dad put it together and it is the barre you see in the photo.

Something I had taken for granted was always having the opportunity to dance on Marley, a vinyl flooring. The special flooring, while useful but not necessary, makes dancing safer by providing a non-slip surface for dancers. Many brands of Marley include a layer of foam intended to be a shock absorber and prevent injuries. In all my years of dancing, I never expected to purchase my own flooring because studios always provided the necessary equipment to practice. Purchasing the Marley flooring cost an arm and a leg, but it was worth every penny. With all the needed materials for a home studio, I went right to work in making a space I felt comfortable moving in.

Creating a temporary dance studio was not the only difference between in-person class and online learning. How was I going to learn from my professors through a computer? Students around the world are having to make this same sort of adjustment from in-person to online learning. Teachers can help with this transition by considering the ways that students learn and offering modes of learning that appeal to the variety of learning styles. By offering a variety of learning modalities the teachers can keep students engaged and help them learn in a way that also produces the best long-term retention of the material being taught.

Creating a dancing environment taught me a lot about myself as a student and learner. There are three main types of learners: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. Everyone has their unique way of learning and changing to virtual learning has challenged teachers and myself to think outside the box. I learn best using a little of all three styles and believe the easiest transition of learning online is a visual and auditory learner. I still face troubles like having the teacher's microphone cut out due to an unstable internet connection or other technical

difficulties. This often makes me miss the combination or correction. Now I am not saying this happens all the time but it becomes frustrating if it happens continuously. Even though I face these challenges, I am still able to see the teacher on Zoom and can hear what they are saying so I do not feel like my visual and auditory learning has been significantly hindered.

As a kinesthetic learner, it is important for me to participate in many activities that are immersive and active. The Faculty of Physical Education and Sport Science at the University of Athens, Greece, offers insight on teachings of physical education online. It describes the responsibilities of the teacher and student stating that "on the part of the teacher, it combines the demonstration of motor skills together with the verbal description of the rules and principles that govern them. On the part of the student, it demands experimentation on these demonstrations through the practice of movement type activities and cognitive tests..." (Dania et al. 3356). I still have the opportunity to work through the combinations in my own space and apply corrections I receive from my professors. Receiving personal corrections in person is super helpful because the teacher is able to physically show me what I need to improve. Working on personal corrections has increased my proprioception, awareness of my body in space, and has created a deeper understanding of how my body likes to move. Many of the dance technique professors are supplementing physical training with video viewings. One of the benefits of having class on Zoom is the format allows me to watch performances in styles I would not normally gravitate towards.

One of the biggest adjustments to online class is learning dance combinations.

Learning combinations in modern and jazz, in particular, seem to give me the most trouble. One challenge that I face every day in class deals with learning combinations in real-time. When in a studio, I can physically see the teacher and copy their movements. But on Zoom, I have to mirror the teacher and it can get confusing. The screen seems like a barrier to instruction. It can be frustrating and disheartening, as a student of dance.

Still, although working through my frustrations is hard, I am also learning to take time for myself and focus on what dance means to me. Perhaps that is a benefit of learning to dance on Zoom.

So despite being confined to my one-bedroom apartment and not being able to see my friends, dancing has been a place of joy and security. Mallozzi writes that “maybe our obsession with dance shouldn’t come as a surprise—studies prove it’s good for the brain. Not only do endorphins kick in with the physical touch and the aerobic movement of dance, but frequent dancing increases neuroplasticity, the ability to form new neural connections, which help in recovering from injury and disease” (Mallozzi). Dancing has allowed me to release anger and frustration that has built up in the past months of staying at home. During these unprecedented times, I am thankful to have benefited from the

emotional and physical aspects of dance. A downside of online schooling is being in front of my computer all day. There are days in my schedule where I will have academic and dance classes back to back for eight hours. After classes, my energy feels completely drained. Unfortunately, that does not include time rehearsing for shows which can extend my, already full schedule, time on zoom up to four hours. Every night once classes and rehearsals are over, I am thankful because I finally get to rest. But in the back of my mind, I am reminded that I will have to do it all again tomorrow.

After months of taking dance classes on Zoom, I can confidently still say that I get confused during class (the paradox of Zoom learning!). I struggle every day, whether I am confused about which way to turn in a combination to something as simple as having trouble unmuting my microphone before speaking. I have had many positive and negative experiences. There were moments of embarrassment where I did not realize my microphone was unmuted or my camera was still on. It ranged from everyone hearing me talk about being unprepared for an audition to realizing I had my camera still on while the class was trying to watch another student perform. The changes I have experienced as a dancer during this global pandemic have expanded my knowledge of dance and allowed me to creatively figure out how to best continue my training.

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