

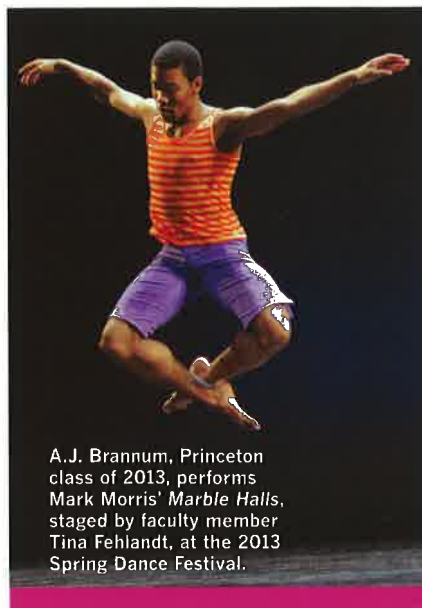
I'm NOT a Dance Major

Three ways to dance in college without majoring

BY ASHLEY RIVERS

Many dancers graduate from high school knowing that they absolutely must be dance majors in college. But for just as many, deciding between dance and other interests can be tough. Maybe you'd like to explore a field like communications or biology, while keeping up your dance technique. Maybe you didn't get accepted to an audition-only dance major program, so are searching for other dance options. Or maybe you just want it all: an academic degree and the possibility for a future dance career. It's possible!

Fortunately, there's no cookie-cutter college dance experience. Even if you choose to major in an academic field,



A.J. Brannum, Princeton class of 2013, performs Mark Morris' *Marble Halls*, staged by faculty member Tina Fehlandt, at the 2013 Spring Dance Festival.

you might be surprised by the number of ways you can still get in your daily pliés during your college years. Read on for info on three such outlets: dance teams, dance minors and extracurricular companies.

DANCE TEAMS

The dance team experience varies from school to school, but in many cases it can be just as intense as a dance program, with members who are just as committed. The big difference between the two is in the approach and dance styles: "Dance teams tend to be more athletic and competition-based," says Kelly Olsen-Leon, dance team coach at Hofstra University. "While many dance majors focus on ballet and modern, we compete fast-paced jazz, pom, lyrical, and hip-hop routines, and perform at sporting events. So dance teams attract those interested in a more upbeat, energetic style."

For most dance teams, being a member isn't just a hobby—it's a lifestyle. Not only do team members attend multiple practices each week, as well as team workouts and sporting events, they also often serve as the "faces" or ambassadors of the school at local community events. (Because dance teams and majors are both so time-consuming, you usually can't participate in both at the same time, though some dance team members choose to minor in dance.) And the intense devotion pays off after college, too: Some college dance team members



Carthage College dance minors perform *Synchronized Sitting*, by Stacy Pottinger, in their fall dance concert.

go on to audition for professional dance teams in the NBA and NFL, and many coach a college or high school dance team.

The skill level of each team differs by school. (The Hofstra team, for example, is advanced, and requires that every dancer can at least do a triple pirouette.) So check out online videos of teams you're interested in to get an idea of which one fits your goals.

DANCE MINOR

At many schools, earning a dance minor is the perfect way to customize your college dance experience. "I always tell interested students that there are many levels of involvement, and you can decide how much you want to or can be involved," says Stacy Pottinger, director of the dance minor at Carthage College. "You can just come to technique classes, or you can do extra activities like performances, going to the American College Dance Festival Association conference or doing community-based outreach that we do on campus."

The ability to target specific dance

styles is what interested Madison Coia in the dance minor at the University of Colorado—Boulder. And he recently chose to switch from a double major in dance and astronomy to a major in astronomy and a minor in dance. Though Coia, who studied hip hop growing up, initially joined the school's dance major to find an artistic outlet during his first semester in the science department, he's found that the minor keeps him in the studio enough to satisfy. "I'm not dancing for eight hours a day," he says, "but it's enough that every day I can take a break from the academic world. It's a great stress-reliever."

While a dance major's whole life tends to revolve around the fine arts building on campus, being a minor gives Coia time to also experience other activities he's interested in, like participating in a fraternity. According to Pottinger, dance minors at Carthage also participate in a variety of activities on campus, like choir or student organizations, and many are working towards careers that blend dance with their other interests, such as

dance therapy (by majoring in exercise sciences) or teaching dance in a public school (by majoring in education).

Many dance minors welcome any skill level from beginner to super-advanced, and the personality of the program can vary, especially between schools that offer just a minor and those that also offer a major. A school with a major may have more course offerings and stage productions each semester, whereas a school without a major may offer choreographic and scholarship opportunities to minors, for which a dance major might otherwise have preference. "I treat my dance minors here like majors," Pottinger says. "Because we only offer the minor, they are getting all the attention."

EXTRACURRICULAR DANCE

Don't be fooled by the fact that they are student-led—many extracurricular dance companies run a highly professional show. At Princeton University, for example, 21 such dance companies ranging from ballet to world dance cooperate with the school's Performing

Arts Council (an arts-based student organization) to set up rehearsals and performances on campus. While most schools have fewer student dance organizations, hip-hop or break-dancing groups are common, as are contemporary and liturgical groups.

"We have this buffet, and it's up to the student to choose," says Rebecca Lazier, senior lecturer at Princeton. "Some manage to dance about 30 hours a week. And that's on top of their majors and other classes," she says. Most students join the companies as a creative and social outlet from academics, but some have gone on to pursue professional careers in dance.

Don't be afraid to ask about the unique dance opportunities that schools you're interested in offer beyond the conventional dance major. Some even partner with local professional companies or prominent dance schools to ensure their students are reaching their full potential. With a plethora of dance options out there, there's a wide world of dance available in college, even outside the dance major. ✱