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Teaching and Artistic Practice Statement

In this statement, I frame my teaching in the following ways: building warm classroom environments and my view of the roles of student and teacher, my commitments in teaching forms of the African Diaspora as a white educator, my teaching methods, and my experience serving diverse populations. I view both classroom and rehearsal contexts as pedagogical space, and am committed to bringing the same care and attention to students' experience in choreographic work as I am to my classroom practice. I am passionate about teaching jazz, tap, and musical theatre dance technique courses, as well as dance pedagogy. I would also gladly teach ballet or contemporary technique, choreography, improvisation, dance history (including specializations in jazz and musical theatre dance), somatics/wellness, movement for actors, and general education coursework. Additionally, I am excited to continue choreographing in collaboration with students and designers across the disciplines of theater and concert dance.

I create a warm atmosphere by carefully building rapport with students. It is important to me that each student feels welcomed, seen, and heard in my classroom and rehearsal spaces. I recognize the value students bring to the classroom; the teacher or choreographer, as the designated authority figure, is not the only one with knowledge to share and students deserve to be allowed and empowered to bring themselves fully into the room. I acknowledge their responsibility in contributing to the environment and classroom experience for themselves and their peers. Along these lines, an important goal across any pedagogical space I inhabit is valuing students as people, not just as dancers. Seeing the whole person and acknowledging that students are impacted by things that happen outside the room feels integral to my teaching style and values. Helping students learn to be functional and healthy humans is my main goal, as well as – of course – pursuing excellence in the art of dance. Prioritizing and valuing embodied knowledge, I frame opportunities for students to listen to and honor the knowledge they bring to the space. I begin some of my classes with a mindfulness practice in order to provide a moment for rest and reflection, and encourage mind-body integration through guided awareness utilizing breath.

Within the context of jazz pedagogy specifically, I am committed, as a white woman, to honoring the roots of the form and acknowledging the historical and cultural context of the form's lineage. I work to ground my jazz classroom in African aesthetic values, such as improvisation, musicality, and the interrelationship between individuals and the community. I start each class in a circle, establishing a clear difference in value and form from Euro-centric practices. My jazz practice is influenced by the vernacular (particularly movement from the Swing Era), codified forms (such as Giordano technique), as well as contemporary practices in musical theatre and precision jazz. Finding ways to honor historical and cultural contexts is also integral to my course planning. I prioritize

discussions of where these forms came from and who developed them, especially acknowledging practitioners often ignored by the traditional academic canon. Additionally, I am committed to prioritizing jazz music in classes focused on jazz dance, and intentionally cultivate playlists showcasing a variety of musicians and time periods.

I work to incorporate a variety of teaching methods centering on clear expectations and feedback. I bring a unique background to dance instruction in that I hold a B.S. in Secondary Education from Penn State University. I offer strong skills from my formal training, including: clear and explicit communication, planning (across overarching curriculum, units, and individual lessons, as well as assessments), smoothly navigating transitions during class, staying flexible and adjusting in the moment based on overarching course objectives/values (as well as planning ahead for such adjustments), and incorporating literacy/writing skills across disciplines. I work to acknowledge a variety of learning styles in my classroom by encouraging students to engage with information in a variety of ways: reading, viewing, listening, writing, and verbal discussions, in addition to physical practice activities. Additionally, I implement strategies that benefit all students. One major take-away from the Special Education coursework at Penn State University is that strategies that benefit students with differing abilities usually benefit *all* students. For example: explaining the trajectory of class at the beginning, clear cueing in transitions, and providing clear instructions in multiple formats (verbal, written, pictorial, etc.), facilitate positive classroom experiences for students. Furthermore, taking a process-oriented approach to choreography allows students to utilize their unique skills and encourages them to speak up for their unique needs in a rehearsal context. By process-oriented, I mean a shift in my awareness to the specific participants in the space and a negotiation of their needs while upholding my choreographic intentions in a malleable way. I approach choreography from a collaborative perspective that involves a great deal of coaching and direction; while I prepare material beforehand, my work is adaptive based on who is in the room participating in the experience.

I have been fortunate to teach a diverse student body through my experiences in higher education thus far, including students with diverse lived experiences of race, class, gender, sexual identity expression, and disability. I am committed to providing accommodations for students, as needed, in order to support positive interactions with dance as a practice for all students, regardless of their situation or ability. One of the formative learning experiences during my first year of graduate school was accommodating a student with severe medical issues into my Jazz 1 course at the University at Buffalo. Meeting his inability to physically participate in the class with accommodations (rather than forcing him to withdraw), while challenging and time consuming, ultimately allowed him to successfully complete the course. Shifting his participation to an observational format, and grading written reflections on these class observations as well as additional reading and viewing material, allowed him to encounter dance in a positive way despite his temporarily limited ability. This encounter inspired me to rethink what is considered “practicable” for accommodations in physical practice courses. I am currently working with another student facing significant health challenges in my role as an adjunct instructor at SUNY Fredonia, and have continued to offer creative

solutions, including extended deadlines for assignments and video options for her to film her performance for feedback when she is physically able.

My ongoing artistic research focuses on the choreographic values of storytelling, worldbuilding, and collaboration, and intersects with my exploration of pedagogical strategies to foster wellness for dance students. This research happens in collaboration with undergraduate and graduate students, in the pedagogical space of rehearsals and performances. With a focus on iteration, I often use the analogy of sculpting clay: slowly crafting layer by layer, continually adding detail with each rehearsal as we move together toward the ultimate goal of performance. I also hold collaboration with production teams as an area of strength; I view production elements as integral to the storytelling and worldbuilding goals of each piece I create. For example, my most recent work, *hers for the reading*, employed sound, lighting, and environment designers as key collaborators using funding from a Humanities New York Public Humanities Grant (in the amount of \$4,000). My background as a tap dancer makes sound and music an important part of my process – regardless of genre – and I utilize these tools to clearly shape the worlds I build onstage. I diligently pursue opportunities to choreograph with different populations of students across the genres of concert dance and theatre. Recent highlights include working with dance majors and minors in the Fredonia Dance Ensemble faculty concert, and choreographing *Rogers + Hammerstein's Cinderella* with director James Beaudry. In addition, I have built a strong resume in local theater venues as a performer, and would be eager to continue building these types of professional connections in a new community.

In sum, I create a warm environment where students are welcome to participate as valued community members. I choose to value inclusion, and employ strategies that foster wellness for dance students, teaching skills that support them both as people and as artists. My focus on jazz pedagogy is framed within the context of African aesthetic values and an open acknowledgement of the complex history of the form. Ultimately, as the formal authority figure in the room, I serve students by providing opportunities and skillsets that empower them to take ownership of their own learning journeys both within and beyond my classroom or rehearsal spaces. I believe my philosophy is a strong match for the Department's mission and values, particularly in meeting the call to support students as individual learners and to integrate learning experiences across academics, embodied practice, and performance.