In my experience, composition classes can be a bit nebulous, lacking concrete ideas to latch onto. It is my intention, in integrating a composition course and Labanotation, to provide specific concepts for the students to use in their creative research. While assistant teaching a freshman dance composition course, I noticed that the majority of their movement phrases remained more or less stationary, using mostly upper body movement, and using facing dead front. By incorporating Laban concepts of level, spatial relationship, motif, gesture versus support, and floor plan, the dancers will begin thinking about their work holistically—space, time, effort and body—rather than just in terms of shape, what their body was doing.

Also, I am continually struck in reading student writing about dance, how little the dance is discussed. They cover costumes, lighting, narrative, and their subjective opinion, but are unable to state what the dancers were actually doing: jumping, walking, turning, changing level. Supplementing dance composition with Labanotation will give students language to discuss dance and to articulate their personal aesthetic. As part of the reflection and observation process, Labanotation helps to define main actions and qualities/dynamics.
Introduction to Dance Composition and Basic Labanotation Concepts

Credits: 3 credits - Undergraduate Population
Course Meets 2 times/week for 1½-2 hours

Objectives and Procedures

In integrating a composition course and Labanotation, this course will provide specific concepts for the students to use in their creative research. By incorporating Laban concepts of level, spatial relationship, motif, gesture versus support, front signs, body parts, accents and floor plan, the dancers will begin thinking about their work holistically—space, time, effort and body—rather than just in terms of shape, what their body was doing. Supplementing dance composition with Labanotation will give students language to discuss dance and to articulately define their personal aesthetic.

This course serves as an introduction to dance making, and will guide students through improvisation to support aesthetic inquiry, basic Labanotation concepts, coherent structure, innovative exploration, historical influences, individual point of view, creative breakthroughs, and roadblocks in dance composition and design. Students will look at movement vocabulary as something that is invented and created personally, crafted carefully in time, space, dynamic arrangement, and relationship to other bodies, with an ever-present potential for surprise.

Students will complete short assignments for each class, ranging from movement generation, video viewings, reading assignments, live performance, written responses, internet research, and generative projects.

Through this course, students will:
1. Heighten the ability to pay attention to ourselves and the world around us as inspiration, information, and grounding infrastructure in dance making.
2. Explore diverse strategies for resourcing and developing movement material in dance making.
3. Investigate the various forms that material can take to support content/context in dance making.

Requirements
* All cell phones must be turned off before class begins!

Attendance
Because the student’s progress toward the course objectives is dependent on physical practice in class, regular attendance is imperative. Absence from more than 10% of classes will affect the final grade by lowering a half grade for each additional absence. There is no distinction made between excused (illness) and unexcused absences. Make-up classes are not permitted.

Participation
Students are expected to participate fully in all class activities. Our progress as a class is dependent upon our ability to work together as a community. Students who are sick or injured should inform the instructor at the beginning of class, take detailed notes from their observations and turn them in for partial class credit. Students disrupting class will be asked to sit out, and will receive an absence for the day.
Promptness
Students joining the class after attendance is taken are considered late, and should not enter the class until there is a break between combinations. Three late arrivals and/or early departures constitute one absence, and will affect the final grade.

Showings (in addition to daily showings in class):
- Midterm: WEEK 5
- Dance Department Informance
- Final Class Showing

Out of class work:
- Movement—Students will be required to create short movement phrases and larger studies outside of class (the midterm will be created entirely outside of class), and conduct rehearsals on their own.
- Notebook/sketchbook—Students are required to bring this notebook to class for regular use in class and to reflect on class work, readings, and rehearsals outside of class. Include reflections of how you choose to solve movement problems assigned in class. The notebook will be turned in twice during the quarter (midterm and final).
- Readings—Short readings will be distributed in class. Students will be expected to reflect on these readings in their notebooks and should be prepared to discuss their responses in class.
- Viewings—Students may be asked to view choreographic works on reserve in the library or online and should write responses in their notebooks and be prepared to discuss them in class.
- Formal writing assignments—Students will complete a short mid-quarter reflection paper and a 3-5 page final essay.

Attendance at 5 dance events

List of events

Materials
Unlined notebook (sketchbook), pens, markers
One mini DV tape
Students should reserve funds for any performances requiring ticket purchase

Grading
Regular attendance is expected and is, therefore, not part of the grade calculation, although poor attendance can lower the final calculated grade. Please refer to the attendance policy above for details.
- Degree of commitment, concentration, participation, and attitude in class movement exercises, discussions, and notebook observations 40%
- Quality and originality of compositions, discussions, and written work 20%
- Movement Midterm and Final choreographic project 20%
- Written Reflections (mid-quarter and final) 20%
A= Consistent, generous, thoughtful, curious involvement in studio material—gaining and demonstrating an understanding of the material presented daily—actively contributes to class discussions and offers constructive peer feedback—extraordinary improvement—demonstrated ability to take and make risks with creative material—overall exemplary performance of course objectives.

B= Consistent involvement in classroom material—provides peer feedback and contributions to class discussions—gaining and understanding of the material presented daily—average improvement—demonstrated ability to take and make risks with creative material—overall above average performance of course objectives.

C= Lack of consistency in classroom involvement with material—not gaining and understanding of the material presented daily—minimal improvement—offers little feedback or contribution to class discussions—takes few risks with creative material—average performance of course objectives.

D= Failing to engage with classroom material—not demonstrating or gaining an understanding of the material presented daily—no improvement due to lack of concentrated effort—no feedback or verbal contribution to class discussions—failing to take risks with creative material—below average performance of course objectives.

F= Inability to keep up with class work—usually due to excessive absences.

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**Reading list**


Marks, Victoria. “Against Improvisation: A postmodernist makes the case for choreography.”


Nachmanovitch, Stephen. *Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art*. New York:

Tarcher/Putman, 1990.
Topical Outline

Unit 1: Mining Your Material

   Week 1
   What is choreography?
   Impulses to begin/Paying attention
   Preparing to work
   Transformations/translations

Unit 2: Designing Space

   Week 2
   Ways of Seeing/Associations
   Levels (Laban-integrated)
   Spatial Relationships (Laban-integrated)
   Positive/Negative space

   Week 3
   Floor Plans (Laban-integrated)
   Facings/Front Signs (Laban-integrated)

Unit 3: Crafting Structure

   Week 4
   Motif (Laban-integrated)
   Types of Movements
   Movement Manipulation Devices
   Language for discussing dance

   Week 5
   Theme and Variation (Laban-integrated)
   Surprise/reconfiguring expectations
   Editing

   Week 6
   Points of Initiation/Body Parts (Laban-integrated)
   Chance connections/Partner work
   Visual art/Text/Found objects

   Week 7 part 1
   Sound (Laban-integrated)
   Choosing connections

Unit 4: Collaboration

   Week 7-10
   Working as a group & with a group/Directing & Participating
   Examining Values
   Finding new questions
   Creating new methods
   FINAL CHOREOGRAPHIC PROJECT—STUDENT DESIGN
Reading list


Rationale

In my experience, composition classes can be a bit nebulous, lacking concrete ideas to latch onto. It is my intention, in integrating a composition course and Labanotation, to provide specific concepts for the students to use in their creative research. While assistant teaching a freshman dance composition course, I noticed that the majority of their movement phrases remained more or less stationary, using mostly upper body movement, and using facing dead front. By incorporating Laban concepts of level, spatial relationship, motif, gesture versus support, and floor plan, the dancers will begin thinking about their work holistically—space, time, effort and body—rather than just in terms of shape, what their body was doing.

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Topical Outline

Unit 1: Mining Your Material

Week 1
What is choreography?
Impulses to begin
Paying attention
Preparing to work
Transformations/translations

Week 2
Creative research
Ways of Seeing/Associations
Theme and Variation/Motif (Laban-integrated)
Surprise/reconfiguring expectations

Week 3
Designing Space (Laban-integrated)
Positive/Negative space
Floor Plans (Laban-integrated)

Week 4
Levels (Laban-integrated)
Spatial Relationships (Laban-integrated)

Unit 2: Crafting Relationship

Week 5
Chance connections/Partner work (Laban-integrated)
Visual art/Text/Found objects
Sound

Week 6
Choosing connections
Duet/Trio Study

Unit 3: Collaboration

Week 7-10
Working as a group & with a group/ Directing & Participating (Laban-integrated)
Examining Values
Finding new questions
Creating new methods
FINAL CHOREOGRAPHIC PROJECT—STUDENT DESIGN