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Diversity Statement

I recognize that as a White body who also holds the systemically privileged identities of heterosexual, cis-gendered, not physically disabled, and neurotypical, identities that have historically and oppressively been upheld as the norms and standards to which all others are compared, I consequently have the privilege to not *have* to engage in critical awareness of how I interact with and am perceived by the world around me. Yet as an ongoing, life practice I choose to live in constant navigation of my own positionality in the classroom and studio, interrogating the identities that give me power and leveraging that privilege to create a more inclusive environment.

In this continuing process of self-awareness it is crucial that I continue my own research and education outside of the studio and classroom. I seek scholarship from those who identify differently than me, ensuring that my commitment to diversity and inclusion is being informed by individuals whose lived experiences are different than my own. Challenging my perspectives helps me to see the ways in which I've been conditioned to uphold oppressive hegemonic worldviews, which in turn allows me to think critically about my own pedagogical, research, creative, and relational practices.

Part of this confrontation with my positionality includes questioning my values and expectations and communicating clearly with students. For instance, my syllabi requests that students come to dance class with their hair pulled back. In years past this seemed like an obvious and inconsequential imperative. Yet in my growing understanding of the political nature of the body I have come to realize that this request has many implications. Now, I include in the syllabus why having my hair back is a personal value to me but I no longer demand this of students. Instead, I offer a choice in how they want to show up in class, honoring each student's individual expression of their identity.

I have had the privilege of experiencing my identities being consistently and adequately represented in the academic institution. What is considered canonical has often coincided with what I have personally identified with and experienced. As I have come to realize this I am intentional about disrupting a simultaneous hierarchization and white-washing of class material. If I am not teaching ballet then I do not speak in ballet terminology, allowing movement material to be more widely accessible while challenging the belief that ballet is foundational to all dance forms. When teaching jazz and Hip-hop I structure the syllabus through a historical lens, centering the forms' emergence and lineage in the African Diaspora in the United States. Scholars, artists, and thinkers of varying identities and experiences are brought into the class so that multiple voices and perspectives are shared with students. When discussing the context of dance forms and cultures such as disco and voguing, queer, non-binary, and trans individuals are centered and their voices guide class content. I honor the importance and validity of all dance forms. I do not use the term "technique" to talk only about leaps and turns, but instead emphasize all dance forms as having specificity and context, being explicit in communicating the unique qualities of each form.

I recognize that in academia the written word and intellectual ways of knowing are deemed more reliable and accurate than knowledge learned through embodiment, experience, or feeling. To challenge this institutional ideology students are exposed to a multitude of research and scholars that extend beyond what is considered “academic”. Scholars without academic accolades are held in the same regard as those with Ph.D.’s. Similarly, students are assessed in a variety of ways including creative assignments and embodied responses. When academic writing is used, I make clear that it is just one method out of many, and though it is a useful skill to have it is not the best or only tool to express learning.

As a dance instructor I am increasingly aware of how the language I use has the potential to create barriers for students with varying physical abilities. To create a class that is accessible to more bodies I offer multiple choices for movements, encouraging students to shift the form to meet their needs instead of forcing themselves to meet the form in one specific way. I offer feedback in the context of sharing strategies that have been helpful for me, emphasizing that there are multiple ways to embody movement and I am simply utilizing one of them. If students are willing, I engage in individual conversation with them, collaborating together in how to make the class a space in which they can thrive. Agency within the structure is emphasized as I encourage students to apply, modify, and even disregard any prompts that infringe on their ability to be present in class. Students are invited to approach class wholly and abundantly from where they are, rooted in their individual self-knowledge and open to growth.

Ultimately I recognize that identities matter. Though they are constructs they have real and material implications. There is a precarious complexity in working and being in relationship with individuals who differ in identity and life experiences. Yet I am committed to being uncomfortable, to listening and remaining open, and to leveraging my own privilege in order to uproot interworking systems of oppression and foster an environment in which everybody has the chance to thrive.