

## **Dance and Civic & Community Engagement: Service-Learning and Study Abroad as Vehicles to experiential learning, cultural humility, and global citizenship**

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### **Abstract**

Dance at Buffalo State University delivers a liberal arts education and embraces a civic and community engagement philosophy in all aspects of the program. In addition to rigorous studio training that enhances the physical experience of the art form, the curriculum is designed to deepen students' understanding of the cultural, historical, and social, as well as aesthetic, value of dance to our world. This community and civically engaged program fulfills dance students' distinct aspirations while addressing local and global societal priorities. These experiences are supported by the Dr. Katherine S. Conway-Turner Office of Civic and Community Engagement (CCE) and the Maurene Callahan Bouras Center for Global Engagement (CGE) on campus, which facilitate a broad array of short-term and virtual community-engaged applied learning programs.

5 keywords; civic and community engagement, experiential learning, cultural humility, global citizenship, dance

### **Introduction**

Buffalo State University believes it is critical to develop students as active citizens, clearly connecting academic program learning outcomes with opportunities to address community priorities, both at home and abroad. Dance educators at Buffalo State University deliver a liberal arts education and embrace a civic and community engagement philosophy in all aspects of the program. In addition to rigorous studio training that enhances the physical experience of the art form, the curriculum is designed to deepen students' understanding of the cultural, historical, and social, as well as aesthetic, value of dance to our world. This community and civically engaged program fulfills dance students' distinct aspirations while addressing local and global societal priorities. These experiences are supported by the Dr. Katherine S. Conway-Turner Office of Civic and Community Engagement (CCE) and Maurene Callahan Bouras Center for Global Engagement (CGE) on campus, which facilitate a broad array of short-term and virtual community-engaged applied learning programs. The unique learning environments brought on by COVID-19 have allowed for transitions from traditional to virtual interactions in new and creative ways that give rise to exciting possibilities. Both traditional and virtual experiences allow students to 'travel' and interface with faculty and global communities with the goal of developing deeper experiences with cultures different from their own and to build important civic skills.

The authors have coordinated nearly a dozen recent and upcoming programs connecting students to dance course content and cultural learning opportunities. We provide in-depth background information and promising practices for building

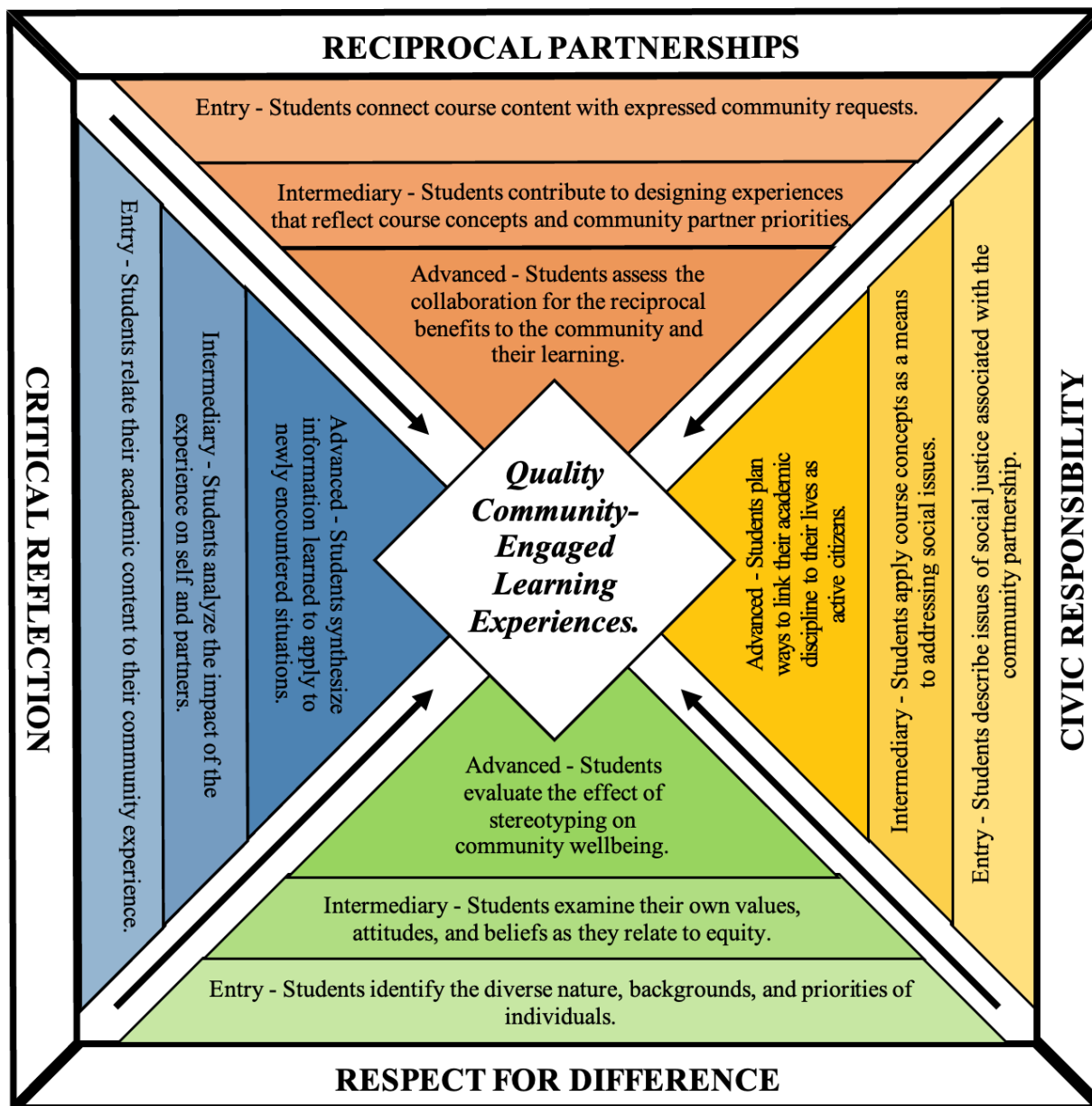
experiences that successfully support student participants and deepen respect and appreciation for diverse communities. We utilize student-centered pedagogical practices such as storytelling, creating cultural awareness, and utilizing integrated applications, adaptable for in-person and virtual settings. Students explore opportunities to connect the dance discipline to civic priorities, by using a unique quality community-engagement component taxonomy, and to global priorities, by investigating the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. This paper aims for dance educators to come away with potential plans and spark ideas for course integration with a local or global partner. Ultimately, the authors model equitable strategies for dance educators, that positively impact students' self-esteem, affirm their cultural identities, and nurture cultural humility. This decenters Eurocentric dance techniques as an essential component of the core curriculum, and recenters civic, community, and global engagement as a means of learning diverse dance techniques (DeGruy 2017, Hagan 2020, Horrigan 2020, McCarthy-Brown 2010).

### **Facilitating dance as civic and community engagement**

Facilitating Dance in the CCE Office is a model for cross-cultural exchange and community building through a decolonial lens. Not only does this program foster diplomacy, professional development, and empathy, it gives students practical experience to become emerging leaders with global vision. Dance as a movement language has the power to create accessibility and inclusion across diverse student groups. Therefore, when paired with the opportunity for students to experience dance in service-learning courses and study abroad programs, it allows for practical life skills to be developed in a safe environment guided by an experienced educator. As dance educators and activists, we are passionate about our art form, as we know how dance has impacted our lives. We witness the joy of dance and movement for people throughout the world. We recognize that dance is social and emotional learning, community-building, cultural humility, social justice, global engagement, and all that makes us human. Students have expressed they have experienced how global and civic engagement fosters emotional intelligence through a pre-professional dance experience. Buffalo State University graduates' credit their critical analysis and problem-solving skills to participating in this study abroad and service-learning programs. These skills serve graduates well as dance researchers, practitioners, and educators. However, to experience dance in such a profound manner takes planning, forethought, and reflective pedagogical 55e.

### **Intentionally connecting the CCE curriculum at home and abroad**

In addition to learning outcomes that focus on curricular content, the authors designed a Quality community-engaged learning taxonomy to address four community-engaged learning components - reciprocal partnerships, civic responsibility, respect for difference, and critical reflection. As a course is developed, the faculty member determines the appropriate learning level of each component and plans the experience accordingly.



A culture's values are embodied in its dance practices, which allows dance to be a conduit to cultural humility and an empathetic global perspective. Purposeful global learning builds cultural competence and serves to illuminate the world's most pressing inequities to achieve a more sustainable future. It can occur in a variety of formats, allowing all students to participate in meaningful community-engaged collaborations whether they be virtual connections through Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) or in-person with multilingual community partners at home and abroad.

To empower young people as global citizens, the authors adopted UNESCO's

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*Education for sustainable development goals: learning objectives* text as a guide for identifying learning objectives for each of the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNESCO 2017). Dance students identify their own global learning outcome by pairing at least one of the seventeen goals to their dance education or choreography project.



## Course development

Successful projects require intentional course development with clear learning outcomes, defined vocabulary, and an understanding of both course requirements and community priorities. A degree of flexibility is necessary when developing and implementing local, national, and international civic-engaged dance experiences, particularly while maintaining a commitment to the collaborative process. The authors incorporated a 5-step cyclical process that continually refers to the course content, community-engagement, and global perspective learning outcomes.

- Preparing the Class
- Structuring the experience
- Time out for reflection
- Feedback Plan
- Closing the loop

## Local and global collaborations: hearing from our partners

These community-engaged research projects purposely began with community voice to identify their necessities. This process included investigating the possibility of dance having an impact and then considering the education and training are essential for providing the required skills. Program leaders collected data on-site through observation and formal interviews, with questionnaires, and in conversation. This design comprises a community-based dance program that will fulfill our dance students' distinct aspirations and local and global societal concerns. Starting with this community dimension offered a fresh perspective of possible careers for students after graduation and the education and training necessary to cultivate these required skills. Specifically, community partner organizations state that mutually beneficial partnerships foster self-reflexive students and assist them with incorporating new ideas, increase the number of

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clients served, better meet community priorities, increase mentoring services, increase services offered, and make new connections.

Community partner organizations state that mutually beneficial partnerships with service-learning students help them...

- 100% incorporate new ideas;
- 100% increase the number of clients served;
- 98% better meet community priorities;
- 96% increase mentoring services;
- 98% increase services offered;
- 98% make new connections.

### **Lafayette International High School, Buffalo, NY**

My limited English-speaking refugee students gained wonderful language skills through a performance-based project involving traditions of sharing tea. The students were able to be creative and collaborative. They thoroughly enjoyed themselves. Pre and post surveys demonstrated the success of the learning experience.

- Heidi Salva, Lafayette International High School

Students participated in the service-learning courses, Teaching Dance and Technical Theater, explored culture with community partner Lafayette International High School. Students from these two courses and Lafayette High School's 7th and 9th grade Bridges Program for multilingual immigrant and refugee youth representing at least 15 nations used the Burchfield Penney art installation, "Taking Tea," as a catalyst to connect students in a collaborative service-learning project that explored artistic concepts through critical thinking and kinesthetic activities. Both groups found common ground through empathy, dance, and cross-cultural collaboration.

### **Community Academic Center, Buffalo, NY**

Working with the Buffalo dance class has been a great experience for our after-school students at the CAC. The students and their professor share engaging and diverse experiences through movement and dance, which our multilingual community students have truly appreciated. Their lessons have expanded our students' creativity in the arts and have provided new perspectives on how their bodies can tell their stories through movement.

- Jenny Serniuk, Community Academic Center, Buffalo, New York

Hundreds of dance students have partnered with the Community Academic Center's after school Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) program, which provides learning support for middle school children from refugee backgrounds. The focus of the course informs the theme of the dance activity. Students have created lessons on cultural awareness, academic content, social and emotional

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skills, community-building, social justice, and dance techniques.

### **Universidade de Minho, Braga, Portugal**

*'Highly motivated students, staff, and the refugees themselves greatly benefitted from this innovative project as did the institutions involved.'*

- *Francesca Rayner, Universidade de Minho, Portugal*

Three different Buffalo State University cohorts traveled to Guimaraes, Portugal, for a study abroad experience to participate in 3 different immersive service-learning projects and had a wide range of professional development and community engagement experiences. Professors from both universities asked students to work in small groups, strategically placing students together. In 2017, the project involved American students teaching Portuguese students yoga, Hip hop, and African vernacular jazz classes, while Portuguese students offered devised theater workshops to American students. The goal was to build relationships that led students to collaborate on performance art projects inspired by the stories of the refugee population in Portugal. These projects included films shown in the local community center and site-specific dance performances. This work premiered on one special night, where the students, community members, and local leaders attended. At the end of the performance, refugees turned community activists shared how the work impacted them and the importance of cultural sensitivity. They pointed out where students had shown innovation and creativity, plus discussed opportunities for them to show empathy and dig deeper. Students were able to celebrate their success but also strategize ways to improve as a global leader. Since its first iteration in 2017, the dance program has returned with students almost every year. Educators continually strengthen the program through critical reflexivity and praxis.

### **The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, Barbados**

*'This research can serve as an educational tool for dance students and the public at large, to examine and identify the embodiment of culture, politics and power.'*

- *Neri Torres, The University of the West Indies*

In the summer of 2018, Buffalo State University students, alumni, and faculty participated in the 3rd Biannual International Dance Conference hosted by University of the West Indies in Bridgetown, Barbados. The conference theme was "Decolonizing Bodies: Engaging Performance". Thus, students were asked to consider the ways in which their dance artistry and teaching practices could be decolonized. Faculty was tasked to deeply reflect on their educational philosophies and model for the students practice-based research that center's decolonization. The result was students performed in multiple dance works about colonialism, resilience, healing, and community on an international stage. Buffalo State University faculty lead research presentations and movement workshops on anti-racism. It is important to highlight those

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students attended faculty presentations because it showed students the correlation between concert dance and dance studies research in dance careers. Students and faculty also visited plantations, historical sites, and engaged with the local community. This showed the difference between discussions of decolonization and decolonizing in practice.

### **Conclusion: the civic & community engagement difference**

*'The students really, really cared. They did not just do a project; they dug in to make a difference.'*

- Carmaletta Zandi, *The Morlock Foundation*

To summarize the benefits of service-learning and study abroad are experiential learning, cultural humility, and global citizenship. Experiential Learning is the process of learning by doing and is recognized as a high-impact teaching practice. By engaging students in hands-on experiences and reflection, they are better able to connect theories and knowledge learned in the classroom to real-world situations. Cultural humility gives us a greater understanding of cultures that are different from our own and helps us recognize everyone's unique cultural experience (Center for Global Engagement 2023). In the education space, it is valuable for developing appropriate, sensitive, and respectful approaches for working cross-culturally. Global Citizenship nurtures personal respect and respect for others, wherever they live. It encourages individuals to think deeply and critically about what is equitable and just, and what will minimize harm to our planet. Intentionally connected curriculum is the bridge between dance and civic and community engagement to develop experiential learning, cultural humility, and global citizenship. Students leave Buffalo State University as professionals prepared for the journey ahead, having already developed the communication skills and practical experience necessary for successful career trajectories.

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## **Biography**

Joy Guarino is the Director of Global Engagement and a Professor of Dance at SUNY Buffalo State University, coordinating experiences that bring creative curricula and engaging opportunities to benefit faculty, staff, students, and local, national, and international community organizations with the goal of forming meaningful partnerships and collaborations.

Enya-Kalia Jordan is an artist-scholar and doctoral candidate at Texas Woman's University. Her extensive research on cultural embodiment and black feminist choreographic perspectives works toward creating equitable space in dance education.

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