DEPARTMENT OF WORLD ARTS AND CULTURES / DANCE

BRIEF HISTORY

Created from the 1995 merger of the World Arts and Cultures Program and the Dance Department, with the addition in 2001 of resources, faculty, and staff from the Interdepartmental Program in Folklore, the department is comprised of scholars, artists, and educators who are dedicated to developing interdisciplinary, cross-cultural modes of investigation that address the complex cultural and artistic issues inherent in our multi-layered contemporary world. Working without a shared genre or area of expertise, our faculty has instead forged a curriculum out of thematic connections that transcend the traditional boundaries of form and discipline.

The strands that formed this department and chronology:

The Department of Dance was founded in 1962 under the leadership of Alma Hawkins. It was the first to be recognized as an academic discipline housed within a College of the Arts (now School of the Arts and Architecture). (Others were located in Physical Education departments.) Over its 33-year history, the Department played a pioneering role in establishing dance as a field of study in the university setting, and developed a uniquely interdisciplinary approach to dance studies, including offerings in Modern Dance Choreography/Performance, Dance Education, Dance Ethnology, Dance History and Dance/Movement Therapy with dance degrees at the BA, MA, MFA, and MA in Dance/Movement Therapy levels.

In 1972, Professor Hawkins and faculty from six disciplines convened to establish the World Arts and Cultures Program (originally named Ethnic Arts). The WAC Program developed an interdisciplinary B.A. with faculty members from Anthropology, Art History, Dance, Folklore and Mythology, Music, and Theater. Flourishing for over two decades, WAC emphasized the development of interdisciplinary, intercultural perspectives on the arts, grounded in independent research and field study.

In 1993, the World Arts and Cultures and Dance faculty started discussions to organize a new department around a unique configuration of creative, conceptual, and educational goals. The faculty of both units (Dance and WAC) recognized the deepening crisis that the arts in this country face, and in response, proposed to develop a stronger, more viable academic unit that would produce a new generation of artists, arts scholars, and cultural leaders. By 1995, the Department of World Arts and Cultures was created from the merger and our unique interdisciplinary character stems from this dual institutional heritage offering the B.A. degree in World Arts and Cultures (initially with three concentrations; subsequently with two concentrations – dance and cultural studies, named “dance concentration” and “world arts and cultures concentration”) and MFA degree in Dance/Choreography. After four years of planning, the Ph.D. and M.A. programs in Culture and Performance (CAP) were approved by the University of California Office of the President in 2000, and the department discontinued its M.A. in Dance and M.A. in Dance/Movement Therapy degree programs.

In 2001, the faculty, staff, and other resources of the Interdepartmental Program in Folklore and Mythology were transferred to World Arts and Cultures, becoming a significant component of the department. This College of Letters and Science IDP graduate program originated in 1965, providing MA and PHD degrees (beginning in 1965 and 1978 respectively) in Folklore and Mythology. Folklore is one component in the undergraduate and graduate programs among others.
In 2010, after three years of deliberation which included input from faculty and students, the faculty proposed and received approval of changing its department’s name to Department of World Arts and Cultures / Dance. This name change became effective Fall of 2011, establishing a stronger and clearer representation of the scope and strengths of our two subunits – the study of arts and cultures, and the study of dance.

In 2011, the faculty proposed and received approval of the new (or return of) B.A. in Dance degree, along with a revised B.A. in World Arts and Cultures degree, both of which better reflect the two subunits at the undergraduate level. These undergraduate programs became effective Fall 2012. Current students have the option of remaining in their respective current programs or apply to switch to the new/revised degree programs. The BA degree in World Arts and Cultures (WAC) encompasses research on culture and representation as key perspectives for understanding creativity in local and global arenas, engagement in cross-cultural and interdisciplinary study through commitment to a range of practices including ethnography,activisms,visual and related expressive arts,documentary and short films,museum and curatorial studies, performance, and other creative perspectives and methods. The BA degree in Dance focuses research in dance, offering opportunities to engage in multiple dance practices, civic engagement and choreographic inquiry, moving the study of dance into the 21st century. The emphasis is on developing a dance practice that includes mastery of more than one technique,a strong composition series that allows students to explore dance making and as they develop their own voices as art makers, and dance studies enlivening the place of dancing and dance making within global and local, as well as political contexts.

While operating with considerable independence, our degree streams are unified by the department’s common concern for aesthetic production, corporeality and performance, the dynamics of “tradition,” and “culture-building” in contemporary societies. Connections are forged between critical theory and artistic practice, and attention is given to the changing social roles and responsibilities of artist practitioners and scholars of the arts in the United States and worldwide. Undergraduates and graduates have excelled in fields including technology and the arts,videography,documentary work, public service,education,theatrical/events production,performing arts,urban planning,law,environmental activism,public health and medicine. They have made careers in community non-profits and activist groups,government arts agencies,museums and arts foundations.Potential careers for Culture and Performance MA/PhD and Dance MFA graduates also include positions in research universities and colleges, and MFA graduates are active as choreographers/performers in their own companies or with other professional organizations as well.

Working within this acutely interdisciplinary environment, the department’s vision is to blend explorations in the library, the field, and the studio, to find unity through a shared engagement with problems of cultural and aesthetic diversity. All areas of our department promote interdisciplinary exploration and students are encouraged to combine rigorous scholarship, creative practice, and experiential learning.