

Dancing students not flipping over job outlook

By Bevin Gilmore
Emerald Contributor

Unlike states such as Ohio and Texas, Oregon has no formal public school certification for its college dance majors who wish to pursue a teaching career in the public school system.

Certification could be likened to putting the cart before the horse in today's economic climate, as so few jobs exist in the Oregon public schools that would require it.

Dance majors who wish to teach in public schools will either move to a state where the certification and jobs exist or "they will go on to get a master's degree and teach at a university," said Janet Descutner, University dance department head.

Descutner said there has not been a move at the University to push for certification in the past few years because the state has been cutting back on teachers of physical education, art and music.

"We figured there wouldn't be any takers for putting more teachers on the market who would not be employable," she said.

Sharon Oberst, a graduate of the University dance program and currently a dance instructor at Western Oregon State

College, said the dance certificate would still be a worthwhile goal for the University's dance program. Oregon has a good reputation for teachers, Oberst said, and the certificate would enable graduates to

a time when federal funding was encouraging the growth of dance and other art programs in Oregon.

There are five alternative schools in the state that are artbased and have received fed-

erated grant money. Dance was highly visible at that time, McIntyre said, but the funds are disappearing.

"Today no one is going to hire you to teach dance alone," she said.

Both McIntyre and Oberst claim that in addition to the economy acting as a barrier to the creation of more certified dance programs, a system that devalues dance in education also contributes.

"Dancers as a rule are not in real high echelon," McIntyre said.

Oberst, a former dancer with the Houston Ballet Company, said Oregon is doing as well as any other state in the area of higher education dance. However, she said she is appalled

by the state of dance at the elementary school level in Oregon.

She attributed this lack to a national belief that dance is a luxury and therefore not worthwhile as core curriculum.

"Because of our background (in the United States) we don't think that dance is necessary," she said. "But it is not a luxury, and it is not something that should be the first thing to cut when the funding is cut."

Oberst called dance an interdisciplinary activity, focusing on what she called "creative dance" as opposed to the more codified forms such as folk dancing or ballet.

"In creative dance, there is no right or wrong" no winning or losing, Oberst said. "You may be more successful or less successful, but whatever you do is right."

She cited England as one country where dance is part of the core curriculum in public

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becoming more difficult because "increasingly we are finding that more and more children are coming from dysfunctional homes."

Martha Harris, curriculum coordinator for elementary schools in the 4-J School District, said she also believes that elementary school is the proper place to begin exposure to arts such as the dance, but she also said that the district would not be in a position to hire certified dance specialists as teachers anytime in the near future for full-immersion studies.

While there is no specific school position on the importance of dance in the school curriculum, goals relative to movement and dance exist within the physical education domain, Harris said.

The University dance department is still working to create the climate where dance-certified programs would be accepted. At present the effort to pro-

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school education.

Oberst said dance instills discipline, develops creativity, helps a student learn problem-solving, and also builds self-confidence. Lesson plans from other disciplines are being incorporated into dance classes. Oberst cited research studies in geriatrics that are demonstrating benefits in dance that have always been known intuitively.

"Dance is, after all, a primitive human instinct," Oberst said. "It gives children an outlet to express themselves and communicate through gestures and movements in a way that is gone by the time we are adults."

McIntyre agreed that dance is considered something peripheral in public education. She said teaching any class today is

more dance in public education is being done through workshops and lecture demonstrations sponsored by the Western Oregon Institute for the Arts and Education and by the Oregon Dance Association.

Descutner said these efforts come at a time when the economic climate is still not very favorable, but she defends them as the type of groundwork that is necessary for any future expansion.

The Oregon Dance Association is pressing to develop a curriculum and philosophy in dance outside of the one that currently exists within the physical education domain, Descutner said.

"We are starting to build up steam toward this again," she said.

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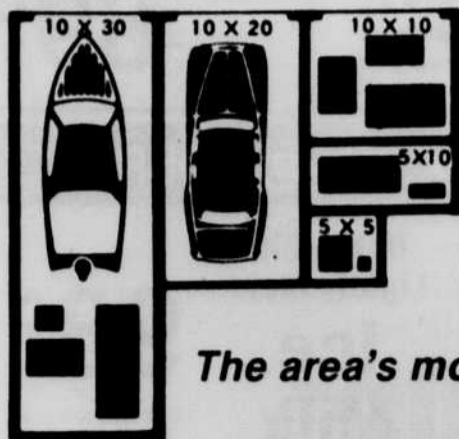
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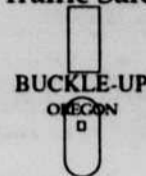
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