

PROPOSAL

The Department of Exercise Science, Dance and Athletics proposes that Skidmore College create a separate Dance Department as an independent program of study.

RATIONALE

The Dance major that was ratified by the faculty approximately 30 years ago grew out of the discipline of Physical Education, as did the Athletics program. Over the years the Dance program has undergone evolutionary changes in response to the needs and interests of students, faculty and the larger curricular goals of the College. Furthermore, the department no longer houses a Physical Education major. Instead, Physical Education has itself evolved into Exercise Science, while the Athletics program has grown in size, scope, and importance and is currently administered by a full time athletic director. The current Dance program has its own distinct and well-developed epistemology and is much more closely aligned with other performing arts on campus than it is with either Exercise Science or Athletics. There is no curricular or faculty overlap between Dance and Exercise Science or Athletics, and indeed there has been none for over two decades. Dance has developed its own faculty and its own curriculum. Now it seeks recognition as an independent department. "This change will more accurately reflect the consistently high artistic achievements of the institution's well-established dance program and will strengthen Skidmore College's position as an institution dedicated to excellence in the liberal arts." (Dance Program Review Report 2/03)

In many ways, we are simply seeking endorsement of a process that has evolved naturally over many years. As the department came to realize that Dance required a knowledgeable voice to speak on its own behalf, several administrative changes occurred to foster the independence of dance and to consolidate the identity of the dance program: a director of dance was appointed in 1990, the budget for dance was separated from the department budget, and the dance faculty were moved as a group from the mosaic of offices in the main corridor of the Sports and Recreation center to an enclave in the addition. The director of dance is currently charged with most of the responsibilities that typically fall to the chair; the director administers the dance budget, schedules classes, is responsible for the curriculum, writes faculty and staff evaluations, and communicates directly with the Dean's office on most matters.

DANCE PROGRAM MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Dance Program is to link critical thinking, analysis, craft, history and creativity with the distinct movement skills derived from studio practice and stage performance. Students are required to work toward proficiency in the particular movement language of Western and/or Eastern

COMPARISON DATA

A review of Dance at comparable institutions demonstrates that Skidmore is unique in being part of the Department of Exercise Science, Dance & Athletics. Five of our peer institutions (Barnard, Bard, Connecticut, Sara Lawrence and Wesleyan) have independent Dance Departments. Eight of our peer institutions offer majors or concentrations in dance as part of a combined department with another performing art (theater, film and/or music). Only three institutions (Colgate, Bates, and Vassar), which offer only a few courses in dance, are part of the Department of Physical Education.

The external reviewers' report (2/03) recognized the problematic placement of Dance within a larger department, particularly one that is not aligned with the arts. The report stated:

“We believe that dance should be a separate department, allowing dance faculty to focus more fully on their own academic program. The change appears possible with no negative financial impact.

This change will reflect Skidmore's recognition that dance in academe is a liberal arts course of study with its own curriculum, its own complex body of knowledge, and its many possible interdisciplinary connections.” (External Reviewers' Report 2/03)

Within Skidmore College itself, Dance is unique in that, as a performing art, it is housed within a department, which houses three programs (Exercise Science, Dance and Athletics) all of which have vastly different missions, language, and pedagogies. All other performing arts disciplines at Skidmore are housed in independent departments.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The creation of a separate Dance Department should result in no additional costs to the college. The current institutional commitments to Dance include:

- Dance has had a separate operating budget managed by the Director of Dance (since 1990)
- The Dance staff include 4 tenure-track faculty, one full-time technical director, 3 musicians, an Artist-in-Residence, and 6 part-time instructors.
- Dance shares secretarial support with Exercise Science. This arrangement works well and we see no reason to consider changing it.
- Dance has ten student assistants who are the crew-members for the Dance Theater and help with office work.
- Dance facilities include a theater and two dance studios. We also teach classes in a multipurpose room that is shared with Exercise Science and Athletics.
- Full-time Dance faculty are housed in an enclave of offices in the Sports and Recreation center.

- The Technical Director/Dance Center Manager has an office in the Dance Theater.
- The musicians and part-time faculty share two offices directly adjacent to the dance studios in the Dance Center.
- The director of Dance currently receives a course load reduction each semester for administering the program.
- Dance has its own annual prize (The Margaret Paulding Award in Dance) that is fully funded.

There are long-term goals that have been articulated by the Dance faculty over the past 8 years that will have financial implications, including moving faculty offices to be in closer proximity to the dance studios, enlarging the theater capacity, and enhancements to the dance studios and Dance Theater. However, these aspirations exist regardless of whether dance exists as an independent department or remains with the current department configuration. It is worth noting, however, that the ability to attract external funding to support these long-term goals will be enhanced when Dance is given credibility and visibility, and granted the right to stand alone as an independent department.