Performing Arts

Performing Arts at Washington University comprise dance (p. 1) and drama (p. 1).

Dance

Students may select dance (http://bulletin.wustl.edu/undergrad/artsci/dance/) as a major through the Performing Arts Department. This course of study combines intensive studio work in the technique and theory of modern dance, ballet and composition with seminars that examine dance as a global phenomenon containing forms that reflect culturally specific historical, aesthetic and ethnological features. The program also includes a broad range of courses such as stagecraft, music resources, improvisation, anatomy for dancers, pedagogy, dance therapy, musical theater dance, world dance forms, jazz and tap. In addition, students may choose to minor in dance or in world music, dance and theater. The interdisciplinary minor in world music, dance and theater encourages students already interested in the performing arts to explore those outside of Euro-American traditions. A certificate program in somatic studies is offered through the University College division of Arts & Sciences.

The senior capstone experience is framed in consultation with Performing Arts faculty. In April, prior to registration for the fall semester, dance majors discuss the capstone requirement with their advisers. The dance capstone requirement can be satisfied by a senior honors thesis or a senior dance project. The format may range from a research paper or a written analysis of the student’s dance development to a project emphasizing movement expression (e.g., the creation of a video résumé, a performance or a choreographic project). In all cases, dance capstones have a written component.

Those who study dance at Washington University learn from faculty members who have both professional experience and academic degrees. Students also have the opportunity to study with guest artists-in-residence who teach master classes and set choreography.

Students may audition for the Washington University Dance Theatre, which holds annual auditions for students. Selected students will appear in faculty- and guest artist-choreographed concerts in Edison Theatre. Dance students particularly interested in performance may audition for the student repertory company, Washington University Dance Collective (WUDC). WUDC rehearses and performs throughout the year at area venues and on campus. Students may also participate in departmental drama productions as well as student work in choreography and theater. Each year, students have the opportunity to attend the regional American College Dance Conference to adjudicate work, perform, and take master classes.

Drama

The drama (http://bulletin.wustl.edu/undergrad/artsci/drama/) major combines the historical, cultural and theoretical study of theater and performance with a full array of theater production courses, including acting, directing, performance art, design (i.e., set, costume, lighting, and sound) and playwriting.

The theater and performance studies faculty offer courses in theater history, performance studies, and dramatic and performance theory. Majors may also take cross-listed courses in such departments as African and African-American Studies; Classics; English; East Asian Languages and Literatures; and Film and Media Studies. Our courses analyze theater and performance as resonant and significant cultural practices, both historically and currently. Courses combine critical analysis with attention to the corporeal and material embodiment of actual performance.

In small, individualized classes (capped at a maximum of 16 students) characterized by a high number of weekly contact hours, professionally and academically trained faculty teach a rigorous system of production courses. In the acting area, the department offers four courses covering scene and character study, acting styles and solo performance work. A two-course directing sequence issues into a public showing of student-directed work, and some students have chosen to direct a fully designed production as their Senior Honors thesis. Recent graduates of the acting and directing sequence have been placed in prestigious MFA programs, in internships and jobs in regional American theaters, and in various professional schools and graduate programs. Our nationally recognized program in design and technical theater offers students a varied selection of costume, scene, lighting and sound design courses. A highly successful playwriting program, enriched by the annual A.E. Hotchner Playwriting Competition and workshops run by leading American dramaturgs, has produced playwrights whose work is now being performed in nationally recognized venues such as Chicago’s Steppenwolf Theater, as well as in film and television writers’ rooms.

The culture of performance is abundantly rich at Washington University. A wide array of producing student theater ensembles, including improvisation groups, provides many opportunities for student-generated performance on campus.

Since 1991, the Performing Arts Department and Globe Education have been running a national summer program held at Shakespeare’s Globe in London. This four-week program includes a 3-unit course on the textual, historical and cultural
study of Shakespeare; a 3-unit course on acting Shakespeare (with particular attention to acting on the Globe stage); master classes taught by Globe personnel; playgoing in London and Stratford; and more.

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