

Institute for the Performing Arts. New York University

Tisch School of the Arts

by Jeanne Vaccaro

Tisch School of the Arts at New York University was founded in 1965, and the Institute for the Performing Arts offers six postgraduate degrees:

- ◆ M.F.A. in Graduate Acting
- ◆ M.F.A. in Design for Stage and Film
- ◆ M.F.A. in Graduate Musical Theatre Writing
- ◆ M.F.A. in Dance
- ◆ M.A. in Performance Studies
- ◆ Ph.D. in Performance Studies

This report focuses on the postgraduate degrees offered by the Departments of Performance Studies (M.A. and Ph.D.) and Dance (M.F.A.), and outlines credit requirements, admissions, financial aid, and extra-curricular opportunities.

Department of Performance Studies

The field of Performance Studies emerged in the 1970s as collaboration between director Richard Schechner and anthropologist Victor Turner. The discipline was inaugurated as such in 1980 at the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University under the direction of Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. The Department of Performance Studies at New York University is the first in the world dedicated to the study of performance as an object of analysis. The Master's and Doctorate in Performance Studies are accredited university degrees.

Profile & Aims

An interdisciplinary field, Performance Studies incorporates strands of anthropology, dance, theatre, women's and gender studies, queer theory, and critical race theory to explore performances in everyday life, embodied art, aesthetic practices, and visual culture. Students are trained to analyze live and mediated performances, including theatre, music, and dance.

Master's of Arts



The M.A. in Performance Studies is an accelerated degree program, allowing students to concentrate their studies over a one-year period. An incoming class of Master's students begins every June, with graduation scheduled the following May.

M.A. Credit Requirements

- ◆ The M.A. consists of 36 credits
- ◆ Each course is three credits
- ◆ Students enroll in three courses during the Summer, Fall and Spring semesters, totalling twelve credits per semester
- ◆ The Summer semester offers intensive courses which meet for three and a half hours on a daily basis
- ◆ Courses during the Fall and Spring semester meet for three and a half hours on a weekly basis
- ◆ A grade of 'B' or better is required to maintain matriculation
- ◆ At least 24 credits must be registered with resident faculty in the department
- ◆ Students are permitted to take one course outside the department, or take advantage of New York University's open enrolment consortium with Columbia University, The New School, CUNY, or Rutgers University
- ◆ Students may only earn credit for one non-academic class, such as a practicum or composition course
- ◆ Two departmental courses are required of Master's students: Introduction to Performance Studies, taught in the first semester, and Final Projects in Performance Studies, taught in the final semester
- ◆ Individual mentoring is offered for six credits, as part of the department's required courses, which feature weekly, small (6-8 students) discussion groups led by advanced doctoral students
- ◆ The Introduction to Performance Studies course is a lecture course, led by the chair of the department

Admission to the M.A.

- ◆ The Master's degree admits between 40-50 incoming students annually
- ◆ The GRE is not required for admission
- ◆ International students comprise one-tenth of the Master's class
- ◆ The application requires three letters of recommendation, a writing sample, a graduate proposal or statement of research interests, CV, and official transcripts



- ◆ No artistic portfolio is required for admission
- ◆ Incoming students hold undergraduate degrees from a range of disciplines, such as theatre, anthropology, dance, women's studies, and English
- ◆ Some incoming students have professional experiences, and have worked as dramaturges, in theatre companies, as actors, dancers, and musicians, or in galleries and museums
- ◆ Some incoming students possess additional degrees, such as an M.F.A. in theatre, directing, or dramatic writing

Financing the M.A.

- ◆ Funding is available for a limited number of students and is disbursed in the form of tuition remission
- ◆ Two students in the Master's class are awarded full scholarships, and receive full tuition remission, comprehensive health care, a stipend of \$20,000, and are assigned to work as graduate assistants
- ◆ Graduate assistants work for twenty hours per week for the faculty and staff in the department, conducting library research, planning events, or managing the website
- ◆ The majority of students secure public or private loans via the financial aid office in order to fund their degree

M.A. Final Project

The Master's degree culminates in a final project, in which students dedicate a semester to developing a thesis-like work. In the spring semester students take the required course Final Projects in Performance Studies, led by a tenured member of the faculty, and supplemented with weekly discussion groups led by advanced doctoral students. The teaching assistants spend a significant amount of time working with each student to develop individual projects and provide feedback. The content of the final project is at the discretion of the student, although consultation with the teaching assistant and professor is required. The course culminates with a conference in which students present their findings to the entire Master's class, faculty, and guests. The format of the final presentation may take the form of a traditional presentation, performance, or combination of the two. Developing a performative style and method of presentation is a central purpose of the Final Projects class. Students are expected to experiment with their tone,



writing style, and research methodology, as well as blend various forms of media and technology.

Careers for M.A. Graduates

- ◆ The M.A. prepares students for advanced doctoral research in Performance Studies or another related field
- ◆ M.A. graduates also often find work as dramaturges, performers, dancers, stage actors, architects, curators, museum educators, and filmmakers

Doctorate in Performance Studies

The Ph.D. in Performance Studies is an interdisciplinary degree for students who wish to study performance, broadly construed, outside the traditional frameworks offered in Theatre or Drama.

Ph.D. Credit Requirements

- ◆ The Ph.D. consists of 72 credits, 36 previously earned from a Master's degree
- ◆ There are two required courses for the Ph.D. – Methods in Performance Studies and Advanced Readings in Performance Studies – taken consecutively in the first year of study
- ◆ All courses are conducted in the Fall and Spring semesters
- ◆ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblet teaches the Methods course, and she encourages students to experiment with methods and forms appropriate to the study and documentation of performance
- ◆ The Advanced Readings class is a survey of critical texts in the field, and students utilize the course to develop their exam reading lists in Performance Studies
- ◆ The Ph.D. is a traditional academic degree, and composition classes are ineligible for credit
- ◆ All students must pass a foreign language exam by their 3rd year in the program
- ◆ Area exams are taken in the 2nd year of study, and include three areas of expertise – Performance Studies, and two areas of the students choosing
- ◆ A dissertation proposal is due during the 3rd year of study, and must be defended orally to the student's committee

Admission to the Ph.D.

- ◆ Eight students are admitted into the Ph.D. program annually



- ◆ The majority of students have received the M.A. in Performance Studies
- ◆ Typically only one external student is admitted to the Ph.D. class
- ◆ An M.A. is required for admission, either in Performance Studies or another related discipline such as theatre, dance, dramatic writing, or film
- ◆ Students are advised to submit a dissertation proposal as part of their application, specifying which departmental resources and faculty will factor into their research
- ◆ Application to the degree requires a writing sample, statement of interest, official transcripts, three letters of recommendation, and a professional CV
- ◆ No portfolio is required for admission
- ◆ The GRE is not required for admission

Financing the Ph.D.

- ◆ All Ph.D. students in Performance Studies are awarded fellowships, including full tuition remission, comprehensive health care, and a stipend of approximately \$20,000 annually
- ◆ The Ph.D. fellowship is awarded for four years, and students must maintain good academic standing to qualify for renewal
- ◆ Working for twenty hours per week as a graduate assistant or teaching assistant is required during two of the fellowship years
- ◆ The stipend check is provided during the academic calendar year only, from September-May
- ◆ Students may take out private or public loans through the financial aid office

Ph.D. Final Project

- ◆ The doctoral dissertation, unlike the Master's final project or thesis, is a traditional research project. A straightforward, academic dissertation is undertaken by the student in consultation with the primary academic advisory, two departmental advisors, and two external readers. The methodology of any Performance Studies project is provocative in content and form, and incorporates ethnography, fieldwork, and original archival research
- ◆ Approximately five students defend their dissertations annually
- ◆ Students complete the dissertation in approximately five years
- ◆ The dissertation defense is open to the public

Careers for Ph.D. Graduates



- ◆ The Ph.D. in Performance Studies prepares student for university teaching careers in a range of fields. The interdisciplinary training offered by the department enables students to go into theatre, dance, ethnomusicology, cultural studies, anthropology, women's studies, and American studies.
- ◆ Graduates may also find work in museums, arts organizations, galleries, and stage companies.

Performance Studies at a Glance

Artistic Credits

- ◆ Composition courses are offered every semester
- ◆ East Coast Artists offers a workshop every summer semester
- ◆ Guest artists including Anna Deveare Smith, Ricardo Domiguez, Yvonne Rainer, Carmelita Tropicana, and Nao Bustamante have taught performance composition courses on subjects such as digital media, technology and performance, acting and emotion, and performance in New York
- ◆ Experimental learning and techniques are emphasized in composition courses
- ◆ An annual summer course is offered by the Hemispheric Institute in Latin America, allowing students to engage in intensive two-week seminars with artists, activists, and academics

Academic Credits

- ◆ Courses are regularly offered in queer theory, critical race theory, feminist ethnography, subcultures, tourist productions, museum cultures, performativity and the law, dance ethnography, fetish, psychoanalysis, Black popular culture, movement theory, and religious performance
- ◆ All courses are taught by tenured faculty in the department, with occasional guest scholars and artists offering speciality courses
- ◆ Enrollment in a minority of courses is by permission of the instructor
- ◆ The majority of courses are seminars, with ten to fifteen students enrolled

Networks

The Department of Performance Studies is linked with several other academic and artistic institutions, and aims to enrich student life by supplementing department coursework with extra-curricular activities.



- ◆ The Hemispheric Institute, under the direction of Professor Diana Taylor, is a think tank for artists, activists, and scholars across the United States and Latin America. Hemi publishes an online journal *e-misferica* biannually. Students may contribute essays, reviews, artist portfolios, interviews, and political reports. Hemi digitizes and documents performances in Latin America, enabling students and researchers to access and analyze these ephemeral performances. Hemi also runs an annual seminar in Latin America, and students may enroll in the seminar and receive course credit for their participation. Previous seminars took place in Peru, Argentina, and Mexico. Hemi conducts its work in English, Spanish, and Portuguese, allowing students from various backgrounds to participate. Master's and Doctoral students in Performance Studies are provided with multiple opportunities to get involved with the Hemispheric Institute, as volunteers, interns, work-study positions, graduate assistants, and staff.
- ◆ *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* is a peer reviewed academic journal hosted by the Department of Performance Studies, and published by Routledge, Taylor & Francis. The journal was founded by graduate students in the department in 1983, and provides a forum for the discussion of gender and performance. Graduate students have an opportunity to work on the journal as interns, authors, reviewers, members of the Editorial Collective, and graduate assistants. Each year the journal hires an editorial intern and a managing editor from the graduate students in the department. The journal provides professionalizing experience to graduate students looking to pursue a career in publishing or teaching.
- ◆ *The Drama Review* is the premiere journal in Theatre and Performance Studies, and is edited by Professor Richard Schechner. The journal hires several editorial interns and graduate assistants every year, training students in every aspect of academic publishing. *TDR* also hires work-study positions every summer.
- ◆ The Department of Undergraduate Drama at Tisch School of the Arts hires several Performance Studies graduate students to work as teaching assistants, researchers, and graduate assistants. Every year students are provided with exceptional work experience in Undergraduate Drama, learning how to give undergraduate lectures, grade papers, conduct original research for tenured faculty, and run discussion groups.
- ◆ In 2008 the Tisch School of the Art initiated the Open Arts Curriculum, an interdisciplinary cluster of arts courses, effectively creating an undergraduate



minor in Performance Studies. Advanced doctoral candidates in Performance Studies are able to propose, develop and teach solo courses in the Open Arts curriculum. This invaluable teaching experience is crucial to Ph.D. candidates on the academic job market.

- ◆ Performance Studies International is an association that sponsors an annual conference, and in 2007 PSI #13 was held at New York University. Students were invited to join the planning committee and actively shape the conference events. Every year graduate students attend the conference, organize panels, give performances, and are often provided with funding from the department to supplement their travel expenses.
- ◆ Students regularly participate in other discipline oriented conferences, including Association of Theatre in Higher Education, American Studies Association, Cultural Studies Association, Conference on Research in Dance, and Society for Dance History Scholars.
- ◆ The department operates two email list serves that provide students with opportunities such as job announcements, calls for papers, casting calls, housing exchanges, and events.
- ◆ Students from various disciplines and colleges at New York University are able to enroll in Performance Studies courses, and students from American Studies and the Gallatin School for Individualized Studies are frequent visitors.
- ◆ Students in the department often find their own ways to collaborate and bridge their experiences as actors, directors, dramaturges, and dancers. Faculty also enlist students to be in their own performances, events, and conferences.

Facilities

- ◆ The Department of Performance Studies occupies a floor in one of Tisch's many buildings on the New York University campus. The space was renovated in 2008, and features administrative and faculty offices, student lockers, a student lounge, two seminar classrooms, several small offices available for student use, and a large studio space equipped with sound proofed walls and stage lighting. All rooms are equipped with wireless Internet and audio visual equipment including projectors. Students are allowed to reserve the studio space at no cost for individual and group rehearsals and other special events. Additionally, a library and archive of books and films is available for student use.



Theory & Practice

As an interdisciplinary field Performance Studies foregrounds an engagement with political praxis, artistic productions, and embodied knowledge.

- ◆ The BAM course is offered in the fall semester by Professor Barbara Browning. Students attend the Next Wave Festival at BAM, a premiere arts venue in Brooklyn, NY, and are exposed to avant garde performances, dance, music, opera, and more. The class meets weekly to discuss the performances, developing vital analytic skills. Student are assigned to write reviews of the performances, and workshop their writing with the ultimate aim of producing a publishable review. The course offers practical, career-oriented skills for work in a gallery, museum, arts organization, or university.
- ◆ Professor Tavia Nyong'o often teaches an archives course, organized theoretically through readings on subculture, the history of ideas, and queer and feminist theory. The class meets at the Fales Library at New York University, an archive that houses the collections of Judson Memorial Church, David Worjnarowicz, and Dennis Cooper. Students work directly with collections of their choice, conducting original research and presenting their findings through final papers and in class presentations. The course provides invaluable lessons on scholarly research and archival procedures helpful to a career in a university, arts foundation, or museum.

Teaching Staff

- ◆ The resident faculty in the department hold doctoral degrees in various fields, including anthropology, comparative literature, folklore, and American studies
- ◆ All resident faculty must hold a Ph.D. and be actively producing research and writing
- ◆ Guest faculty must also hold a Ph.D.
- ◆ Teaching assistants are only utilized in two Master's courses to facilitate discussion groups

Self-Assessment

- ◆ Every course culminates with a survey, in which students anonymously evaluate the professor, course content, discussion, and assignments, and the course evaluations are utilized by professors to improve courses



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Department of Dance

The Department of Dance at Tisch School of the Arts at New York University is a rigorous training program combining dance philosophy with technique. Both undergraduate and graduate degrees are offered – the Bachelor of Fine Arts and Master of Fine Arts in Dance.

Profile and Aims

The M.F.A. in Dance is intended for students with prior dance training who seek full-time and professional careers as dancers or choreographers. The curriculum aims to expose students to all aspects of the dance world, including the auxiliary fields of music, crew production, lighting design, and acting.

Master of Fine Arts

The M.F.A. in Dance is a two-year degree that prepares students for work as professional dancers and/or choreographers. The intensive training program includes daily technique classes, as well as instruction in performance, music, and acting.

M.F.A. Credit Requirements

The M.F.A. consists of 72 credits. Each course is assigned a credit value, between two and eight, based on the number of credit hours per week.

Training Program

- ◆ Students take two technique classes daily, in ballet and contemporary dance respectively
- ◆ Pointe, partnering, yoga and Pilates are also available
- ◆ Dance composition is required of every student, in order to give a foundational knowledge of choreography
- ◆ The morning session (8:15 A.M. to 12:00 P.M.) consists of Pilates, ballet, and one additional technique class
- ◆ The afternoon session (12:30 P.M. to 3:00 P.M.) is devoted to academic courses such as composition and theory
- ◆ The evening session (3:30 P.M. to 6:15 P.M.) offers acting, musical theatre, lighting, and other dance auxiliary classes
- ◆ After 6:15 P.M. students often rehearse



First Year

In the first year of study all students are required to take the following courses:

- ◆ Dance Technique
- ◆ Dance Theory and Composition
- ◆ Graduate Acting
- ◆ Music Theory and Composition
- ◆ Graduate Kinesthetics of Anatomy
- ◆ Graduate Seminar in Dance
- ◆ Production Crew in Dance
- ◆ Dance Electives

Second Year

In the second year students concentrate their studies in

- ◆ Dance Technique
- ◆ Dance Theory and Composition
- ◆ Production Crew in Dance
- ◆ Survey of Twentieth-Century Music
- ◆ Research and Writing: Contemporary Performance Practice
- ◆ Dance Electives
- ◆ Second Avenue Dance Company

Dance Electives

- ◆ Choreographers, Composers, and Designers Workshop
- ◆ Dance for the Camera
- ◆ History of Dance
- ◆ Independent Study
- ◆ Lighting Design
- ◆ Music Composition

Admission

The Tisch School of the Arts administers admission to the M.F.A. in Dance, and thus students are instructed to file a general application to Tisch that indicates their particular interest in dance. The application requires official transcripts and two letters of recommendation. The Department of Dance also requires an audition for admission.



Dance Audition

- ◆ The first phase of the audition is a one and a half hour class in ballet technique, including ballet barre and adagio, which the student must successfully master in order to proceed to the next round of audition
- ◆ The second phase of the audition is a short solo dance, no longer than three minutes, of the student's choosing
- ◆ The audition culminates with a personal interview, in which career goals are discussed
- ◆ Applicants must wear appropriate clothing that allows a realistic evaluation of the body
- ◆ All applicants must submit full length body photograph in dance attire, with a dance CV attached detailing the applicants prior training, schools attended, etc.
- ◆ Videotape auditions are allowed with permission of the department for international applicants or candidates on professional dance tour
- ◆ Auditions are available in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles by online appointment

Financing

Very limited scholarships are available to Tisch students in dance. The majority of students are responsible for financing the degree with private funds and/or student loans. New York University does not usually offer financial aid of any kind to international students.

Networks

The Department of Dance works closely with various dance companies in New York and beyond, offering its students an opportunity to learn from working dancers and choreographers. Graduate students collaborate with fellow Tisch M.F.A. candidates in Musical Theatre Writing, Stage Design, and Acting to create fully staged performances open to the public. The annual Tisch Dance Showcase features original work choreographed and staged by M.F.A. students in dance. There are approximately 30 opportunities to perform and choreograph annually.

Second Avenue Dance Company

The Second Avenue Dance Company (SADC) is the resident dance company for graduate students in Dance at Tisch School of the Arts. All second year M.F.A. students



are members of the company. The company aims to facilitate the graduating student's transition into the professional, working world of dance. The SADC presents an annual performance showcase for its graduating students, and has re-staged dance classics choreographed by Bill T. Jones / Arnie Zane and Merce Cunningham. The SADC website also features student profiles and headshots, further creating a genuine opportunity to professionalize its student dancers and advance their marketability in the workforce. Participation and performance in SADC represents the final project or dance thesis for graduating students.

Theory and Practice

The M.F.A. emphasizes the conceptual study of dance alongside physical training. Students are taught dance theory and the various philosophies of dance – such as modern, ballet, ethnic or cultural dance – so that the spiritual, kinaesthetic, and artistic practice of dance is rooted in intellectual language and knowledge. Performances and rehearsals are a primary component of the degree.

Faculty

All faculty in the Department of Dance are professional dancers and/or choreographers or have worked previously as professional dancers and/or choreographers. The majority of faculty and adjunct faculty have earned advanced degrees such as an M.F.A. or M.A., and maintain strong connections to dance companies in New York City and beyond. As working dancers the faculty are well equipped to prepare students for full-time careers in dance, choreography, and dance instruction.

Self-Evaluation

The faculty provides students with both written and oral feedback at regular intervals during the year. Students are encouraged to meet privately with their instructors during office hours.

