

A full-page background image featuring a female dancer in a white tutu and ballet slippers, captured in a dynamic pose with one leg extended horizontally. She is positioned on the left side of the frame. The background is a vibrant, abstract composition of overlapping geometric shapes in various colors including teal, orange, purple, and grey, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall aesthetic is modern and artistic.

DANCE

THE DANCERS OF THE *university of south carolina*

Dance at the University of South Carolina is well-known by the dance community. However, many UofSC students outside of the program don't even know it exists. Having been around for over thirty years, the dance program has trained many successful dancers for careers after graduation. With available minor and two major concentrations— B.A. Dance Performance & Choreography and B.A. Dance Education— dancers who graduate from the program can have careers in both professional performance and teaching dance. Many students even have double or triple majors, with future plans to combine their passion for dance with another field of study. Some students are studying business, marketing, or administration and other students study pre-med, exercise science, or public health to work in dance science, wellness, or physical therapy. For these students, dance is just as an important part of their future career as anything else.

The UofSC Dance Program prides itself on offering rigorous technical training, as well as opportunities for expanding knowledge beyond dance. Dancers study classical ballet, contemporary, jazz, musical theater and world dance, among other styles. Students in the dance education concentration, have many opportunities to participate in professional learning experiences outside of the classroom. Dancers participate in hands-on learning throughout the community, preparing them for teaching dance in a variety of ways.



photography: Amy Chan

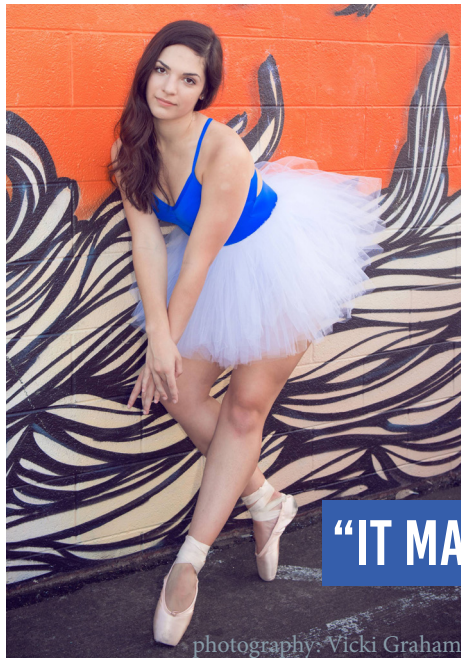
“IT WAS THE ONLY THING I WAS SURE I WANTED TO DO FOREVER”

Many of the dancers in the program have been training in the art since before grade school. Most students started dancing at the age of two or three, and haven’t stopped since. Their passion for dance is unwavering, and their commitment and discipline is just as strong. Senior Dance Performance & Choreography Major, Josie Ketten, loves the “constant challenge and beauty [dance] produces.” Like many other dancers in the program, Ketten can’t see herself doing

anything else. “It was the only thing I was sure I wanted to do forever,” she says. Dance is not just a major for students who choose to pursue it at the collegiate level, it is a way of life that they can’t see themselves living without.

Talbott Carden

is a freshman Dance Performance & Choreography and Spanish double major from Atlanta, Georgia. She began dancing



photography: Vicki Graham

when she was just two years old at the Georgia Ballet School and trained there until high school graduation. Carden decided to continue her dance training at the collegiate level because she couldn’t see herself quitting and she knew she wanted it to be a part of her life in some way. After 16 years of rigorous training, Carden knew that she needed to continue her pursuit of the art. Carden loves dancing because it makes her happy; relieves stress; and teaches discipline, focus, and time management. However, her favorite part of dance is the performance aspect. “I really love to perform,” she says, “It makes me feel so alive.”

Even as a freshman, Carden is already taking multiple classes a semester devoted to her major. So far, she loves experiencing dance on the collegiate level— learning more about dance academically, as well as being pushed physically in technique classes. “It is a really positive environment,” she says, “and a really strong community of dancers devoted to what they love.” For many dancers including Carden, dance isn’t just about studying technique and improving by yourself;

“IT MAKES ME FEEL SO ALIVE.”

dance is a community. Dance connects dancers around the world from different races, socio-economic classes, gender, religion, and sexuality. Dance is about connecting people who seem so different, but who all share the same passion for the art form.

Katie Connell

is a junior Dance Performance & Choreography major and Health Promotion, Education, & Behavior minor. Her hometown is Dayton, Ohio, where she started dancing at the age of three. Before coming to UofSC, she most recently trained at the Dayton Ballet School. As she graduated high school, Connell knew she didn’t want to give up her dance training, but it wasn’t until she auditioned for the UofSC dance program that she knew it would be her major. When she started in the program, Connell expected to be performing in a lot more classical ballet pieces because that’s what she was familiar with. However, she realized pretty quickly the program also offers numerous performance opportunities in many other

styles. “I’ve liked being able to stretch the boundaries of what I was comfortable with previously with the opportunity for more contemporary work.” Being exposed to different styles of dance was a new experience for Connell, but in the end, she realized that it made her a better dancer.

By pushing herself out of her comfort zone when rehearsing and performing, Connell is more prepared for a dance career after graduation. Dancers who are well-rounded in multiple styles of dance are more appealing to professional companies, and they are more likely to be offered a contract. For Connell, her post-graduation plans do include dancing professionally in some capacity. However, her minor also provides another career track as an option. As a Health Promotion Education and Behavior minor, Connell sees herself combining her passion for dance and health. She is also interested in going into the Dance Nutrition or Wellness Coaching field.

Connell’s favorite thing about dancing is the connection she makes with others. Not only has she

“I LOVE BEING ABLE TO EXPRESS MYSELF IN AN ENVIRONMENT THAT PUSHES ME.”



photography: Alison Egeli



met and taken class with some incredible dancers, but she feels like she has been able to connect with them as people, too. Connell also believes dance gives her a better understanding of life. “As dancers we get to show life visually, and I think it gives us an overall better understanding of it,” she says. “I love being able to express myself and enjoy myself in an environment that pushes me.” Like all art, dance is a form of expression. It tells stories and captivates its audience, connecting viewer and creator.

For Connell, the hardest thing about being a dance major at UofSC is the schedule and the lack of visibility the program has to other students on campus. Most dance majors take 7-9 classes a semester freshman to senior year. They have multiple dance technique classes, as well as rehearsal, dance history or anatomy, and dance pedagogy on top of their Carolina Core and additional minor or major classes. Many dance students can be in the studios from 10am to 7pm multiple days per week, and then they have various other classes outside of the studio to fit into their schedule, as well. Additionally, despite numerous opportunities for other students to be involved in the dance program through watching performances, taking dance appreciation classes, or by other means, many students don’t even know the program or major exist. In addition to the multitude of benefits exposure to the arts can bring, it is disheartening to dancers when shows they rehearsed for hours every day for months don’t have full audiences. However, this may be explained by the exclusivity the program creates. Most often, students train their whole life to audition for a dance program. Dance majors aren’t mentioned in exploratory advising appointments, and

students aren't interested in the program unless they've been dancing for years prior. These issues may be solved by simply more exposure of the program to other students on campus. Free performances, beginning dance classes, and greater arts appreciation all round campus means more visibility of the arts, which can have enormous benefits to students and the community.

Amy Chan

is a senior Dance Performance & Choreography major. She began dancing at age three at at José Mateo Ballet Theatre in Cambridge, Minnesota. Chan decided to come to the University of South Carolina to pursue a degree in dance because she knew she wanted a balance between dance and "regular life." Oftentimes when a dancer goes straight into the professional world after graduation, they miss out on truly living during their college-age years. For many students, the high-caliber and technical dance program at UofSC becomes more attractive when you add in the real college experience students receive. On top of rigorous dance training, dance students can also have a social life, go to football games, and take additional classes in other subjects besides dance.

This is very appealing for student dancers who want to expand their knowledge and life experience before starting their professional dance career.

Chan's favorite part of the dance program is the variety in classes and teaching styles offered. She thinks the program is really solid because there is a variety of styles of teaching. "For example, she says, instructor Hillary Troger grounds her classes around technique; Professor Jennifer Deckhart gives us freedom to play with the music and try new dynamics; Tanya and Thaddeus Weidhman-Davis expose us to always expanding in class, being wide, and pushing the limits of our bodies; Instructor André Merdigichian teaches Limon; and Rhythm used to teach Graham." This variety in styles and teaching techniques gives students the opportunity to learn many different styles of dance, creating well-rounded dancers that are more hireable in the professional world.

However, like many dancers in the program, Chan wishes there were more opportunities for classical ballet performances. She enjoyed performing Les Sylphides last year in the Fall Concert, and she hopes for the chance to be in more ballet performances soon. In the past, Stacey Calvert would stage Ballet Stars of New York, an exclusive ballet performance in collaboration with New York City Ballet. Only a few dancers would get to

be in Ballet Stars of New York, and the other shows during the year would be contemporary based. The lack of ballet performances is especially frustrating to Chan when the majority of the dance program is ballet emphasis.

Dance is so much more than just dance to Chan- it is discipline and finding new goals; it is liberating; it is a luxury, and it is a place for her mind to grow. For many dancers, dance is how they first learned to express themselves. Over time, it became how they communicate best.

"I love the work ethic that being a dancer creates in me" she says "and how I am always trying to reach a new goal. I love dancing because the work from the studios will hopefully translate on stage; dancing is so liberating. Getting to dance is a luxury, especially ballet since it is so expensive and not everyone can attend ballet class. Dancing gives me a whole new place for my mind and body outside of the studios because there's a new mindset where you're focused on technique and artistry."

Claire Wunderlich

is a sophomore Dance Education and Economics double major. Wunderlich is from Whitefish Bay, Wisconsin. There, she studied at the Milwaukee Ballet School

& Academy from the age of four.

Wunderlich found her home in the dance program at UofSC. She has loved all the performance opportunities she has gotten, performing in one or more concerts every semester since she started in the program Freshman year.

Wunderlich feels as though all the teachers she has gotten the opportunity to take class with have helped her in numerous ways. She says, "I feel like I've been able to connect with all of the teachers really well." However, similarly to fellow dancer Connell, Wunderlich's absolute favorite part of the dance program is the sense of community it has given her. She feels like it gave her a place on campus to grow and be herself in. "I love the community aspect of the dance program," she says, "I've met my best friends here."

Wunderlich has found the best version of herself surrounded by faculty and peers who want her to succeed. There are still a few things Wunderlich doesn't love about the program "I don't love how far of a walk the dance building is, or how difficult it is to schedule dance classes in with other academics."

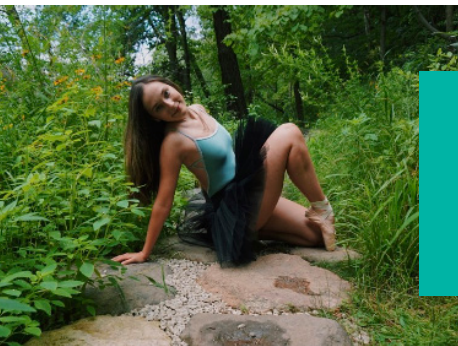
"I MET MY BEST FRIENDS HERE."



photography: Ellie Kumer

However, she claims those are minor inconveniences. Overall, she is very pleased with her time in the dance program.

Wunderlich's second major is economics. She plans on attending grad school and earning her Masters of Business Administration with an emphasis in marketing. Her ultimate goal is to be on the marketing team for a ballet company.



"WHEN I AM NOT DANCING I AM MISSING SOMETHING. DANCE GIVES ME PURPOSE."

like I am missing something. Dance is how I express myself." Part of her feels like it is missing when she can't dance.

For the students in the dance program at the University of South Carolina, dance is way more than just their major. For them, dance is a way of life. It is the driving force behind who they are, and a passion in which they can express themselves.

