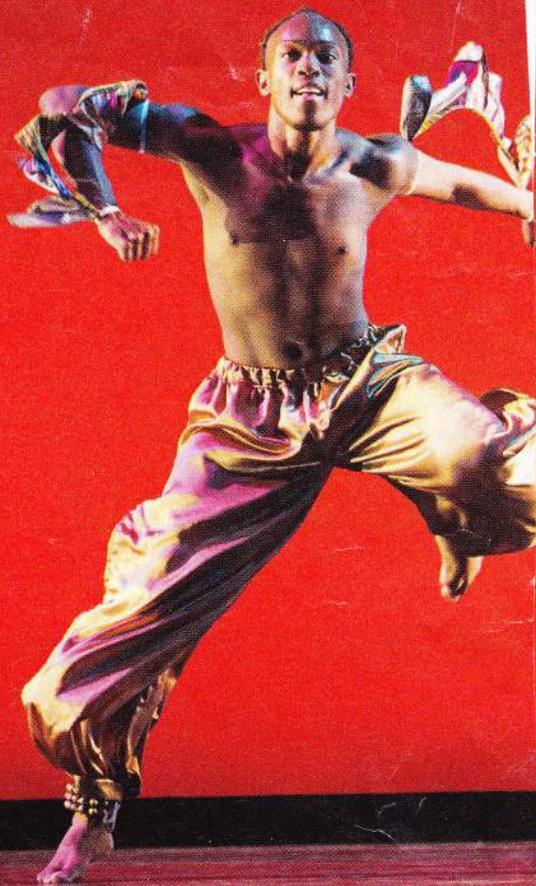


To the Beat of the Drum

College students explore African dance.

What makes a well-rounded dancer? A strong base in ballet and modern comes to mind. But African dance, which has unique rhythmic structures and emphasizes use of the full body, can deepen your understanding of musicality and movement. Many college programs are prioritizing the study of the techniques, history and music, while exposing students to rep from African dance-influenced artists working today. "We are providing dancers who are much more marketable," says Ferne Caulker Bronson, creator of the African dance track at University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee. "The playing field is different now. There are a lot of choreographers out there who are using African dance as a base."

—Suzannah Friscia



A University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee student in performance

OHIO UNIVERSITY

Athens, OH
ohio.edu

Degrees offered: BFA or BA in dance with an optional certificate in African Culture Through Music and Dance

No. of dance majors: 50-plus

Courses: All majors take at least two levels of African dance, and intermediate and advanced levels also take music. History and culture courses are offered to all students.

Performance opps: Select students join the OU African Ensemble, which performs in the school's World Music and Dance Festival Concert and a festival in Athens. They have toured to other cities in the U.S. and Canada.

Guest artists: Recent ones include Urban Bush Women and National Dance Company of Ghana artistic director Nii-Tete Yartey.

Study abroad: OU offers a three-week intensive in Ghana.

Some students join Azaguno, a professional African music and dance group with ties to OU. This summer, it performed at the National Theatre of Ghana.

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

Gainesville, FL
ufl.edu

Degrees offered: BFA or BA in dance

No. of dance majors: About 60

Courses: BFA students take at least two levels of West African technique. Other courses focus on African history, repertory and performance, and drumming and other percussion.

Performance opps: Dancers can join the school's African dance ensemble, AGBEDIDI, after taking specific courses. Students perform alongside guest artists in an annual West African concert on campus, participate in African dance-related events in UF's summer festival and do outreach in the community.

Guest artists: About four guests come each year through UF's Center for World Arts. Recent ones include Congolese choreographer Faustin Linyekula and Panaibra Gabriel Canda, founder of Mozambique's first contemporary dance company.

Study abroad: UF has a relationship with Senegal's Ecole des Sables dance school.

UF's Center for World Arts also hosts artists-in-residence from China and Latin America.

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN—MILWAUKEE

Milwaukee, WI
uwm.edu

Degrees offered: BFA or BA in dance, with an Africa and the Diaspora track (only available to BFAs)

No. of dance majors: About 100

Courses: Students in the track take six-plus semesters of African dance, plus African percussion and history of Africa and the Diaspora.

Performance opps: UWM holds one major concert for African dance-focused students each year. Ko-Thi Dance Company, an African and Caribbean dance ensemble, is affiliated with the university and rehearses on campus. Students sit in on rehearsals, take workshops with company dancers and sometimes perform and tour with them.

Guest artists: Every semester, a guest has a week-long residency. Artists have included Assane Konte, artistic director of KanKouran West African Dance Company in Washington, DC, and Amaniyea Payne, artistic director of Muntu Dance Theatre in Chicago.

Study abroad: Every other summer, the department leads a trip to Brazil, where students study the influence of African traditions there. ■

Ko-Thi Dance Company also offers internships for students in marketing, administration and development.