



Lesley University dance therapy students work with developmentally delayed adults at the Minute Man Arc center (left) and with multihandicapped children at Perkins School for the Blind (below).



## Dancer, Heal Thyself— and Others, Too

What it takes to become a dance therapist **BY HALA SHAH**

**R**ebecca Conners was baking her bare feet in the California sun and listening to postmodern dance pioneer Anna Halprin speak when she had a transformative experience. “The body is like the universe,” said Halprin. “It has everything in it.” Conners, a rising college senior who was spending the summer at Halprin’s creative arts therapy workshop, says something suddenly clicked: She decided to pursue a career in dance/movement therapy.

For the student who isn’t interested in performing professionally but wants to keep dance an integral part of her job, movement therapy is a great (and steady) career option. Conners recently completed her master’s degree in expressive arts therapy and feels fortunate to be putting her dance background to good use. “All of those years of training serve me, whether it was ballet or later in high school doing musical theater, or in college

doing modern,” she says.

Though a graduate degree is required to become a certified dance/movement therapist, students have many options at the undergraduate level to explore the field. Below, we’ve answered four questions your students—and you—might have about this career option.

### **1** Wait...so what is dance/movement therapy?

Dance/movement therapy is a form of psychotherapy that integrates dance and movement. Certified practitioners (DMTs) work with a range of populations and ages, in groups or one-on-one: children who have learning and developmental issues; seniors who have dementia or Alzheimer’s disease; veterans with trauma or neurological problems. And they practice in a variety of settings—rehabilitation centers, schools, health

care facilities or private practices. Using movement (in the form of games or exercises), DMTs help clients improve their self-esteem, create new ways to cope with problems, develop communication skills and identify behavior patterns.

### **2** How do I become a DMT?

You must complete graduate-level study approved by the American Dance Therapy Association (see [adta.org](http://adta.org) for the list of accepted schools) and be certified by the Dance/Movement Therapy Certification Board.

### **3** What makes a dancer a good DMT?

Many DMTs are drawn to the field by personal experience with someone who has special needs or has benefited from expressive arts therapy, says Nancy Beardall, who coordinates the dance/movement therapy master’s program at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Conners, for example, volunteered with the Adopt a Grandparent program and participated in a dance/movement therapy workshop as an undergrad at the University of Virginia before deciding to pursue her master’s degree.

Versatility, empathy and the ability to improvise and be receptive to a client's needs are crucial skills. "DMTs have to really have a sense of their own movement vocabulary and comfort with their body and the way they move," adds Beardall. "Because this is how they're going to be working with people."

#### 4 So what can I do as an undergrad?

The ADTA recommends 11 undergrad programs (see list below) that offer certificates, minors or coursework in dance/movement therapy, but dancers at any university can tailor their undergraduate coursework. Taking classes in dance, kinesiology, psychology and exercise

science is a good place to start. Conners spent her final undergrad year taking psychology and anatomy courses to prepare for her master's program at Lesley University.

There are also off-campus opportunities you can pursue. For example: At the University of Wisconsin–Madison, which has a four-semester dance therapy certificate program, students get to volunteer at the local Hancock Center for Dance/Movement Therapy to observe DMTs firsthand. "That really gets people excited because they get to see the impact of it," says Rena Kornblum, who coordinates the certificate program. **DT**

*Hala Shah is a dancer, choreographer and freelance writer based in New York City.*

## 11 Places to Study Dance Therapy as an Undergrad

### DREXEL UNIVERSITY Philadelphia, PA

**Degrees offered:** BS in dance; accelerated BS/MA in creative arts in therapy and dance/movement therapy

### ENDICOTT COLLEGE Beverly, MA

**Degree offered:** creative arts therapy minor

### GOUCHER COLLEGE Towson, MD

**Degree offered:** BA in dance with a dance/movement therapy emphasis

### LESLEY UNIVERSITY Cambridge, MA

**Degrees offered:** BS in expressive arts therapy; expressive arts therapy dual degree (five-year BS/MA in expressive therapies, with an emphasis on mental health

counseling). Expressive arts therapy undergrads can self-design their major, minor or specialization.

### MANHATTANVILLE COLLEGE Purchase, NY

**Degree offered:** BA in dance and theater with a concentration in dance therapy and required minor in psychology

### QUEENS COLLEGE Flushing, NY

**Coursework:** introduction to dance therapy; analysis of dance movement

### RED ROCKS COMMUNITY COLLEGE Lakewood, CO

**Degree offered:** AA with emphasis in dance and coursework in holistic health

### RUSSELL SAGE COLLEGE

Troy, NY

**Degree offered:** BA in creative arts in therapy with a concentration in dance

### UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS

Philadelphia, PA

**Coursework:** Body Pathways curriculum, preparing students for careers in dance therapy, dance science and injury prevention

### UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

Coral Gables, FL

**Degree offered:** minor in dance with emphasis on teaching and methodology of dance and movement

### UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Madison, WI

**Degree offered:** dance/movement therapy certificate

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