

BA or BFA?

Help students decide which degree is right for them.

BY RACHEL RIZZUTO

When Julian DeGuzman transferred to the University of California Irvine as a junior, he wasn't sure how dance would fit into his career goals. But after a summer away at American Dance Festival, he realized he wanted to perform. When he returned as a senior that fall, he changed his bachelor of arts in dance to a bachelor of fine arts. Today he lives in New York City, performing in Broadway's *Newsies* eight times a week.

Though both are intensive degrees that give dancers a leg up in their training, a dance BFA and BA offer different college experiences. Helping students decide which to pursue means considering interests they'd like to explore in college and after graduation. Because most schools offer either a BA or BFA (though some programs, like UC Irvine, have both), choosing also helps narrow the list of potential schools a student could apply to.

The biggest difference between the two degrees is the time spent in dance-specific courses versus academics outside the department. At George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, BFA candidates must complete 83 dance credits over four years—nearly double what is required for a BA. That means BFAs spend roughly 20 hours a week in movement classes (technique, improvisation, composition), and BAs 10. Depending on the dancer, these time commitments might feel over- or underwhelming.



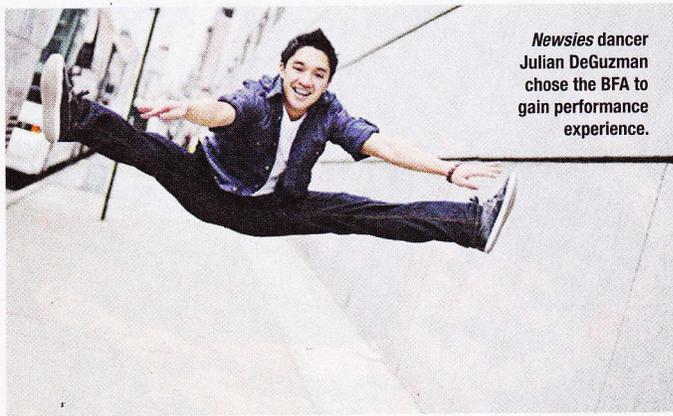
Jacksonville University offers both a dance BA and BFA.

Regardless, the quality of training is equal. "The choreography classes are the same, the theory courses are the same and ballet is the same," says Brian Palmer, chair of theater and dance at Jacksonville University in Florida. "The proficiency necessary for level placement and the courses themselves don't differ."

It was the additional time spent in technique class and rehearsals that prompted DeGuzman to change his

degree to a BFA. "I became more involved with rehearsals and had to collaborate with choreographers. And I knew I needed that on my resumé," he says. "That comes in handy now that I'm assistant dance captain for *Newsies*. I feel more eloquent in communicating movement to new cast members."

In general, BFA candidates tend to be performance-oriented dancers, while BAs are interested in jobs like dance programming, physical therapy or



Newsies dancer Julian DeGuzman chose the BFA to gain performance experience.

teaching. For instance, GMU program coordinator Marjorie Summerall points out that two recent GMU BFA grads dance with Mark Morris Dance Group; a BA graduate, who double-majored in dance and mathematics, is in grad school studying biostatistics at Johns Hopkins University, while teaching ballet in Baltimore.

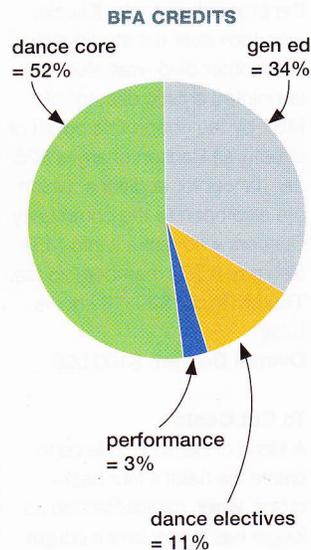
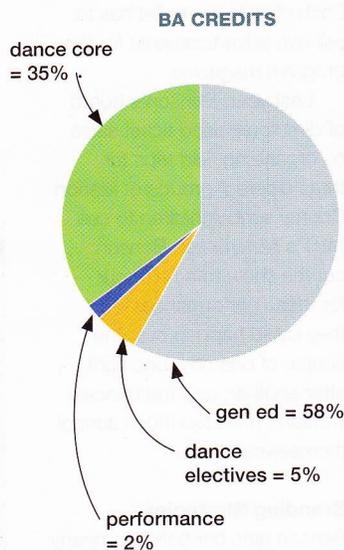
For students with additional interests, Summerall says the scheduling flexibility of a BA makes it easier to double-major or minor. And the additional academic load may make students more attractive to graduate schools and nondance employers. "Sometimes students develop a strong interest in another area of study," she says. "They can better manage

it with a BA and still graduate in four years."

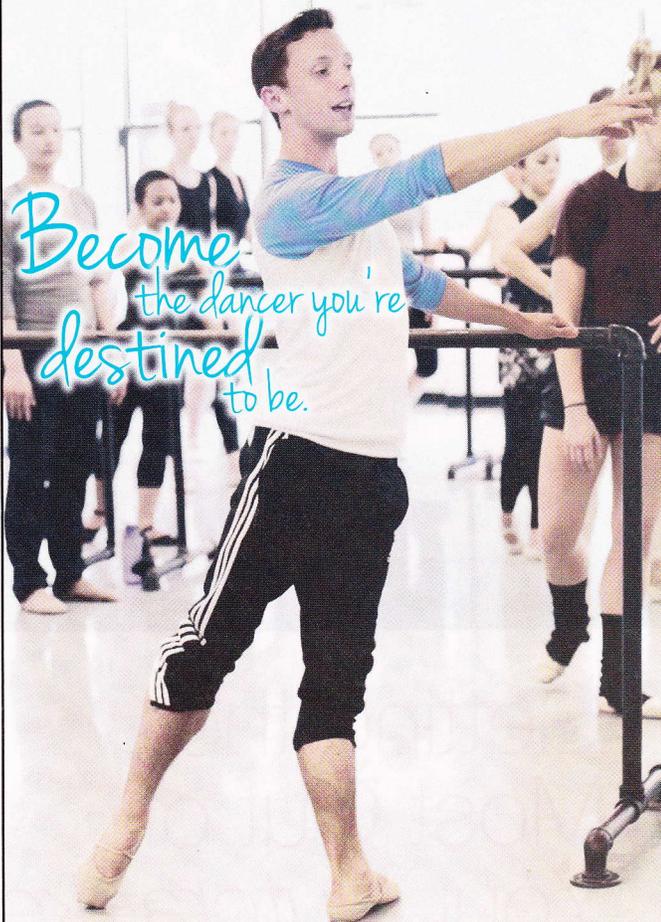
BA students also find more time to get involved in their university's community through clubs or sports. "A recent BA graduate wanted both dance and crew in her college experience," says Palmer. "She was at the highest technical level of dance and was very disciplined, but couldn't fulfill the higher performance credit amount."

Palmer says it's important to stress to dancers that one degree isn't more prestigious than the other; it's about which is best for their training needs and career goals. "There's always going to be a comparison when there are two degrees," he says. "But it all depends on the experience a student wants." **DT**

Here's how **George Mason University dancers** spend their four years.



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