**RESEARCH AND TEACHING STATEMENT**

SCHOLARLY RESEARCH

My scholarly research lies within the intersection of Dance and Black Studies. It centers on using dance as an anthropological tool to study the role and functionality of Dance across the African Diaspora. Co-editing and publishing a special edition to Black Dance in the *Journal of Pan African Studies* is my most notable scholarly achievement. This edition marked the second occurrence in history, where an academic journal edition was committed solely to Black Dance. My article, *The Black Male Dancer Physique: An Object of White Desirability* was published within this edition. The article illustrates how the Black male body, from past to present, continues to be viewed by the white gaze as a sexualized deviant object of desire. Media representations of racial differences are discussed, particularly addressing the first major crucible of raced representation in the United States: the minstrel show. I am interested in building upon my research within this area and hope to publish more work within Pan-African Studies journals.

I currently serve on the editorial board of *Siyabonana: The Journal of Africana Studies*. *Siyabonana* is an open access online peer-reviewed academic journal that publishes original research and creative intellectual work within the discipline of Africana Studies and across the global African world. I recently edited the first edition of this journal, "Africana Studies at Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Hispanic Serving Institutions." I am currently working on a proposal to launch a second special edition of Black Dance in *Siyabonana.* African/Black Dance scholarship as a body of knowledge is one of the least developed areas in scholarship, consequently, few Black Studies textbooks used to teach courses such as Intro to African-American Studies include African/Black Dance either generally or specifically. Only a handful of Black Studies departments offer African/Black Dance classes, and even fewer require it as part of their degree programs. Therefore, in order to further develop this body of knowledge, and simultaneously move the discipline of Black Studies forward, I feel it is imperative for an entire special edition to be devoted to discussing African/Black Dance. I plan to submit this proposal in fall 2023 with the hope of the special edition being released within the summer edition of 2024.

Currently, I am interested in what ways might artists and arts leaders collaborate to foster impactful community engagement initiatives in support of the #BlackLivesMatter? Initially a hashtag, but now a global movement, #BlackLivesMatter emerged as a response to the 2013 acquittal of Trayvon Martin's murderer. With the mission to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes, the global network is expansive, affirms the lives of Black queer and trans folx, as well as Black peoples' humanity throughout the world. But defining what the role is of arts and culture in advancing the #BlackLivesMatter movement has been a central question that has piqued my interest.

Following the racial upheaval in the US in the summer of 2020, I was inspired by the published interviews of Bayard Rustin who in 1970, argued that “the Black artist, whether or not he considers himself as such, is an essential member and a most important member of the freedom struggle.” He further contended that, “one of the fundamental reasons that the artist is always a forerunner in the movement for freedom among oppressed people is that all men, including Black men, judge a society or an ethnic group or a nation on the basis of their artistic creativity.” Furthermore, Nina Simone has been quoted as saying, “You can’t help it. An artist’s duty, as far as I’m concerned, is to reflect the times.” I believe that art has a responsibility to serve as a platform for social commentary and for promoting social change. The arts are the mediums we use to viscerally engage within our communities.

For the past year, Dr. Antonio C. Cuyler, an Arts Management professor at The University of Michigan and I have been working collaboratively to focus on how to use culture as a meaning-making system to advance racial justice in communities by using the arts to ask provocative questions in service to envisioning and actualizing an antiracist world. Our research explores the importance of creating, encouraging, and expecting collaboration in support of culture that engages communities in addressing the historic and continuous discrimination, marginalization, oppression, and subjugation experienced by Black people, specifically, throughout the world.

Our research centers around a screendance I created in 2020 following the murder of George Floyd entitled, *Say Her Name…Too*. This work combines cinematic elements with choreography and explores the lives of 5 Black women who died at the hands of law enforcement. The goal of this work is to bring awareness to the often-invisible names and stories of Black women and girls who have been victimized by racist police violence. After presenting this work to our targeted audience we then pose the question, “How would one build a community engagement initiative around this work based on what they've learned?” Data is then collected from these discussions to 1) assess the emotional/psychological impact of *artivism* and 2) formulate community engagement/police reform initiatives that help foster a sense of awareness of the humaneness of Black bodies from law enforcement, consequently developing a sense of empathy from police as they reflect on their policing practices within Black communities.

Dr. Cuyler and I have presented this research within national and international academic conferences within the past year such as The Pan African Society for Musical Arts Education 2023 Conference (Cape Coast, Ghana); Eighteenth International Conference on the Arts in Society, (Kraków, Poland); and the A2RU National Conference (Ann Arbor, MI). We have garnered significant feedback/data from our colleagues and community leaders across the globe. In 2023, we were invited by the National Center for Institutional Diversity to join other artists from multiple disciplines in a webinar to discuss *#BlackLivesMatter Art*. The webinar, “*#BlackLivesMatter*:In and Through the Arts” was attended by over 500 participants and provided a wealth of information for our research.

I have increasingly become interested in *artivism.* “Artivism” involves using art as a tool to not only comment on needed societal changes but also to inform others of these pressing issues and inspire them to take action. Artivism, as the name suggests, is the combination of the words ‘Art’ and ‘Activism’. It refers to when art is used as a form of protest. The use of art in protest not only strengthens the foundational pillars necessary for a successful movement, but also ultimately serves as a tactic that movements can deploy. Since the creation of *Say Her Name, Too*, I have seen the impact of art’s ability to inspire socio-political change. I am interested in creating more artivist work.

In 2021, I received the “University of Alabama President’s Faculty Research Award for a Mid-Career Scholar.” This award recognizes a sustained program of excellence and strong name recognition for faculty within their fields. I was honored and inspired to continue contributing to the discipline through my scholarly endeavors.

CREATIVE RESEARCH

Creative research involves open-ended investigation, one guided by creative objectives. When I create a piece of choreography, it is a present-tense process of investigation, inquiry, and collaboration on many levels. I am inspired throughout the creative process in which I try new ideas, rearrange, and reconfigure them. The intricate weave between movement invention and choreographic structure intrigues and fascinates me.

My choreographic aesthetic has become a medium in which I create expression through various elements: physicality, repetition, internal rhythms, focus, stillness, speed, silence, intention of movement, and beauty. I am continually examining the gestural relationships between musical and dance physicality. What kinds of images are evoked by hearing music, and what types of rhythm are produced internally by viewing dance? These are the questions that I continue to examine when creating dances.

Through abstract movement and sound, I attempt to extract emotion from pure physicality. *Silent Exchange* (2019) is a contemporary work I created that explores nonverbal communicative exchanges. The work is set to the music of contemporary composer Ezzo Bosso. This work is an exploration of the inner world; movement produced from internal intention that is then expressed externally. I believe this approach to creation allows for an honest exchange between the performer and viewer. I am consistently curious about the awareness of the internal body. I am inspired by full bodied movement yet I love attention to detail. From my professional dance experience, I have learned that this focus builds into a captivating presence that exudes internal strength and commitment. As such, I continually challenge myself to be an artist that dances with a mind-body-soul connection; in pursuit of a deeper understanding of even the most basic movement. I strive for honesty in my storytelling over perfection in movement. *Silent Exchange* beautifully captures this philosophy.

My body is my voice and through technique, I gain control and articulation of the body, allowing for meaningful communication with the audience. By instilling this physical, mental, and spiritual understanding of dance, I push myself choreographically to continuously grow as a complete, mature artist capable of creating work through an array of mediums. I create concert dance, dance theater, dance film, and multi-disciplinary performances. I am passionate about dance and its ability to empower communities. I am passionate about bringing dance into the public, exposing new audiences, interacting and creating community in an immediate and experiential way. Throughout my career, I have had the honor to create and showcase my work nationally and internationally and engage with communities through classes and workshops.

I enjoy interdisciplinary collaborative experiences with other artists. *Come Sunday* (2023), afforded me the opportunity to collaborate with GMU School of Music Director of Bands, Dr. William Lake Jr. *Come Sunday* is a two-movement tribute to the Hammond organ's central role in Black worship services. The first movement, “Testimony,” follows the Hammond organ as it readies the congregation's hearts, minds, and spirits to receive “The Word” via a magical union of Bach, blues, jazz, and R&B. The second movement, “Shout!”, is a virtuosic celebration - the frenzied and joyous climactic moments when The Holy Spirit has taken over the service. This experience was a ground breaking artistic collaboration and allowed me the opportunity to build on my research by building a vocabulary derived from the African Diaspora. Additionally, GMU dancers were exposed to the storied culture of the Black church's sacred space, allowing them to develop an understanding of the types of movement vocabulary that reflect the energy and history of these spaces and traditions.

As a means of engaging the community within this process, we arranged a pre-concert chat with theologians and scholars Carla Jackson, Esq. and Dr. Tony McNeill to discuss 1) the importance of this collaboration; 2) Origins of Black Sacred worship; 3) How movement has preserved African Diasporic Dance in modern Black culture. The event was open to the GMU community and well attended. I am grateful for this opportunity and hope to continue fostering creative and interdisciplinary collaborations of this nature that build upon my scholarly research, foster community engagement, and provides an opportunity for educational and artistic growth for the GMU student body.

I use the body and visual imagery to create thought provoking and visually stimulating dance experiences. My work is dynamic and highly visually driven, often exploring topics of race and identity. Having been trained in classical and contemporary dance, I often incorporate diverse movement vocabularies, building a new and approachable visceral movement language. My work seeks to explore liveliness, authenticity, and transformation and aims to allow the audience to have an experience to feel, rather than to sit and watch.

In my work, Separate and Equal (2019) I embarked upon a collaboration with playwright, Seth Panitch. The work is a depiction of Alabama during the 1950's, when segregation was evident everywhere, from schools and restaurants to water coolers, bathrooms and even the local basketball court. When six young men, three black and three white, play basketball on a local court, it is both competitive and contentious. Throughout the game, the personal backgrounds of the players and racial tensions are revealed. The 57 basketball plays throughout the work are stylized and choreographed to reflect those tensions/revelations. To authenticate the basketball plays of the time period, I researched basketball plays of the 1950s NBA games, and documented them, using them as an architectural design for all the choreography. The work was a creative endeavor that challenged and required me to work collaboratively with non-dancers to develop a movement vocabulary that supported the emotionally charged nature of the work. This experience expanded my choreographic voice and allowed me the opportunity to create work outside the concert stage.

I bring all of who I am into the expression when I choreograph- my heritage, cultural experiences, and ways of perceiving the world around me. Throughout my lifetime, I’ve experienced a change in society that brings me hope. My choreography tends to be a reflection of that hope, while living in the reality of my experiences and the cultural work that still needs to be done.

TEACHING

Learning is one of the most empowering and important human experiences. The ability and desire to learn are the key attributes that allow us to gain knowledge, wisdom, and personal growth. I believe that excellence in teaching originates from an insatiable desire to learn, and a constant pursuit to maximize one’s ability to communicate information to others.

As a dancer, choreographer, scholar, and educator, I teach with energy, investment, and integrity, while creating an environment that promotes self-discovery. I seek to provide meaningful opportunities for students to connect their experiences within the classroom with other aspects of their lives, with other domains of knowledge, and with their perspectives as world citizens. I strive to create an inclusive, respectful educational environment that mirrors my socially engaged creative practice within diverse communities.

In my teaching practice, I partner with internal and external colleagues to give and receive pedagogical feedback, to brainstorm, to analyze, and ultimately to invest in each other’s success. While at The University of Alabama, I was selected to serve a three-year term as a Distinguished Teaching Fellow within The College of Arts and Sciences. As members of the Teaching Fellows Committee, the fellows form a teaching advisory board; serve as mentors for other faculty members across the College; provide advice on the assessment of teaching; participate in new faculty orientation; and work with the College in other ways to improve its overall teaching mission. As a member of this committee, I gained invaluable insight into pedagogical practices and approaches that have informed and inspired my current pedagogical philosophy.

My teaching philosophy is rooted on the Socratic method. My belief is that I am not the possessor of all knowledge. Within my lecture courses, I draw on my student’s acquired knowledge by skillfully directing questions intended to develop critical listening, reading, thinking, and writing skills. I serve my students as a compass and road map. As a facilitator of learning at the highest obtainable level, I take my responsibility to encourage and inspire students to become active participants in their leaning process seriously. Despite their diverse backgrounds, I must become a positive role model for my students. It is my desire to be a role model who not only upholds university ethical policy, but one who possesses high standards in personal ethics as well. In turn, I trust my students will become functioning, intelligent, and responsible participants in the cultural development of our global society. It is my goal to encourage my students to actively participate in their education, careers, and communities.

Within my studio courses, I routinely design assignments where students build interpersonal intelligence, while working together to complete a project that synthesizes learning. In these assignments, students are responsible for comprehensively assessing their work. This student-centered approach underpins every class I teach, from a university level introduction course to a graduate level course, or a master class for pre-professional/professional artists. My student-centered teaching philosophy is grounded in a curiosity and respect for individual experience and each unique perspective. Physicality is an avenue for research, understanding, inquiry, and envisioning possibility within our bodies. I expect students to dance fully and dialogue about the course material thoughtfully.  Students in my classes will develop technical skills, but also build intrapersonal intelligence, and critical thinking skills through frequent reflection. In addition to movement work, students are instructed to write insightful papers, present ideas orally, in online discussion boards, and keep a journal of their growth and progression throughout the course.

This student-centered approach I employ extends to evaluation processes within my studio courses. At the beginning of the semester, students are provided student-learning outcomes for the course, and are then asked to document, through their journals their own personal learning goals within these course objectives. Then, at the beginning of each individual class, students identify a personal area of focus. Through journaling, students gauge their own progress in relationship to their self-identified goals, while I track their progress in relationship to the course objectives. At the middle and end of the semester, students write a two page-long self-assessment, and they assign themselves a letter grade for their investment within the course.

I believe in equality of opportunity. Each student deserves equal opportunities to learn. Students must have fair access to classes suited to their abilities, interests, and talent, plus equal access to classes that will fulfill their degree requirements. Furthermore, within the individual classroom, each student deserves equal opportunity to learn. I strive to reach out to both the most and least advanced students and to use a variety of classroom techniques to relate to different learning styles and student experiences. I listen to students and let their experiences inform my teaching. Learning is a participatory process for both teacher and student. It is essential that students are engaged in, and take responsibility for their own learning, and this responsibility also includes being explicit about what they need from me.  One forum I utilize to receive feedback from the students is through a mid-term class reflection. This mid-term moment gives me insight into the student experience, and informs my pedagogical approach for the remainder of the course.

The immersion of my professional career into the academic environment has helped shape my vision of dance in higher education. This immersion molded me into an instructor who encourages fluidity between dance and scholarly investigation, and dynamic interaction between the training of dancers and the development of scholars. Because of my diverse background, I strive to foster cultivation of a student’s creative performance, and scholarly voice through exposure to diverse practical and philosophical approaches to dance studies and the development of critical thought processes.

One of my greatest achievements within the academy was helping develop and implement a Master of Fine Arts in Dance program at The University of Alabama in 2020. This was a vision of mine after arriving at the UA in 2014 and realizing there was a need for the program within the southern region of the US, where only a few graduate programs in dance existed. Along with my colleagues, we crafted a graduate curriculum that is designed to support the development of diverse skills in classical and contemporary dance techniques, dance pedagogy, historical perspectives, and critical theory, as well as technical and artistic integration of dance-technologies. The approval process for this program took two years before the program welcomed its first cohort in 2020 where I was appointed director of the program. After its implementation, I began the accreditation process of the program through the National Association of Schools of Dance (NASD), as I wanted to ensure that both the undergraduate (already accredited) and the graduate programs were both accredited. In September 2022, before graduating its first graduate cohort, the program received accreditation from NASD. Accreditation through NASD will ensure the program adheres to the highest levels of dance education standards…a huge accomplishment for the program. One of my proudest moments was being invited back to UA in spring 2023 to speak at the commencement ceremony of the first MFA cohort of the program.

As Associate Chair of Dance at UA, I served a number of roles within the program where advising students academically and/or creatively through their choreographic or scholarly endeavors was a hallmark of my work. I served as Artistic Director of six mainstage productions within the dance program throughout the academic year. Three of those productions included the choreographic works of undergraduate dance majors; two included the choreographic works of guest artists and dance faculty; and one included the choreographic works of graduate students within the Master of Fine Arts in Dance program. In 2021, UA awarded me an “Outstanding Advising Award” for my work as a research advisor to several undergraduate students through their scholarly pursuits within the discipline. In addition to my role as Associate Chair, I also taught undergraduate and graduate courses in contemporary modern dance technique, jazz dance technique, dance composition, dance history, dance pedagogy, and research methods in dance. As Director of the graduate program, I advised and oversaw committees for the graduate capstone project, including oversight of theses committees/choreographic projects.

In Spring 2022, I created an online, undergraduate independent course entitled, “Recognizing Systemic Racism in Dance.” I was inspired to create this course after delving into my research surrounding the #BlackLivesMatter movement. In this independent study, students develop a thesis project examining systematic racism in dance. The student then crafts a research agenda that will develop into a research project that will consist of collecting data through qualitative research that will be presented as a documentary. Throughout the semester, the student documents their process through bi-weekly journal entries that are used to show the development of the thesis and its progression into a documentary. The foundation of this course is *to foster cultivation of a student’s creative performance, and scholarly voice through exposure to diverse practical and philosophical approaches to dance studies and the development of critical thought processes.*

It is my aim to develop reflective problem solvers who use critical thinking and an inquiring spirit. I am committed to further developing cultural and global awareness and sensitivities within my students. I strive to create collaborative partnerships between my students and the community, including elementary and secondary schools and the curriculum integration of knowledge and information of those social forces and concerns, which drive education.

I believe community engagement is an essential component to transformative learning as it provides opportunities for developing relationships, crafting and clarifying values, and igniting action that sparks change. From 2016-2022, I consistently applied and received funding from the Alabama Arts Council, through the Alabama Touring Artists Program. The funding was used to support touring dance Alabama! a pre-professional dance company within the department, in rural school districts throughout the state of Alabama. Dancers traveled to several schools across the state to perform and interact with K-12 students. I started the program with the belief that it is imperative for students to develop and maintain relationships throughout the communities for which they serve. Many rural areas in Alabama have limited access to the arts, so the goal of this project is to engage and educate these regions by awakening interest, excitement, imagination and creativity to those areas that have historically had limited exposure to the arts.

I approach teaching from the philosophies that 1) student empowerment is the key to transformative learning; 2) teaching and community engagement ignites transformative learning and 3) creating learning environments where students have the opportunity to grow artistically and intellectually inherently creates a world of socially conscious, resourceful, intellectually curious, and thoughtful people. I want my students to not only be prepared for the world we exist in now, but also be prepared to create a better world that does not *yet* exist.

Lawrence M. Jackson