DANCE CAREER GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on taking the next step in thinking about your career in dance! Whether you are a freshmen or nearing graduation, now is a good time to start thinking about your future. This career guide is meant to give you broad information to think about as you picture yourself working in different environments. As a dance professional, you may work as an independent artist, company manager, educator, or administrator, or likely a combination of all four. We hope reading through this will spark your curiosity and that you will come meet with Fine Arts Career Services for an appointment. We are highly skilled in helping you to find the perfect job, internship, or just to brainstorm different career paths.

DANCE PERFORMANCE

As you start your career in dance, it will be important to think about how you brand yourself. While you will want to be open to a large multitude of performance opportunities, it is best to focus on the areas in which you enjoy working and excel.

Whether your pursuit is contemporary dance, ballet, or dancing for musical theatre, branding yourself within your speciality is important. It is also important to think about if you would rather work as an independent artist or start or join a dance company.

Starting a dance company can be highly rewarding and create more job stability, but requires strong entrepreneurial skills in the areas of administration, operations, marketing and finance.

Very few dancers, especially outside of the larger metropolitan areas, have full-time positions with dance companies. Many professional dancers combine together two or three performance, education, or choreography opportunities into stable and gainful employment.

As with any arts professional who works as a freelancer, it is essential that you view your career as a small business. Luckily, both UT Austin and the surrounding community offer a variety of resources for individuals to learn business and entrepreneurial skills.

See the “Let’s Talk about Money” section later in this guide for more information about how to manage your finances as an independent freelancer.

Danceusa.org maintains a well-curated job board, as well as Dance.nyc for New York-specific opportunities. These job boards have a wide array of great entry-level positions, such as fellowships and apprenticeships.
DANCE ADMINISTRATION

Dance companies big and small need strong administrators and entrepreneurial thinkers to function and thrive, and developing skills as an arts administrator is a great way to complement your skills as a dancer while you are in college.

If you are considering starting your own dance company, completing an internship(s) in dance administration is highly recommended as it will teach you early some of the business skills necessary for this pursuit.

Check out our Arts Administration Career Guide for more information!

DANCE EDUCATION

For the purpose of this guide, we are defining dance education as more than just jobs within a school district. Dance is taught in many places, and many dance professionals can become educators, even if they did not elect the dance studies option.

To get a job as a school dance teacher, you will need to hold a state teaching certificate. If you are a dance studies major, this process will be laid out by your faculty, but usually involves student teaching, a criminal background check, and the passing of licensing exams. If you did not earn a degree in theatre studies but choose to become a teacher after graduation, many certification programs exist. Through a combination of coursework, exams, and student teaching, it is possible to become a credentialed teacher after you graduate.

Working as a school dance teacher is a highly rewarding career that combines live performance, pedagogy, and advocacy. Many dance teachers thrive on the feeling of teaching young people about the various facets of performance.

The experience of teaching dance at the middle and high school level is entirely different, so it is essential that students explore their strengths and interests when it comes to these settings. Many school districts interpret dance education in different ways, so it is important to do your research before applying.

If your goal is to work in the schools, find any way you can to get in front of students, even while you are still in college. You could help with summer dance camps for young kids, or help at any of the educational experiences that dance or theater companies put together. Many of these opportunities pay, and could be a very useful part-time job while you are still in school. Getting these experiences early and often will strengthen your resume for your first teaching job.

PRIVATE DANCE STUDIOS

Private dance studios employ large amounts of dancers and choreographers for various types of dance classes and could be great jobs to gain experience or if you are not interested in working for a public school system. These jobs tend to also be flexible and could work well with a growing performance career.

Becoming a dance/movement therapist is a way to help others while using your talents as a dancer. To become certified, you will need to earn a master’s degree. Dance therapists work in settings that include psychiatric and rehabilitation facilities, schools, nursing homes, drug treatment centers, counseling centers, medical facilities, crisis centers, and wellness and alternative health care centers.

Choreography work is usually contracted by schools, dance or theater companies, and is another great way to build up your resume.

DANCE ADMINISTRATION (cont.)

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As a starting dancer or choreographer, you will be likely living more of a freelancing lifestyle. You can live financially stable as a freelancer if you manage your funds and upcoming opportunities carefully. As a freelancer, it is wise to sit down with a Certified Financial Planner to develop a plan for how you will process payment from various performance companies and venues, and how much you need to put aside for income tax. Individuals working as arts administrators or educators are more likely to see a full-time salary that may provide benefits.

In the modern arts world, the more you can see yourself as a multi-faceted professional, the better. If you are working as a dance teacher, that doesn't mean you cannot build a professional performance resume at the same time. If you are working in the marketing department of a performing arts center, you will be developing useful skills to help market yourself. Diversify your skill set! Every opportunity can be used as a chance to grow.

A Master of Fine Arts (MFA) is a degree that students often use to gain more experience, build their resume, or prepare for a career in higher education. While an MFA is not necessary for many employment opportunities in dance, it is necessary to teach dance at the college level and to become a dance/movement therapist. Students should weigh the pros and cons of attending graduate school carefully and seek multiple opinions on how this could impact an individual's career trajectory.
...NOW WHAT’S NEXT?

Maybe reading this has left you with even more questions, and feeling even less sure about what career opportunities you may want to explore. That is okay!

Setting up an appointment with Fine Arts Career Services is a great place to brainstorm possible career pathways and help to make your application materials reflect you in the strongest way possible.