DIRECTOR’S NOTE  April 15, 2020

I joined Five College Dance only eight months ago, yet I can say with certainty that the 2019–2020 school year was unlike any other. In March 2020, students along with faculty and staff members were asked to quickly evacuate their studios, classrooms, stages and offices and return home to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. We are still in our homes at the time of this writing, as campus leaders decide how to proceed in fall 2020 in the absence of a vaccine.

For Five College Dance, of course, social distancing has fundamentally challenged our work. Indeed, it has shaken the very foundations upon which performance relies: shared time and space, physical proximity, in-person gathering and that magical exchange of energy between performers and audiences.

But we have not stopped working. More than ever—or perhaps, as always—the members of FCD have risen to the challenge of creating human connection, inspiration and art in a time when we’ve been directed to divide, hide and isolate. Our full and rewarding semester and a half of performances, classes, workshops and events catapulted into continued collaboration and exploration across distance. You'll see the highlights of our work in this newsletter, and I encourage you to visit our online newsletter section for additional material.

In the future we plan to use this newsletter to not only celebrate the work already done but also preview what’s coming next and invite you all to take part as you’re able. Today’s uncertainties preclude an invitation in this moment, but they also open possibilities for expansive dreaming of what dance might be in higher education and in our society at large. That has always been the work of Five College Dance, and it is more pressing now than ever before. I look forward to it.

Best,

Alexandra Ripp
Director
CHOREOGRAPHING COMMUNITY: Doug Varone’s Boats Leaving Repertory Project

This past fall, the stars aligned for Five College Dance students to perform in the first restaging of Doug Varone’s Bessie Award–winning Boats Leaving outside of his company since its 2006 debut. As Varone explained when he visited rehearsal at Smith College, between FCD’s reputation for educational integrity and the availability of former Varone dancers and current Smith College MFA students Xan Burley and Alex Springer for restaging, he felt the moment was right. Varone also cited the work’s significance amid growing global uncertainty: through fleeting, shifting choreographic images of togetherness and isolation, Boats celebrates the triumph of the human spirit and community solidarity in times of strife.

Leading two casts that comprised Smith MFA candidates and undergraduates from Smith, Mount Holyoke and Hampshire Colleges and UMass Amherst, Burley and Springer led a weeklong rehearsal intensive in late August. For six hours a day, the 16 performers learned and rehearsed the piece, in which Springer and Burley had performed regularly while in Varone’s company. Rehearsals continued twice a week during fall semester. Springer says, “This piece is thirty minutes long, and [all] of the eight performers are frequently dancing their own individual material, so the staging process is dense. . . . Rehearsals focused on learning movement but also empowering the casts to embody the material in their own ways and, ultimately, to cultivate a community within the work.”

The cast of UMass Amherst and Mount Holyoke dancers performed at UMass’s Fall Faculty Concert, and two weeks later, the cast of Hampshire and Smith undergraduates and MFAs performed in the Smith College Fall Faculty Dance Concert. While these performances were clear triumphs, Springer also noted the project’s less visible success: “Xan and I sensed deeply how close [the dancers] became, not just within their casts but also within the entire group. This is imperative for Boats Leaving. While it is certainly a nuanced and highly crafted dance, the piece is most importantly about a community moving together. The casts truly found an intimate connection to each other. . . . They took their work very seriously, and each dancer was invested in the project in profoundly deep ways. We could not have been happier with the outcome.”

ANNUAL FALL LECTURE Dr. Ramón H. Rivera-Servera on Protest in Puerto Rico

For our 2019 Annual Fall Lecture, Five College Dance had the pleasure of hosting Dr. Ramón H. Rivera-Servera, Professor of Performance Studies and Art Theory and Practice at Northwestern University. The faculty selected Dr. Rivera-Servera to speak because his scholarship on Puerto Rican dance and performance provides an important lens through which to investigate recent upheaval in Puerto Rico incited by fiscal crisis, Hurricane Maria’s devastating aftermath and embattled relations with the U.S. government. Dr. Rivera-Servera’s work excellently demonstrates how dance studies can enrich research in seemingly distinct disciplines, such as social justice, politics and Latin American studies—and vice versa.

Dr. Rivera-Servera delivered his lecture, “Beyond the Surfaces of Perreo Combativo: Puerto Rican Movements in Movement,” at Hampshire College’s Franklin Patterson Hall on Sept. 27, 2020. Five College Dance students attended, as well as members of the Five College faculty, staff and community. Dr. Rivera-Servera shared his current research, which suggests that the combative doggy-style dancing used in recent political mobilizations in Puerto Rico reveals physical movement’s centrality in the overthrow of its governor. He explained the form’s emergence as a political expression by drawing on the histories of dance experimentalism, social dance and feminist and queer interventions in Puerto Rican dance training.

Dr. Rivera-Servera offered us a reframing of political protest and action that centers dance and movement as crucial and deeply tied to its sociopolitical context. This understanding of dance as an essential political tool is one that the students and faculty carried forward in their studies, teaching and performances this year.
In fall 2019, Mount Holyoke College’s Department of Dance, led by professor Rose Flachs, performed a restaging of Uri Sands’ contemporary ballet *One*. *One* takes inspiration from the story of Henrietta Lacks, a 31-year-old African American woman who underwent cancer treatment in 1951 and whose cells were used, without her permission, to create a cell line still important in medical research. Lacks died that year, but her durable cell line has contributed to the polio vaccine’s development and to studies on AIDS and cancer.

Professor Flachs was inspired to bring *One* to Five College Dance when she saw the Grand Rapids Ballet perform it in 2018. She says, “I knew, from the choreographic score to the musical score, that the experience of performing this work would be an exceptional educational and artistic learning experience. The story of Henrietta Lacks is so important to women, to science and to medicine. Honoring her through this ballet is a tribute I wanted our students to participate in.” She shared the idea with Dr. Gary Gillis, Professor of Biological Sciences, associate dean of faculty and director of the Science Center at Mount Holyoke. Enthusiastic about the proposal, Gillis procured crucial financial support through the Science Center Directorship Fund to bring the performance to fruition.

Professor Flachs held auditions in April 2019, assembling a cast of students from three of the five colleges. Those students returned to campus in late August for 10 days of grueling five-hour rehearsals with stager Kaitlin Bell. They also read excerpts of Rebecca Skloot’s book, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*. Flachs notes, “Although the work was staged and not created on these dancers, they had to bring their embodied knowledge, tenacity and strength to it. They had to work as a team, as a support group to each other, and go beyond their comfort levels.”

During the fall semester, Flachs led thrice-weekly rehearsals through her repertory course. Fellow professor Charles Flachs also engaged with the piece’s biological aspect: students in his Photography and Dance first-year seminar, with biology professor Rachel Fink, used high-speed specialized photographic equipment to view cell movement and division. Students in Cell Biology 230 also attended the dress rehearsal, and the department showed a film of dividing cells in the theater lobby before performances.

The cast performed three times for the November 2019 Mount Holyoke Faculty Dance Concert, alongside works choreographed by Mount Holyoke faculty members and lecturers. On opening night, Charles Flachs led a post-show conversation, which included the whole cast. The performers voiced their gratitude to have participated in this restaging, citing not only their own artistic growth but also their new understanding about a woman whose overlooked story must be told and whose ongoing contributions to human health must be honored.
FIVE COLLEGE DANCE FACULTY UPDATES

Associate professors Chris Aiken and Angie Hauser (SC) spent much of fall 2019 in Asia performing, teaching and traveling. They presented new choreography in Hong Kong, Taipei and Japan as part of the multicountry iDance Festival. Aiken and Hauser also traveled to Moldova, where they created and performed new work and taught residencies presented by the U.S. Department of State.

After 17 years of chairing, professor Rodger Blum (SC) was delighted to return to the ranks of the regular faculty this year. In fall 2019 he premiered a new contemporary ballet, Another World, which was choreographed for Smith and Five College dancers and was inspired by the work of artist Rex Ray and the music of the South Korean trans pop group SsingSsing. This spring he, along with much of the dance world, entered the strange land of online dance and, through teaching Zoom Ballet, was happy to reconnect with many former students. Continuing his research in the video projection of dancers and light onto silk surfaces he hand-prints, Blum was honored to receive a generous Harnish Fellowship to fund his upcoming sabbatical research.

Associate professor Paul Dennis (UM) directed an event at the 92nd Street Y in NYC celebrating the life and legacy of Dr. Pearl Primus, which included a premiere of Stan Sherer’s film Pearl Primus: “Omowale,” Child Returned Home, a restaging of Primus’ once-performed Michael, Row Your Boat and a panel discussion including UMass Dance faculty emerita Peggy Schwartz. Dennis received a UMass Faculty Research/Healey Endowment Grant to support a pilot study on dance’s effects on the symptoms of Huntington’s disease, in collaboration with Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center. He also presented his research online at the worldwide Somatic Movement Summit in April 2020.

Last summer professor Rose Flachs (MHC) taught a weeklong teachers’ seminar based on the Vaganova syllabus at Mount Holyoke College. Eight teachers from across the country gathered for seven days to investigate the progressive methodology and artistry inherent in teaching classical ballet.

In January professors Charles and Rose Flachs (MHC) celebrated the 15th anniversary of the Massachusetts Academy of Ballet (MABETA) with the premieres and restagings of choreographic works. They also hosted a silent auction at Open Square’s event space, with proceeds benefiting MABETA and the restoration of the Victory Theatre in Holyoke.

In July 2019 assistant professor Deborah Goffe (HC) began work as lead author on a series of performing artist case studies with the Institute for Curatorial Practice in Performance for the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. She presented her research on nested arts ecosystems at the 2019 Dance Studies Association Annual Conference and used it to facilitate a workshop for regional dance artists, hosted by New England Foundation for the Arts. Choreographically, Goffe and her collaborators performed Liturgy|Order|Bridge at Wesleyan University’s Center for the Arts in February 2020.

Assistant professor Molly Christie González (UM) presented her research on decolonizing the dance classroom through Katherine Dunham’s pedagogy to decolonize the dance classroom at the Dance Studies Association, African Studies Association, Collegium for African Diasporic Dance and National Dance Educators Organization annual conferences, among others. She received a 2019–20 Teaching for Inclusivity, Diversity, and Equity Ambassadors faculty fellowship and Mutual Mentoring Micro Grant, both from UMass, and a Straw Dog Writers Guild writing residency grant. González was guest choreographer for the MacDuffie School, and serves on the Institute for Dunham Technique Certification’s executive board and faculty.
This year’s Five College Dance Faculty Concert, in February 2020, offered five faculty member and guest-artist works, one from each campus, that explored human distance and intimacy. Set against the backdrop of global social and environmental crises, these performances provided ways to contemplate how we connect—or not—with our own internal landscapes, with other individuals and with our physical surroundings. The concert invited performers and audiences to consider how embodiment, movement, collaboration and the community inherent to performance can provide not solutions to the difficulties we face but rather new avenues by which to broach them.

All pieces were premieres that either continued or initiated the artists’ choreographic investigations with Five College Dance students. In presenting new work by newer members of the community, this concert could be seen as a look into the future of Five College Dance.

FEATURED CHOREOGRAPHERS:

Deborah Goffe,* Assistant Professor of Dance, Hampshire College
Barbie Diewald,* Assistant Professor of Dance, Mount Holyoke College
Sarah Lass,* Smith College MFA ’18, Smith College guest artist
Jenna Riegel,* Assistant Professor of Dance, Amherst College
Aston K. McCullough, Assistant Professor of Dance Science, UMass Amherst

* indicates co-choreography with the dancers

(Top to Bottom) our bioelectric selves, choreographed by Jenna Riegel and dancers. | Coda, choreographed by Barbie Diewald and dancers. | witch box I, choreographed by Aston K. McCullough. FCD Faculty Concert. Photos by Derek Fowles.
Assistant professor Dr. Aston K. McCullough (UM) received an LRP award from the National Institutes of Health to support his continued research on the impacts of dance exposures on health. His novel algorithm for analyzing movement via 3D cameras was published in *Sensors* ("Quantifying physical activity in young children using a three-dimensional camera"). He served as lead statistician and coauthor in "Quantitative gait assessment in children with 16p11.2 syndrome," published in the *Journal of Neurodevelopmental Disorders*. Other published works include "Cadence-based classification of minimally moderate intensity exercise during overground walking in 21- to 40-year-olds" in the *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*, as well as "Cardiometabolic thresholds for peak 30-min cadence and steps/day" in the journal *PLoS One*.

Associate professor Lester Tomé’s (SC) article, “Black Star, Fetishized Other: Carlos Acosta, Ballet’s New Cosmopolitanism, and Desire in the Age of Institutional Diversity” appeared in *The Routledge Companion to Dance Studies* (2019). Tomé was a guest speaker at Reed College, in Portland, OR and the Cuban Cultural Center, in New York. He presented papers at the conferences of the Collegium for African Diaspora Dance, at Duke University, and the congress of the Latin American Studies Association. He continued his work on the editorial boards of *Dance Research Journal* and *Cuban Studies*. He has been awarded a residential fellowship at the National Humanities Center for spring 2021.

Associate professor Tom Vacanti (UM) spent a month in Paris, France, last July to become a certified SAFE Barre instructor. Vacanti has spent the past five years studying this award-winning ballet technique that was developed by Alexandre Munz in collaboration with scientists and somatic practitioners. A SAFE Barre ballet class is based on biomechanical principles and the concept of the vertebral spiral being necessary for proper dance training. Vacanti has been working the SAFE Barre pedagogy into the technique classes and training of dancers at UMass and FCD.

This year, visiting assistant professor Lailye Weidman (HC) presented “Dancing the Star-Image,” a lecture-demonstration that examines histories of hard-core music, DIY punk paradigms of performance and the politics of borrowed choreographies at the Dance Studies Association Annual Conference (DSA) at Northwestern University. Also at DSA, she collaborated with six dance scholars to facilitate “Un/Common-ing Pedagogies: Teaching Critical Dance and Movement Studies in Divergent Times.” As a collective, they presented a further iteration at the National Women’s Studies Association Conference in San Francisco. Weidman will soon premiere a new solo at SPACE Gallery in Portland, ME, with support from New England Foundation for the Arts (June performance postponed because of COVID-19).

During the summer of 2019, professor Wendy Woodson (AC) continued to work on her new full-length theater-dance piece, *Leeway*, which she began during a residency at the Bogliasco Foundation in Italy. She was planning to audition and rehearse the piece in the spring and summer of 2020 but has had to put the project on hold. She is working on a series of video-text pieces excerpted from the *Leeway* script that will soon be online. In January she performed a new duet (*Elsewhere*) with Anna Maynard (SC MFA ’19) for the Bodies in Motion festival at 33 Hawley Street. wendywoodson.com.
This year, even with half the spring semester moving online and seven concerts canceled or postponed, Five College Dance and its constituent departments hosted 13 concerts. These included a number of senior concerts hastily (but beautifully) mounted weeks in advance so that students could perform before leaving campus. Each of these concerts had representatives from multiple campuses among its choreographers, performers, crew or staff. These included two repertory projects, Doug Varone’s *Boats Leaving* and Uri Sands’s *One*, which you can read more about in this newsletter.

As always, Five College Dance offered numerous events, classes and workshops with visiting artists and scholars open to all our campuses’ communities. Some highlights include the following:

- Yanira Castro and a canary torsi residency, class visits and performances of *CAST* and *STAGE* (Amherst Theater and Dance)
- Somatic Dance Festival with Nancy Stark Smith, Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, Janet Adler and Andrea Olsen (Smith Dance in partnership with School for Contemporary Dance and Thought, Northampton Center for the Arts, Historical Northampton and NCTV)
- *Dancing the Museum: Practice and Performance*, with guests Tara Aisha Willis and Shaneeka Harrell (Smith Dance in partnership with Smith College Museum of Art)
- jumatatu m. poe and Netta Yerushalmy master classes (Amherst Theater and Dance)
- RUBBERBANDance Group master class (Hampshire Dance in partnership with the UMass Amherst Fine Arts Center)
- Bonnie Mettler Method workshop and public showing (Hampshire Dance)
- Dr. Kate Sicchio mini-residency on technology and choreography, with class visits and a participatory workshop (Mount Holyoke Dance)
- American Ballet Theater Studio Company performances and master class (Mount Holyoke Dance)
- Philadanco three-day residency, with guest teaching on technique, composition and dance theory (UMass Dance in partnership with the UMass Amherst Fine Arts Center)
- Kelli Forman master class (UMass Dance)

STUDENT RESEARCH

Five College Dance students are movers and thinkers. Their embodied practice is inextricably tied to an intellectual one. In our online newsletter section, you will find:

- Ella Ammann-Bianciardi (SC ’22), “The ‘Becoming—Mother’: Motherhood in the Life and Work of Isadora Duncan,” from Lester Tomé’s Dance 171: Political Bodies, at Smith College

- Anna Hendricks (MHC ’20), “Margaret H’Doubler’s Lasting Legacy on the Field of Creative Dance Education,” from Lester Tomé’s Dance 171: Political Bodies, at Smith College

- Veronica Israel (HC ’20), “A Life, a Soul, a Future: Dance as a Tool of Exploration, Expression, Connection, and Joy,” a Division III project advised by Deborah Goffe at Hampshire College

- Sarah Maurer (UM ’20): “Compositional Methods of the Judson Dance Theater: Yvonne Rainer’s ‘Trio A,’” from Lester Tomé’s Dance 171: Political Bodies, at Smith College

- Senior thesis work by Nora Gall, Amisi Nazarie-Hicks, Karisma Pathak and Molly Smith (UMass ’20), advised by Aston K. McCullough at UMass Amherst

FIVE COLLEGE DANCE CREWS GO REMOTE

When COVID-19 forced us to cancel our remaining FCD productions, the Production Management Office needed to find another way for the students expecting to fulfill their crew assignments this term, in order to complete their school’s requirement.

To do this, we created a replacement curriculum. Clearly, we could not truly replace the experience of being on an FCD concert crew—the physical tasks, time management, process of observation and, most important, collegiality and sense of community inherent to crew work cannot be fabricated outside of the theater. Our program provided students with production-related projects that they could complete in their current environments, using some of the tools that they would have encountered in a traditional crew assignment. Covering topics such as lighting design, sound and video system management, costume design, spatial design and creation and stage management, the projects introduced student choreographers to real questions that they must consider when making performance work. The projects were designed to take 40 hours, the average number of hours for a typical FCD crew assignment.

We were extremely impressed with the student work we received, and wanted to share some of it with the FCD community. To view the projects, please visit the production page of our website.

—Matthew Adelson, Five College Dance production manager, and Achaetey Kabal, assistant production manager

CONGRATULATIONS TO 2020–2021 VIRGINIA WAGNER SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS!

The Virginia Wagner Scholarship is a faculty-nominated award for students who have made substantial and valuable contributions to FCD’s programs and productions. Each dance department nominates one student recipient who will be fully matriculated in the upcoming academic year. This year’s awardees are as follows:

Hannah Berry (MHC ’22) | Ariana Haddad (UM ’21) | Kiara Mickens (SC ’21) | Jillian Oliveira (HC ’21) | Christianna Mariano (AC ’21)
Joey J. Haley (MHC ’20) My favorite moment for this year, though terribly sad because of the circumstances, was when the MHC Dance Department (students, faculty and staff) came together within 24 hours of Mount Holyoke’s shutting-down announcement to put on the Seniors of 2020 Capstone concert together. I’ve never felt a room, or an audience, so empowered together. The air was electric. There was so much community, it was an over-full house. There was so much encouragement and cheers and laughter and crying. Though the shutdown was devastating to us, the concert was completely lived in the present by all who were there and by all who attended in the theater or on the livestream. It’s a memory I will hold and feel forever.

Sara LaPadula (UM ’21) A moment that has stayed with me since it occurred was in a rehearsal for One [see “Dancing to Honor,” p. 2]. This particular day of rehearsal was a dreary one in the Studio Theater and began with us gathering together, reading an excerpt from the biography on Henrietta Lacks. Because the piece was in dedication of her struggle and journey, it felt relevant for the cast of this piece to hear her story before working on embodying it for ourselves. After we spent a portion of rehearsal reading through this, we went to begin a run of the piece. When we began dancing, light began to shine through the opening of the theater, as if her spirit were there with us. Additionally, this very day happened to be her birthday, making it even more of a special moment. That run of the piece felt like no other: energized, emotional, supported and inspired. We all felt her presence with us, and worked to dance our hardest in this challenging piece. It was an unspoken occurrence during our dancing that we all saw the light miraculously shine, lighting up the room; however, once we finished, we were able to share this beautiful moment together.

Sophia Botran (SC ’22) The afternoon sunlight spilled through the towering windows onto the wooden floor of the crew house at Smith College. My dance composition class, DAN 151, was about to start an exercise called “Grab Bag” when my professor Xan Burley said, “Invite being seen” and “Be bold, but don’t worry about being creative.” These two phrases stuck in my brain like a piece of gum on a park bench. As I watched half the class move in the space, painting a story with their bodies, I was reminded that what we create does not always need to be a work of art. As I slid my feet on the wooden floor and created shapes with my body, I told myself what truly matters is that I push my boundaries as a dancer and let go of being perfect. Dance is about inquiry, collaboration and vulnerability. There is no need to dance every piece as if it were “stage-ready.” This suggestion, “invite being seen,” pushes me to be fully authentic in a vulnerable way, leaving behind an effort to be “creative.” At the end of class, we gathered in a circle while the water of Paradise Pond sparkled behind the glass. We reflected on the multiplicity and the extraordinary virtuosity of dance. Our discussion oozed with in-depth analysis, emotion and questioning that lingered in the layers of thought. It was at this moment I felt connected with my peers and instructor on a deeper level than just an academic class but of one of family. I was ready to invite being seen.

Find more student memories online here.
For the last 15 years, Lucy (Albert) Bermingham (MHC ’74) has been teaching an Arts Appreciation course at St. John’s University in Queens, NY. Every few years, she co-teaches Dance History at Mount Holyoke College. Her courses are all distance learning, which has been very practical especially at this peculiar time.

Jacqueline Nalett Bobet (MHC ’94) has been on the dance faculty at the University of Houston for 26 years and at Rice University for 14 years. She is still working both these jobs, teaching a variety of techniques and levels, and is also in charge of recruitment for the UH dance program. Bobet still works as an independent choreographer and performer.

Anne Penner (AC ’97) is an Associate Professor of Theater at the University of Denver, where she teaches courses in acting, directing and movement. Penner also works professionally as an actor, director and producer, most recently with the Colorado Shakespeare Festival. She cohosts an acting and psychology podcast called The Actor’s Mind (theactorsmind.com), which launched its third season in early May.

Mariana Valencia (HC ’06) resides in Brooklyn and has been making solo performances and teaching. Valencia performs mostly in New York has toured in England, Serbia, France and Seattle in the past year. Her performance AIR premiered January 2020 at Performance Space New York. Her dance embodiment is a daily practice and awareness.

After graduating from Amherst with a BA with honors in Theater and Dance, Chaka Laguerre (AC ’08) received an MA in Legal and Political Theory with the highest distinction from University College London; JD from Michigan Law and MPhil in History and Philosophy of Science and Medicine from the University of Cambridge, where her research focused on race and the philosophy, ethics and politics of science. As a member of the New York State Bar, she works at Clifford Chance in London and served as the senior counsel and legislative director to a New York State senator, where her work focused on, inter alia, criminal justice reform, housing, and election law and voting rights.

Merli V. Guerra (MHC ’09) works as a professional choreographer and is artistic director and co-founder of Luminarium Dance Company in Boston, MA, and its satellite company in New Jersey. Guerra’s screendance film The One I Keep was recently awarded Best Experimental Film in the international Europa Film Festival in Barcelona, Spain. She is currently an MFA in Dance candidate at Rutgers University. See more of her bio online.

Rose Abramoff (AC ’09) lives just south of Paris, France, and works as a climate scientist for a laboratory within the Institute Pierre Simon Laplace. Years ago during grad school, she danced with the Luminarium Dance Company, founded and run by fellow Five Colleges Merli Guerra and Kim Holman. Lately she has been taking Cunningham-Limón classes and sees Tanztheater Wuppertal whenever they come to town.

Over the past few years, Stephanie Simpson (SC MFA ’12) has been working with dancers and performers of all ages and backgrounds on the mental aspect of preparing for auditions, performances and overall career health and wellness. In 2019, Simpson graduated from Teachers College, Columbia University, with an MA in Clinical Psychology with an emphasis in Spirituality, Mind, and Body. She created a stress management workbook, which teaches people how to redefine their relationship with stress through a holistic perspective.

Olana Z. Flynn (HC ’13) worked at Pioneer Valley Ballet, taught dance at Springfield College, worked as the assistant production manager for FCD and founded the LOCULUS Collective along with five other Five College Dance alumnai. In 2019, Flynn finished her MFA in Experimental Choreography from the University of California Riverside. She currently works as a freelance stagehand in New York and a part-time production manager for the Dance Department at Sarah Lawrence College. Flynn also co-directs the LOCULUS Collective with fellow Hampshire alumnus Madison Palffy (HC ’10).

Dayita Nereyeth (MHC ’15) lives in Bangalore, India, and works as a freelance dancer who performs and collaborates with other independent artists in Bangalore. She also works part-time as a copy editor. Last year, she performed an evening of solos at the Platform (a dance festival for emerging artists); these solos were the results of long-distance collaborations with Ellen Oliver (HC ’16) and Margaret Wiss (MHC ’16). Her current dance projects—as performer in Prorna Swami’s (MHC ’15) The Long and Short of It and Aineish Madan’s The Dance Song—have been put on hold until further notice. Nereyeth is in her second year of a teacher training program in Alexander Technique.

Ellen Oliver (HC ’16) is choreographing, performing and teaching in Boston and Providence. Since graduation, she has found another passion for rock climbing. She is making short films and dancing with Lorraine Chapman the Company. She fell in love with Bearstown, ME. She is a living statue with TEN31 Productions in Providence, where she directs the Metamorphosis Dance Youth Program. Oliver collaborates with 3 Spice Dance and ProviDANCE Project, and will be the 2020 White Mountain National Forest Artist in Residence. “I miss FCD!” she tells us. ellenoliverdance.com.

Kelsey Saulnier (UM ’18) continues to work and move as a freelance dance artist both in Boston and in New York. Recently she has worked with David Dorfman, Jenna Pollack / Boston Moving Arts Productions, Prometheus Dance and now Boston Dance Theater and has collaborated on a mini “tour” of a new solo, Her.

Sofia Engelman (SC ’19) lives in Northampton, MA, working as an administrator at Contact Quarterly, the School for Contemporary Dance and Thought (SCDT) and the School of Classical Ballet and as an instructor at SCDT and The Center Dance. This past year, along with partner Em Papineau (SC’21), Engelman received support for her choreography through residencies at SCDT and the Dance Complex, as well as grants from the Northampton Arts Council and New England Foundation for the Arts. In addition to touring work with Papineau, she has had the privilege of performing in projects directed by Kathleen Hermesdorf, Tyler Rai, Michael Figueroa and Jenna Riegel. Engelman is a cofounder of freekewl, a platform for online dance and movement classes during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Angela Weigel (UM ’19) currently works for Teach for America as a full-time preschool teacher in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and attends graduate school for a master’s in Teaching. In NYC, Weigel is in three dance companies: Dance Works NYC, Continuum Dance Company and Variety Pack Collective. She is also a part of photography projects, such as Dance as Art. Recently she started her own series called Barre-n-yard Ballet, where she teaches a basic ballet barre among the cows, bunnies, chickens, chicks, ducks and dogs that live on her family’s farm.
Lauren Cox (Lecturer in Jazz Dance, UM) will be joining the UMass faculty in the fall as Lecturer in Jazz Dance. Lauren started her dance career as a nationally competitive rhythmic gymnast. Since then she has passionately studied and performed in hip-hop, street jazz, ballet, jazz/contemporary, samba/Afro-Brazilian, Haitian cultural dances and improvisational-based dance. She has appeared on Black Girls Rock, Saturday Night Live, America’s Got Talent, and The View and performed with Pharrell Williams, Alicia Keys, Joey Yung (a Hong Kong pop icon) and many more. Lauren has been a guest performer for companies such as Kota Yamazaki’s Fluid Hug-Hug, Rhapsody James’ Rhapsody En Dance, Cecilia Marta Dance Company, Maria Torres Dance Company and Culture Shock Dance Troupe. Her extensive career has led her to teach in India, Hong Kong, Bolivia and Colombia, often infusing volunteer classes at local orphanages and girls’ shelters. Lauren is a certified teacher for the year-round program at Joffrey Ballet School Jazz & Contemporary and travels representing the school.

Martha Potyrala (FCD Program Coordinator) joined us in December. She brings extensive experience within the local performing arts community, including roles as the managing director of Pioneer Valley Ballet and the current education director of youth programs at the Academy of Music Theatre in Northampton.

IN MEMORIAM: Susanne Anderson (Five College Dance musician accompanist) Susanne filled Five College Dance classes with beautiful music and caring energy. Most students knew Susanne as the laughing woman at the piano who played the right music, set the perfect mood and brought elegance to each exercise. As a teacher, I relied on Susanne’s unparalleled technique and commitment to ballet training. She rarely needed a meter or tempo: I trusted her talent, patience and connection to the dancers. Ballet and Susanne are synonymous in my heart. I was deeply saddened when, for the first time in more than two decades, I entered Scott Studio this spring semester without her. With her great pile of sheet music, Susanne seemed to have sat behind that piano forever. I could turn to Susanne and ask for “our favorite”—with a grin, she would launch into a heart-wrenching version of “Ashokan Farewell.” When she closed the piano lid after class, it was a joy to hear her exclaim, “Now, that class was fun!” After every performance warm-up, she stayed to watch the students’ pre-theater run-through and never failed to remind nervous dancers that they were “simply gorgeous!” Her observations mattered because she meant them. Susanne was a sought-after and multifaceted artist, equally comfortable directing church choirs, playing for world-class choreographers, teaching private piano lessons and singing Mozart’s operas onstage. Across her nearly 50-year career, Susanne gained great admiration for that versatility. She was an essential member of our arts community, and Susanne—a mother, grandmother, sister and friend to many—was one of the most original and truly good people I have ever known. The last line of her obituary captures how we all felt about Susanne: “She charmed anyone who met her with her genuine kindness. She forged an eccentric path and will never be forgotten.” —Rodger Blum

Mike Vargas (Musician-Lecturer in Dance Technique and Performance, SC) The conclusion of the spring 2020 semester marks the end of an era in the Smith College Dance Department with the retirement of Mike Vargas, its longtime musical director and lecturer. Mike was a fixture in the dance studio, creating music that defied categorization and yet was always soulful. Known for his brilliant piano playing and percussion, Mike could also play anything from sticks and toys to plastic bags. Mike is an internationally renowned composer and musical performer who, prior to coming to Smith, worked at such institutions as the Juilliard School, Princeton University, Marymount Manhattan College, Naropa University and George Washington University, as well as at all the five campuses. For the past two decades, when he was not teaching composition and playing music, Mike toured internationally with his partner, Nancy Stark Smith, a legend in the world of postmodern dance, creating workshops and performances focusing on dance, improvisation and contact improvisation. Mike leaves Smith a legacy of creative inspiration, mentorship, philosophical inquiry, humor and insightful mind that made him invaluable to students and the faculty. His spirit of experimental thinking and intellectual rigor, combined with his soft, gentle spirit, will be missed greatly. We congratulate him for his years of service and wish him well in his future endeavors. —Chris Aiken
IN MEMORIAM: Nancy Stark Smith  On May 1, 2020, the legendary dancer and teacher Nancy Stark Smith died after a two-year struggle with ovarian cancer. Nancy, considered by many to be the “mother” of contact improvisation, left behind her partner of 22 years, Mike Vargas, the musical director of the Smith College Department of Dance. Her influence on the field of contemporary dance, through her masterly teaching, dancing and performing—as well as her writing and role as the coeditor of the international journal Contact Quarterly, which she cofounded and published for over 45 years—is enormous and will continue for generations to come. Headquartered in Northampton, Contact Quarterly has long provided a forum for dancers to write about their dancing, teaching and creative works. Nancy mentored generations of dancers and dance educators through her sheer brilliance, presence and ability to inspire deep research and joy for the power of movement and touch. Nancy created a long-form dance improvisation score, “The Underscore,” which has been adopted and practiced by dancers on five continents. We honor Nancy Stark Smith for her work and, more important, for her beautiful being and for touching us so deeply. —Chris Aiken

It was such an honor to have Nancy teaching at Smith College with Mike only this spring semester in the historic Crew House, where so much fabulous contact improvisation took place over the years. In her last class, Nancy shared amazing archival footage of her dancing with Karen Nelson and Andrew Harwood in the very same Crew House. It was truly a special homecoming . . . and a sweet goodbye to a master teacher and giving human being. —Melinda Buckwalter

Join us for weekly news during the academic year! Sign up here.

Please find more newsletter content here.

Follow us on Facebook and Instagram (@fivecollegedance).

THE FIVE COLLEGE DANCE STAFF
Director: Dr. Alexandra Ripp
Program Coordinator: Martha Potyrala
Production Manager: Matthew Adelson
Assistant Production Manager: Achaetey Kabal

Newsletter Design: Falyn Arakelian
Copyediting: Eliani Torres