Professionalism for Dance Artists  CSU Sacramento- Dance Program

As the Dance Program at Sacramento State constantly grows to include those new to dance, classes, choreography, and performance ensembles, faculty see this as an opportunity to clarify goals and expectations for committed and talented dance artists involved in our program.

The following are guidelines for professional conduct that are used for professional companies, modified for university purposes. We were inspired to put this handbook together as we see many of our dance majors going on to professional careers, or transitioning into dance outside of a school setting. We want you to be fully aware of what will be expected of you as you enter the world of live performance and pedagogy outside of school, and to help you be the artist that is always hired because of his/her outstanding skills, work ethic, attitude and reliability. These things are gold to a choreographer or director, and without them you will find that your talent alone is not enough to keep you working.

Many of these standards will be familiar to you from previous programs and companies that you have joined. These guidelines are meant to support you in making choices that promote your health, creativity, enjoyment of and success in the field of dance and performance. If you have suggestions you would like to contribute to this handbook, or ways that you feel it could be improved, please communicate with us.

ATTENDANCE – this is the foundation of training and performance. It is nearly impossible to achieve your goals, or to make progress with the goals we have for you, if you are not in class and in rehearsal. We expect each dancer cast in a performance to attend all classes and rehearsals. You may have a total of 2 excused absences without it affecting your grade, as long as you give prior notice (call and email) to your instructor/director and your choreographers. If you miss rehearsal, you may have a reduced role in the work you are rehearsing. Each absence after that, and each absence without prior arrangement, will reduce your grade by one half (i.e. A to an A-) and could result in your being removed from the cast of any piece (by consultation with the choreographer).

PUNCTUALLY – is a sign of respect, commitment and readiness to work. All late arrivals and early departures will count toward reducing your grade.

COMMUNICATION – this is the basis of trust and teamwork in all art forms. As a dancer, your professors and choreographers rely on you to communicate directly about your needs, your experiences, and any obstacles in the way of your full participation. It is not appropriate to send a message through another person or through Facebook, texting, email; always communicate directly with your director or choreographer, especially about any lateness or absence. Also, give your choreographer enough advance notice that s/he may plan around your being absent.

ILLNESS - If you are ill or injured, come to class or rehearsal anyway. You may observe and learn, even if you are not able to participate fully. This is especially important as you get close to a performance date. If this is not possible, make sure to communicate with your instructor and choreographers.

OTHER LIFE CHALLENGES - there are often days or weeks when life is not going as well as we want it to. Take care of yourself AND honor your commitment to your fellow artists to train, rehearse and perform. Nine times out of ten, dancing will lift your spirits, give you hope, make you strong, take your mind of things, give you new insight into your problems, and help you to fulfill your dreams in spite of adversity. Of course, if tragedy strikes (such as a death in the family, or a hospitalization), then let us know where you need to be instead of here. Let us know why you are gone. Come back as soon as you can. You can dance your way through anything life throws your way....

ATTITUDE – an attitude of trust, hope, mutual support and respect will make your artistic life and community harmonious. Keeping this positive attitude is one of your rights and responsibilities as a dancer! Believe in yourself, trust your fellow artists, take new risks, try things you never thought you could do before, and do it it one step at a time. It's only too late to be a dance artist if you don't start now.

TRAINING – professional dancers train all the time, in a wide variety of ways. Taking technique class will help you be a better dancer. In general, you need to take more than the minimum requirement of technique classes for the Dance Major in order to improve. Do not skip class instead of rehearsal. This will not only leave you open to injury but also limit your range as an artist. A professional dancer is expected either to take class or engage in a training practice 5-12 times per week. What are YOU doing to maintain and improve your technique? When was the last time you tried a new technique? Have you challenged yourself to take a class that is beyond what you already comfortably know? Do you
take class outside of school? Do you stretch on your own? Try these guidelines for growth, and be amazed as you become the professional dancer you always dreamed of being!

**REHEARSAL and CLASS ETIQUETTE** – a professional performer is expected to **arrive early** to rehearsal to change into appropriate clothes, greet friends, eat a snack, have social time or otherwise get ready to move. Dancers are expected to warm up and review material from the last rehearsal OR class on their own; don’t wait for someone to guide you, but instead, take the initiative.

It is **unprofessional** to–

- Text or make phone calls, to have social conversations, to interrupt the teacher/director, to practice choreography or skills other than what is being focused on in that class/rehearsal, to **mark material** unless choreographer has instructed this, to eat, run errands or otherwise divert your attention away from dancing during class or rehearsal.

**Do not make appointments, schedule work or offer to help friends/family during rehearsal or class times.** In cases of a real emergency, quietly let your instructor know, and minimize disruption to the rest of the group and to the class/rehearsal.

**TEAMWORK** – every dancer is here for a reason, and each has unique strengths and weaknesses. Use your natural strengths to help your choreographer and fellow dancers to make progress with the material you are working on. Listen to feedback and corrections given to others; it may help you to remember and someday teach others these very same concepts. If you don’t know what you should be doing, work on your own role, your own material, or ask the instructor/choreographer what you should focus upon.

**TRUST AND CONFLICT** – trust is the foundation of healthy risk-taking. Trust can take a long time to earn, and a moment to undo. You can help foster trust in the Dance Program by being generous and kind, and speaking the truth. If someone says or does something that you are uncomfortable with, take care of your feelings and then speak about it with that person, with or without the help of others. Conflict can be a healthy force for change and re-evaluation if we use it as a tool instead of a weapon. Listen to each other, and avoid unnecessary conflicts by practicing the guidelines suggested above.

**SELF-CARE** – this is your most important responsibility as a dancer. Injury prevention, stress-relief, proper nutrition, adequate sleep and getting help (medical, counseling, conflict-resolution or financial assistance) are things you can do to stay healthy for your dancing and your life! Your teachers and your choreographers expect you to do these things, especially when going into performances. Take good care of yourself and **GIVE the GIFT of YOU!**

**CARE OF THE SPACE** – is an often overlooked aspect of being a professional artist. We must assume that if we don’t do it, it’s likely that nobody will. Please strive to leave the dance studios, rehearsal rooms, theatres and other spaces that you use, in better condition than you find them. This both serves your own training, and your fellow artists by maintaining spaces that are conducive to concentrated art-making. Some tips: don’t leave any garbage, throw away garbage others have left, take care of all equipment, come early and sweep the floor sometimes, help the instructors and/or choreographers return the space to order after class/rehearsal, and most of all, be proactive!

**CLOTHING** – Make sure to wear clothing that best supports your training. This includes leaving enough time to change before class and wearing clothes that allow maximum movement range with minimal self-adjustments needed. Do not wear street shoes, jeans or anything you are going to worry about getting dirty or worn out. Do not have anything in your pockets when you train, as it will distract you and others.

**SPECIAL TOPICS:**

**TECH AND DRESS REHEARSALS** - it is of the utmost importance that you are at all of these. Even if you think your role is minor, your absence can make a performance look unprepared simply by your not being familiar, comfortable or prepared in the space. For dance (unlike some theatre events), always bring your costumes to Tech Rehearsal. Generally, your lighting designer and operator will need to see how you and your costume look while you are moving under lights to set levels, etc. Dress Rehearsals are also paramount for achieving group unity on stage. Unless you are having a dire emergency, you are expected to be at all Tech and Dress Rehearsals. When you agree to be in a piece, always ask for the Tech schedule, so as to avoid working hard for months and then being unable to perform. In the professional world, anyone who is absent from Tech/Dress is not allowed to perform.
PERFORMANCES – in some ways this is the end goal of our training and rehearsing. In other ways, these are simply times that we open our process to new energy. The ratio of time spent performing to time spent getting ready is usually very small, so it is a good idea to reflect on your performing, before and after each show. Set a goal for yourself, discuss it with your choreographer, gently and honestly evaluate your performance, ask for feedback, and apply all the above qualities of a professional dancer to make each performance unique, worthwhile, and a genuine learning experience.

COMPANY WARM-UP CLASS PRIOR TO PERFORMANCES - You must arrive early and sign in on the sign in sheet for performances. Attendance and full participation and focus is mandatory for all company/cast members. Full body warm-up will be given, and then time will remain for performers to warm-up specific phrases, styles, etc., individually. Performers are responsible for taking advantage of this class and time to prepare their own instrument and must stretch, warm-up, and make sure that they are ready to perform to the fullest.

Procedure for working on Stage Crews:

At the beginning of the semester, a sign is posted in the breezeway for anyone who is interested in a stage crew position. This does not guarantee you a spot. Ron Reisner and I fill the crew positions from this list. If you are given a crew position, you must complete an ADD Permit, get it signed by Ron Reisner, and turn it in to the office so we can register you for THEA 120. You will also be given a syllabus with a contact sheet that goes to the stage manager. The priority for filling crew positions is the following:
1. Graduating Seniors
2. Remaining crew positions are filled, starting at the top of the interest list, with each student being assigned one crew position.

All crew positions are assigned by Ron Reisner. If you need THEA 120 credit, you need to see Ron Reisner. Stage managers cannot put you on their crew. There are only so many crew positions to go around. Please plan ahead so that you don’t stress yourself out in your senior year by cramming all your remaining graduation requirements into one semester or one year.