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Dance Partners

07.05.2011 | Students, Campus and Community  The University of Dayton is taking steps – literally – to infuse students’ academic and living experiences with creativity.

The University has again named the Dayton Contemporary Dance Company (DCDC) as community-artist-in-residence and is gearing up for a second year of education and enlightenment from the innovative Dayton-based dance organization.

DCDC’s presence is more than just bringing dance performances to campus. The company is helping the University explore how dance can help students tap their creativity in non-arts fields as well as in arts fields, said Paul Benson, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

Benson said the University is seeing a steady increase in enrollment in STEM fields — science, technology, engineering and math — and continues to explore how to give those students an extra edge by developing their abilities as creative thinkers and problem-solvers.

"In an era in which education in STEM fields rightly has a high priority, we are looking for ways to liberate and develop students’ creative imagination," Benson said. "DCDC is a powerful educator in the art of creative thinking.

"Experiencing dance in performance and through their own participation can help students surface new ways to approach problems and give them new passion for tackling difficult problems."

Ro Nita Hawes-Saunders, executive director of DCDC, said the company is pleased to bring another dimension of education to University of Dayton students.

"Artists are citizens of the world because the way they communicate is universal," she said. "Communicating through the language of dance is allowing the audience to learn by seeing, feeling and touching.

"What art does is to help students unlock their imaginations, and that's what DCDC does best. Our founder, Jeraldyne Blunden, wanted the company to touch lives with art and create social change – our partnership with the University is very much in that spirit."

Founded by Blunden in 1968, DCDC is rooted in the African-American tradition and holds the world’s most comprehensive repertoire of classic works by African-American choreographers. DCDC is internationally celebrated and is known for its significant contributions to the history of American dance.

DCDC was a visible presence on campus last year, said Susan Byrnes, ArtStreet director, and was very successful in demonstrating how dance can be used for innovative learning.

"We were quite surprised with how many requests for collaborations we received from so many different departments," she said.

One of the most interesting collaborations was with members of a business class who initially maintained dance had no relevance to the field of accounting, Byrnes said.

"They created a work focused on body movement that related to counting," she said. "I think they were surprised with their own creativity."

Byrnes said a highlight of the year was in November, during Black Catholic History month, with a collaboration among DCDC, Campus Ministry and the music department at the University’s Immaculate Conception Chapel.

"They brought together sacred music, dance and liturgy — all in the African-American tradition," she said. "It was a beautiful, powerful experience of Mass."

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