The aDvANCE Project: a study of Career Transition for Professional Dancers

This is the first study of its kind, a coordinated inquiry into the career transition of professional dancers in different countries. In total, eleven countries were included: sample surveys were undertaken in Australia, Switzerland, and the United States to provide insights into the challenges of career change as seen from the viewpoint of the individual dancer, and country profiles were written in eight additional countries to illustrate further the global environment of dance.

ST. MARY’S COLLEGE OF CALIFORNIA, SCHOOL OF EXTENDED EDUCATION, U.S.

“LEAP” (Liberal Education for Arts Professionals) is an innovative Bachelor of Arts in Performing Arts program designed for current and former professional dancers. The program is offered through the School of Extended Education at Saint Mary’s College of California and can be completed in two to four years of part-time study. LEAP’s flexibility encourages dancers to pursue individual interests and explore different disciplines while obtaining a comprehensive liberal arts education from a nationally recognized college.

LEAP students earn college credit for professional dance experience as well as for prior learning in other subject areas, and the program can accommodate dancers entering with different levels of academic experience. Classes meet once a week and courses are 8-10 weeks in length. The program’s director consults with students to arrange class times and locations that accommodate the dancers’ work, touring, and rehearsal calendars, as well as the professional schedules of former dancers. Financial aid is available and a strong support system offers encouragement and guidance.

Dancers from the San Francisco Ballet, New York City Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, Joffrey Ballet, Dance Theatre of Harlem, Oakland Ballet and SMUInBallets/SF have participated in LEAP, as well as dancers from a variety of modern, jazz, ethnic dance, and musical theatre backgrounds. The program has recently expanded from the San Francisco Bay area to include Los Angeles.