

COUNCIL ON TEACHING
Follow-Up Report for
Teaching in Higher Education Conference Award

Name: Kristin Marrs

Department/Unit: Dance

Conference Attended: National Dance Educators Organization National Conference

Date of Conference: September 29-October 1, 2024

Award Amount: \$1200.00

Briefly summarize how your attendance at the conference enhanced your professional development and allowed you to gain a better understanding of teaching in your discipline or trends in higher education in general.

In this conference, I was able to share my pedagogical research with colleagues from around the country, receive feedback on the efficacy of my teaching practices, and learn from fellow teachers of ballet and somatics who are experimenting with progressive and inclusive teaching practices. Teaching my “Ballet-in-the-Round” class to a group of colleagues allowed me to offer fellow teachers innovative ways to re-structure a traditional ballet class; I received valuable feedback as to the opportunities and challenges this afforded students. Based on this feedback, I’ve been both encouraged to continue teaching my Ballet-in-the-Round class without barres and mirrors, but have also begun to incorporate more “scaffolding” in classes *with* barres and mirrors, thus helping my students transition to a new way of moving and being in class and reducing feelings of overwhelm and/or confusion.

In taking classes and workshops from other teachers, I was pleased to see the large number of teachers who are enthusiastic about expanding the discipline of ballet to a larger cross-section of the population, and learned valuable ways to incorporate anatomical imagery, improvisation, and non-traditional sequencing of movement into my classes. I also engaged in multiple conversations about novel strategies for effective assessment in movement classes, and attended two lectures underscoring methods for helping teachers attend to students’ overall wellness. I was encouraged to see these growing trends of wellness-centered learning and inclusive dance practices, particularly in the field of ballet, where harmful practices that emphasize very narrow aesthetic ideals and body types endure.

Finally, I attended a workshop from a west coast school with a low-residency MFA program, and learned about the ways they ground somatic practices as central to their education and teaching. While the low-residency model is very different from what we offer at Iowa, as the incoming Director of Graduate Studies I was curious to learn about this program's unique approach and getting a broader understanding of the landscape of MFA programs offered across the United States.

How have you been able to share what you learned about teaching with your department, the University of Iowa, and/or beyond?

Upon returning from the conference and this semester, I've begun to share ideas directly with students—I've incorporated new improvisational movement prompts, community-building exercises, and anatomically-sound teaching methods for a particularly challenging ballet movements in my ballet classes. I've also had the opportunity to share my experiences with colleagues. As we co-teach our ballet classes in our department, we regularly work closely to develop a consistent curriculum, and I've had the pleasure of connecting with all my fellow ballet faculty about the ways ballet pedagogy is evolving and how our department's teaching practices can continue to evolve, while still respecting the traditions and many norms of the genre.

Looking ahead, I'm working this semester on writing an article with the aims of publishing in *Dance Education in Practice*, a peer-reviewed journal with a wide readership among dance teachers in higher education, private sector, and K-12 populations. The upcoming special issue is wellness-centered and thus a good match for my teaching interests. While at the conference, I attended a workshop held by the journal's editors and received feedback on best practices for submitting a journal article for this particular publication.