on jazz dance in higher education, observing that jazz dance has a lower status than modern dance or ballet on most college campuses. Although jazz dance in academe is a growing part of the curriculum, it will take time and faculty support for it to reach equal footing with ballet and modern. Community education through jazz dance is the focus of Lynnette Overby's article, where she offers both a rationale and practical tips for implementing such a program. These programs offer opportunities for college-age students to learn teaching skills including creating a curriculum, teaching the curriculum, and working with community administrators to organize the activity.

Jazz dance education has branched out into various environments, and each focuses on different student populations. Private studios, higher education, and community education are all an important part of keeping the legacy of jazz dance alive.

Today's dance studios offer a wide range of opportunities to those who wish to train as jazz dancers. Studios vary with respect to the size of the student body, the size of the facilities, the experience of the faculty, the range of class offerings, the number of performance opportunities, whether they are profit or nonprofit organizations, competition studios or conservatories, and recreational or professional. Most privately owned dance studios that train young children through young adults offer jazz dance classes. From a business perspective it is necessary to do so; jazz dance is a popular style of dance desired by prospective clients. When observing jazz dance training today in privately owned dance studios, it is apparent that there is no greater variable than the decision to, or not to, attend dance competitions and conventions. Taking a closer look at dance studios, including their relationship with dance competitions and conventions, may help to reveal how studio owners choose to train their dancers and what kinds of factors inform their decisions.

Privately Owned Dance Studios

Dance studios are businesses, and regardless of their artistic vision, they operate with the underlying intention of making money. Some studios combine advertising and marketing to lure clients, possibly masking their insufficient qualifications. There are successful dance studios that are staffed by less than qualified instructors, with no formal education or experience beyond the studio at which they trained. On the other hand, there exist highly qualified
studios run by faculty who are well versed in the field of dance and have pursued a professional career as a performer, a college degree in dance, or continued their personal growth and training through certification programs such as Dance Masters of America or the National Dance Educators Organization. Qualifications aside, enticements such as glossy ads, studio windows full of trophies, frilly costumes, fancy recital locations, family-oriented atmospheres, and free classes can draw clients in with ease. Artistry frequently takes a backseat in order to illuminate what "sells."

Dance studios typically fall into two major categories: those who compete and those who do not. Dance competitions have had an increasing influence on the way jazz dancers are trained. In recent years, dance has re-integrated into popular culture, and America's perception of dance is largely influenced by television shows such as So You Think You Can Dance and Dancing with the Stars. While these programs acknowledge artistry, they are competitive in nature, and their presence alone blurs the line between dance as art and dance as a sport. Young dancers today often want to train at competitive studios, and because of this, studio owners are increasingly inclined to bring their students to competitions in order to maintain and increase their clientele.

**Dance Competitions and Conventions**

Jazz dance has always been competitive in nature. From the Savoy Ballroom to the streets of New York City, dancers have competed in social and professional settings to earn the respect and admiration of peers. It has not been until more recent years, however, that touring competition venues have been established and, as such, defined the way that dancers today train and understand dance.

Today's dance competitions function as traveling circuits in which the faculty hold weekend competitions in cities across the nation. Dance studios pay a fee to have their works adjudicated, and they enter their studio's routines in a category specific to the choreographic style and age and/or level of the dancers performing. The highest scoring dances within each category are then awarded medals, ribbons, trophies, or cash prizes. Additionally, most competitions now offer recorded feedback to the dancers, where the judges comment on all aspects of the routines, from the choreography to the technique and precision of the dancers. Many competitions select dancers from each city to go on and compete at a national level, which typically takes place in a select city over the summer months (some competitions have more than one national final so they offer more than one location). Prizes for winning at the national level are larger in scale and more prestigious than at the local level, and dancers who win national titles are treated like celebrities within that competition circuit.

Some competitions have a convention that runs parallel to the competition, and there are also conventions that function independently. Like competitions, dance conventions are also touring circuits that visit cities across the nation. Each convention has a faculty of highly sought-after master teachers. Again, classes are typically divided by age and/or experience. Over the course of a weekend, dancers can experience a range of dance classes in a variety of styles. Many conventions now offer scholarship auditions where dancers can audition for free classes at major training centers like Broadway Dance Center in New York City or The Edge in Los Angeles, tuition scholarships that can be used at future dance conventions within the same circuit, apprenticeships with concert dance companies, and even paid tuition for a college education.

Various jazz dance styles are taught at dance conventions and are seen in dance competitions. At conventions, popular styles of jazz dance are often offered, including street jazz, jazz funk, pop jazz, contemporary jazz, lyrical jazz, and musical theater jazz. Hip-hop dance classes have become a mainstay on competition circuits; classical jazz is a rarity, and authentic jazz is unheard of. Within dance competitions, it is up to a studio to decide what style of jazz they would enter into a jazz category. When observing a competition and seeing the wide range of entries in a jazz dance category, it is evident just how diverse and hard to define jazz dance is. According to Dance Studio Life magazine, teachers frequently express frustration when trying to understand jazz dance, since jazz dance competition routines vary so much and all fall into the same category. Due to increasingly blurred lines between jazz dance styles, two very different styles of jazz dance can end up in direct competition—confusing the choreographers, dancers, and audience alike.

**Competition History and Innovators**

The origins of Dance Masters of America can be traced back to 1884. As a convention for dance teachers, the organization was well established long before they instituted a formal competitive event in 1963 with the Miss Dance of America Scholarship Pageant. This event expanded in 1964, with the first Performing Arts Competitions being held at the National Convention in Washington, DC, along with the Teenage Ballroom Competitions. DMA along with competitive ballroom dance inspired other formal dance competition ventures, such as Michael Valentic, who formed the Summer Dance Festival in 1970. Summer Dance Festival was the first private dance competition, and the concept of private dance competitions spread rapidly...
with pioneers such as Beverly Fletcher, Brian Foley (in Canada), and Sherry and Rhee Gold. While business-minded dancers found financial success following the competition paradigm, mainstream competitive TV shows such as *Dance Fever*, *Saturday Night Fever*, and *Star Search* fueled their growth.4

Jazz dance educator and choreographer Joe Tremaine formed his competition and convention circuit in 1981. His empire has since grown to the point where his faculty travels to approximately twenty-five cities each year, which is the equivalent of teaching about 50,000 dancers nationwide.5 Tremaine began his career as a performer in New Orleans, New York City, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas before opening up his studio, Joe Tremaine Dance Center, in Los Angeles in the 1970s. He catered primarily to adults and claims that all the stars were in attendance: "Even Cyd Charisse took my class."6 Tremaine Dance Conventions & Competitions maintains a faculty of about twelve master teachers, including Tremaine himself, and they teach a variety of jazz dance styles: lyrical jazz, fusion jazz, tap, hip-hop, street funk, and musical theater. Tremaine's signature style draws from a street influence, his love for freestyling, and music. He feels that music is the foundation for jazz dance, and in his classes he teaches to upbeat pop music that keeps students engaged.7

Another mainstay on the dance convention and competition scene is Joe Lanteri, who is the executive director of New York City Dance Alliance. Lanteri founded NYCDFA in 1993 with the goal of bringing the vibrant NYC dance scene to cities around the country. He strove to elevate the standards of the dance competition and convention experience by bringing a unique perspective, renowned faculty, professional production venues, and an emphasis on educating dancers within a nurturing environment.8 NYCDFA is thriving today, and currently tours twenty-three cities each year.

Lanteri continues to reform the way people view dance competitions and conventions. In July 2009, he and Scott Jovovich, NYCDFA faculty member and adjunct professor at University of the Arts in Philadelphia, began a college scholarship program. In 2009, they were able to award two NYCDFA students full scholarship tuition to University of the Arts. By July 2011, Point Park University in Pittsburgh and Marymount Manhattan, in addition to University of the Arts, had agreed to use NYCDFA as a valuable recruitment opportunity and also offer scholarships through what is now called the New York City Dance Alliance Foundation. This initiative changes the perception that dance competitions and dance in higher education have no relationship to one another. Lanteri feels that his organization has a long history of attracting some of the best talent in the country and now is his chance to literally, invest in these dancers. He is proving that the heart of NYCDFA is about training and inspiring dancers, not awarding trophies and medals. As Marymount Manhattan's dance department chair Katie Langan told *Dance Studio Life* magazine writer Joshua Bartlett, "When I saw how well the dancers were trained, I was very impressed. The talent level was very different. Joe seems to be attracting schools that are really doing some training."9

In addition to Tremaine Dance Conventions & Competitions and New York City Dance Alliance, there are countless other competition and convention circuits available to dancers today. In the December 2011 issue of *Dance Studio Life* there are twenty-five full-page advertisements for competitions and/or conventions. This is not unusual. This type and amount of advertising is common in just about any dance magazine.10 Many of these advertisements highlight various incentives and rebates, a focus on winning cash and other prizes, photos of dancers executing flawless leaps or leg extensions, and a list of the cities on the tour. In a competition and convention guide presented in the same issue of *Dance Studio Life*, there is a list of 102 competition and convention options. It is easy to see that dance studios are overloaded by the sheer number of options available to them and possibly feel pressured to compete when the message speaks loud and clear in these advertisements: dance competitions and conventions have an integral role in training dancers today.

**Competition Pros and Cons**

Dance today straddles a fine line between being an art form and a competitive sport. The influences of television shows such as *So You Think You Can Dance* and *Dancing with the Stars* have permeated the studio scene; young dancers today idolize the dancers they see on television and often strive to perform in a similar fashion. The trends on these dance-based television programs are the same trends that dominate competitions and conventions. As such, these trends filter down into dance studios with varied levels of integrity. Brian Friedman, who choreographs for *So You Think You Can Dance* and is the creative director for *America's Got Talent* and *The X Factor*, says of *So You Think You Can Dance*: "A lot of the dancers have trained like Olympic athletes, and you can't look down on that. But there's not a lot of artistry in, say, running track—it's technical and falls under athleticism. I choose artistry with strong technique over tricks any day."11 This emphasis on tricks, or flash movements, is apparent in *So You Think You Can Dance* and is enforced in the solos where a dancer on the chopping block has to "dance for his/her life." To avoid being eliminated, each dancer with the least amount of votes has to dance a thirty-second solo full of as many complex multiple pirouettes, leaps, and gymnastic feats as possible. When a dancer performs a solo...
with an emphasis on artistry rather than tricks, judge Nigel Lythgoe is likely to tell that person that he/she was not dancing. Is this sending today’s dancers the message that “real dance” is in the tricks and the rest is just... extra?

It is exactly this issue, in addition to others, that stimulates a negative perception of dance competitions for some. Nationally renowned master teacher and choreographer Mandy Moore notices the following about some of today’s dancers: “So much importance is put on technique and execution that some of them have forgotten about the entertainment side of dance. With 5,000 fouetté turns and switch leaps, it’s no wonder they don’t have time to smile or perform, because they have so much on their minds.”

Competition dancers are often stereotyped as cookie-cutter dancers with slicked-back hair, covered in sequins, and either void of emotion or notorious for mugging (layering fake emotion, often melodrama, on top of the choreography). Many studios make a point of transcending this stigma and strive to offer a unique artistic point of view. Dena Kay Boticelli of DK Dance in Webster, New York, is adamant about keeping her choreography artistic and creative. She frequently observes dancers who look like robots at dance competitions, who perform with the sole purpose of “showing off.” Dena will challenge her dancers with complex choreography, but only if it suits the dance routine and only if the dancers can execute the steps properly.

Nicole Bibby of Defying Gravity School of Dance in Cranston, Rhode Island, who grew up performing in competitions, offers a different perspective. She feels that it is important to add tricks to her dance routines; each dancer has specific strengths, and she uses her dance routines to highlight their best skills. She feels that this is especially important in dance competitions, since tricks are a tool for showing off technical ability.

The system of giving awards is another controversial aspect of dance competitions. Many competitions offer medals or trophies for every participating dancer, which is clearly a business strategy. Studio owner Lindsay Deneault of Elite Dance Center in Foxboro, Massachusetts, finds this to be a drawback. Gold medals should be given to dancers who demonstrate the highest level of technique and artistry, not to every dancer who pays a registration fee. She has also noticed that some competitions base the scores on the number of students and routines a particular studio brings to the competition, rather than on the dancing itself. Deneault has learned to steer clear of these competitions and focuses on the ones that offer her students valuable feedback for improvement, even if it means not winning. This system for winning and awarding prizes can give dancers confidence, but possibly also an unrealistic perception of talent and place in the industry.

Many college-level dance instructors have been faced with a similar problem. The freshman dance student who has been dancing his or her whole life, and has possibly even received trophies or other awards at competitions, is shocked by placement in beginning level technique classes. Dance competitions are subjective, and each competition circuit functions differently. A prize at one of the smaller-scale or local dance competitions obviously holds far less distinction than some of the nationally respected and well-established competition circuits. Depending on the competition, dancers with less than adequate training could possibly walk away with medals, trophies, and inflated egos.

Additionally, it is becoming more and more common to see dancers who can execute turns and jumps with finesse but cannot adapt to style or contribute a sense of dynamics to choreography. There are vast numbers of talented solo dancers coming out of the present-day competition scene, but there are even more dancers who seem to have lost their sense of ownership and individuality in the classroom and in performance. Treating dance as a sport may be creating a generation of dancers who go through the motions without intent or creative impulse.

Possibly the most controversial aspect of competitive dance is age-appropriateness in music and costume choices. In May 2010, there was an Internet firestorm over a jazz dance that appeared at the World of Dance competition in Los Angeles. Dancers as young as eight did a sexually provocative and explosive routine to Beyoncé’s hit “Single Ladies.” Their technical ability and talent was undeniable, but an uproar resounded due to the costuming and R-rated movements. The little girls wore embellished bra-tops, hot pants, and
knee-high boots while they lip-synched the popular song, a female-empowering celebration of being single and confident. Some would say the choreography resembled an erotic dance, which clearly sent the wrong message to audiences but was hardly a problem for the judges. The parents of the young dancers explained that their daughters’ moves and outfits were appropriate for competition.16

James Robey, director of the Ridgefield Conservatory of Dance in Ridgefield, Connecticut, points out that widespread objectification of young girls is becoming more and more customary. It makes “parents involved in the competitions callous to how bizarre it is that they are paying an adult money to teach their child how to move in a sensual way.” Robey notices this trend reaching far beyond the dance scene; it is especially apparent in reality shows like Toddlers in Tiaras: “Ultimately, I see more negatives than positives in commercial [dance] competitions. The commonly accepted objectification of the female image, the “us versus them” mentality, and the product-oriented emphasis are just a few of the philosophical problems inherent in commercial competitions.”17

According to a survey I did in 2011 of dance studio owners,18 one of the most commonly expressed concerns regarding dance competitions was the price. Most of the time, studios require that their competition teams or studio competition companies take extra classes so that the time spent on perfecting competition routines does not interfere with regularly scheduled technique classes. Extra time is extra money. Additional performances equate to additional costumes, which can be very expensive. Then there are the actual fees for attending the competition. JUMP Dance Convention, which is run by dance celebrities Mia Michaels and Brian Friedman, is one of the most popular competitions today.19 On the JUMP website, as of December 2011, you can see their policies and pricing structure. Every dancer competing must be enrolled for the entire convention,20 which costs $220 for a teenager if the tuition is paid early and $260 after the early deadline passes. Each dancer has to pay an additional $95 fee to perform a solo, $50 for a duet or trio, and $35 for a group. (These are the early-registration fees. The late prices are an additional $10.) Many studios bring group dances, sometimes several, to compete in different categories, in addition to solo, duet, and trio performances. The cost of traveling to the competition and possibly staying overnight at that location is also a factor for many. It is easy to see how these fees add up and might not be realistic for every family to afford.

Dance competitions and conventions offer valuable experience to the students involved, and participation can open dancers’ eyes to a greater perspective on dance, reaching far beyond the confines of their studio. Dancers can see the large scope of styles that exist, get valuable feedback for improvement from judges, and be inspired by youth from other studios and become more goal-oriented. If a studio owner can encourage dancers to value the experience over the desire to win, competitions can be a place for dancers to build confidence and learn teamwork and respect for one another. Competitions, and especially conventions, can also be a valuable opportunity for dancers to network within the field of dance and learn what it takes to stand out in a crowd. Lawrence Rhodes, artistic director of the Juilliard School, notices that “something competition dancers take away from that world is the ability to be fearless and have a lot of energy. That makes them naturally strong. There are many attributes we look for when we audition, and many from the competition world have them because of the work they’ve done already.”21

Perspectives on Training

Students who go on to dance in college are likely to reflect on their dance studio training and, while surrounded by peers who have been trained either similarly or differently, make insightful observations. Dancers at Salve Regina University pointed out two fatal flaws in their previous studio training. First was a focus on winning at competitions. This pressure led to tension among their peers, rollercoaster emotions, and an overall disconnect from the artistry of dance. Junior dance minor Courtney Randall expressed, “My studio owner/choreographer could have emphasized the love of dancing more than the competition and winning. I feel that she worked with us to improve and maintain her reputation rather than supplement our own growth.”22 The second commonly expressed reflection was on the narrow scope of their training. Many of the dancers surveyed had attended five to six competitions a year with their dance studios, but had never attended a dance convention, taken class from a master teacher, or worked with a guest choreographer. They noticed that their studios taught one or two distinct styles of jazz dance, and they had not been taught anything about the history of jazz dance or lineage of jazz dance styles. Sophomore Chrissy Rooney felt that she was comfortable in the theatrical jazz style taught at her studio, but she felt completely sheltered from other jazz dance styles.

At the root of the pros and cons of competitions, conventions, and studio training in general is the dance studio owner. Whether or not a dance studio competes bears little relevance on the success of the studio and its dancers. A studio owner who is adept at leading dancers toward future success in the industry will hire the most educated and experienced faculty possible, give dancers a strong technical base with exposure to plenty of variations.
in movement styles, create a nurturing environment where dancers are free to be creative individuals, and offer as many performance opportunities as possible whether through competitions or other venues. The very best studio owners will do all of these things while encouraging discipline, structure, and a love for dance. It is important that dancers are encouraged and supported, but also that they are granted a healthy dose of reality. A dancer with a good breadth and depth of training, who recognizes his or her strengths and weaknesses and in turn demonstrates a proficiency in technique and the ability to adapt to various stylistic demands, is the dancer who is prepared for a future career in dance.

Notes
6. http://www.tremainedance.com. Cyd Charisse was the lead actress and dancer in many Hollywood movie musicals from the early 1940s to the late 1950s. She frequently partnered dance legends Gene Kelly and Fred Astaire.
10. According to author’s observations from Dance Teacher, Dance Studio Life, Dance Spirit, and although to a lesser degree, Dance Magazine.
12. Ibid.
17. Robey interview, October 17, 2011.
18. Guarino, unpublished survey, fall 2011. An electronic survey was sent out to approximately forty dance studio owners throughout the country. They were questioned regarding their feelings about dance competitions and conventions. Almost all privately owned dance studios surveyed attended competitions, but there were varying opinions on the value of competing.
19. Friedman and Michaels are internationally known dance educators and choreographers who reached celebrity status through their work on So You Think You Can Dance.
20. This is a policy specific to JUMP Dance Convention.
22. Guarino survey. The paper survey questioned thirty-five dance minors at Salve Regina University about their studio training before college.

Jazz Dance in Higher Education

Kim Chandler Vaccaro

There exists a potent intersection between an argument for the inclusion of jazz dance in higher education and the work of dancer and anthropologist Mura Dehn. Multicultural valuation, Gardnerian Theory, the National Standards of Dance, the influence of African-American and Popular Culture Studies programs, and a growing attention to professional preparation have influenced the prevalence of jazz dance in U.S. college and university dance programs. Although the growth of jazz dance classes offered has occurred mainly in the past two decades, Mura Dehn advocated for its inclusion in dance education as early as 1934.

Jazz dance is an amalgamation of every variable that existed in the creation of the United States, including the African diaspora. At the core of the diaspora—the ideology that allowed European governments to enslave “other” peoples—was the devaluing of the black and brown body. Curricula in higher education in this country often mirrored that philosophy. The first dance programs in the United States were begun in the 1920s and were dominated by white, female modern dancers. Ballet, with its air of European aristocracy, soon followed and fit neatly into the system as dance began to move from physical education departments to theater and dance departments. Even as tap enjoyed some early success in college dance programs as part of the American folk/clog dance tradition, there was, until the 1990s, a curious absence of jazz dance. Though jazz dance emerged in roughly the same era as modern dance in the United States, the jazz dance vocabulary and body was created, in large part, within African-American social venues and later adapted to the studio, stage, and screen. It was not typical, prior to