

# MINH TRAN

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## TEACHING STATEMENT

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As a dance educator, dancer, and choreographer, over the past twenty-seven years I have focused on contributing to the field of performing arts by adding elements from my cultural heritage and training. I have used teaching, dancing, and choreography to explore my personal experiences as a political refugee, a Vietnamese native, a naturalized American citizen, a Vietnamese Opera performer, and a contemporary dance maker. I value all dancers with whom I have worked—including dance students whose thoughts and energy nourished my work. I have always endeavored to promote cultural diversity among the artists I have encountered. Most of all, I enjoy sharing my devotion to dance with students, artists, colleagues, staff and general audiences.

In my technique classes, I try to instill the notion of using the body as a vehicle to express one's ideas and thoughts clearly. My goal in technique classes is to get students moving as much as possible during the 80-minute class. The challenge I set forth in planning exercises and assignments in technique classes is to combine the physical and intellectual senses. Through this experience, I am hoping students will embark on a journey to discover why we move differently when given the same set of movements. As a result, I hope students in my technique classes will develop an awareness of their weaknesses and strengths, hence, a better understanding of their own body movements as they become stronger dancers.

In composition and choreography assignments, my goal is to guide students and explore movement that creatively and specifically relates to their identities. Students are required to provide feedback to their peers both verbally and in writing. I invite students to discover and challenge their weaknesses and strengths in a nurturing and supportive environment.

For both technique and choreography courses, there are reading assignments from dance journals, critics, and professional practitioners that stimulates students' critical thinking in their physical practice and intellectual curiosity in developing their own aesthetic in dance.

In repertory class or Advanced Technique & Performance, my specific goal of rehearsing a dance work with the students is to master and take ownership of the choreography. My classes are conducted with a goal of transforming students to performers. Performers should own every single second of the work whether it is a highly technical movement or just a mundane gesture. Students are challenged to develop their own sense of musicality to the work even when they are performing in silence or to ambience sounds.

In the realm of curriculum development, I am interested in in-depth studies of cultural concepts for understanding the historical and artistic significance of choreographic works from Southeast Asia in the context of religion, social, and political development. I continue to investigate and discover different methodologies in developing courses that explore works of choreographers that reflect significant cultural history in a biographical context.

To enhance the diversity of course offering in the dance department at Reed, I have focused on the dance techniques outside of Western culture. In the spring of 2011 I introduced a new course *Dance 260--Dances of Bali, Indonesia*. This course offers the opportunity for students to combine contextual study of Southeast Asian culture and performance arts with studio activities in dance. This class provides social, cultural, and aesthetic views of the performing arts in Southeast Asia with a special focus on Bali, Indonesia. This course examines selected ritual, social, and court dances of Bali such as Kechak, Legong, and mask dance in a cultural and historical context. Students were introduced to the technical aspects of Balinese dance and its relation to music. Studio sessions brought these ideas to life as students learn basic dance movements and musical structures. Lectures, readings, films, and slides are presented to cover the diversity of the island, the role of dance and music in Balinese culture, and the challenges of globalization. I was able to invite guest artists from Bali to speak at Reed College and worked with students for a week. This course was taught again in the fall of 2012, I was able to accompany students in this class to a two-week workshop in gamelan music at Lewis & Clark College, and attended with students to a professional concert of music and dance by the Venerable Showers of Beauty Gamelan at Lewis & Clark College.

This upcoming spring, I am again excited to teach one of my favorite course. *Dance 351--Dance Traditions/ SE Asian Civilization*. This course is an in-depth study of cultural concepts of the Southeast Asia region. An exploration in classical dance forms including Peking Opera of China; court dances of Cambodia; ceremonial and ritual dances of Burma, Indonesia; and performing arts of Vietnam; as well as contemporary Asian dance works. Students learned small, simple excerpts of traditional dances as a base from which to explore creative processes through cultural and anthropological perspectives of performing arts in Southeast Asia.

For community outreach, I try to capitalize on my relationship with White Bird Dance to conduct workshops and residencies for students at Reed and the community at large. White Bird Dance is one of the most prominent dance presenters in the nation, presenting established and emerging dance companies from all over the world to Portland's audience. These opportunities are rare for students and I find it to be an exceptionally rewarding experience. I coordinated with White Bird to bring a workshop with national and international dance makers to work with students and offered the workshop to general community beyond Reed.