

Beth Megill

Sabbatical Application Request

One Semester Sabbatical for Fall 2023

Sabbatical Project Overview:

The work of keeping our students safe while learning is never ending. Safety in the performing arts is essential both physically and emotionally in order for the students to do their work as dancers, actors, musicians, performers. The negative impact of sexual harassment in the arts is something our students should be aware of and prepared for as they enter into four-year programs or professional careers in the arts.

Hostile or uncomfortable work environments especially in a field which can require touch and vulnerability can disrupt entire projects resulting either in students dropping or being dropped from productions and classes. Since COVID closures (and the momentous MeToo movement), I have witnessed an even greater need for students to learn how to consensually interact with each other physically, verbally, and creatively in dance and theater spaces. I believe it is our job to model and convey the best practices of the field while teaching our students what is and isn't appropriate behavior between choreographers, directors, dancers, and actors.

This sabbatical project aims to cultivate safer spaces for our Moorpark College Performing Arts students as I would receive specific training now offered in the field of Intimacy Direction and Coordination. The work of an intimacy coordinator or director is to ensure that the performers on stage or screen are safe and comfortable while working on a show or project that requires sexual scene work or other intimate touch. This is useful and applicable to dance interactions as well as live theater and musicals.

This proposal outlines essential coursework through a certifying body called the Intimacy Directors and Coordinators (IDC) and self-directed research for coaching intimacy in live performance to ensure best current practices in the dance and performing arts program at the Moorpark College. I would return with stronger skills for establishing better boundaries and clearer expectations of our students and would be able to consult and work as needed with other faculty on projects of this nature.

What does an Intimacy director do?

Intimacy directors and choreographers have existed for the past decade or so but have become more central to the creative process since the MeToo movement gained momentum and national recognition in 2017. As of 2022, organizations and unions are strongly recommending intimacy direction as a best practice. Students coming through our programs and entering the industry should know about and expect to be working with intimacy director and coordinators as professionals.

To learn more about the field of Intimacy Coordination and Direction, please view the following resources:

- Choreographing Intimacy on Set: CBS News <https://youtu.be/GLu2-FY6dic>
- SAG-AFTRA Explains their support for intimacy directors: <https://youtu.be/FsigNtQKnV0>
- Comparing Intimacy and Stunt Coordinators: <https://youtu.be/Ws6Rpre6gnw>

For an introduction to common sexual harassment issues in theater, please read the following:

- Facing (and Fixing) the problem of Sexual Harassment in Theater: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5984c4a0cd39c369f61bbf0f/t/5bce80bee4966b5e2c2388c7/1540260045383/MeTooSouthernTheatre.pdf>
- On Stage Blog (April 2018) Article concerning sexual harassment between students/peers in productions: <https://www.onstageblog.com/columns/2018/2/4/the-ugly-truth-of-sexual-misconduct-in-our-community-and-college-theatres>
- On Stage Blog entry (Oct 2022) outlining unskillful behavior on behalf of a HS Theater Director. <https://www.onstageblog.com/editorials/2022/10/5/tx-high-school-theater-director-accused-of-sexual-harassment>

One of the key solutions identified by Lehman and Morris in their article *Facing (and Fixing) the Problem of Sexual Harassment in Theater* (linked above) is to clearly establish expectations for performers, crew members, and staff early in a production. The role of the intimacy director is to do exactly that, so that people entering into a creative or production process feel safe and can skillfully complete the work (or learning) that needs to be done.

Value to the individual faculty:

I intend to learn new ways to invite students to be both safe and expressive in intimate situations as required in a live dance or theater performance. A few years back I completed the Safe Zone training through Moorpark College, but otherwise have no formal training that relates specifically to intimacy in the dance field or theatrical performances. I hope the course work through the IDC and the self-selected reading will give me new tools that will be relevant to our current culture and student needs.

In my formative years of schooling and performing there was no such thing as intimacy coordination. I recall my first kiss was a stage kiss as Dream Laurie in Oklahoma. No one told me anything, taught me anything, or asked for any permission to touch. Fortunately, I felt more or less comfortable (even if a little nervous) as a heterosexual 16-year-old female with a gay male partner (and now that I think of it, he was well over 18). In the “theater and dance world,” this is just the way it has been.

I recall another situation when I was 15, and I missed a quick-change entrance. I had to get down to tights and a bra in order to change costumes in exactly 60 second on the side of the stage. The director, upset that I had missed the change, called everyone over to watch me with my dresser try to do it timed so he could see what was happening. So, I did it. Granted, I had the benefit of a stable body image as a confident, CIS gender body and was more or less comfortable with doing what was needed to get my quick change down. But, in retrospect, there was no permission sought, and there was no verbal consent given. There was only authoritarian direction from my male director toward a young girl in front of a cast of mostly adult performers. This is just an example of how a power differential can cause discomfort in performers seeking to please their director or choreographer. Fortunately, this is the worst that I experienced. However, for many this would be nothing.

So, this is an education I need because I never got it. It is my way of disrupting the status quo by cultivating new habits and behaviors that the students will be able to adopt and practice in their own world.

Value to the students:

Upon my return, students will benefit from having an educated professional steering the helm during creative processes that involve touch, exposure, or other sexual content. Students participating in performances will experience a greater sense of safety and trust moving forward knowing that I have dedicated specific time and training to this important work.

I will be able to maintain standards of creative excellence in the program while keeping students safe and modeling for them the best practices of using touch and intimacy in their own creative projects. I want to foster a safe and creatively robust environment for the Moorpark College performing arts students so they can enter their professional world with integrity and confidence. They need to know what to expect from professionals in the field and be able to identify and respond to circumstances that are out of integrity.

Value to the college and district:

I know each year there are many Title IX complaints among and between students. While I am fortunate that not many have surfaced from the dance department or within my classrooms, I am keenly aware that mental health challenges from COVID closures and the resulting isolation have changed the game. Students don't know how to be physically together in the same way they did before. We have strayed farther into unskillful behaviors.

Students are generally familiar with traditional classroom code of conduct, but when you have the heightened emotional experience of a "show climate," boundaries can get blurred. Working on a show there is competition between performers for roles, peer pressure to be accepted, and the fear of displeasing a director or choreographer or being labelled "hard to work with." These are some of the conditions that lead to Title IX issue in the performing arts.

Social justice movements including MeToo and Black Lives Matter among others have changed the game. It is essential that we continue to move in the direction of equity, access, consent,

and safety for all individuals making this awkward topic important to address in the dance studio, stage, and beyond.

I would be able to bring my new knowledge and skills back to the Performing Arts Center as a whole. I am already invited into theater performances as a movement coach to help support the students with embodied expression. This is another way I can help serve the department, division, and campus to foster safer relationships involving choreographed touch and exposure of a sexual nature.

Previous Sabbaticals granted:

2014-2015

Sabbatical Topic: Inclusion and Access using Language of Dance (Dance Notation)

Seniority of Service:

Fulltime at Moorpark College since 2007

Likelihood of Continued Service

I currently have at least 13 years before I can apply for early retirement. I have a long way to go!

Reasonable distribution of sabbaticals in service area:

The Dance program last received a Sabbatical for 1 year awarded to Robert Salas in 2016-2017

Size and Scale of the Project:

This project should be conducted within one semester timeframe. I plan to spend an average of 35-40 hours a week to complete online classwork, selected readings, homework, dance program analysis (curriculum and best practices), and other relevant activities.

Relevance to teaching assignment:

I anticipate this training will support my work in all of my teaching and program planning. However, I expect strongest application being in the following courses:

- Musical Theater Dance M17 (Our large-scale interdisciplinary performances)
- Movement Improvisation Danc M20ABC, M20H
- Dance Performance Danc M55ABCD

In additional below are few examples from past PAC performance circumstances that would have benefitted from the presence of an intimacy coordinator. I hope that my training will allow others to navigate common situations, and I could be further consulted or invited in for more intimate situations as needed.

- The portrayal of sexual assault
- The use of partial or frontal nudity

- Actors disrobing each other
- Specifically, the context of student written and directed one acts involving intimate situations which may involve practice outside class hours.

Objectives of the project:

1. Complete Levels 1 and 2 of the online course work entitled “Foundations of Intimacy: through the Intimacy Directors and Coordinators (IDC) professional organization.
2. Complete 5-6 additional workshops through IDC online offerings.
3. Conduct a foundational literature review from the IDC recommended resource list
4. Gather resources on intimacy and consent culture relevant to our Moorpark College student performer and choreographer/director population.
5. Cultivate skills and apply best practices for keeping our student performers safe during the various creative practice and performance opportunities at Moorpark College.
6. Review current Moorpark College dance curriculum and classroom standards to ensure we are operating with sensitivity and excellence regarding intimacy and performance.

Proposed Timeline:

Certification course work and Workshops:

The IDC offers courses on a regular basis. I expect that I will be able to complete the initial course and two levels of certification work within 3 months, leaving 2 months to conduct further research into my areas of interest and the relevant context of a community college performance arts setting.

Additional workshops may be selected as they are available and relevant to dance education and performance in a community college setting.

As of writing this proposal, here is a list of recent workshop titles through the IDC include:

- **Skills from the Laban/Bartenieff Movement System- A Choreographer's Toolbox- August 13th & 14th**
- **Intimacy in Improv- August 23rd**
- **Consent in Academia/University- Monday, September 12th**
- **Anatomy of An Apology: When "Oops/Ouch" Isn't Enough- September 21st**

Upcoming workshops:

- **Intimacy on the Page – Oct 26th**
- **Digging Deeper into Boundaries – Nov 21st**
- **Culturally Competent Productions – Dec 11th**

Current offerings can be reviewed at www.idcprofessionals.com/workshop

Self-Directed Reading and Research:

In addition to the certification course work and community workshop classes, I plan to read and review 3-5 books from the recommended reading list provided by the IDC. Titles may include books such as the following (to be determined as part of my course work and research to find the most relevant titles for dance and live performance).

Ask: Building Consent Culture by Kitty Stryker
The Ethics of Touch by Ben E. Benjamin and Cherie Sohnen-Moe
An Acrobat of the Heart by Stephen Wang
The Body Speaks by Lorna Marshall
The Lucid Body by Faye Simpson

If determined necessary or more relevant, I may choose to substitute 3-5 articles for a single book. Articles may include some of the following as deemed relevant:

“The Bases of Social Power” by John R.P. French, Jr. and Bertram Raven
“The Power Matrix” by Valeri Miller, Lisa Veniclausen
Fatherly: “How to Teach Young Kids About Consent
Edutopia: “How to Teach Consent to Elementary Students”
Planned Parenthood: “What is Sexual Consent”

Proposed benefits or expected outcomes:

1. I will return and share my new knowledge and skills with my fellow faculty through division, department, and PAC advisory committees. The format will be a written or PowerPoint summary of my findings including any recommendations or key resources for reference.
2. I will be able to serve as a facilitator of best practices in a variety of performance context in the MC PAC.
3. I will review and revise current curriculum and classroom practices to ensure they are meeting industry standards. Should any recommendations surface, I will share them in the summary mentioned above.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any further questions about my proposal, the nature of the project or how it will be achieved, please feel free to contact me at bmegill@vccd.edu.

Sincerely,
Beth Megill