

**Gabriel Mata**  
pronunciation: gah-bryehl mah-tah pronouns: he/him/his

## **Teaching Statement**

Teaching is a constant evolving endeavor of critical awareness. I engage in teaching from the viewpoints of choreographer, performer, researcher, dance film maker, and artist activist. Additionally, my identities as queer, immigrant, person of color, and now a permanent resident to the US play a central role. Those identities and experiences inform me as an educator within the canon of classical western concert dance. Also, I make room to question and think critically about present awareness. My research looks into expanding contemporary practices of instructing dance history, pedagogy, choreography, and embodiment. There are expectations and notions on subject matter and I bring attention to deconstructing, inclusion, and interrogation of those processes. When thinking about students, I am interested in exploring alternate forms of instruction and engagement which is an active negotiation between the student and teaching. Their individual form of access, experience, and the course content is worth considering. I work to understand where and how each student's identity is able to engage and contribute within the collective.

In my experience, students arrive with various levels of knowledge and awareness. Creating a foundation that allows for collective attention and process is beneficial. Negotiating with the class is something that organically develops and the pace is something to attend to. An intermediate-advanced ballet course that I taught at the University of Maryland - College Park expanded and challenged the generalized forms of instruction. Under my direction, the course introduced modern approaches supported by contemporary educators and researchers. I engaged in discussion on the divisiveness of French terminology, navigating class without the barre, offering various forms of musicality, and observing classical choreographies with dimensional viewpoints. As supplemental resources, I have a collection of readings and essays that expand on the source of inspiration for deconstructing and redesigning the approach.

The loaded 400-year old genre was known and respected by the students. I was met with reservation, I had to actively reflect on my approach and develop the method of instruction. This is not something that I was taught but that I had to critically attend to. I directed work that would challenge them with course content and their own identity. I met with students during the pre-midterm timeframe and received end of semester personal review and analysis, as a way of

getting insight into their experience under my direction and course evaluation. In our one-on-one pre-midterm meetings, they articulated how they were working with the newly introduced ideas, what they were challenged with, and how they were accessing class. At the end of the semester, the class had a final that challenged them to deconstruct and restage a romantic ballet. They embodied and presented their movement research with contemporary themes from gender, gun violence, queer identity, and equity.

Recognizing how institutions and academia are cemented with western concert dance as a foundation, I recognize the limitations from not recognizing the value of social dance forms. My research in disco dance, music, and culture has been able to offer information that I have not received in my own training experience. I taught a Disco course within my teaching assistantship, as well as a fusion class of Jazz-Disco. Course instruction developed from recognizing collective notions of Disco and the introduction of historical context. The content expanded onto identity, politics, social movement, gender, and queer studies. The movement course was also directed as a critical investigation of present socio-political themes. The movement portion of the class, I ask the movers to attend to themselves and work through sequences as well as their own forms of expression. Additionally, collective sourcing of movement was a process they took on. Choreographic development, embodiment, and instruction was a part of their final examination. Historical while incorporating their identity and experience, this brings into the space not just a reenactment but a present embodiment and environment that has so much to offer within the academic space and individual awareness.

Approaching dance education through the codified classical notions of education is not enough within our present mindfulness and social consciousness. I guide my contemporary modern movement, choreography, and now dance for camera practices with the same attention. Developing a teaching practice that incorporates individuality while also interrogating constructs is part of what needs critical attention. I continue to examine and generate an environment that engages with each individual student while also challenging and heightening their own knowledge and how they engage with the course content. Allowing for a conversation and varying notions of teaching rather than the traditional notions of collective expectation. It is a tireless effort and evolving approach, however I hold myself accountable in invigorating classical western concert dance with the incorporation of various bodies that make up the environment we teach and live among.