Job Description at the North Carolina Dance Project

*Please provide written description of your role as intern. What will you be doing? How will it be assisting the agency/organization? How will you be applying your Sociological Imagination to your role as intern? How will this internship help you in your future career goals? What connections might you make from this position that will be beneficial to your long-term plans?*

The NCDP is divided into three separate areas: the Jan Van Dyke Dance Company, the NC Dance Festival and the School at City Arts. I will be working with the NCDF and the School. The company is tiny; there are only four salaried workers, and they are only allowed to work 30 hour weeks. Basically, they take all the free labor they can get. As for function, NCDF brings in performing artists/choreographers to offer master classes at an affordable price for aspiring professional dancers. In the late summer/fall, they host a tour of performances. It is the key note event of their year. They purposefully offer the master classes and ticket prices below market price so that the art is more accessible to all populations. The artists/choreographers are also brought in to put on performances for the local community. NCDF sends performers into schools in the triad to bring modern dance to as many young people as possible. They really strive to open up art to all populations, not just the bourgeois white community that dance is normally limited to. Because of that, it is extremely important to record the demographics of everyone in attendance at classes, performance and workshops. Part of my job will be to document the demographics and to publish them in a readable, transferable way. I looked over previous demographics, and it’s still mostly young, white women coming out to a lot of the events. Part of my internship will involve thinking of ways to expand NCDF truly to appeal to everyone. That will involve my sociological imagination, but I’m not sure how, yet. It has to be really intimidating for racial minorities to try and “infiltrate” something that is stereotypically an upper class white art (even though NCDF isn’t snooty). A lot of my job in this section of the Dance Project will be working with budgeting, as well. I’ve already worked with Anne Morris, my supervisor, on adjusting the budget and evaluating where we need more money. Much of this also involves applying to grants. I’ve been editing and reworking grant applications to fit their needs for this season. That’s probably the biggest thing I’ll be doing. On a smaller scale, I’ll be distributing posters around the city and starting the social media campaign for the big Festival show in the fall.

Since this is the 25th year of the Festival, I’ve been brainstorming how to make it a huge celebration. So far we’ve decided to open up the Greensboro performance site to high school students. Before the professional artist perform, young students will be presenting site specific works around the venue to create a moving art gallery as audience members come into the UNCG dance theater. I’m in correspondence with high school teachers to make sure the choreography idea fits into their curriculums, and to make sure they have all the necessary supplies. We might try a similar idea at the Boone and Raleigh sites, but working with their city ordinances might be more difficult. I really have to figure that out, too. This is turning into a long term thing. My supervisors have already expressed their want for me to stay on for another season or two, which is something I am very much interested in doing.

I’m also working with Lauren Trollinger in the School at City arts. This is the section of NCDP that focuses on youth classes. This area is probably where I will be spending most of my time. Lauren already has me working on press releases, flyers and contacting schools/performance venues. I’ve learned how to register students for classes and how to do all the basic office tasks (checking the voicemail and answering FAQs). The School also has a Performance Company that does community outreach. The kids and adults that dance for the Company go into elementary schools to introduce modern dance to other kids. It’s a really interesting idea; children reaching out to children through dance. It provides a realistic goal for the audience children, as if to say, “Look, we’re so similar. This is totally real and you can be an artist, too!” This will involve a lot of contact with children on my part. We’ll see how that goes.

Finally, for the School, I am looking for ways to introduce the Performance Company to art. It’s funny; they reach out to children, but they still require so much guidance and being reached to themselves. So I’m finding affordable professional performance and classes to take them to, and other ways for them to volunteer in the state. A lot of this will include creating fundraisers. In fact, so much of what I do depends on finding money. I’m quantifying art, and I kind of hate that. Art isn’t quantifiable, in my humble opinion. Which brings me to my sociological question that I’m thinking about exploring: Can we put a price on something that gives us such a subjective fulfillment? Can we put a price on the experience of stereotypically disadvantaged people? One thing that I’ve noticed about modern dance is that it typically attracts people without power: women, children, people of color, and people in poverty. NCDP is run entirely by women; all the teachers in the School are female, all the administration is female (including a woman of color), and the founder of NCDP is also female. We’re a group of women, an already disadvantaged group in the power scale, and we’re artists on top of that. Modern dance is such a beautiful art of self-discovery and expression, and there is so much power in it, but it’s a power you can’t measure materially. You don’t see powerful white men trying modern dance, and when you do see men in dance, they are assumed to be effeminate (without societal power).

To pin it down even more succinctly, I’d like to see how the women in this organization assert power in the community, and how they justify themselves as powerful beings in a world that doesn’t want to acknowledge us. Durkheim was so painfully right when he said we can’t dissociate ourselves from our social experiences. Since this is such a personal issue for my identity, as well, I’m struggling with how to observe in an unbiased manner.