

ANYTHING BUT ROUTINE

by Morgan Collier

“ I’m not just trying to make them amazing dancers, I am trying to make them hunger for excellence at everything they do in life. ”

—Brixey Blankenship-Cozad

From the bright lights of a Saturday night on an AstroTurf field to vibrant colors hitting a stage in a dimly lit theatre, dancers move to the rhythm of music. For Lamar University Dance Team coordinator, Brixey Blankenship-Cozad, dance is more than just a routine; it is passion poured into movement, creating a career that exemplifies a can-do attitude. For the LU Dance Team, it is more than a hobby; it is a place to learn life lessons while expressing their talent through art.

Blankenship-Cozad said she has been dancing since she was 2 and finds it therapeutic to create and perform. “There are no boundaries or expectations to be met for yourself,” she said. “Every routine or piece I set for a show is a challenge, and I want to constantly challenge and push myself with the routines and other creative channels in order to grow.”

One of Blankenship-Cozad’s team members, senior education major Callie Macon, believes that through the dance program, she has experienced more than just dance routines. “We are learning a lot about social interactions through working all kinds of events in the community and feeling confident about talking to people in the real world to promote our school,” Macon said.

Senior education major Nicole Hardy, said being a team member has taught her valuable career skills. “In a way, this is our job,” she said. “You have to get things done by a deadline, you have to listen to an authority figure to accomplish a goal and through this you learn how to be a professional.”

According to Hardy, during her four years in the program, she has grown as a dancer and person. “Dance-wise, there are so many technical skills and ways of dancing that I never thought I could accomplish,” she said. “It isn’t easy to balance everything when you have work, practice and you have to study for finals. It is just like being an adult; you have to figure it out as you go along and prioritize everything.”

The LU Dance Team also values diversity, offering hip-hop routines, pop, jazz and more.

“I never experienced dance routines such as Bollywood or salsa in high school,” Hardy said. “It is really cool to

come here and be able to do different types of [dance] styles.”

Blankenship-Cozad said she pushes her students to become great. “If you are great at what you do, there is no reason you should have to talk about it. Your actions should show it,” she said. “That is what I teach in this program. I’m not just trying to make them amazing dancers, I am trying to make them hunger for excellence at everything they do in life.”

Three-year team veteran and senior mechanical engineering major Hannah Ross said each year is different from the last, but the unifying factor between every year is the coach, the program and the officers. “Brixey is the most amazing coach I have ever had,” Ross said. “She has the ability to pull greatness out of anybody. She sees potential in people and she won’t give up until she gets what she sees out of you. She will never give up on you or the program.”

Blankenship-Cozad teaches her students to drive themselves as individuals toward the reward. “Don’t shoot for the minimum required to get by,” she said, “shoot for the best. Everything you do counts. Our mind is stronger than we think, and so is our body.”

A support system for the program is the LU Dance Team alumni who come back to help with dances. “I am thankful that I have that group,” Blankenship-Cozad said. “If it weren’t for my alumni, the program wouldn’t be built to the level it is today.”

Dance team alumna and assistant coordinator Jaleeca Morris, from Orange, inspires and encourages the students that come through the program. “I have been in their shoes before, so I understand and can relate to the girls on the team,” she said.



LU Dance Team coordinator and adjunct instructor of dance Brixey Blankenship-Cozad, foreground, stands with her 24-member award-winning team and the 13 dance team alumni, in black on left, who provide invaluable help throughout the year.

“When the girls get down on themselves, I tell them that they are here for a reason so dance with a purpose.”

Each summer, the LU Dance Team competes at a camp of Blankenship-Cozad’s choosing to grow the talent in the program. It started with nine veteran dancers and has grown each year since the start, said Blankenship-Cozad.

“We won first the first year, so the next year my goal was to bring more people. We did and won again,” Blankenship-Cozad said. “We wanted to try something new, so we went to Alabama, where all of the huge schools go to compete and our team won first in its division there as well.”

According to Macon, the dance team has been able to prove their talents by competing successfully with big-name universities. “We are growing so much that we are able to do more challenging things, and that is how we keep the program excelling,” Hardy said.

Blankenship-Cozad said she instills into her team that they are blessed, beautiful and talented so to never settle nor give up. “I don’t believe in being lazy. Even when I go out there to dance with them, I give it my all and show

them that they can do this for as long as they want,” she said.

Macon, Hardy and Ross are proud to have made a name for the Lamar University Dance Team and be ambassadors for the school. They, as well as Blankenship-Cozad, hope the program gets bigger and better each year.

“We are beginning to slowly change things. We are starting our own traditions,” Macon said. “We are growing, and seeing that happen is what I enjoy the most.”



At the end of each year, the team gives a public performance joining with the LU Department of Theatre and Dance and other community dance teams as well as teams from the other universities. The team performs 34 numbers choreographed by professionals from LA, Houston, Dallas and New York.

LU faculty and staff are eligible to receive one free ticket to the annual show scheduled for May 5 & 6.

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Counseling program receives accreditation

The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs has granted accreditation to the Clinical Mental Health Counseling (M.Ed. degree) on-campus and on-line programs for the period of two years through October 31, 2018. “The work of all faculty and staff in the Department of Counseling and Special Populations,” **Dean Robert Spina** said, “reflects the commitment in the college and university to serve our students, stakeholders and the community by exceeding the highest standards.”

Innovative online program focuses on tech

New to the college, the Master of Education in Digital Learning and Leading is an innovative online program that combines technology training with advanced leadership skills. It prepares students to transform different educational environments by using advanced methods and technologies to support various learning styles. The program aims to keep educators at the forefront of today’s evolving digital learning landscape by training them to be leaders in their chosen fields.

Titus invited to summit

Through his interest in and contributions to STEM education research, **Freddie Titus**, assistant professor of teacher education, was invited to exchange ideas about improving science and mathematics teacher education at the Summit on Stimulating Research and Innovation for Preservice Education of STEM Teachers in High-Need Schools. The National Science Foundation Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship Program supports the initiative to help retain teachers in high-need schools.

Carlisle named site visitor **Robert Carlisle**, distance clinical professor, was invited to join the editorial boards of a regional and national journal in the field of counseling and recently became an approved site visitor for the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs.



From left, students Timberlyn Cook, Kiersten Lamb, Kaitlyn Ezell, Sarah Henderson, Teresa Marble

Students study in Italy and Mexico

The growth of LU’s study abroad program has allowed undergraduate teacher education students the opportunity to study in Bologna, Italy, through a program sponsored by Salisbury University under the direction of **Patty Dean**, an associate professor at Salisbury and a professional colleague of **Andrea Karlin**, professor of teacher education. The students spent three weeks with counterparts from Salisbury studying creative arts in the elementary school. “It was astounding to see our LU students blossom from this experience,” Karlin said.

For the second year, **Rick Carter**, professor of health and kinesiology, led an undergraduate study abroad team to Xalapa, Mexico, to investigate health attributes of the Mexican people and to interact with students from the Universidad of Veracruzana, Xalapa, Mexico. The students visited many medical and community delivery sites, focusing on obesity interventions used in Mexico.



College named Grand Champion of Homecoming 2016

Homecoming is one of Lamar University’s biggest traditions on campus. Last fall, led by **Tammy Comeaux** and **Tilisa Thibodeaux**, the college created the Mirabeau B. Lamar steamboat for the “Rollin’ Out the Red” homecoming parade, complete with smoke stacks, oars and an operable paddle wheel. More than 20 students, faculty and staff across various departments within the college participated in the event, and **Dean Robert Spina** served as the ship’s captain with **Associate Dean William Holmes** as first mate. Their efforts, enlivened by releasing red balloons and powder poppers, earned them the judges vote for Grand Champion.

➤ **Singh awarded fellowship** **Mamta Singh**, assistant professor of teacher education, received the 2016 Presidential Faculty Fellowship in Support of Undergraduate Research/Creative Activity. The award, which confers the title of presidential faculty fellow and has a \$15,000 stipend, encourages faculty-led collaboration with Lamar University undergraduates in scholarly activities.

➤ **Leadership earns Villate recognition** The Lamar University Sigma Beta Chapter of Kappa Delta Pi, the international honor society in education, awarded **Vanessa Villate**, assistant professor of teacher education, the 2016 Regional Chapter Counselor Award for the west region, which comprises over 100 chapters. She has been counselor of the chapter for eight years.

➤ **Flamez leads association** The International Association of Marriage and Family Counselors has named **Brand Flamez**, distance clinical professor, president of the organization. She recently completed a book to be published by ACA this year titled *The Counselor’s Guide to the Dissertation Process: Where to Start and How to Finish*.