Researching Dancer's Information Seeking in the Digital Age

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Intent: To generate new knowledge about the information seeking of dancers through data collected from an independent study course in the MLS program of the University of Maryland.

Scope: Preferred past and current sources of dance information (i.e. dancer health, audition and dancer class schedules) and barriers to that information from the point of view of dancers who are pre-professional, professional or currently studying dance in Bachelor or Master of Fine Arts programs.

Research Questions: 1) How and why do dancers use – or not-use – computers for – what type(s) of – dance information? 2) How often do dancers use libraries (public or academic) to find dance information? 3) What are the sources of dance information used? 4) What are the major barriers that dancers face in finding dance information? 5) Who are dancers most likely to speak to first when they are looking for dance information? 6) What are dancers' suggestions to libraries for improving their services to dancers?

Methods: Surveys with thirty-four dancers who specialize in a variety of dance styles and are dancing at either the pre-professional, professional levels or in an academic setting.

Research Findings: 1) All dancers surveyed had access to computers and used them to find dance information; 2) the dancers rarely used libraries (public or academic) to find dance information; 3) some of the most popular sources of dance information were videos and DVDs, books, and online reference sources; 4) some of the most frequently-mentioned barriers dancers faced in locating dance information included dance company websites that vary in their quality and accessibility; the unavailability of a centralized online source for dance information and a lack of training in how to search for dance materials; 5) the dancers preferred to rely on other dancers (especially through social networking media such as FaceBook and MySpace) for dance information instead of librarians; and 6) dancers recommended that libraries offer a wider array of dance materials; centralize online dance sources, and train library staff to help dancers locate dance-related information.

Significance & Relationship with the Conference Theme: The findings can advance the understanding of the needs of dancers, and improve library services for this particular user population whose information seeking has been minimally addressed in the library and information science literature. This project also addresses general topics of concern to libraries such as user studies; the use of Web 2.0, social networking and new media and information literacy.