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Faculty Profile

Sam Baumgarten

Professor Sam Baumgarten's academic title is Associate Professor of Movement Arts. To many outside of academia, the definition of Movement Arts may be a bit esoteric. One might legitimately ask, what is Movement Arts and what does a professor of Movement Arts teach? In the case of Sam Baumgarten, the answer to those questions can be found both at the College and at the Burnell Campus School in Bridgewater.

Over a career that has spanned twenty-two years, Professor Baumgarten has been a highly respected instructor at the Burnell Campus Elementary school. He is currently a member of the Movement Arts, Health Promotion and Leisure Studies Department. His general professional specialty is physical education with emphasis on dance. As part of his regular teaching load at the College, Professor Baumgarten works closely with prospective teachers advising them on how they can incorporate dance into the physical education curriculum. In his years as a dance specialist, Professor Baumgarten has used Rudolf Laban's analysis of movement as a foundation for developing units and lessons. As Professor Baumgarten describes his Laban-based approach to dance, "Rather than being asked to focus on precise steps and techniques (not that these are not important or taught at appropriate times), students respond to open-ended tasks, selected from various movement themes, and create their own sequences or sentences. These sequences are practiced and refined so that children can polish their skills, and then the sequences are shared with the class. This process of dance-making and sharing helps children feel that the dance is something that all can do and allows them to experience dance as participants, creators, performers and observers."

Professor Baumgarten's passion for dance and enhancing the creative talents of his students at the Burnell School has been linked to programs offered by the College. Since 1984, when Professor Cora Wells ran the program, Burnell students have been given the opportunity to dance with the BSC Dance Company, and they now participate annually in the Winterdance concert. Professor Baumgarten feels strongly that participation by the young people in programs such as Winterdance deepens their knowledge of dance and allows them to understand the benefits of an "on-stage" experience. One student from the Burnell School continued on with Winterdance until he completed high school and then went to college on a dance scholarship.

One of the key philosophical foundations of the dance program at Bridgewater State College that Professor Baumgarten emphasizes is "dance for all." He believes that the dance experience should be open to all ages and to all levels of talent from elementary school up through older adults. Baumgarten is the first to admit that his dance experience came as a result of Professor Wells' encouraging him to join the performing group. As he proudly says, "With little technique training, but with the ability to improvise and create movement, I became a performer - something I never expected in my lifetime." Since that initial performance, Professor Baumgarten has participated in numerous Winterdance events and also the Dance Kaleidoscope concerts put on by Professor Nancy Moses. Professor Baumgarten is certainly a visible example of someone who practices what he preaches.

Although Professor Baumgarten spends most of his time in the classroom, he is actively involved in a number of community-based programs. He just completed the 21st Bridgewater Kids Road Race, a one-mile event for K-8 students and their parents. This year there were 253 runners. In the Spring, Professor Baumgarten heads the Youth Track Program in Bridgewater for 8-14 year olds. A few years ago, the program was expanded to include 30 special needs children from the area. And for twenty years he has been principal organizer of the Jump Rope for Heart event that has raised over $80,000 for the American Heart Association. As to the future, Professor Baumgarten is working with an international children's dance association to organize its first United States conference at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Professor Baumgarten is thoroughly committed to children's physical education. He has dedicated his professional life to ensuring that young people have a full range of opportunities to become physically fit. He sees dance, in particular, as a means for all boys and girls to enhance their motor skills, strengthen cardio-vascular capabilities, increase muscle development and learn to express themselves through creative movement. If you meet Professor Baumgarten, he is likely to greet you with the following observation — "If, somewhere inside you, there is a dancer waiting to emerge, come to BSC. I think you'll find a place to let it out!"