

Proposal for an Area of Existing and Emerging Excellence:

Critical Practices and Pedagogies

Participating Departments:

Department of Communication Studies, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Department of Dance, College of Arts+Architecture
Department of Theatre, College of Arts+Architecture
Department of Reading and Elementary Education, Cato College of Education

Collaborating Leaders:

Gretchen Alterowitz
Dr. Kaustavi Sarkar

Participating Faculty:

Jason Edward Black, Ph.D
Kaja Dunn
Dr. Tehia Glass
Dr. Daniel Grano
Dr. Erin Miller
Dr. Marissa Nesbit
Dr. Stephanie Norander
Dr. Margaret M. Quinlan
Tamara Williams

Keywords:

Queer Studies, Practice-as-Research, Critical Race Theory, Activism, Transnational
Feminist Praxis

Executive Summary: *Critical Practices and Pedagogies* highlights the work of scholar/ artist/ educators whose research and teaching examines and questions established orders--systems of perquisite, power, and privilege, traditional histories and canons, and standards of beauty and achievement--to reimagine the socio-cultural and political landscapes as sites of shared power and equity. This work is often related to the theoretical lenses of cultural studies--critical race theory, intersectionality, transnational feminist theories, and queer theory-- and/or to working across disciplines--the digital humanities, for example, as they provide new perspectives on established ways of thinking and creating. As research and teaching outcomes are informed by theoretical and interdisciplinary understandings, so are new theories developed and affected by and through the practices embodied in this work.

Cultural or Area Studies, and the theoretical frameworks that support them, are important to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice efforts, and key players in contemporary scholarship and pedagogy. As lenses through which scholars, artists, and students learn to see differently, these theories help uncover intersectional relationships among experiences of race, gender, sexuality, class, ability, and nationality, constructions of power and privilege, and the impact of cultural products (curricula, pedagogy, literature, film and video, dance, theatre, music). Additionally, scholars and pedagogues in the arts, education, and humanities help refine these frameworks. Practice as Research approaches, for example, enable new ways of understanding what we learn through doing, and help us understand the interrelationships of theory and practice. Our contemporary use of intersectional analysis is one example of how theory is refined through its application. As theories are applied through classroom spaces, artistic practice, and research dissemination, they help us to conjure alternate worlds, centering indigenous epistemologies while dismantling traditional hierarchies and systems of privilege as we write, create, lead, and teach using new methods and priorities.

For scholar/ artist/ educators working across disciplines, new approaches, and often, the presence of interdisciplinary partners, provokes a rethinking of established theories and methodologies. For example, ongoing digital humanities projects across dance, architecture, and computer science at UNC Charlotte, “Sensate Technicities” (community performance) and “Plavana” (virtual reality dance-game), critically examine assumptions and received narratives about technology as digital making, and help us reimagine it as culturally embedded *techne*, or making and doing across the arts, education, humanities, and sciences. Further, interdisciplinary projects create historically and politically contextualized choreographic and pedagogical narratives enabling questioning of technology as medium and message.

Evidence for Excellence: Critical Practices and Pedagogies faculty members demonstrate excellence in research and in teaching, and are well-known for innovative pedagogies that confront social problems and issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and freedom. The group contains established collaborators, such as Dr. Tehia Glass and Dr. Erin Miller, who head the Anti-Racism in Urban Education graduate certificate program offered through the College of Education, and others whose work (as suggested in the R1 call), approaches “society’s most complex and urgent societal challenges that often transcend traditional departmental or disciplinary boundaries.” In selected discussions below and demonstrated further in individual CVs, members of this group have broad impact on public and professional education, a significant record of engagement with Charlotte communities, and expertise in critical and interdisciplinary strategies that allow people to think through shared problems and strengthen communities. Group members have established ties to the Charlotte Teacher Institute, Charlotte Arts and Science Council, Kannapolis City Schools, Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts + Culture, Levine Museum of the New South, the Charlotte History Museum, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School district, and the Indian Association of Charlotte, among others. Many are award-winning teachers, including Dr. Margaret Quinlin, Bonnie E. Cone Early-Career Professorship in Teaching (2015-18), and two College of Arts + Architecture Board of Governors Teaching Award winners, Gretchen Alterowitz and Tamara Williams. With the intersecting focus of education, community-engaged work, and anti-racist and inclusive praxes, this newly-formed group is especially well-situated to serve Charlotte’s diverse populations. Further funding would lead to joint publications, symposia, and community and professional outreach.

In addition to Drs. Miller and Glass, group members have significant history, expertise, and experience in anti-racist praxis, often involving the arts. Kaja Dunn and Tamara Williams are members of the College of Arts+Architecture Black Arts Initiative. Dunn developed Anti-Racism modules for Actor’s Equity Workplace Inclusion Lab; has pioneered work on Race and Intimacy Choreography, including historical contexts; and co-convened the first ever summit on Race and Intimacy at Princeton University. This summit centered the expertise of Black women in an array of marginalized identities. Dunn was a keynote speaker at The Kennedy Center College Theatre Festival, NC Theatre Producer’s Conference, and the Association of Theatre in Higher Education, Micheal Chekov Institute. Dancer/ scholar Tamara Williams’ extensive Ring Shout project uses critical race theory to explore interactions among American history and the erasure of Ring Shout, an expressive practice of enslaved people living in the Southern United States. Williams contextualizes Black dance in the United States within and outside academia (Harvey B Gantt Center for African-American Arts + Culture, the Charlotte History Museum, and the McLeod Plantation in Charleston, SC).

In his academic writing and speaking engagements, Dr. Don Grano investigates relationships among sport and race. Recent publications include Grano and Butterworth, eds. *Sport, Rhetoric, and Political Struggle* (New York: Peter Lang, 2019) and [lead article] “Football After Fragmentation: Brain Banking, Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy, and Racial Biosociality in the NFL,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 17, no. 4 (2020): 339-359.

Other group members investigate questions of gender and sexuality through their research, teaching, and community engagement. In addition to her work in Communications Studies, Margaret Quinlan is a Core Faculty Member of the Interdisciplinary Health Psychology Ph.D. Program at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. She explores how communication creates, resists and transforms knowledges about bodies and critiques power structures in order to empower individuals who are marginalized inside and outside of healthcare systems. Part of her innovative pedagogy involves creating with her students, health documentaries that have won regional Emmy-awards. See for example, Pope, N., Michalik, M., Maine, S., Rouse, M., Davis, C., Sadler, O., Cameron, S., Medlin, E., & Bataba, D. (COMM MA Student Producers), Quinlan, M. M., & Johnson, B. (Senior Researchers) (2017). *1 in 8: Communicating (In)fertility* (draft). Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/7z9jfZioS04>. In this 42-minute documentary, Reproductive and Endocrinology and Infertility (REI) patients, doctors, nurses and fertility allies discuss their positive and negative experiences with infertility and fertility treatments (e.g., social support, practitioner-patient communication).

Convener Gretchen Alterowitz, Interim Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, College of Arts + Architecture (Spring 2021 and Spring 2019), and co-convener Dr. Kaustavi Sarkar foreground critical reflection on embodied praxis across queer/ feminist lenses across classical western (ballet) and classical Indian (odissi) dance forms. Alterowitz was the 2019-2020 Faculty Fellow, Communication Across the Curriculum, UNC Charlotte, where she developed and supported faculty-led community around teaching, learning, and Communication Across the Curriculum principles. Her academic writing and pedagogy focus on reimagining the ballet class and ballet choreography from feminist, queer, and democratic perspectives. Odissi soloist Sarkar, is a recent National Endowment for the Arts grant winner for bringing together Indian Dance and American Communities. Her interdisciplinary experimentation, writing, choreography, pedagogy, and community engagement using transnational feminist theories to examine how classical Indian forms operate across the globe within community praxis and mainstream arts contexts. Through Continuing Education, Dr. Sarkar directs a certificate program on Classical Indian Dance Pedagogy that attracts dancers from around the world.

Alignment with Regional and National Priorities:

This proposal aligns with the College of Arts + Architecture's Strategic Plan to develop vibrant cross-disciplinary partnerships both within the College and with other colleges and individuals across UNCC. This initiative will advance our institutional mission and academic relevance by laying the foundation for a center of influence and hub of research activity that impacts all dimensions of our learning and creative community and that it informs both existing programs and proposed ones (for example the MFA in Arts and Civic Practice, which is currently under development). This proposal addresses the University's mission by: leveraging our "location in the state's largest city to offer internationally competitive programs of research and creative activity" that reinforces our "commitment to addressing the cultural, economic, educational, environmental, health, and social needs of the greater Charlotte region" and beyond. This proposal addresses University values that foster "A robust intellectual environment that values social and cultural diversity, free expression, collegiality, integrity, and mutual respect."

This work also addresses UNC System priorities. As the UNC System states, our universities will be critical if North Carolina is to "face today's challenges and those on the horizon, from shifting economic demands to an increasingly diverse population." This will involve the development of relevant and innovative areas of study that will capture the imagination of this state's youth and that explore the complexities of 21st century cultural dynamics. At the state level, this proposal addresses the North Carolina Arts Council's goal to "Lead to Ensure a Strong Future for the Arts", which aims to "strengthen the arts industry's capacity to embrace diversity and engage our state's changing communities."

This proposal also supports the National Endowment for the Humanities' Strategic Planning Goal 1: to "Provide opportunity and access for all Americans who wish to pursue knowledge in the Humanities;" their objective of "Expanding Access to the Humanities in Traditionally Underserved Communities; Facilitate Humanities Scholarship at the Post-Secondary Level;" and their strategy to "encourage collaboration between humanities scholars and academics of other disciplines."

Similarly, this proposal supports the National Endowment for the Arts' Strategic Planning Goal 2: "Cultivate Public Engagement with, and Access to, Various Forms of Excellent Art across the Nation" as well as their Objective to "Provide opportunities for the American people to engage with the arts; Objective 2.2 Provide opportunities for the American people to acquire knowledge and skills in the arts at all stages of life; Objective 2.3 Provide opportunities for the arts to be integrated into the fabric of community life." In these ways, this initiative addresses ingrained legacies that hinder institutions of higher learning.

Supporting Documents: Names and titles (in tabular form), and a short description of the contribution or expertise of each member.

Name	Title	Contribution/Expertise
Gretchen Alterowitz	Associate Professor of Dance	Dance Studies/Ballet Studies, Practice as Research, Women's and Gender Studies, Feminist Pedagogy
Dr. Kaustavi Sarkar	Assistant Professor of Dance	South Asian Studies, Dance Studies, Digital Humanities, Queer Studies, Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis, Practice-as-Research
Jason Edward Black, Ph.D.	Professor and Chair of Communication Studies	Rhetorical studies and social change with an emphasis on Indigenous activism, LGBTQIA2S world making, and Black liberation through decolonial, queer, and critical race theories.
Kaja Dunn	Assistant Professor of Theatre	Black Theatre, Critical Race Theory, Womanist Theory, Theatre and Race Pedagogy and Praxis, Acting
Dr. Tehia Glass	Associate Professor of Elementary Education and Educational Psychology	Anti-racism in curriculum and lessons, culturally responsive teaching, and teacher education
Dr. Daniel Grano	Professor of Communication Studies	Sport and politics, emphasizes on race, health, labor, the body, religion, and public memory
Dr. Erin Miller	Associate Professor of Reading and Elementary Education	Critical Whiteness Studies, Racial Identity Theory, Early Literacy, White Teacher Identity Studies

Dr. Marissa Nesbit	Assistant Professor of Dance	Dance Education; K12 Dance Pedagogy, Curriculum, and Assessment
Dr. Stephanie Norander	Associate Professor of Communication Studies	Communication Pedagogy, Organizational Communication, Gender and Organizations, Feminist Theory, Qualitative Research Methodologies
Dr. Margaret M. Quinlan	Associate Professor of Communication Studies	<p>Feminist pedagogy, Communication Education, Instructional Communication, Communication pedagogy</p> <p><i>Health Communication</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · the nexus of public perceptions of science, technology and medicine · women's health, especially reproductive health, social media, motherhood, parenting practitioner-patient communication, medical expertise · narrative and aesthetics approaches to health, disability and illness
Tamara Williams	Assistant Professor of Dance	Black Dance Performance, Critical Race Theory, African Diaspora Religion and Spirituality