

Rebecca Galt

## **Project Overview**

**Project Title:** Dance for Parkinson's

### **Project Description**

I am constantly finding ways in which dance is applicable to what I am studying in psychology and medicine. One aspect of dance that I have always been amazed with is the therapeutic role it has played in my life and in the life of others. Two summers ago I heard about the Mark Morris Dance Group, and I was very interested in their Dance for Parkinson's program in which they work to bring dance to people with Parkinson's disease. Having a passion for both dance and medicine, dance therapy has always been a topic of interest to me that I would love to learn more about and explore. This past summer I shadowed a neurologist and while I was there I came in contact with many patients with Parkinson's disease. Learning about their disease and observing their symptoms firsthand really impacted me more than anything else I experienced during my time in the hospital. Being a dancer I have always cherished my range of motion and my ability to create movement. Parkinson's disease is a chronic and progressive movement disorder. The disease affects the nerve cells in the brain that produce dopamine, a chemical that sends messages to the part of the brain that controls coordination and movement. Some symptoms of Parkinson's disease include muscle rigidity, tremors, and changes in speech and walk. The idea of bringing movement and coordination back into the lives of people with Parkinson's disease gets me very excited and eager to educate myself more on the topic of dance therapy.

I desire to learn more about the methods used to help people with Parkinson's disease through dance, and I believe that this grant will help me discover the benefits and practices of dance therapy while concentrating on Parkinson's disease. For me, this project will begin my exploration into the potential uses of dance as treatment and to help me gain a better perspective on the real benefits of dance for Parkinson's patients. It also will be exciting to uncover more associations between my academic and artistic studies.

The Mark Morris Dance Group provides training and enrichment programs for everyone interested in the intersection of dance and Parkinson's disease. The enrichment program is an overview of Dance for Parkinson's approaches and best practices, and it is designed to provide a comprehensive and intimate look at core components of the Dance for Parkinson's program. My plan is to attend this workshop and use all the information I acquire from there and from my own research around Virginia to help me gain a comprehensive perspective on how dance is helping people with Parkinson's disease. This compilation of information about Parkinson's disease and my experiences will all be incorporated into a paper (approximately 10-15 pages) that I can present to the Center of Undergraduate Excellence. I also plan on making a poster and displaying it at the National Dance Education Organization (NDEO), and International Association for Dance Medicine & Science (IADMS).

In the spring semester I am choreographing for the dance department's Spring Dance Concert. I am using the information I learned from my initial research about Parkinson's disease to inspire my dance piece. The concept I am currently working with is the thought of not having the ability to be in control of your own movement. This thought was the first emotional response I had while learning about Parkinson's disease because as a dancer it is difficult to imagine not being in complete control over my body. I also intend to apply for further funding in which I will take this comprehensive understanding I will have on Parkinson's patients and dance therapy and use it to further explore the topic in an artistic way. In the end I hope to finish up with a dance piece that fully embodies what I witnessed and learned about Parkinson's disease.

I find that the biggest limitation will be getting support and involvement from people with Parkinson's and their support groups here in the Charlottesville community. Ideally I would love to speak with many different people who are diagnosed with Parkinson's disease for my research. My plan is to attempt to form relationships this semester with people who have Parkinson's around the Virginia area so that when I return from the workshop I will have more support. Also, since I will not be certified as a Dance for Parkinson's teacher I will most likely never be able to hold my own class for community members with Parkinson's disease. However, I do plan on attending classes taught by certified Parkinson's teachers, observing how they interact with their patients, and interviewing the instructors about how they adapt their classes for people with movement disabilities. There are many locations in northern Virginia where dance for Parkinson's classes are being offered that I plan to attend one. There is also a Senior Center in the area that I will look into trying to teach a movement study at. I am going to present everything as an exploratory study that would be fun and engaging for everyone rather than as a therapy that is directed towards treating people with disabilities. Hopefully through teaching movement studies in which I apply some of the methods I learned during the workshop I will gain useful information and insight into how it is to work with people with limited movement.

## **Timeline**

Fall semester I began making connections with professors, physicians, and Parkinson's patients in the Charlottesville community. Some ways I accomplished this was through contacting the people who run the Support Group for Parkinson's patients and the Senior Center here in Charlottesville to learn ways I can get involved. My advisor, Peter Brunjes, is also a professor in the Neurology and Psychology department and was able to give me more resources and reading material. I also plan on talking to the neurologist I shadowed back in Miami, FL, and psychology professors I have classes with now.

Spring semester I will continue researching about the disease and finding people who know about Parkinson's disease and can further my understanding. I also will be working on my dance piece that is influenced by my research. I received

a DVD created by the Dance for PD program that leads me through the founding teachers favorite moves for the class they developed in collaboration with the Brooklyn Parkinson Group. I also plan on watching and possibly aiding in a class taught by a certified Dance for PD teacher here in Virginia. In March I will be attending the Dance for Parkinson's workshop in Ann Arbor, MI. At the workshop they focus on core philosophies and methods, issues related to working with people with Parkinson's, safety considerations, integration of music, and general teaching approaches that can be applied to somatic practice, yoga, and physical therapy for people with Parkinson's. I will document my experiences there and will hopefully gain some insightful information and enough knowledge to come back to Charlottesville and have a better handle on what information I further want to research.

I plan on writing a paper about my experience and presenting it to the Center of Undergraduate Excellence along with a recording of my choreography.

**Budget**

<b>Dance for PD Workshop in NY</b>	
Workshop Cost.....	\$250-300
Airfare.....	\$340
Hotel.....	\$150
Living expenses.....	\$60
<b>Travel in VA</b>	
Class costs.....	\$100
Gas (to NOVA) + food.....	\$50
<b>Camera</b>	
Memory card, Camera, & tripod.....	\$200
<b>Total.....</b>	<b>\$1,200</b>