

Sharon Oberst – Award for Excellence in Teaching



If Sharon Oberst had been told at age 17 she would end up a dance professor, she wouldn't have been very happy. By that age, she had devoted 13 years of pain and sacrifice to becoming a professional ballet dancer. At the age of four she began taking ballet and tap classes.

Living in Houston, she had many opportunities to study with great ballet masters from the Ballets Russes, the Royal Ballet, the New York City Ballet and American Ballet Theatre.

Oberst knew by age 11 she wanted to become a professional ballet dancer. It was her single focus from then on. She was so focused on her goal that she danced through injuries she should not have performed with.

Today, x-rays and MRIs tell a grim tale of multiple fractures, worn down cartilage and scar tissue from injuries she was unaware of. The cost was her performing career.

"I learned a lot about dancing during my time in the professional world. As a dance educator, I've learned a lot about everything else," Oberst says. "Had I not gone to college and then on to graduate school, I wouldn't have faced nearly the range of challenges, nor had the range of opportunities I have found on the academic side of the fence."

Oberst is thankful for the opportunities she's had in a university setting, including teaching and choreographing for

a blind tap dancer and a deaf body builder.

Prior to her 19 years of teaching at WOU, she earned a bachelor's in dance and a secondary teaching certification in dance and theatre from Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas. She was advised during her undergraduate career to get a graduate degree so she could teach dance at the college level. She did and she's glad she made the choice to study at University of Oregon to earn a master's in dance.

Since joining WOU, Oberst has choreographed and directed dozens of theatre, musical and dance productions. Most recently she directed and choreographed the *West Side Story* musical production in March.

Her students appreciate her hard work and dedication to all performances and classes.

WOU student Rebecca Chadd has known Oberst for two years and worked with her on "West Side Story." "Sharon is the most patient, composed professor I've had the privilege of working with. I am amazed at her professionalism and consistently positive attitude."

Chadd commended Oberst for her unwavering dedication to "West Side Story." While battling excruciating pain from a recent neck injury, Oberst made sure the cast stayed on track with choreography.

Colleague Deborah Jones characterizes Oberst as an outstanding educator, "a dedicated and caring mentor, giving of her time and self to encourage academic and personal growth."