

University of Florida – School of Theatre and Dance

Somatic for Dancers | Fall 2025

Instructor: Tracy Julias Shields

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Office Hours: email me to schedule an appointment

Class Meetings: Mondays & Wednesdays, 8:30–10:25 am

Location: CON G-11

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces dancers to somatic practices with an emphasis on Pilates principles, body awareness, and alignment. Through experiential movement, guided exploration, and reflective practice, students will cultivate tools for injury prevention, improved efficiency, and expressive range in dance. The course emphasizes personal discovery, self-awareness, and application of somatic principles to technical and creative practice.

COURSE OBJECTIVES / LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the semester, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate increased body awareness and proprioception through somatic and Pilates-based practices.
2. Apply principles of postural alignment and spinal organization to enhance dance technique.
3. Integrate breath, core engagement, and movement efficiency into performance and rehearsal.
4. Identify and release habitual muscular tension to improve mobility and prevent injury.
5. Translate somatic and Pilates exercises into expressive, controlled, and fluid dance movement.

REQUIRED & RECOMMENDED MATERIALS

- **Recommended Text (not required):** *Return to Life Through Contrololgy* by Joseph Pilates
- Yoga/Pilates mat, theraband, and journal for reflection
- Comfortable movement attire (bare feet or socks)

COURSE FORMAT

Classes will include a blend of:

- Guided somatic exploration and awareness practices
- Pilates-based mat work and conditioning
- Movement application to dance training
- Reflection through journaling or discussion

ASSIGNMENTS & ASSESSMENTS

- **Weekly Journals (30%)**
Short written reflections (1–2 paragraphs) on somatic discoveries and personal connections to dance training.
- **In-Class Participation & Engagement (40%)**
Active participation in all class activities, demonstrating focus, effort, respect, and application of feedback.
- **Final Integration Project (30%)**
A short written, creative, or movement-based exploration presented in class during Week 15. This is not a performance but a sharing of individual integration of course material.

GRADING SCALE (SOTD Standard)

- A = 93–100
- A- = 90–92
- B+ = 87–89
- B = 83–86

- B- = 80–82
- C+ = 77–79
- C = 73–76
- C- = 70–72
- D+ = 67–69
- D = 63–66
- D- = 60–62
- E = below 60

Note: A grade of “C” or better is required to count toward major requirements.

ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION POLICY (SOTD Standard)

- Attendance is required for this movement-based course.
- Students are allowed **2 absences** without penalty.
- A **3rd unexcused absence** will lower the final grade by 5%.
- On the **4th absence**, excused or unexcused, the student must meet with the instructor.
- Each additional unexcused absence = 5% deduction from the final grade.
- Three tardies = one unexcused absence.

Excused Absences include illness, serious family emergencies, official UF activities, and religious holidays (with documentation).

Make-Ups: Students with excused absences may complete an alternate written or experiential assignment at the instructor’s discretion.

COURSE SCHEDULE (subject to change)

Week 1: Introduction to Somatics & Pilates Principles; Neutral Alignment

Week 2: Breath Mechanics, Grounding & foot-toFloor Connection

Week 3: Core Activation, Pilates Mat Integration

Week 4: Spinal Articulation, Dance Application

Week 5: Flow, Movement Transitions, Improvisation

Week 6: Precision & Proprioception with small Apparatus

Week 7: Lower Body Mechanics & Dance Technique
Week 8: Upper Body Integration, Shoulder Mobility
Week 9: Rotation & Spiral Dynamics in Movement
Week 10: Mind Body Connection, Partner Work, Journaling
Week 11: Dynamic Stability, Standing Balance Challenges

Week 12: Recovery & Nervous System Regulation
Week 13: Integration of Somatic into Technique
Week 14: Flow & Expression, Pilates Principal Review
Week 15: Student-Led Exploration & Peer Teaching
Week 16: Closing Practice & Course Wrap-Up

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Academic Honesty

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge:

“We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code.”

Academic dishonesty (cheating, plagiarism, etc.) will result in disciplinary action.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Students requesting accommodations must first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc). The DRC will provide documentation, which must be presented to the instructor at the beginning of the semester.

Wellness Resources

- U Matter, We Care: 352-392-1575 | umatter@ufl.edu
- Counseling & Wellness Center: 352-392-1575 | www.counseling.ufl.edu
- Student Health Care Center: 352-392-1161

Equity & Inclusion

This course supports an inclusive learning environment that respects all identities, experiences, and perspectives. Students are expected to engage with openness, curiosity, and respect for others.