



# NEWS RELEASE

 Washington University in St. Louis

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## **WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY, COCA ANNOUNCE NEW MFA IN DANCE**

*Innovative degree program will welcome first class in fall of 2016*

(ST. LOUIS, MO) – The Performing Arts Department (PAD) in Arts & Sciences at Washington University in St. Louis, in collaboration with [COCA-Center of Creative Arts](#) — one of the nation’s foremost community arts schools — will launch a new Master of Fine Arts Degree in Dance in fall of 2016, administrators announced today.

The program, which is now accepting applications, combines faculty and studio resources from the PAD’s undergraduate Dance Program and from COCA’s nationally recognized dance division. The result will offer an innovative approach to teaching dance theory, technique, composition, improvisation, history and production, one that develops each dancer’s personal artistic practice while also encouraging a global perspective on dance studies, performance, pedagogy and choreography.

“Dance speaks to the body and to the mind,” said Mark Rollins, PhD, professor of philosophy in Arts & Sciences and chair of the PAD. “The great strength of the new MFA is how it seamlessly combines rigorous studio practice with an equally rigorous understanding of dance as an art form and expression of culture, and thus as one of the liberal arts.”

“Whether focusing on modern, ballet or jazz, our students will receive a solid grounding in dance technique while also incorporating the insights of history, theory, ethnology, somatics and other fields.”

Leading the MFA program will be Christine Knoblauch-O’Neal, professor of the practice in dance in the PAD, who spent 20 years with such companies as the American Ballet Theatre, the National Ballet and the Cincinnati Ballet.

Former Alvin Ailey stars Antonio Douthit-Boyd and Kirven Douthit-Boyd, who this summer were named COCA’s co-artistic directors of dance, will teach in the program, serving alongside distinguished PAD faculty. Candidates also will have the opportunity to perform with The Slaughter Project, the PAD’s professional company-in-residence, and to work with a variety of contemporary guest choreographers and répétiteurs.

Moving forward, both institutions will seek opportunities to co-sponsor visiting artists and choreographers-in-residence. Through the collaboration, COCA’s high school dance students, many of them preparing for postsecondary education after working their way up through COCA’s long-standing Pre-Professional and Talent Identified Program, will gain additional access and exposure to the resources offered at Washington University.

“COCA has always been committed to delivering the highest quality and most-progressive arts training and programming possible across the continuum of arts education — from introductory experiences to mastery,” said Kelly Pollock, COCA executive director. “This collaboration is a milestone that pushes our work further along that continuum. Our students will see firsthand what it takes to be competitive and successful at the university level and beyond.”

Over the past 16 years, COCA has had an excellent record — with 100 percent of the students enrolled in pre-professional programs matriculating into postsecondary schools or professional companies; many represent the first in their families to achieve this level of education. Nearly 70 percent of this group receives financial assistance while at COCA.

The Dance Program in the PAD emphasizes the study of dance as both an independent and collaborative art and as a global phenomenon expressed in a wide variety of contemporary and traditional forms. All full-time faculty possess academic credentials and backgrounds as professional dancer-choreographers. In addition, they pursue specific research interests ranging from somatic practices to ballet pedagogy and contemporary and traditional Asian dance.

### **About The Performing Arts Department in Arts & Sciences**

Housed in the Division of the Humanities in Arts & Sciences at Washington University, the PAD is dedicated to teaching the disciplines of theater and dance as fundamental parts of a liberal arts education.

The department's mission statement: "We believe that the practice and study of theater, dance and performance provide crucial interpretive windows into history and culture, deepening our understanding of diverse human experiences across time and around the globe."

### **About COCA**

Founded in 1986, COCA is the fourth largest multidisciplinary community arts center in the country and a national leader in innovative arts education. With a mission to enrich lives and build community through the arts, COCA serves 50,000 people of all ages and skill levels, from enthusiastic amateurs to emerging professionals — all taught by a faculty of distinguished arts educators.

From COCA: "We provide meaningful arts experiences in our own studios, gallery and theatres as well as in schools, community centers and corporate settings in order to build a vibrant St. Louis that is creative, connected and inclusive. To ensure diversity and inclusion in all of our programs we are committed to eliminating economic and social barriers to participation in the arts."