

A PE Dance Course Offers Fun Outlet to Students

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MIT Physical Education Hip Hop Dance Instructor Christin Collins began training as a dancer at the age of four and continued her education at Boston University where she completed a dance minor.

Though her background is in ballet and contemporary dance, Collins was drawn to the genre of hip-hop. "I fell in love with hip hop for its energy, audience accessibility, and its endless range of dance vocabulary." Since then she has been teaching hip hop for nine years total and five at MIT.

MIT student, Selam Gano '18, always enjoyed hip-hop music and dancing in her room but had never participated in any structured dance group or education. "I've never danced professionally and find following choreography really difficult, so I wanted to take hip hop as a PE class for more practice and also to have fun with it."

In the T-Club Lounge, Collins' expertise and Gano's enthusiasm combined. Gano found Collins' teaching style to be perfectly conducive for an activity that both requires high energy and a degree of vulnerability. "[Collins] was really good at helping students who had never danced before be comfortable with just trying it out and providing an environment where no one was ever really embarrassed or felt uncomfortable trying new things and following her choreography," described Gano. "We all messed up a lot, so there was never any reason to feel bad about it."

Hip hop demands a significant amount of practice and preparation to nail down even a short segment of choreography. Gano came to value dance for more than being a fun activity and physical release. "The PE class definitely gave me a better appreciation for the art and for its performers," said Gano. "It's really, really hard to come up with and perform even ten seconds of choreography."

Collins finds that the perseverance and attention to detail required of hip hop dancers meshes well with mentality of many MIT students. "I love the students at MIT," said Collins. "They are truly sponges that can absorb a wide range of information presented to them. They are usually hard workers, and it's great to see their work ethic applied to a skill like dance."

Constantly looking for new material, Collins claims it has become impossible to listen to a song without visualizing a dance. Much of her choreography occurs while she is driving, what Collins calls "car-ography." Turns out Boston traffic may actually do some good after all. Now with a little help from her experience in the PE class, when Gano hits her own metaphorical red light on a pset, she works it out by dancing in her room.

As Collins expressed enthusiastically, "I am thrilled that dance is alive and well at MIT!"