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## Somatic Dance (Summer 2024)

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*University of Mississippi*

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## **Staff Creative Residencies Summer 2024 Self-Assessment**

### **Somatic Dance**

**Rebekah Allen, Counselor in Student Affairs of University Counseling Center, *used dance techniques to develop creative movements that enhances mental wellbeing.***



Exploring the intersection of dance and mental health, which I will refer to as “somatic dance,” during the Creative Residency week was exhilarating, challenging, and fulfilling. I went into the week overwhelmed by the enormity of the subject and the options I could explore. I initially worried about difficulties finding space to dance, scheduling with my mentor, and my how my rusty dance skills would hold up after years of neglect.

However, when I let go of self-judgment and the pressure of wanting to know it all, I found that the week progressed naturally through the main facets of what I hoped to accomplish. I also learned that a living room is sometimes the best place to dance because it is comfortable, provides a grounding effect, and is intrinsically accessible!

Throughout the week, I prioritized checking back in with and building my foundational dance technique by taking virtual masterclasses. The classes

varied from classical and contemporary ballet to modern floorwork and artistry technique. Then, with the help of others in the field, I was able to transition into exploring several different facets of somatic dance applicable to mental health. These included somatic yoga and choreography, dance/movement therapy, Alexander technique, principles of movement analysis, Polyvagal Theory, and Somatic Psychotherapy. All of these embodied experiences allowed me to connect to my own body story as well as create a shareable somatic dance practice that anyone can use to explore and improve their mental health. The practice is available publicly on Spotify (<https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/movementasmedicine>).

I used the stipend to pay a professor of dance and somatic practitioner at Belhaven University, Elle Ciccarone, for mentorship, travel to and from Jackson, MS, and for the dance technique masterclasses. While at Belhaven, I was able to see and learn from the staff how they are using somatic dance in the community and utilize their state-of-the-art studio space to practice somatic dance. I was also connected to a healing arts center in Jackson, MS, that currently provides different forms of bodywork and creative expression for mental health benefits.

This week impacted me in several different ways. First, I expanded my knowledge about the field and gained confidence in researching and discussing theories behind the practices. Then, I was able to spend considerable time practicing the methods and theories in my own body which allowed me to find healing and connection for my own mental health journey. Finally, I created ways to share the work using video and audio tools and built an understanding of how other experts in the field use it to benefit their communities.

In the future, I hope to continue learning, practicing, and sharing somatic dance with others. I have thought about offering a community somatic dance experience or continuing to share self-help materials online. Although I do not know exactly where the path will take me, I know it does not end here. I am immensely grateful for the opportunity to dance closer to my goals of intertwining creative movement and mental health.

Exploring and sharing somatic dance to benefit mental health.



