

# Uniting UO and the City of Eugene Through International Dance Day

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## **Introduction and Purpose:**

In 2016 The City of Eugene Partnered with Project for Public Spaces to study how Eugene residents use and view downtown and how they think the downtown area could improve. Their research included surveys, focus groups, and interviews. Concluding that research, Project for Public Spaces found that a slight majority of people who visited downtown said that when they usually went there it was for dining or retail purposes; when they do go downtown, they didn't always feel safe; and there isn't much attracting them to spend regular or extended recreational time there. Included in their partnered data collection were suggestions from the Eugene citizens on how to create a more attractive Downtown, specifically while utilizing the public spaces.

Targeting the full-time residents of Eugene, the UO student population was omitted from the study. Since the final research project was published, The City of Eugene has been accumulating data centered around the same points of concern collected in 2016 but targeted towards the UO student population. To do this, The City of Eugene has partnered with UO through their "Real World: Eugene" undergraduate students to conduct a series of research projects relating to students' experience downtown.

Our group has been asked to engage the UO student community with the purpose of collecting qualitative data regarding UO student inclusion in downtown multicultural events. While in the early phases of planning, The City of Eugene Cultural Services has asked us to focus our research on answering, "how can we create a connection between University of Oregon students and downtown Eugene through the use of public space for Eugene's International Dance Day celebration?" We've used secondary data from previous students and planning organizations while also collecting our own data through a series of interviews and focus groups to answer that research question.

## **Methodology:**

For our research for the upcoming International Dance Day event our group decided to focus on qualitative data regarding student experience with downtown Eugene. To do this we incorporated the information we gathered from informal interviews, focus groups, a quick transportation feedback activity, and secondary data sources.

### **Informal Interviews and Intercept Feedback**

With the 16 informal interviews that we gather, participants were asked about their experience with downtown Eugene which included how frequently they visited and what they liked or disliked about it. Additionally, student participants were asked what would draw them downtown. Our transportation intercept feedback activity involved studying the transportation habits of students. We created a chart where students could label which method of transportation they used most to access downtown Eugene. This information was gathered and used to supplement information gained from our previous informal interviews.

## Focus Groups

The most significant research we conducted was the use of three focus groups with different student gatherings.

1. **LiveMove:** The first focus group conducted was with 13 members of LiveMove, a student organization on campus with a focus on active and public transportation. This focus group was used to gauge the level of interest that students had for a multicultural downtown event, what would engage them in such an event, and any barriers to attending such an event. Although this focus group was extremely productive because this group consisted of students organized around active transit, further focus groups had to be conducted.
2. **Alpha Phi Omega:** A second focus group was conducted with seven members of the service fraternity Alpha Phi Omega. This focus group was centered around learning more about the accessibility of downtown for students, ideal scheduling of our event for students, and learning more about the level of interest students had in our event.
3. **Real World Eugene:** The third and last focus group was conducted with members of the Real World Eugene class in the Planning, Public Policy, and Management department. This focus group was conducted to learn more about the scheduling of the International Dance Day event, as it was learned the event had the potential of conflicting with student midterms.

## Secondary Data

**Past Data:** We gathered quantitative data from a 2016 Real World Eugene report and from a 2016 Project for Public Spaces report on downtown Eugene.

1. **2016 Real World Eugene Report:** This report delved into the student experience in downtown Eugene. This helped give us insight into how students typically view downtown. We were able to use this data to help form our questions for our focus groups and our informal interviews. This data gave us a solid foundation to build off of with our own research.
2. **2017 Project for Public Spaces:** The City of Eugene partnered with Project for Public Spaces to publish a report on the issues and opportunities in the public spaces of downtown. We used this report to reference the information about the perceptions of downtown from the citizens of Eugene.



made them feel uncomfortable. Students also mentioned that there were not enough activities downtown to draw interest them in going. For example, many students mentioned that they would go downtown to visit specific restaurants or go to events like the Saturday Market but would not go without a specific reason. Additionally, some students said that downtown was too far and not easily accessible enough from campus. A more common complaint was that downtown lacked sufficient parking which made quick visits to downtown for students very difficult. Another commonly heard comment was that students wished that there was more student presence downtown and that they would be more likely to go if they heard about other students going.

### **How They Get Downtown**

We conducted a survey, where students placed dots on a poster in order to identify what modes of transport they take to get downtown. This poster was sent out on Snapchat to get additional responses. By far, the most commonly used mode of transport was public transit at 40%, followed by car travel at 29% and walking at 22%. This shows that most students primarily used public transit to access downtown, and that advertising the usage of the EMX is a good way to increase usage. Findings from this survey contradicted information gained from previous interviews as students had said that they difficulty using public transportation. Perhaps there was some sampling bias with our interview or more likely that students willing to answer a survey about transportation in Eugene were more knowledgeable about the topic than the average student.

### **How They Want to Celebrate**

Every interviewee and focus group member that was asked about what they wanted from an international dance day event mentioned food. The most commonly stated idea was that ideally the food would be culturally relevant with the dance performances that were happening. Additionally, students also said that having access to food that was not normally accessible to them in Eugene near the downtown or UO campus area would be a huge draw for them to attend. Price was mentioned multiple times as a huge factor for student attendance. Students from both various focus groups and interviews said that they were on an extremely limited budget and would only attend an event downtown if the event was free or if there was a student discount.

Another idea that students had for the event was the idea of having an interactive component. They clarified on what the interactive component meant by stating that workshops or free lessons would be a really engaging way to host the event. Additionally, a few respondents mentioned that having a place for the audience to participate and dance could be a good way of engaging the community downtown.

Finally, our group asked students about the timing and scheduling of the event and what would be ideal for them. Most students mentioned that hosting an event on Monday of Week 5 of spring term would be a dealbreaker for their attendance. They said that Mondays are generally extremely busy days for them especially in the middle of the term. Students suggested hosting

the event on a Friday or Saturday as they would have enough time and energy to attend. Students were conflicted on scheduling the event for Sunday as some said they would be free to attend an event at that time and others said they would be busy with the upcoming week's schoolwork.

## **Case Studies**

### **Santa Cruz:**

Instead of a single day International Dance Day celebration, Santa Cruz hosts events for the entire week. In 2018, Santa Cruz hosted their Dance Week celebration from April 19th to the 27th. This Dance Week celebration has been ongoing for the past 10 years. Santa Cruz offers hundreds of dance classes across dance studios in the whole county for the entire week. In addition, the area hosts pop-up performances in public spaces in various locations. The Dance Week event also has three main stages featuring over 50 performances from different studios, with dances ranging from Northern Indian Kathak dancing to performances from local dancers. Both Facebook and Instagram pages were created to raise awareness for this event. In addition, it appears that the event advertised through local news as many local sources ran stories about the event. Passes for dance lessons cost only 10 dollars and allowed access to any dance lesson hosted in the county associated with the event at the time. The Dance Week event also hosted a community dance to engage the local community.

### **San Luis Obispo**

For the last four-years San Luis Obispo has hosted its dance celebration during the third week of April with the majority of the activities beginning in the late afternoon or early evening. Utilizing the streets and spaces around their local farmers' market, San Luis Obispo approaches their dance celebration as "an opportunity for various dance troupes, companies, and schools around SLO to share their love of dance, heighten the awareness of dance and its contributions to our culture, and to celebrate this art form." Using a somewhat informal approach, the collective dance community organizes and markets the "National Dance Week San Luis Obispo" through Facebook, their city events calendar, and the participating organizations. There did not appear to be an official (non-Facebook) webpage.

The activities of this events primarily consisted of performances by the participating dance organizations. Multiple public spaces around the farmers' market were used to showcase a variety dance types and dancers at varying levels of development. They use streets as performance stages with no charge to observe. From a video filmed of the event, it appeared that there were opportunities for the general public to participate, but I wasn't sure about to what extent. With no trace/ link back to the official City of San Luis Obispo (with the exception of the events calendar archive), the dance organizations participating are self-facilitated with accommodations made by the city. As the event has grown overtime the diversity of dance organizations grow and so has its presence in the community.

## **Ideas for Consideration**

To create a connection between University of Oregon students and downtown Eugene through the use of public space for Eugene's International Dance Day celebration we have made special considerations of the space, time, and people involved. It's through our diligence, time, and effort that we conclude that the following ideas should be considered moving forward in the event planning process.

### **1. Collect diverse cultural representation through food and dance.**

- a. Food was the most commonly cited desire amongst interviewees and focus groups about what they would want from a multicultural event in addition to dance. Having food trucks that represent the dances being performed, such as offering Indian food in addition to having an Indian dance performance, would be our main suggestions. There were concerns that bringing in food trucks and outside vendors could detract from local business downtown. Therefore we have thought of some solutions. One solution would be to host a culinary competition where local businesses could be challenged to create a menu of culturally relevant food to the dance performances. Examples of this to follow would be the Portland Burger Week that occurs annually in Portland. During this event roughly 50 of Portland's restaurants and bars create special burgers that are offered only during this week long event. Portland Burger Week has been wildly successful in attracting the Portland community to try restaurants they would not normally try. Applying this model for food would be our group's suggestion in regards to the potential culinary component of the event.

### **2. Create an affordable price for students.**

- a. Many students said that they were on a limited budget and would only be willing to attend an event if it were free. In addition, students repeated that budget was a huge constraint for attending events and that this extended towards food. They recommended having low cost food and drink options otherwise they would not be able to attend. Students conceded that if the event required an attendance fee a sufficient student discount might still allow them to make the event. However, since the event is public we recommend keeping the event free and accessible to everyone.

### **3. Provide diverse and accessible interactive components.**

- a. Some of the most common suggestions included having workshops and lessons where community members could learn how to dance. Additionally, an idea presented was having places for the community itself to dance to music. Our group liked Santa Cruz's method of partnering with local dance studios to offer dance lessons for a 10 dollar pass. Following Santa Cruz's model is our suggestion for having an interactive component to the dance day event.



**4. Utilize student groups for student outreach and advertising.**

- a. There are currently many multicultural student organizations on campus that feature dance performances at their own event. Contacting these student groups for performances would vastly increase the student audience for the event. This is because many students will go to the event if they know that there are other students performing, especially if these students are from their own student groups. In addition, this allows for free marketing as student organizations have multiple social media pages such as on Facebook or Instagram that can each reach hundreds of students. Student dance groups that we have contacted have showed interest and see the event as good advertising and outreach for their groups, showing how utilizing these groups would be beneficial to everyone involved. Paying student groups to perform would be another option to raise interest, although payment was not mentioned as an expectation by the groups contacted. However, there are a number of student groups that would have high interest in participating through volunteering. Along with accessing a different set of students (non- arts and culture), this creates a new source of assistance in putting on the event. This will be important if the event ends up occurring over the span of a few days.

**5. Timing: Span it over a couple days or at least not on Monday.**

- a. Having the event on International Dance Day, Monday, April 29th is not conducive to student participation. This applies to students' groups for participation and students attending as patriots. This date falls during week 5, midterms. We suggest celebrating National Dance Week which occurs the whole third week of April. It would allow more flexibility for the whole Eugene Community and lead to a more successful and accessible multicultural event downtown.

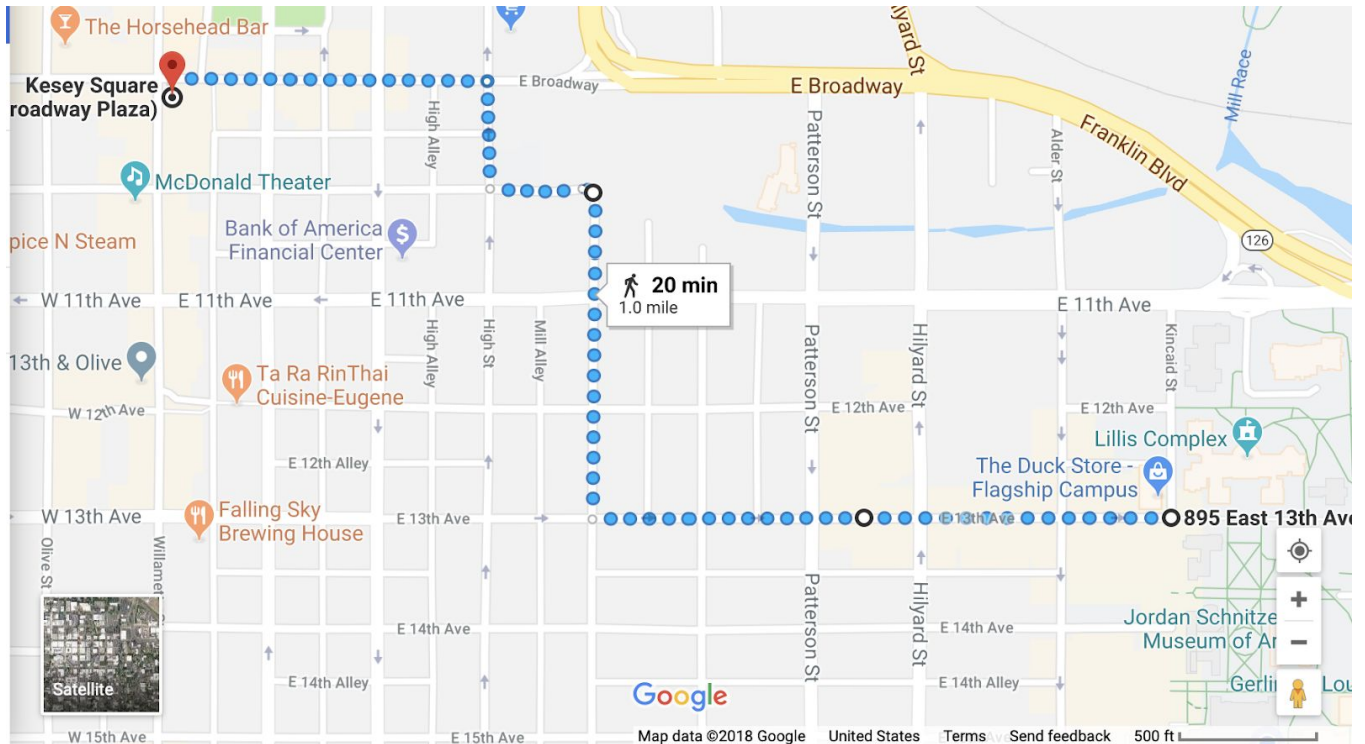
**6. Shuttle students downtown with EMX 40% of the time students use EMX to get Downtown.**

- a. We can take advantage of this by calling attention to the EMX platforms to encourage spontaneous trips downtown. Many students haven't been downtown because they are unaware of the leisure activities there for students. The opportunity here is to bring part of the dance event to them by utilizing the EMX stops as an extension of the celebration with pop-up dance performances. We want to advertise the event before and during so to inform students that Downtown is a few stops away and there's exciting things to do downtown for students.

**7. Create a well-lit path to Downtown to show them safe and accessible.**

- a. Seeing how students get downtown 23% of the time walking or biking, we want to use the same principles around utilizing the EMX. We'll want to create a vibrant, loud, and clear route for student pedestrians Downtown. With a multicultural dance focus, we could use local light-up art installations, pop-up dance performances, and multicultural music elements to call the students through the path to Downtown. We have created a path (below) as an example of how

students might go. We choose this path because it takes into account the major student access points going northwest that doesn't cross into dense traffic, its bike accessible, and it provides useable public space to occupy with event activities. It'll be important to incorporate fun clear signage and maps for this path, well before the event dates(s) so that student groups can share them and plan how to use the connecting spaces.



Google Maps

# Works Cited

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