

A Dancer's Toolkit

An Online Dance Portfolio and Two-City Comparison from a Dancer's Perspective

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General University Honors

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Spring 2012

ABSTRACT:

This capstone researched and created a “dancer’s toolkit,” the materials necessary for a career in professional dance. The first component of this toolkit is a dance portfolio. The portfolio includes a dance resume; full curriculum vitae; professional quality photographs; business card design; video reel of choreography and performance highlights; video of a self-choreographed and self-performed solo; several dance-related writing samples; and supplementary materials including concert programs, letters of support, certificates, and publicity materials. The second component is a research paper comparing and contrasting the quality of life for a performer in New York City versus San Francisco. The paper examines cost of living, job market, transportation options, cost of continued study, health insurance options, demographics, and other pertinent information about each city. After examining this information, a detailed budget was created for one of the cities. The third component, a self-reflection, is a self-evaluation of the first and second components. It is also an examination of how these first two components will aid a career in dance.

ONLINE DANCE PORTFOLIO:

sites.google.com/site/laurencchristie

As I was compiling my dance portfolio, I decided that mounting the information onto a website would be an easy, cost-effective way of presenting it. It may also be beneficial in the future if I decide to convert it into a public website.

New York City vs. San Francisco: A Comparison of Two Cities from a Dancer's Perspective

Introduction

As someone who is about to enter the world of professional dance, it is not only valuable but also necessary to weigh options and opportunities before moving to a new city. I have chosen to investigate New York City and San Francisco. These two cities have robust dance scenes, and I would be interested in moving to either one in the future. In this paper, I will present research I have accumulated for each city in seven different categories: cost of living, job opportunities, public transportation, cost of continued study, health insurance, demographics, and weather. Then, I will compare each city based on these categories and make a decision about which one is more appealing to a performer.

New York City

Cost of Living

As expected, the cost of living in New York City is astronomically high. According to AreaVibes.com, the cost of living in New York City is 124% greater than the national average. For example, the average rent price of an apartment in New York is \$3500 ("New York, NY"). According to the New York Times, the average monthly cost for a studio apartment in Greenwich Village in 2008 was \$2200 (Toy). While there are areas of New York in which it may be easier to find a cheaper apartment, it will be necessary to share an apartment to make the cost affordable. According to the New York Times, studio apartments for under \$2,000 per month can be found in the East Village, the Lower East Side, and in neighborhoods North of Midtown (Toy). The suburbs will also have cheaper studio and one-bedroom apartments, which could be worthwhile as long as the daily commute into the city is not too expensive.

Furthermore, many New York City landlords have strict requirements. Many require tenants to have an annual salary that is at least forty times the monthly rent (Toy). For guarantors, landlords often require an annual salary of at least eighty times the monthly rent (Toy). In addition, renters must pay a security deposit, and sometimes the first and last month's rent (Toy). Needless to say, housing in New York is astronomically expensive, and it is often difficult to find reasonable prices. It is necessary to have a roommate; research housing options online; allow four to six weeks to find a reasonable apartment; and bring financial documentation for landlords.

Water is included in the monthly rent of most New York City apartments, but electricity, gas, and Internet are the tenant's responsibility. Consolidated Edison services all boroughs of New York City with electricity, and the average electricity bill per month is between \$100 and \$200 ("Typical Utility Costs in New York"). According to ApartmentRatings.com, summers are more expensive than winters, especially if you use an air conditioner. In the winter, most apartments use gas heaters, so not as much electricity is used. The average monthly gas bill is anywhere from \$15 to \$150. If you only pay for cooking gas in your apartment, you may pay only \$15 to \$30 per month for gas. However, if you pay for hot water and heat, you may pay upwards of \$150 per month, especially in the winter. If an apartment building is wired for Internet prior to move-in, it will cost about \$45 per month. Thus, one can expect to pay between \$160 and \$400 per month per apartment on utilities ("Typical Utility Costs in New York").

Food prices in New York City are generally higher than the national average. For example, the average price of a dozen eggs is \$2.35. The average price of bread is \$2.56 per loaf ("New York, NY). According to Bundle.com, the average grocery cost per person per month is \$296, and the average cost per month for dining out is \$287 ("Cost of Food").

Job Opportunities

New York City is home to myriad dance opportunities, and there are many modern dance companies in the area. Some companies are contracted, and others are project-based. Some positions are paid, while others are not. DanceNYC.org lists many auditions in the upcoming months. However, many of the positions receive only a stipend or no payment at all. Thus, it seems feasible to perform in New York City, but getting paid may be more elusive. Some modern dance companies in New York City that are currently auditioning for dancers are Amalgamate Dance and Jessica Gaynor Dance (“Auditions”). Dancing in Broadway shows would also be an option in New York City.

Safety jobs could include any number of things. There may be opportunities to use administrative skills or do secretarial work. There may also be opportunities to teach dance to young children. Furthermore, there are plenty of openings for restaurant servers and baristas, which would work well with a dancer’s schedule.

Transportation

The MTA New York City Transit is one of the most extensive public transportation systems in the world. Taking advantage of public transportation would be preferable to having a car in New York City, both in terms of cost and convenience. According to MTA.info, the cost of a single ride for a subway or bus is \$2.50. Depending upon how often you use public transportation, there are several ways to save through MTA. For example, they offer both Pay-per-Ride MetroCards and Unlimited Ride MetroCards. For the occasional rider, a \$10 Pay-Per-Ride card reduces the cost per ride to \$2.10. A more regular rider could buy a 7-Day Unlimited card for \$29, which reduces the cost per ride to \$2.07 for fourteen rides per week (*MTA*).

Cost of Continued Study

In New York City, open dance classes are abundant. Many different schools offer classes in varied styles at all times of day. Furthermore, open class rates seem fairly similar in price around the city. At Dance New Amsterdam, a single class for a non-member is \$16.50. If you buy a membership for \$45 per year, a single class is \$15.50 (*DNADance*). At Peridance Capezio Center, a single class is \$17 (*Peridance*). At Steps on Broadway, a single class is \$18 (*Steps*). At all of these schools, there are discounts when you buy classes in bulk. For example, a five-class card at Dance New Amsterdam costs \$80, which saves \$2.50 (*DNADance*).

Health Insurance

Luckily, the Affordable Care Act makes it possible for young adults to stay on their parents' health care plan until their 26th birthday. After this point, it will be necessary to find a job that provides health care, join a union, or purchase individual health insurance. Because the likelihood of finding a dance job that provides health care is slim, it will probably be necessary to purchase individual health insurance. Furthermore, every New Yorker has the right to buy health insurance, and you cannot be denied because of your health status, age, or gender ("Artists Health").

There are three different types of private, direct-purchase health plans. HMO plans offer a wide variety of health services, but limit coverage to doctors within their network. POS/PPO plans pay for care in or outside of a network of providers. If you visit an out-of-network provider, you often pay the provider directly and file for reimbursement from your insurance company. HSAs combine tax-sheltered funds for health care with qualified high-deductible insurance plans ("Artists Health"). An HMO or POS plan would probably be suitable for a dancer's needs. In New York County, prices for individual HMO plans cost \$1200 per month on average ("Health Insurance"). POS plans cost \$1800 per month on average ("Health Insurance").

The Actors Fund recommends Delta Dental Insurance in New York, which is a type of dental insurance that requires co-payments for services performed by contracted dentists. The annual premium for one enrollee is \$123 plus an enrollment fee of \$15 (*Delta Dental*).

Demographics

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the population of New York City was just under 19.5 million people in 2011. In 2010, the population was split almost evenly by gender: 51% female and 49% male. In addition, New York City has a fairly young population with about 58% of the population between the ages of 18 and 65. As of 2010, 84% of those over the age of 25 had graduated from high school, while only 32% had earned a bachelor's degree ("New York City Quick").

Weather

New York City seems to have four distinct seasons. Summers are hot with an average high temperature of 84 degrees Fahrenheit in July and an average low temperature of 69 degrees Fahrenheit. Winters are cold with an average high temperature of 38 degrees Fahrenheit in January and an average low temperature of 27 degrees Fahrenheit. New York City also receives plenty of rain each year with an annual average of 45 inches ("Monthly Averages for New York").

San Francisco

Cost of Living

Unfortunately, the cost of living in San Francisco is not much lower than in New York City. According to AreaVibes.com, the cost of living in San Francisco is 61% greater than the national average ("San Francisco, CA City"). The average monthly rent for an apartment is \$2546. The average monthly rent for a studio apartment is just under \$2000 ("San Francisco

Apartments”). According to the San Francisco Examiner, apartments are difficult to find in the city, and prices are rising quickly. Over the past four years, rent prices have increased 13.7 percent in San Francisco (Gantz). As in New York City, it will be necessary to have a roommate to afford these housing prices.

Utilities costs in San Francisco will include water, electricity, gas, and Internet. Water costs \$45 to \$60 per month. Electricity and gas cost \$70 each on average per month. Internet costs about \$32 per month (“Typical Utility Costs in San Francisco”). Thus, a monthly utility bill would cost between \$147 and \$162 depending upon how much energy you are able to conserve.

Food prices in San Francisco are higher than the national average. For example, the average price of a dozen eggs is \$2.56. The average price of bread is \$1.77 per loaf (“San Francisco, CA City”). According to Bundle.com, the average grocery cost per person per month is \$370. However, the median monthly expense on groceries is \$209, which may be a better indicator of typical spending behavior (“Cost of Groceries”).

Job Opportunities

San Francisco has a quickly growing contemporary dance community. Similar to New York City, dance opportunities may be contracted or project-based and paid or unpaid. Audition postings are available at BayDance.com. Several companies of interest in San Francisco include ODC Dance, Robert Moses’ Kin, and Liss Fain Dance. Safety job options in San Francisco would be similar to those in New York. Anything that fits into a dancer’s schedule and uses available skills would suffice.

Public Transportation

San Francisco has an extensive public transportation system, which makes it the preferred method of travel. According to their website, Muni operates 80 routes that stop within 2 blocks

of 90% of residences in San Francisco. Basic fares are \$2 for a single ride with free transfers for 90 minutes. Depending upon how often you use Muni, there are ways to save. For example, Muni offers an unlimited monthly Muni Fast Pass for \$62 (*SFMTA*).

Cost of Continued Study

In San Francisco, there are several options for open dance classes. The ODC School seems to offer the widest variety of dance styles at various times of day. They offer many modern and ballet classes, as well as ethnic dance classes. A single class costs \$14. There are several discount options if you buy classes in bulk. For example, a 4-class card costs \$44 and reduces the price to \$11 per class (*ODC Dance*). The San Francisco Conservatory offers open ballet classes in the mornings for \$12 per class (*SF Conservatory*).

Health Insurance

The health insurance situation in San Francisco is similar to that of New York City. The Affordable Care Act makes it possible for young adults to stay on their parents' health care plan until their 26th birthday. After this point, it will be necessary to find a job that provides health care, join a union, or purchase individual health insurance. However, if you are not insured through an employer, union, or other type of group, you are not guaranteed the right to buy health insurance in California. You may be denied or charged a higher premium based on age, gender, or health status ("Artists Health").

Similar to New York City, there are three options for private health insurance in San Francisco: HMO, PPO, and HSAs. Health insurance brokers and ehealthinsurance.com can help to weigh prices. Also, if private health insurance is not affordable, Healthy San Francisco is a program that makes basic health care affordable to all uninsured San Francisco residents. This

program does not include vision or dental, and it is limited to care providers within Healthy San Francisco's network ("Artists Health").

Demographics

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the population of San Francisco was just over 800 thousand in 2010. The population is split almost evenly between males (51%) and females (49%). The population of San Francisco is also fairly young; 70% of the population is between the ages of 18 and 65. As of 2010, 85% of the population had graduated from high school, and 51% had earned a bachelor's degree ("San Francisco County").

Weather

San Francisco has a very mild climate and not very distinct seasons. The highest temperatures seem to occur in September with an average high temperature of 70 degrees Fahrenheit and an average low temperature of 55 degrees Fahrenheit. The lowest temperatures seem to occur in December and January with an average high temperature of 57 degrees Fahrenheit and an average low temperature of 46 degrees Fahrenheit. San Francisco is not a particularly rainy city. The annual precipitation average is about 20 inches ("Monthly Averages for San Francisco").

New York City vs. San Francisco

After researching both New York City and San Francisco, it is clear that each has a very high cost of living. However, New York City boasts higher rent and utility prices. While both cities are expensive, New York City seems a bit more prohibitive, especially when working with the meager budget of a dancer. Both cities have extensive and reasonably priced public transportation systems. New York City's MTA is a bit more expensive per ride than San Francisco's Muni. Furthermore, health insurance seems comparable in each city. However, it

seems restrictive that the right to buy private health insurance is not guaranteed in California.

Both cities have options for obtaining affordable health care.

Open dance classes are much less expensive in San Francisco than in New York City. However, there are many more options for places to take class in New York City than in San Francisco. Job opportunities seem comparable in each city. New York City is obviously the Mecca for dance, and it has many big and small opportunities. However, San Francisco's dance scene is growing, and it may be less overwhelming than New York City.

New York City is much larger than San Francisco, which can be good and bad. Because of the large population size, there are many opportunities in New York City. However, it could be overwhelming and unwelcoming. San Francisco would probably feel more like a community. Also, the weather in San Francisco is much more mild than in New York City, and also not as rainy.

Conclusion

After researching each of these cities, I find New York City more appealing than San Francisco. New York City has many more options for concert, commercial, and theater dance. It also has more options for open dance classes, which is important when trying to maintain your technique as a dancer. While New York City is more expensive in most ways, the opportunities outweigh the costs for me. My hope is that jobs will be more prevalent in New York City, and thus easier to obtain. After conducting this research, I feel more aware of the realities of living in a large city, but also more prepared to tackle those challenges.

Monthly Spending Plan for New York City

Based on a hypothetical dancer's salary of \$1000/month, a Starbucks salary of \$720/month (\$9/hour, 20 hours/week), and \$1000/month from savings account

Food

Groceries	\$300
Breakfast (Dining Out)	\$0
Lunch (Dining Out)	\$0
Dinner (Dining Out)	\$50
Total	\$350

Shelter

Rent	\$1,000
Phone	\$100
Gas/Electric	\$250
Internet	\$45
Household Items	\$40
Renter's Insurance	\$0
Total	\$1,435

Debt Repayment

Credit Cards	N/A
Student Loans	N/A
Bank Loans	N/A
Personal Loans	N/A
Total	\$0

Self-Care

Clothing	\$100
Hair Care	\$0
Medical	\$300
Dry Cleaning/Laundry	\$50
Gym	\$0
Total	\$450

Recovery/Self-Improvement

Spiritual/Tithe	N/A
Total	\$0

Dependent Care

Children's Tuition	N/A
Childcare	N/A
Pets	N/A
Total	\$0

Transportation

Gas	N/A
Parking/Tolls	N/A
Car Insurance	N/A
Car Payment	N/A
Public Transportation	\$104
Total	\$104

Entertainment

Movies	\$0
Books	\$0
Theater/Performances	\$50
Magazines	\$0
Total	\$50

Investments

Savings Cushion	\$0
Retirement	\$0
College Savings Plan	N/A
Total	\$0

Miscellaneous

Holiday Gifts	\$0
Dance Classes	\$270
Total	\$270

Cash on Hand	\$1000/month
(plus) Income	\$1720/month
(equals) Total Income	\$2720/month
(minus) Total Expenses	\$2659/month
(equals) Cash Flow	\$61

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Reflection

This Dancer's Toolkit has challenged and prepared me both practically and intellectually. Creating the dance portfolio has given me practical items for use in marketing myself. Writing the two-city comparison has given me valuable knowledge about living in a city on a dancer's salary.

The process of creating the dance portfolio was both enjoyable and difficult at times. The hardest part was being concise. For example, while I have a significant amount of performance experience, it is not necessary to show all of it in a performance reel. In fact, people most likely will not watch anything over three to five minutes. Therefore, I had to make decisions about what made me look the best. It was also important to show range and variety in the portfolio, especially in the performance reel and the writing samples. Another difficult part of creating this portfolio was making it look professional. I am not a web designer, but I tried hard to make the website look clean and clear. If I decide in the future to make it into a legitimate website, I may hire someone to design it for me.

Writing the research paper was both disappointing and enlightening. I knew that both San Francisco and New York City were expensive cities, but I had no idea how expensive. Especially with a dancer's budget, it is disheartening to learn that a studio apartment costs \$2000 on average in New York City. Making the monthly budget was a challenge, but also a learning experience. I feel like I am much more knowledgeable now of what it will take to live in either of these cities.

Each of these elements has better prepared me for a career in dance. By creating the dance portfolio, I have compiled and created most of the elements necessary to market myself. With some polishing, I could send many of these elements to potential employers. By writing the two-city comparison, I have armed myself with knowledge of what it will take to survive as a

dancer in a big city. Creating this Dancer's Toolkit has been challenging and valuable mentally, emotionally, and physically.