Heather Watts says that she prepared for teaching her Harvard course, “George Balanchine: Ballet Master,” the same way she used to prepare for a performance at the New York City Ballet (NYCB). “At 11 a.m., I would go to the Dance Center, get my students’ responses to their reading assignments in hard copy, reread them and highlight a few, finish going over which videos we were going to watch, and then run back to my apartment. Then I’d put on a costume—plain back pants, nothing athletic or casual, different than I dress in my usual life, I’m an old hippie—and hop on my bike and get to class just in time for the curtain to go up and do it.” She laughs and confesses, “I was terrified each and every Monday.”

Her presence on campus is a sign of a burgeoning of interest in dance at Harvard and a flowering of commitment by the University administration. Watts may not have attended college herself—a Ford Foundation scholarship at the age of 13 took her to New York to study with Balanchine, and she spent 24 years dancing with his company—but her firsthand knowledge gives Harvard undergraduates and graduate students a privileged look at the works and personality of one of the great artists of the twentieth century.

“What we offer here is a blend of the experiential, the historical, and the theoretical,” says Elizabeth Bergmann, the energetic dance administrator who has led the Harvard Dance Program since 2000. A dance community that was often overlooked by the University as a whole now boasts extracurricular student troupes specializing in everything from Bhangra to ballroom, for-credit courses taught by dance professionals, and the glamorous, efficient space of the new Harvard Dance Center, which lies along the gentle swell of Observatory Hill on Garden Street and is busy from midday to midnight.

“There are 700 students using the building every week, and that’s not including audiences,” Bergmann explains. Dancing at Harvard can be a huge time commit-
Off the Shelf
Recent books with Harvard connections

A Natural History of North American Trees, by Donald Culross Peattie ‘22, illustrated by Paul Landacre (Houghton Mifflin, $40). This is a one-volume edition of two classics from the 1950s by Peattie (1898-1964), who wrote about the giant sequoia and the lodgepole pine with such eloquence, erudition, and even humor that a botanical colleague once snippily remarked to him, “I see you could not resist the temptation to be interesting.”

No Excuses: Concessions of a Serial Campaigner, by Robert Shrum, J.D. ’68, IOP ’74 (Simon & Schuster, $28). A veteran strategist in Democratic presidential campaigns, Shrum provides much well-recounted insider’s history, likely to nourish political junkies.

Glamour Addiction: Inside the American Ballroom Dance Industry, by Juliet McMains ’94 (Wesleyan University Press, $26.95). An assistant professor in the dance program at the University of Washington and an active DanceSport competitor, McMains explores the meaning of this blockbuster cultural phenomenon. With photographs.

A Fighter’s Heart: One Man’s Journey through the World of Fighting, by Sam Sheridan ’98 (Atlantic Monthly Press, $25). Sheridan chose violence as a career and here wipes the blood from his nose long enough to give readers a first-hand account of disciplined aggression.

The Lonely Patient: How We Experience Illness, by Michael Stein ‘81, M.D. (Morrow, $23.95). For the benefit of both the sick and their well family and friends, Stein probes the inner life of patients who are seriously ill, their experience of betrayal, terror, loss, and loneliness.

True North: Discover Your Authentic Leadership, by Bill George, M.B.A. ’66, professor of management practice, with Peter Sims (Jossey-Bass, $27.95). Based on research done at Harvard Business School and interviews with 125 top leaders in business, George, former CEO of Medtronic, shows readers how to craft their own leadership-development plan. You should, he advises: know your authentic self, orient your moral compass, understand your motivations, build your support team, and stay grounded by integrating all aspects of your life.

Letters from Eden: A Year at Home, in the Woods, written and illustrated by Julie Zickefoose ’80 (Houghton Mifflin, $26). Zickefoose is an artist, naturalist, and sometime NPR commentator, who knew at the age of seven that she wanted to paint birds for a living. She paints—and writes—delightfully.

At the brown thrasher’s instruction in April, it’s time to plant peas. From the book.  

At Large and At Small: Familiar Essays, by Anne Fadiman ’74 (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $21). The familiar essayist, writes Fadiman, speaks “to one reader; as if the two of them were sitting side by side in front of a crackling fire with their collars loosened, their favorite stimulants at hand, and a long evening of conversation stretching before them.” Most of these essays first appeared in the American Scholar, which Fadiman edited before becoming the Francis writer-in-residence at Yale. She was once this magazine’s “Undergraduate” columnist and remains on its board of incorporators.

It’s not uncommon to see a dancer stretching in the corner with a laptop open in front of her. Founded, with Balanchine, what would become the School of American Ballet and NYCB. Beginning in 1965, modern dancer Claire Mallardi ran the undergraduate dance program, expanding it to incorporate a broad variety of genres. As artistic director emerita she continues to teach “Movement for Actors,” a course she introduced in the mid-1980s.

But in 1999, the newly created Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study announced long-range plans to reclaim in 2005 the Rie- man Center for the Performing Arts, housed in the century-old gymnasium in Radcliffe Yard that had been used exclusively as dance space since 1980. “Dance had been happening there since 1898; Mark Morris taught his first choreography class in that space and the feet of Anna Sokolow, Merce Cunningham, and the Nicholas Brothers, among other greats, had touched that floor,” says Cathleen McCormick, director of programs at the Office for the Arts, which oversees all of Harvard’s ongoing arts activities, including the dance program. “We had a problem. We had dance here and we were losing our home, so we had a concrete issue we had to solve.”

Students rallied. “They developed a 50-page report with all kinds of statistics, press clippings, and letters from alums,” McCormick remembers, “signed by a mix of people who had gone into the arts and others who were management consultants, software developers, policy people with..."

Proximity between studio and class-room space makes it possible for an instructor to shift easily between discussing dance and presenting it. When Christine Dakin, former principal dancer and artistic director of the Martha Graham Dance Company, taught a course on Graham’s œuvre last spring, she was able to combine intellectual and embodied methods: “Each week I showed a film of one of Martha’s works and discussed it from historical, political, sociological, and literary directions, as well as what I had discovered about the work, what Martha had told me about the work, and what the students saw in the work. Then we did some movement explorations to let the students discover the basic principles of breath and weight and energy as she was discovering them in the 1930s. They loved it!”

Personal connection with dance professionals has made all the difference for some Harvard students. Kate Ahlborn ’07 took the initiative to cold-contact Damian Woetzel, an NYCB star (after trying seven likely permutations of his e-mail address). Ahlborn had “heard through the grapevine” that Woetzel was earning his master’s in public administration at the Kennedy School of Government with an eye toward preparing for a future career in arts policy or international affairs after his dancing days were done. Would he be willing to teach a class occasionally for the Harvard Ballet Company? Woetzel wrote back to say that he was settling into student life, but that perhaps his wife, former NYCB principal dancer Heather Watts, would be available. On a Sunday night a few weeks later, Watts taught a ballet-technique class. Ultimately Elizabeth Bergmann convinced her to teach both technique and the Balanchine seminar. When, with the approval of the Balanchine Trust, Watts set excerpts from Balanchine’s Apollo on the students,
Woetzel was on hand to coach Adam Singerman ’09 in the title role.

“I grew up idolizing these people,” says sociology concentrator Claudia Schreier ’08, who signed up for both Dakin’s and Watts’s courses. “I grew up in Stamford, Connecticut. Damian would guest as the Cavalier in our Nutcracker, and I’d be an angel or a soldier. I never imagined that I’d be working with them at Harvard.”

A handful of dancers carry their Harvard degrees into professional dance careers. Elizabeth Waterhouse ’02, a former physics concentrator, now dances with the Forsythe Company in Dresden, Germany. Marie “Molly” Altenburg ’07, a winner of Harvard’s Suzanne Farrell Dance Prize, who danced with the Washington Ballet before enrolling at Harvard, expects to audition for ballet companies after she graduates. For many more, dancing will be a compelling avocation for the next decade or beyond.

Nonetheless, enthusiasm for dance at Harvard is not restricted to serious dancers. Watts talks about the lessons of Balanchine’s career: lessons of preparedness, of versatility, of patience, that have as much relevance to aspiring CEOs as they do to those bound for the world’s.

Michelle Crames, M.B.A. ’03, founder and CEO of Lean Forward Media in Los Angeles, says, “You never see cartoons where there are bad outcomes,” says Michelle Crames, M.B.A. ’03, founder and CEO of Lean Forward Media in Los Angeles. “But bad outcomes are often the result of bad decisions.” Last year, Crames’s company released its first product: a new kind of storytelling vehicle, the interactive movie, that lets viewers make freighted decisions and then face their consequences. The DVD, titled *The Abominable Snowman* after the eponymous book by R. A. Montgomery (from the Choose Your Own Adventure series), is an animated film for 5- to 11-year-olds that tracks the adventures of three youngsters who go off to meet their Uncle Rudy in Katmandu and search for the legendary yeti.

But along the way they face choices, like staying on a faltering airplane or parachuting out. Using the remote control, a viewer can choose what the characters will do, and watch the story unfold along the chosen narrative path. Decision points generate 11 possible stories within the 80-minute film—and most of the choices turn on issues of character, emotional intelligence, and even morality. Early on, for example, a huge, smooth-talking, but vaguely sinister Nepalese man approaches the little group and says he will take them directly to the yeti. Go with him or stick to the plan of meeting Uncle Rudy? You decide, but if you take the big guy’s offer, the film ends with the protagonists at the bottom of a pit, about to become dinner for a group of hungry tigers.

“Parents love these movies because it’s a real window into their child’s mind,” says Crames. “They see how their children make decisions, and [that in turn] can be a way to help them with their critical thinking.” In fact, Lean Forward’s website (www.choosemovie.com) includes resources to help parents discuss the film with their offspring. *The Abominable Snowman* has won awards for excellence in family entertainment, including a KIDS FIRST! All Star Award from the Coalition for Quality Children’s Media. “There is so much more thinking, active participation, and listening than in standard cartoons, which are pretty mindless,” says Crames. “Most video games are very violent, with little cognitive or developmental value—the bulk of them are about thumb-twitching, winning and losing, and shooting things. The decisions aren’t much more than ‘Go left, or go right?’ ”

Lean Forward is developing a suite of interactive movies, including a live-action thriller for teenagers. Crames says her products fall between traditional entertainment and video games. Although the former market is contracting slightly, the latter is a fast-growing industry whose $12.5 billion in hardware, software, and accessory revenue for 2006 was up 19 percent over 2005. The interactive DVD, a format that Crames is helping to pioneer, may anchor a new product category in home entertainment, where the trend in content, she says, “is only toward more interactivity.”
Twin Passions

Two scientists explore science and religion.
by SARAH COAKLEY

Both these elegant little books on science and religion are by eminent Harvard professors emeriti—much-revered researchers, writers, and educators. Both authors hope their monographs may stimulate some less tired thinking about the disputed relationship between science and religion than has recently been the case in the United States. More heat than light has indeed been produced in the political debates about the teaching of secular evolutionary theory or “Intelligent Design” in schools; or in the sensationalist press discussions of the assaults of Richard Dawkins and Daniel C. Dennett on religious belief; or, even closer to home, in the seemingly ill-fated attempt to insert a requirement on “reason and faith” into the successor to the Harvard College “Core” curriculum.

But both Owen Gingerich and E.O. Wilson believe, in their different ways, that religion and science need not be at such loggerheads—in deed, that they can, and should, harmoniously cooperate.

Wilson, the sociobiologist, a Baptist in his youth but long a religious agnostic, fashions his book on creation and the ecological crisis into an imaginary dialogue with a fundamentalist pastor. His stated hope is to harness conservative Christianity into a shared passion with science to save the earth from impending ecological disaster. Gingerich, the astronomer and historian of science, who is also a firm Mennonite believer, has stronger intellectual ambitions, ostensibly: not merely to declare a truce between science and religion for the sake of an urgent practical end, but to demonstrate the intrinsic compatibility of the two realms. God, for Gingerich, is alive and well and sustaining the cosmos purposively from Big Bang to contemporary moments of personalized salvation.

Both books have the great merit of being attractively and accessibly written: no obfuscating jargon or confusing theoretical complexities will distress the scientific novice. Indeed Wilson devotes an entire excursus to the damage he sees...