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assistant professor in the department of dance
self-statement tenure review - 2015

Over the last ten years I have been extraordinarily productive in my contemporary dance making and performance practices, as well as in my teaching and service to the multiple institutions where I have been on faculty. My dance company *casebolt and smith* has toured nationally and internationally, showcasing a collection of dances unique to the field for their blend of criticality and accessibility. The impact of the work is evidenced by our record of presentation, the press response, and the diverse audiences we have reached. In particular, our evening-length work “O(h)” has been performed seventy-five times in twenty different cities and five countries since 2010, and was named a “Top 10 Performance of 2013” by the *San Francisco Chronicle/SFGATE*, as well as one of “Five Unforgettable 2010 Dance Performances” by the *MinnPost*. With *casebolt and smith*, and as an independent choreographer, I have been commissioned to create over fifteen new works for professional companies and college dance departments and have been a guest artist in residence at nine different institutions across the country and abroad. Prior to being hired at UCR I was on the faculties of Scripps College in Claremont, CA; University of California, Los Angeles; Cerritos College in Norwalk, CA; El Camino College in Torrance, CA; and at Rio Hondo College in Whittier, CA. I taught upwards of six courses a semester for nine years between all five schools, developed new courses, amassed stellar student evaluations, and created a name for myself as part of dynamic and bustling constellation of artists and academics on the West Coast.

Since being hired as an assistant professor at UCR, I have been very active in my teaching, mentorship and service to the department and the university. I stepped into the department at a time when it was experiencing a faculty shortage, and I accordingly contributed in ways that are not typical for an assistant professor. I was pleased to be able to bring my energy into the position and take on multiple roles from the outset. This statement focuses primarily on my research record, with some attention to my teaching as well.

Research

Since my hire at UCR my main research project has been my work as artistic director, choreographer, performer, designer and producer of *casebolt and smith*, a duet dance theater company based in Los Angeles with artistic partner Liz Casebolt. Established in 2006, *casebolt and smith* is a platform for collaborative research in duet dance making, specifically that which challenges the hetero-normative conventions of male/female partnerships traditionally seen in modern and contemporary performance. Over the last nine years we have shared our research with diverse communities throughout North America and in Europe, and from 2011 to 2014, we were represented by Pentacle DanceWorks Inc. in New York. “O(h),” *casebolt and smith*’s seminal evening-length work, has been touring since 2010 and continues to be booked by high profile performing arts institutions. Since my hire, “O(h)” has been performed sixty-three times, including at Echo Echo Dance and Movement Festival in Derry, Northern Ireland; 92nd St. Y Harkness Dance Festival’s Stripped/Dressed Series curated by Doug Varone at Buitenschip Hall in New York City; South Miami Dade Cultural Art Center’s Cabaret Series in Miami, FL; Toronto and Winnipeg Fringe Festivals in Canada; Auditorium Theater’s Katten/Landou Studio in Chicago; the University of Nevada, Reno Redfield Proscenium Theater; Contemporary Arts Forum in Santa Barbara; Spring to Dance Festival in St. Louis, MO; and at the SDHS/CORD joint conference at the Culver Center of the Arts in Riverside, CA. “O(h)” has been reviewed by the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Toronto Star*, *SF Chronicle/SFGATE*, *LA Weekly*, *CBC Manitoba*, *Windy City Times Chicago*, *Broadway World* and numerous other culture sites.

“O(h)” is a talking dance that describes itself. Through scripted text and chatty conversation, improvised and set choreography, Casebolt and I offer honest insights into our limitations as a duet company and our fear of becoming unoriginal. The dance evolves from demonstrations of what we can, can’t and won’t do into intricate movement sequences layered with pop culture references and iconic dance images of the past. Larger issues of gender, sexuality and power arise through role-playing, begging us to consider and re-imagine the histories of so many closeted dancers of the past, where alternative sexualities have been

submerged. We also build movement and text in front of the audience. Through accumulation, repetition and drilling of the material, our creative process, collaborative responsibilities and labor (division of it), are revealed. Every time “O(h)” is performed I take on the role of artistic director, choreographer, and performer and am responsible for negotiating the artistic vision of the piece. “O(h)’s” success depends on the relationship we build with viewers. Its pacing, tone and improvisational moments adjust, respond, and lead to creative choices made through speaking and dancing. It is, in other words, an ongoing research project. “O(h)’s” impact on the field is visible through the writing of critics. Alan Ulrich of the *SF Chronicle* writes, “The couple . . . while skewering conventional thinking about dance, glide through the space with a blithe, airy quality that sustains them through the evening, and they integrate the spoken word and the gesture as well as anybody I have seen since David Gordon a generation ago.” *Toronto Star’s* Michael Crabb writes, “For those who’ve suffered at the receiving end of casebolt and smith’s target subject, it’s like a breath of fresh air and also side-achingly funny. But it’s the clever way the pair integrate themes of gender identity and stereotyping and pose questions about artistic appropriation and the very nature of “contemporary” that add texture to “O(h)” and leave lots of food for thought. It’s a dance fan’s must-see.” Notably, “O(h)” was presented at the Actor’s Company Theater in Los Angeles in 2012 for a six-week run – eighteen shows total. For this iteration of “O(h)” we collaborated with award winning architects Hadrian Predock and John Frane –*Predock_Frane* – to transform the black box theater into an immersive atmosphere of glowing light using luminous wire. “O(h)” continues to be booked at high profile institutions, and in January 2016 will be presented at the National Theater – Experimental Theater of Taiwan. **(refer to work sample *O(h)*)**

“O(h)” builds on and further develops *casebolt and smith’s* approach to making talking dances that unpack traditional gender and sexual norms with humor, rigorous partnering, and critical self-awareness. For example, our 2006 piece “In the space provided” reveals our working relationship and friendship by engaging in conversation with each other and the audience, while combining gestures related to our own personal narratives with demanding physical partnering. The script is loose enough for us to embellish, but tight enough to push the dance forward and demonstrate our acute skill to match words with specific movements, rhythms of speaking with rhythms of choreographic sequences, meanings of words with possible meanings of gestures. **(refer to work sample *In the space provided*)** “After Words,” also created in 2006, is a staged, post-performance discussion in which we speak and review/rehearse specific moments in an “imagined” dance that we feel is reading as too romantic. Our anxiety about representing heterosexuality traps us further into a comedy of errors and unexpected sexual innuendo. **(refer to work sample *After Words*)** “Having Words,” created in 2008, is a talking dance performed in the square. Relying largely on simple unison vocabulary, we simultaneously ask for assistance and support from audience members to execute the choreography, all the while performing in time with each other. The primary focus for the first fifteen minutes of the dance is to demonstrate the skill required for a dual process: we are listening to each other while we speak and engage audience members; we keep in time with each other while instructing audience members to assist us separately; we give commands while receiving commands. In 2013 we were commissioned to re-construct “Having Words” for DanceWorks Chicago, a prominent dance company with six members. We paired everyone up: two women, two men, and a man and woman. While in the residence, the work took on many new directions and ended up being very different. **(refer to work sample *Having Words*)**

My research has also taken shape both with and apart from *casebolt and smith* through several commissions, dramaturgical projects, and guest artist residencies. In 2014, we developed “some of its parts” for dance students at the University of Nevada, Reno, where it was performed four times as part of their faculty and guest artist concert. **(refer to work sample *some of its parts*)** We also created “...in space” for dance students at Los Angeles Valley College, where it was performed three times as part of their annual spring concert. In 2012 we were commissioned to make “In Other Words...for six” for Scripps College’s Dance Department, a variation of our table duet “In Other Words.” **(refer to work sample *In Other Words*)** In 2012 I was commissioned to make “The Take” for Santa Ana College’s Dance Department. **(refer to work sample *The Take*)** “In Other Words...for six” and “The Take” were presented at the American College Dance Association Festival at Modesto Junior College in 2013 and

both were selected to be in the Gala Concert, an honor that was widely recognized by high profile artists and scholars in attendance. I also served as dramaturg for dance scholar and choreographer Susan Foster's "Performing Authenticity and the Labor of Dance" in 2012, which has had multiple performances across the US and abroad.

Research – New Directions

While my work with casebolt and smith is ongoing, my most recent projects take a different turn by exploring solo work and collaborations with other dancers. "Little Yellow Leo: Papa's Bones/Mama's Flesh" is the working title of a new autobiographical solo I am developing. I have my dad's (Caucasian) bones, my mom's (Mexican) flesh, and the memory of playing dress up in my bedroom with costumes that often rode up my butt – a fetish/fantasy of wanting to become a male exotic dancer when I got older. Learning the customs and traditions of my Mexican American family, like cooking, dancing and religion, was a dominant part of my adolescence. Simultaneously I experienced the growth of unwanted body hair, bizarre sexual fantasies, and fear/anxiety of being seen. While shaving the dark black hair on my arms, legs and face, refusing to play macho, and building resentment towards the church, I inadvertently invisibilized many of the characteristics that marked me as Latino. This solo attempts to unfold the intersection of my Hispanic and queer identity in a body that over time has developed the skill to code switch and pass/respond in multiple environments: to hide, succeed, perform, find love, find sex. I am interested in unearthing the past to uncover many things that were lost. "Little Yellow Leo..." weaves personal story and embodied memory through speaking, dancing and contemporary dance tropes to forge dynamic and thoughtful approaches in a critical way. This is very much a work in progress. (refer to work in progress sample *Little Yellow Leo*)

I am concurrently developing another solo for professional dancer Gabriel Mata. Since July 2014, I have been collaborating with Gabriel to develop choreographic and written material that unpacks his personal story. At the age of five he was brought to the US from Mexico by strangers, while his mom was crossing in the desert. Gabriel grew up gay in a household with an abusive step-father, and his lack of citizenship is in conflict with his desire to dance with the Limon Company, a company that would require him to travel abroad, which legally he's not allowed to do. With gay marriage being legal, Gabriel finds himself longing for marriage as a way to find status. Our stories are very different, but intersect in interesting ways, especially as I have been a mentor and artistic figure in his life for a few years. We are working to develop and honor his story and to also challenge the ways in which his story might be told. We are creating a movement vocabulary that relies on his Limon training, but that seeks to find possibility away from the codes through which Limon translates meaning. The intersection of Gabriel's citizenship, sexuality and dance interests are woven together with spoken word, gestural movement and contemporary movement vocabularies. "Gabriel: A Prologue" was presented at the Dance Portfolio Concert at San Jose State on May 4-5, 2015 as a twelve minute study. We will continue to work together through Fall 2015 to further develop "Gabriel" into a twenty- to thirty- minute work. Ultimately, "Gabriel" and "Little Yellow Leo..." will be paired together in an evening, tentatively scheduled for winter 2016. (refer to work in progress sample *Gabriel*)

I am also currently collaborating with queer Cambodian choreographer and dancer Prumsodun OK on a new evening-length performance, "Beloved." Funded by a prestigious MAP Fund Grant, "Beloved" casts a history of ritual lovemaking onto the dancing bodies of gay men. It strips away the heavy costumes of Khmer classical dance down to a barren minimalism, revealing the charged eroticism of the ancient art form. Inspired by an Angkorian fertility rite recorded in the 13th century – in which the Khmer king made nightly sexual unions with a nine-headed serpent who took the form of a woman – "Beloved" situates the love between men in the ritual-poetic space in which Khmer dance is set, mirroring and shaping, stretching and re-choreographing the image of ultimate social order: heaven." Together with Prumsodun we are developing a script. I am originating/writing the role of the King and he the serpent. Once the script is developed I will consult with Prumsodun through the creative process as he develops the choreography and stages the work. "Beloved" premieres in Los Angeles winter 2015, and is produced by ShowBox LA. (refer to work sample *Beloved*)

casebolt and smith is actively working with RAWdance Company in San Francisco to develop a duet for Artistic Directors Wendy Rein and Ryan Smith. RAWdance was awarded a National Endowment for the Arts Grant to fund the commissioning of twelve artists to set new original work on the company. Other commissioned artists include Joe Goode, Ann Carlson, KT Nelson and Shinichi Iova-Koga. Casebolt and I developed the first version of “Too Squared” for RAWdance January 2015, and it was presented as part of the Walking Distance Dance Festival at ODC Theater in June 2015 as a work in progress. We will work with RAWdance later this year to finish “Too Squared,” which will be presented alongside the work of the other eleven choreographers as an evening of work by ODC Theater in summer 2016. **(refer to work sample *Too Squared*)**

Teaching

My ethnicity and sexuality have intersected in multiple ways throughout my life, but nowhere has this been more visible than in the classroom where my identity politics, personal background and research interests all come into play. It was only when I entered the classroom as a teacher in my mid 20’s that I started to see myself, and it was in direct reflection of my students. The importance of developing deep critical thinking skills with my students is embedded in my pedagogy, as well as in my performance and choreography. Engaging in critical conversations about how dances are made, who is dancing, and what is being danced, leads us to ask important questions about gender, sexuality, race, class, power and ultimately representation, not only in the classroom but in performances spaces as well. Having an awareness of how meaning is constructed is a hallmark of my courses and research, regardless of topic or title. I often approach my courses as an improvisational artist. Similar to the improv structures I develop in performance, I feel it’s important to respond to the people in the room and the environment, and be open to their shifting dynamics. This is particularly important at UCR where our student population is one of these most diverse in the country. It requires great sensitivity and appreciation for vastly different levels of experience and understanding. One of the many aspects of the UCR undergraduate program in dance that I am drawn to is its mission to include students of all levels of experience and training backgrounds. Dance at UCR is not a conservatory program, and therefore students do not audition for the major. Perhaps because I only started dancing as a sophomore in college, and that it was while I was discovering my sexuality, I am sensitive to those who are searching for a means to express themselves physically, artistically and socially, when they have had little to no experience doing so prior to college.

Since being hired at UCR I have been instrumental to energizing both our undergrad majors and MFA students. My teaching has included courses in graduate and undergraduate composition, repertory and movement practice, chairing two MFA projects, serving on an oral committee exam for a dance PhD candidate and leading multiple independent studies in composition. I created a new graduate course in choreography, “Special Topics in Dance Making,” specifically designed for faculty and guest artists to teach from a narrower topic of interest and/or from their own research. I also brought Jazz Technique back to the department. Teaching Jazz has proven effective in reaching a part of the population of dancers on campus who know little about our department, but have an interest in continuing their dance training. Their experience with me both as teacher and performer piques their interest in the other kinds of course work we offer, and in particular our composition classes. I have encouraged many students to declare themselves dance majors with great success. In my first four years at UCR I directed *UCR is Dancing* and *Spring Forward*, our annual showcases of undergraduate choreography. My responsibilities include providing critical feedback on their choreographic projects, facilitating publicity with our PR manager, working with a lighting designer and theater staff, managing a production calendar and budget, and designing the poster. Over spring break 2015 I brought ten students to the American College Dance Festival held at Cal State Long Beach, where two student works were adjudicated to great acclaim. There I taught two master classes in contemporary and Jazz technique, and provided mentorship to two of our MFA students who also guest taught from their area of expertise. In addition to teaching on campus, I have been invited to be a guest artist and teacher in residence with *casebolt and smith*, including at: the 92nd Street Y in New York City; South Miami Dade Cultural Arts Center in Miami, FL; Echo Echo Dance and Movement Festival in Derry, Northern Ireland; College of Saint Benedict and Saint John’s University in St. Cloud, MN; DanceWorks Chicago in Chicago, IL; and at University of Nevada, Reno.

The approach to dance-making I have forged with my company *casebolt and smith*, the high degree of visibility we have achieved, the commissions I have received and the guest artist residencies I have held, together with the new solo and collaborative work I am developing, demonstrate my contributions to and status in the field. The relationships I have developed with colleagues and presenters nationally and abroad at important institutions will allow me to continue my record of presentation and collaboration. I believe strongly that all my efforts are worthy of a promotion to tenure. I appreciate your consideration of this request.