

Student combines passions for dance and teaching, looks forward to future

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A seasoned dancer now, Jessica Madden's craft didn't always come easy.

Growing up a bowlegged child, Madden's doctor suggested participating in soccer or dance to help. The cheaper solution was the local sports team.

Later, when her grandmother offered to support Madden's first year of dance classes, she became hooked.

Dancing since she was 8, the 20-year-old rising college junior has used the medium as a creative outlet.

"It's both an art and a sport at the same time," she said. Ten years of study at the Mid-Maryland Performing Arts

Center, where Madden learned different styles, helped solidify her love for dance.

But once college applications were due, Madden was stumped.

"I thought I wouldn't be able to dance in college, since dance isn't exactly a guaranteed career," she said. Making the choice to drop her art was "too hard to think about," Madden said.

A trip to Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania to watch her best friend's dance audition opened Madden's eyes to the possibilities of a double major in dance and elementary education.

If a life of dancing didn't work out, Madden always planned to study education, hoping to become a teacher.

"Ever since I was little, since before I can remember, I've

always wanted to be a teacher," she said.

The usual college search led Madden to Slippery Rock, what she called "the strongest for both programs," allowing her to double major.

Getting both degrees would usually take five years. Madden is trying to graduate in 4½.

"I've always had a problem trying to do too much," Madden said.

She is used to working hard with little time, though. In high school, Madden would attend school during the day, take hours of dance classes at night and still complete her homework.

The Tuscarora High School graduate spent the second semester of her senior year as a student intern in the afternoons, learning the ropes as a teacher.

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Jessica Madden will be a junior at Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania in the fall, double majoring in elementary education and dance. Staff photo by Travis S. Pratt



Slice

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"I always thought I wanted to teach first grade, until I did that," she said. Now she's leaning toward the third through fifth grades.

"I want to teach to inspire kids to have a love for reading," Madden said. "To show them the imagination behind it; that it's not just reading a book and answering questions."

Despite her love for kids and teaching, Madden hopes to make it as a dancer in New York City or Chicago after college.

"It's a hard life to live forever," she said.

Once her dance career has been exhausted, Madden will probably settle down and teach.

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