Faculty in the Spotlight presents the inside scoop on the life of yoga teacher, Angela Jamison. Here at the University of Michigan Department of Dance, Angela teaches a weekly class of Ashtanga Yoga, which she has been practicing daily since 2003. Her dedication and profound research in the practice of yoga are what make her such a great addition to the Department.

When and why did you start practicing yoga?

Do you find yoga to be beneficial for dancers? If so, why?
I’m still learning about dancers as a group, and think that individual students are the best to ask about the benefits of this practice when combined with dance. Speaking more generally, the founding teacher in my lineage, Sri K Pattabhi Jois, said, Anyone can do Ashtanga Yoga. Except lazy person. Most people I work with need to invest an average of 20 hours of intensely focused practice before the breath/inner awareness technique begins to make sense to them. I found that it took the Dance students on average about half that time. It’s great fun to work with such disciplined, kinesthetically intelligent students! The technique has started to come online especially well for those who have chosen to do a bit of self-practice between our weekly meetings.

Do you have any background in dance?
I do not. I grew up mostly off the grid, on a ranch in rural Montana. I ran around cow pastures in the summer, and ice skated on frozen irrigation ditches in winter. My undergraduate degrees are in Philosophy, History, and Communication; and my graduate work is in Sociology.
What kind of yoga do you teach and why?
Ashtanga Yoga. I spent nearly a decade in Los Angeles, exploring the whole world of modern yoga offerings with some of the best teachers alive. During grad school at UCLA, I’d take anywhere from 7-14 amazing yoga classes per week. I chose the Ashtanga method for my daily practice because it is silent (thus much more personal, contemplative, and portable than other styles) and simply because I fell in love with the form.

How has yoga helped you personally?
It’s given me tools to heal enough of my physical, emotional and psychological pain that I feel compelled to put the majority of my energy into serving others. For years, I resisted my teachers’ injunctions to teach, and hated the idea of leaving my academic career to become a mere yoga teacher. But, having made that transition, I find almost exhilarating happiness in the experience of being useful to other people. I do not want to entertain people; I want to offer techniques that they can integrate into their lives after we part ways.

What is the process like for someone interested in getting certified to teach yoga?
In the Ashtanga Method, it’s like this: (1) Practice every day, (2) if you practice with such integrity and skill that your teacher asks you to teach, then (3) you go through a rigorous training process that involves months or years in India and hundreds of hours of unpaid apprenticeship. Traditional yoga is always transmitted person-to-person, and never through books or recorded materials. So receiving the whole content of the method requires years of direct experience.

How else do you spend your time?
Writing, reading, walking, time with my family and pets.

Stay tuned for our Jan/Feb newsletter to learn more about the faculty here at the Department of Dance! Stefania Spadaro-Bliss is an undergraduate student at the University of Michigan. She transferred to the U-M in 2011 and will be graduating with the Class of 2013 with a major in Dance. As a newcomer into the world of newsletter publishing, Stefania is excited to give her readers the inside scoop on the faculty here in the Department of Dance. You may reach Stefania at ssbliss@umich.edu.