

## Pilates® at Goucher Continues to Grow

By Jennifer Ellsworth

Physical fitness is the first requisite of happiness." These words spoken by visionary Joseph Pilates at the turn of the century have become inherent in the lives of the dancers in the Goucher College Dance Department. As new fitness crazes promise a perfect body, an old method lives on and has proven to be one of the best alternatives or complements to an athlete or dancer's daily workout. In the sunlit studios of Goucher, numerous private instruction sessions and group "mat" classes are given daily in *The Pilates Method Of Body Conditioning®* for members of the Baltimore community and Goucher students, including many dancers like myself. What is this name heard so often in present day magazines, QVC, and talk shows? It has definitely become a frequently used term during my time in the dance department over the past three years.

The Pilates Method® is an extensive regime of over 500 exercises that take place on both machines and mats. Low repetitions are used to create strengthened and elongated, not bulky, muscles. There is a deep concentration of the mind over the body, and breathing plays an integral role in the movement. By focusing on a high degree of abdominal strength, one's understanding of one's center is improved. In addition, alignment, posture, and range of motion improve—benefits which I've seen in my own dancing.

Joseph Pilates, originally from Germany, was a boxer who partly developed his regime on injured soldiers in WWI. By isolating the healthy body parts and attaching springs to hospital beds, he gave the soldiers a way to maintain their muscular strength and increase circulation. They responded by healing faster and improving their resistance to disease. Pilates was influenced by both Eastern and Western exercise methods,

which when combined, sought mental relaxation, suppleness, and integration of breath along with increased muscular strength and endurance. He later created his own apparatus equipment and opened a fitness center with his wife Clara in New York City in the same building in which Martha Graham rehearsed. According to the 1998 Pilates® Teacher Certification Program Manual, he greatly emphasized instilling into a teacher "the ability to observe and locate the origin of movement dysfunction." This, along with the gift to motivate and encourage, is what makes the Goucher Pilates® staff so talented.

The Goucher Pilates® Program is headed by Elizabeth Lowe Ahearn, who studied the Pilates® Method for 12 years before obtaining her Pilates® certification five years ago. She was first introduced to the Pilates® Method as an undergraduate at SUNY Purchase. After transferring to NYU, she continued practicing the Method®, and tried out other alternative regimes, such as the Alexander Technique, but found that Pilates® really worked best for her body. After graduating from New York University with a B.A and M.F.A in dance performance and choreography, Ahearn taught at the University of Washington, and began implementing Pilates® into her technique classes and approach to injury treatment. At Goucher College, she was fully supported in her pursuit to become officially certified in the Method once the Pilates® program was developed.

Giving private sessions out of her home led to more of a demand than expected as word spread, and in the fall of 1996, Ahearn proposed the development of a Pilates® studio within the dance department to current chair Amanda Thom Woodson.

Woodson said that the Pilates® Program has exceeded expectations after its construction in the spring and summer of 1997.

"It brings in a new clientele to the dance department, including people who will support the arts and annual concerts," Woodson said. Inspired after teaching at the University of Washington to really "help the students," Ahearn developed an academic Pilates® class at Goucher that imparts hands-on knowledge others could only gain in the actual certification program.

Ahearn said that after students have taken Pilates®, she has noticed "increased strength and flexibility in both dancers and non-dancers, and an improvement in the prevention of chronic injuries."

Future goals of the program include "expansion of the space used," since two studios would simply increase the opportunities so more people could experience it. Ahearn would also like to see more instructors added to her current group which consists of Lynne Bailliete, Linda Moxley, and Goucher alumna Julie Clime '97.

The presence of the Pilates® Program here at Goucher has also inspired students such as myself and Aliza Cohen to train and go through the certification process prior to graduation. After training for two years with Elizabeth Lowe Ahearn and Lynne Bailliete, the two of us applied and were accepted into the year-long training program that can be started at Goucher but must be completed in New York City through 600 hours of observation and apprenticeship. As a visiting prospective student in 1997, I remember hearing Ahearn speak of the soon-to-be-built studio, and since I practiced the Method® throughout high school, the existence of a program at Goucher was one of the reasons I chose to attend Goucher.

As I've watched the program grow over these past three years, seeing it gain new clientele on a daily basis, I feel privileged to have such an opportunity to implement this into my college experience.

As stated by Joseph Pilates, "our interpretation of physical fitness is the attainment and maintenance of a uniformly developed body with a sound mind fully capable of naturally, easily, and satisfactorily performing our many and varied daily tasks with spontaneous zest and pleasure."

The Goucher Pilates® program has enabled the students and members of the local community to do just that, and will continue to provide people with this positive, enlightening experience for years to come.



**New Pilates instructor and Goucher alumna Julia Clime '97 helps Aliza Cohen '00 with a Pilates® exercise.**

PHOTO BY BRINSLEY DAVIS