Questions for Professor Cynthia Williams

1. What was the specific assignment?
Here is the actual assignment:

DAN 210 Dance History BALLET RUSSES PAPER ASSIGNMENT
For this paper, due Wednesday, November 19, please describe one of the major ballets
of the Ballet Russes from the voice of a participant; either the choreographer, composer,
designer, dancer, critic, or audience member. The paper may take the form of a letter, a
diary entry, or a newspaper column. The length of the paper will depend upon which
format you take, but the suggested length is 2-3 pages. Please include all pertinent
information about the ballet (choreographer, date, composer, dancers, designers) but
don’t spend an inordinate amount of time on the plot. Citing your sources is more
difficult in this kind of paper—I’d suggest either using a different typescript for direct
quotations, followed by (author page) or some other way of acknowledging use of
published material. Use primary sources when possible and cite all references using
MLA style. Include a works cited page.

Ballets to select from:
Petrouchka Fokine
L’Apres midi d’un Faune Nijinsky
Le Sacre du Printemps Nijinsky
Les Noces Nijinska

Additional source materials (on reserve):
Baer, Nancy Van Norman Art of Enchantment
Baer, Nancy Van Norman Bronislava Nijinska
Berg, Shelley Le Sacre du Printemps
Craft, Robert Stravinsky: Selected Correspondence
Garafola, Lynn Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes
Garafola, Lynn The Ballets Russes and its World
Hansen Scenic and Costume Design for the Ballets Russes
Hodson, Millicent Nijinsky’s Crime Against Grace
Kochno, Boris Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes
Lederman Stravinsky in the Theater
MacDonald, Nesta Diaghilev Observed by Critics in England and the US
Ostwald, Peter Nijinsky
Wachtel, Andrew Stravinsky Le Sacre du Printemps Anthology of Musical Criticism
Petrouchka

Please bring to class on Monday a draft of your paper. We will spend time in class
discussing them.
2. How does this assignment fit with the goals of your course?
The assignment fits within the goals of my course in several ways: it asks the students to move beyond detached observation about dance to inhabiting the experience of the dance, as choreographer, dancer, or audience member; secondly it requires the students to absorb the factual information about the dance and its importance in history and express that in a personal way; and thirdly it provides them with the opportunity to be more creative in writing style--not all academic papers need to be dry treatises!

3. Why does this student’s essay stand out for you as strong writing?
This essay stood out for me for a variety of reasons: Meg's deftness with incorporating cited material within a non-typical format; the vibrancy of her prose; the sense that she was actually there at the premiere, and the depth of understanding she displayed in her discussion of the ballet.

Questions for Meg Stirling
1. How did you go about completing this essay? What steps did you follow?
First, I selected my topic – I chose to write about the ballet Petrouchka from the perspective of a dance critic because this topic was of interest to me. The next step of my writing process involved library research – I took notes from an encyclopedia and from a number of books that I found on course reserve. Then, using my notes, I created a three section outline. In the first section, I listed some facts about the ballet (the choreographer, premiere date, composer, dancers, designers, and librettist). In the second section, I summarized the basic plot information of the ballet, and I listed (and cited) several important quotes that I found in my reading. Finally, I generated a list of quotes about the ballet which were taken from dance critics at the time of the ballet’s premiere. This added authenticity and an element of historical perspective to my piece. Once my outline was complete, I began to write my first draft.

2. What was the most challenging aspect of this essay assignment?
The most challenging aspect of this assignment was for me to imagine that I was a dance critic in 1911. Fortunately, I was able to find many sample critiques of this ballet through my research in the library.

3. How does this essay connect to your work in the course as a whole?
This semester, the class has studied many different styles of dance, choreographers, and specific ballets throughout history. This essay connects to my work in the course as a whole because it represents a close examination of a particular choreographer and ballet.

4. What is the most important thing you learned from doing this essay?
Writing this essay reminded me of the importance of the writing process. When writing a paper that involves research, I have learned that it is especially important to outline and draft the paper before composing the final copy. In addition, I learned a fair amount of information about the topic of my paper. Fokine’s Petrouchka holds a significant place in dance history because it was unlike any other ballet of its time.