THEA 4390.001 Topics in Theatre: Unarmed Stage Combat
January Short Term 2017—MTWRF, Noon - 3:45 PM

Class Meetings: M-F, Noon – 3:45pm, Warren Theatre
Instructor: Jason Paul Tate
Office Hours: M-F, 3:45 PM – 4:15 PM
Office Location: Bay Hall 3.22
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Email: jasonpaultate@gmail.com

Course Description:
Stage combat is a unique form of acting and movement; integral to the training of the professional actor and an extremely marketable skill. This course is an introduction to the stage fight discipline. It is important as actors that we develop a keen sense of duality in performance; a seemingly impromptu, theatrically engaging moment of violence built upon a foundation of safe, consistent physical dialogue. In this way, we can enhance the physical lives of all the characters we play; especially those engaged in acts of violence. This course explores many fundamental acting techniques in a new light including responsibility to a partner, listening and responding, projection, articulation, spatial awareness and above all intent.

Student Learning Outcomes:

❖ Students will perform the fundamental skills of UNARMED theatrical combat, including but not limited to the compulsory techniques for the Society of American Fight Directors (SAFD) Skills Proficiency Test (SPT).

❖ Students will demonstrate strong acting in the fight, giving appropriate regard to the dangers of the weapon and the given circumstances of a scene.

❖ Students will list safety guidelines for stage combat.

❖ Students will demonstrate good partnering, proper technique, and the successful incorporation of these principles into the acting process; all in pursuit of theatrically effective storytelling.

❖ Students will apply techniques learned to a rehearsal and performance process, culminating in a Final Performance at the end of the course.

❖ Students will be given the opportunity to participate, if so desired, in the SPT sanctioned by the SAFD in hopes of achieving recognized proficiency in UNARMED combat. Final Performance of a scene is mandatory regardless of student’s desire to test with the SAFD.
Course Content:

UNARMED

 Weapons: For the purpose of Skills Proficiency Testing, unarmed fighting shall be defined as the theatrical form of fighting that uses the “natural weapons” of the human body: fists, feet, elbows, knees, etc. rather than weapons.

 Attacks:
  ➢ Three Punches (one contact, two non-contact per combatant): These may include the Cross, Hammer, Hook, Jab, Rabbit, Roundhouse, Straight or Uppercut
  ➢ One Stomach Punch
  ➢ One Slap
  ➢ One Elbow Attack
  ➢ One Kick (per combatant): This may include an Ax Kick, Back Kick, Crescent Kick, Front Kick, Heel Hook, Roundhouse Kick, Side Kick, or a Snap Kick
  ➢ One Knee Attack

 Defense:
  ➢ One Block -either punch or kick (per combatant): These may include a Forearm Block, Open Hand Block, Wing Block and X Block

 Floor Work:
  ➢ One Fall or Roll (per combatant)
  ➢ Grappling:
  ➢ One Strangle/Choke hold
  ➢ One Hair Pull
  ➢ One Throw or Flip

 Knap Techniques:
  ➢ Two Knap Techniques (per combatant): These may include a Cage Knap, Clap Knap, Partnered/Shared Knap, Self/Body Knap or Slip-Hand Knap.

Student Responsibilities:

 Please wear clothing that allows for freedom of movement, keeping in mind that this class is physical in nature and involves falling, rolling, and spending time on the floor. If possible, clothing should show the lines of the body to assist in appropriate targeting for sword work. No jeans, large belt buckles, or clothing that could prove potentially hazardous to course of study will be permitted. All students must wear appropriate footwear (rubber soled athletic shoes or jazz type dance shoes). No sandals, flip flops, open toed or high heeled shoes.

 Personal knee and elbow pads are encouraged, but not required.

 Come to class ON TIME, in the proper attire, warmed up and fully prepared to work.

 Use restrooms prior to class. This is to avoid disruption to the instruction as well as accidents, which may result from sheer excitement at the awesomeness of fist fighting.

 Please remove all jewelry and any loose or sharp objects from your pockets and person prior to class. Pull hair back to keep it from obstructing vision and secure any prescription eyewear.
Out of respect for others working in close proximity and due to the physical nature of the class, everyone is expected to bathe regularly and practice good personal hygiene.

Eating, drinking, smoking and chewing gum are prohibited in class. Water is encouraged for hydration. Coffee is also permitted as it is often a dietary staple and life blood of the actor. Both should be kept in a closed container to avoid spills.

All mobile phones and other portable devices must be turned off or set to silent for the duration of the class unless arrangements are made with the instructor prior to each class.

To assure your comfort and safety, please inform the instructor of any prior or current physical injuries or other limitations that may prove to be a hindrance in performing any techniques presented in class, in order that they may be appropriately adapted.

Regarding the Final Performance scene and/or the SAFD SPT, all scenes should be derived from dramatic literature. (No film or television scripts, please). Some resources for dramatic material will be provided, but students should be aware of their own physical types and choose material with inherent conflict. All scene work must have the prior approval of the instructor. The cut version of the scene should be typed up including all breaks in the verbal dialogue where the physical dialogue will occur and handed in to the instructor.

You must incorporate acting technique into the scene work. The acting work must demonstrate a clearly defined sense of character, an awareness of the circumstances inherent in the text, an obvious pursuit of objective and reason for fighting. In addition the scene must be engaging from the perspective of an audience.

You are strongly encouraged to meet with the Instructor periodically throughout the mini-semester to determine your progress in the course and ensure successful completion by the end of the term. These meetings should occur prior to or at the end of regularly scheduled class times.

The instructor will, to the best of his ability, make himself available to coach techniques and scenes outside of class provided appropriate prior notice is given at the time of the request.

Instructor’s Notes:
Students are hereby advised of the physical nature of the course, and understand that they will be asked on a daily basis to perform activities which will require them to be in physical contact with one another and/or the instructor. Students must take it upon themselves to inform the instructor, teaching assistant and/or any classmates immediately if a particular activity makes them uncomfortable or ill at ease. It is the responsibility of the instructor to adapt the activity if possible to allow for the student to continue or to excuse the student from the activity until a different course of action can be agreed upon. Absent of any such notification, the instructor has no choice but to presume students are comfortable with the physical nature of the course.

It is furthermore the responsibility of the student to keep the instructor, teaching assistant and/or individual classmates appraised of his/her daily wellbeing. Physical injuries including but not limited to muscle strains, sprains, joint pain, back pain, inflammation of prior injury, asthma, difficulty breathing, fractures, chronic headache or fatigue; should be brought to the immediate attention of the instructor or teaching assistant at the beginning of class or upon first appearance of symptoms within class. Techniques learned in this class require a certain level of focus and physical ability and if improperly performed can lead to injury of yourself and others. It is imperative that you are acutely aware of your own wellbeing and the wellbeing of your partner.
Feeling ill or under the weather should also be brought to the attention of the instructor so that proper precautions can be taken to avoid spread of illness to those around you.

**Instructor’s Right of Removal:**
Due to the inherent risk in improper performance of techniques taught in class and the necessary safety of all students, the instructor reserves the right to ask any student to stop participating in an activity, leave the classroom or have them expelled from the course if it is believed that the student demonstrates disregard for the wellbeing of themselves or others. Students must abide at all times by all university policies concerning proper classroom behavior in addition to the safety guidelines set forth by the instructor. The instructor retains the right to disallow any individual(s) to participate in the SAFD SPT.

**Evaluation:**
Each student will be evaluated on their ability to demonstrate understanding of the course material, their adherence to the guidelines set in place above, and their commitment to the work and to their partner.

It is understood and expected that students will work at different paces in order to achieve desired results. Therefore each student will be evaluated according to their individual abilities rather than the collective progress of the class or any one student.

Your grade for performance in this course will be evaluated according to the following breakdown.

- **Presence and participation – 20%**
- **Demonstration of improvement and integration of previous notes – 20%**
- **Mid Term – 20%**
  Demonstration of safe and effective techniques introduced up until this point in the class paired with a brief written exam featuring definitions of techniques learned in class (see attached glossary of terms), and examples of theatrical texts in which this form of combat could be employed.

- **Final Performance Scene/SAFD SPT = 40%**
  Please note that this grade is not contingent on whether or not you choose to participate in the SPT as sanctioned by the SAFD nor is it contingent on a pass or fail if you choose to participate. Rather it is based on your individual ability to demonstrate safe and theatrically effective techniques within the context of your dramatic scene and the presence of clear acting technique that enhances both the emotional and physical lives of the characters.

92 – 100% = A   83 – 91% = B   74 – 82% = C   65 – 73% = D   63% or less = F

In the event that a student is unable to complete the course as a result of unforeseen circumstances, he/she should get in contact with the instructor to discuss the possibility of receiving an incomplete in the course. Such a grade will be issued provided the student has completed at least half of the coursework and is maintaining a C average in the class.
Opportunities for Extra Credit are available. Again, it is highly recommended that you take time to meet with the instructor periodically to determine your progress. The instructor can recommend an appropriate extra credit assignment if necessary at this time.

**Extra Credit Assignments:**
There are two options for extra credit in this course. A student will only be eligible for extra credit if he/she has met with and received approval from the instructor. A student may choose to complete either one or both assignments. Any additional assignments will change the way in which the final grade is calculated. For instance, if a student elects the literary response; the total grade will be calculated from 120% rather than 100%. The grading scale will be adjusted to reflect this change.

- **Stage Combat Literary Response – additional 20%**
  There have been a number of excellent resources and texts written concerning stage combat, its history and practice. Any student may read any of the texts listed below or another not listed (upon express permission of the instructor) and submit a response paper at least 2,000 words in length. The focus of your response should be on the elements of the book which you feel are relevant to the coursework we have explored thus far. What does the author have to say about safety? Acting the fight? Does he/she mention any exercises that resemble something we touched on in class or that spoke to you on a personal level? It is important to mention both the author’s relationship to stage combat (i.e. scholar, historian, teacher, fight director, etc.), and their affiliation with the SAFD (if any). Please be sure to cite the book you read and any other resources.


- **Stage Combat Script Analysis – additional 4% each (maximum of 20%)**
  Choose any scene from dramatic literature that is at least two pages in length and contains inherent conflict. Give a brief character description that includes the characters level of martial experience and any moral, political, or religious stance on violence. Score it, separating it into acting beats. Within each beat, clearly define an objective for each character and identify at least one tactic that the character may use in pursuit of that objective.

**Attendance Policy:**
Due to the experiential nature of this course and the amount of class time spent partnering; attendance is of the utmost importance.
- Students are allowed 1 absence during the mini-mester.
- Any additional absence will result in loss of a full letter grade.
- 2 instances of tardiness or early departure from class constitute an absence. Tardiness is defined as arriving late to class or being improperly prepared for class upon arrival.
- If you are more than ten minutes late to class, you will be considered absent for the day.
- There are no excused absences.
- If you are absent on the date of the written midterm, you will automatically be required to complete a literary response in order to make up the grade.

**Additional Notes:**
The success of this course is directly related to the overall focus of the group. Please approach this class as a member of an ensemble. Show respect and support for your fellow classmates, while striving to do your individual best work at all times. That being said, please do not give notes to your fellow actors or classmates regarding any of the techniques learned in class unless prompted to do so by the instructor as part of an in class activity.

**Academic Integrity**
Any student found guilty of academic dishonesty, such as plagiarism or cheating will receive an “F” for the assignment, and, if the situation warrants it, for the entire course.

**Students with Disabilities**
The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please call or visit Disability Services at (361) 825-5816 in Corpus Christi Hall, Room #116.

If you are a returning veteran and are experiencing cognitive and/or physical access issues in the classroom or on campus, please contact the Disability Services office for assistance at (361) 825-5816.

**Academic Advising**
The College of Liberal Arts requires that students meet with an Academic Advisor as soon as they are ready to declare a major. Degree plans are prepared in the CLA Academic Advising Center. The University uses an online Degree Audit system. Any amendment must be approved by the Department Chair and the Office of the Dean. All courses and requirements specified in the final degree plan audit must be completed before a degree will be granted. The CLA Academic Advising Office is located in Driftwood #203. For more information, please call 361-825-3466.

**Grade Appeals Process**
As stated in University Procedure 13.02.99.C2.01, Student Grade Appeal Procedures, a student who believes that he or she has not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in the class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in
the course. The burden of proof is upon the student to demonstrate the appropriateness of the appeal. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details, including the responsibilities of the parties involved in the process and the number of days allowed for completing the steps in the process, see University Procedure 13.02.99.C2.01, Student Grade Appeal Procedures (available at http://academicaffairs.tamucc.edu/rules_procedures/assets/13.02.99.C2.01_student_grade_appeal_procedure.pdf). For complete details on the process of submitting a formal grade appeal, please visit the College of Liberal Arts website, http://cla.tamucc.edu/about/student-resources.html. For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Associate Dean’s Office.

**Tentative Class Schedule**

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<tr>
<th>DAY</th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>CLASS CONTENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>January 2</td>
<td>Intro/Syllabus Review, Grappling and Partnering, Falls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>January 3</td>
<td>Review Falls, Grappling. Introduce Push/Shove, Contact Punch, AVOIDs, Blocks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>January 4</td>
<td>Non-Contact Technique – Slap, Jab, Straight, Hook, Cross, Knaps</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>January 5</td>
<td>Kicks/Knees/Elbows</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>January 6</td>
<td>Throws, Chokes, Hair Pulls</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>January 9</td>
<td>Midterm/Begin Choreography</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>January 10</td>
<td>Choreography and Coaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>January 11</td>
<td>Choreography and Coaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>January 12</td>
<td>Dress Rehearsal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>January 13</td>
<td>Final Exam</td>
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