

Stage Combat

THEA 382 – Section 001
University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point
Course Syllabus, Fall 2016

Mondays & Wednesdays, 1:00 – 2:50 pm, NFAC 283
Final Exam Period: Wednesday, December 21, 8:00 – 10:00 am

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Teaching Assistants

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PURPOSE

This course is a study in the necessary skills and practices for approaching the highest extremes of physical action on stage – violence. So many of our greatest plays include scenes of physical violence, and as actors we must be prepared to perform them effectively for an audience, and safely for all actors involved. Through physical exploration and the creation of choreography, we will be learning a movement vocabulary for at least two of the most commonly used combat disciplines on stage: unarmed combat and single sword. Other weapon disciplines may be briefly explored, time permitting. We will be adhering to the vocabulary and practices taught and used by members of the Society of American Fight Directors (SAFD). Over the course of the semester, students will learn how to effectively balance correct, safe movement technique with believable acting.

“...the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere the mirror up to nature...” – William Shakespeare, Hamlet (III.ii)

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Enduring Understandings – Through this course, students will understand that...

- Stage combat – the illusion of physical violence choreographed and acted for a staged performance – is a distinct movement discipline where dramatic integrity is essential and the artists’ safety is paramount.

Essential Questions

- What is the purpose of violence on stage?
- What makes for a dramatically effective illusion of violence?

Specific Goals

- *Knowledge* – Stage Combat students will be able to...
 - Identify combat and movement practices by a specific vocabulary for the purpose of creating and discussing choreography.
 - Recognize and apply the history behind different styles of combat to various styles/genres of theatre.
- *Skills* – Stage Combat students will be able to...
 - Demonstrate compulsory movement techniques for at least two weapon disciplines as recognized by the SAFD – unarmed combat and single sword.
 - Learn, rehearse and execute fight choreography in a professional, safe, and accurate way.
 - Safely and comfortably perform scenes of violence with full commitment to character, objective, actions and given circumstances – convincingly creating the illusion of danger.
- *Dispositions* – Stage Combat students will...
 - Respect the personal safety of all artists involved in the creation and performance of staged violence.
 - Respect the role of stage combat as an art form that intends to promote non-violence in our society.

CLASS POLICIES

Required Readings

- Various reading assignments may be made throughout the semester. These materials will be distributed by hard-copy handouts and/or D2L.

Suggested Text

- Girard, Dale Anthony. **Actors On Guard**. Routledge/Theatre Arts Books, 1997.

Required Materials

- **Attire** – All students are required to wear clothing appropriate for a movement class, with some further specifications. These are the guidelines:
 - Wear a shirt and pants that do not restrict movement nor obscure the shape of the body. A t-shirt and sweat pants are a good ideal. No jeans, ever.
 - Do not wear clothing you care about; it could be damaged, dirtied, etc.
 - Wear tennis shoes without large metal or plastic clasps (soft-tops)
 - Long hair must be tied back and out of the face
 - Remove any and all jewelry/accessories, as they are a potential danger to you and your scene partner. This includes rings, bracelets, watches, necklaces, earrings and body piercings.
 - If you wear glasses and have the option of wearing contacts, contacts are preferred. If you must wear glasses, find an efficient way to secure them to your face and be prepared for the worst. Never compromise your vision.
 - For weapon work, you must have gloves. Leather work gloves, weight-lifting gloves, or biking gloves all work well – winter gloves do not.
 - Optional – athletic protection (knee pads, elbow pads, athletic supports)
 - Have prepared at least one plain white t-shirt that you are willing to have soiled. I will let you know when to bring this.
- **Water** – Bring a personal water bottle to stay hydrated during class.

Class Assignments & Expectations

- **Daily Participation & Growth** – Includes, but not limited to: being prepared for class; a consistent willingness to engage, explore, and play with focus and an open heart in all warm-ups and exercises; understanding of assigned readings; being off-book when due; your growth in the practice of course techniques; a positive attitude that prevents personal issues from negatively impacting the work; a constant regard for personal safety and the safety of others.
- **Vocabulary Quizzes** – Periodically, I will give written quizzes testing your understanding of assigned readings and our vocabulary for staged violence. I reserve the right to give these quizzes without warning.
- **Choreography & Scene Performances** – As we learn the various compulsory techniques involved in each weapon discipline, we will be building phrases of choreography. This will culminate in one long set of choreography for each of the disciplines (unarmed and single sword). You and your partner will be responsible for fitting this choreography to a dramatic text of your choice (with my approval) to be performed with full acting commitment. You will be graded on your technique, accuracy of choreography, and the believability of your acting work (each scene shown twice).
- **Choreography Breakdown & Narrative** – For each scene you present, there is a written component that you will turn in articulating the connection between your script/character analysis and the physical choreography. Details forthcoming.

Final Grade Breakdown

Daily Participation & Growth	30%
Vocabulary Quizzes	20%
Unarmed Scene.....	25%
Scene Performance (80%), CB&N (20%)	
Single Sword Scene.....	25%
Scene Performance (80%), CB&N (20%)	

Grading Scale

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Grade</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
A	94 – 100	C+	78 – 80
A-	91 – 93	C	74 – 77
B+	88 – 90	C-	71 – 73
B	84 – 87	D+	68 – 70
B-	81 – 83	D	60 – 67

Grading Criteria

A (91 – 100%) – Excellent Work – Student consistently demonstrates strong understanding and application of course materials and techniques. Student is consistently well-prepared for and engaged in all class activities. All assignments are completed on time with the highest degree of quality, demonstrating excellent growth.

B (81 – 90%) – Good Work – Student demonstrates good understanding and application of course materials and techniques, with minor issues in performance. Student is consistently well-prepared and engaged in all class activities. All assignments are completed on time with good quality, demonstrating a good level of growth.

C (71 – 80%) – Mediocre Work – Student demonstrates limited or inconsistent understanding and application of course materials and techniques. Student is mostly present and participates in class. All assignments are completed with enough effort to meet minimum requirements, demonstrating limited growth.

D (60 – 70%) – Poor Work – Student attempts to complete all assignments, but is unable to achieve many requirements. Student demonstrates the minimum level of effort, participation, understanding and growth for a passing grade.

F (Less than 60%) – Failure – Student does not adequately participate in class, complete assignments or adhere to assignment guidelines. No improvement evident.

Attendance & Participation

- Prompt, consistent attendance is essential to your growth in this class. Show up dressed to move and ready to engage!
- You may miss two classes without grading penalty. Every absence thereafter will reduce your final course grade by one full letter (i.e. the best possible grade with 3 absences is a “B”, with 4 absences is a “C”, and so on).
- Six absences results in a failing grade for the course.
- There is no distinction between “excused” and “unexcused” absences in this course; save your absences for when you absolutely need them.
- Arriving more than five minutes late to class counts as half an absence. After 2 absences, half an absence will reduce your final course grade by one + or – degree (i.e. 2.5 absences would reduce an A to an A-, an A- to a B+, and so on).
- If you fail to deliver a performance on your assigned day, your grade on that assignment will be “0.” Arrangements for make-up performances will only be made for the scene partner who was present and ready to perform on the assigned day.
- If there are exceptional circumstances (i.e. serious health/family emergencies), please speak with me privately, asap. If you develop a physical ailment (injury or illness) that prevents you from participating, please still come to class and observe (unless you’re given specific orders otherwise and obtain my express permission).
- You are allowed **one** observation day – after that, observing will count as an absence.
- If you are late or miss a class, you are responsible for finding out what work and assignments, if any, might have been missed by contacting your class-mates, e-mailing me and/or seeing me during office hours.
- If a class should need to be cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances, I will e-mail the class and a note will be placed on the classroom door.

Safety & Comfort

In Stage Combat, students are guaranteed to be in close physical contact with every member of the class at one point or another. I will also be working physically with students to help adjust movements. If you are uncomfortable with this at any point in the semester, please come speak with me privately, asap.

Stage combat is the art of safely performing moments of violence. Students must respect the work of others, maintain focus in the room, and heed all safety instructions. Acceleration past safely built speeds or allowing outside personal issues to affect performance of violence is dangerous and can result in serious injury. Coming to class or scene rehearsals under the influence of drugs or alcohol is extraordinarily dangerous to your classmates and scene partners, and will not be tolerated.

Violating any of these safety precautions may result in a student being asked to immediately leave the room, counting as an absence, and may also lead to stronger disciplinary actions.

Combat Out of the Room

Stage combat is a fun and exciting process, but is only to be undertaken under proper supervision. You will be informed when and where it is appropriate to rehearse specific elements outside of the class, but stage combat is NEVER intended as something silly to try outside of theatrical settings. Combat techniques and materials are not to be used for any purposes other than in theatrical settings both for your safety and legal security. Staging fights outside of class is foolish and dangerous, and can result in serious injury, academic punishments, and even police arrest.

(i.e. Faking a bar fight can very easily land you in jail!)

Emergency Response

- In the event of a medical emergency, call 911 or use the red emergency phone located outside NFAC 278 (Jenkins HR Coat Room). Offer assistance if trained and willing to do so. Guide emergency responders to victim.
- In the event of a tornado warning, proceed to the lowest level interior room without window exposure – the restrooms next door.
- See www.uwsp.edu/rmgt/Pages/em/procedures/other/floor-plans for floor plans showing severe weather shelters on campus. Avoid wide-span rooms and buildings.
- In the event of a fire alarm, evacuate the building in a calm manner. Meet across Portage Street in Parking Lot R. Notify instructor or emergency command personnel of any missing individuals.
- Active Shooter – Run/Escape, Hide, Fight. If trapped: hide, lock doors, turn off lights, spread out and remain quiet. Follow instructions of emergency responders.
- See UW-Stevens Point Emergency Management Plan at www.uwsp.edu/rmgt for details on all emergency response at UW-Stevens Point.

UWSP Community Bill of Rights and Responsibilities

UWSP values a safe, honest, respectful, and inviting learning environment. In order to ensure that each student has the opportunity to succeed, we have developed a set of expectations for all students and instructors. This set of expectations is known as the *Rights and Responsibilities* document, and it is intended to help establish a positive living and learning environment at UWSP. Look here for more information:

<http://www.uwsp.edu/stuaffairs/Pages/rightsandresponsibilities.aspx>

Academic integrity is central to the mission of higher education in general and UWSP in particular. Academic dishonesty (cheating, plagiarism, etc.) is taken very seriously. The minimum penalty for a violation of academic integrity is a failure (zero) for the assignment. For more information, see the UWSP “Student Academic Standards and Disciplinary Procedures” section of the *Rights and Responsibilities* document, Chapter 14, which can be accessed here:

<http://www.uwsp.edu/stuaffairs/Documents/RightsRespons/SRR-2010/rightsChap14.pdf>

Americans with Disabilities Act

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal law requiring educational institutions to provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. For more information about UWSP’s policies, check here:

<http://www.uwsp.edu/stuaffairs/Documents/RightsRespons/ADA/rightsADAPolicyinfo.pdf>

If you have a disability and require classroom and/or exam accommodations (even temporarily), please register with the Disability and Assistive Technology Center and then contact me at the beginning of the course. I am happy to help in any way I can. For more information, please visit the Disability and Assistive Technology Center, located on the 6th floor of the Learning Resource Center (the Library). You can also find more information here:

<http://www4.uwsp.edu/special/disability/>

Religious Beliefs

Religious beliefs will be accommodated according to UWS 22.03 as long as the student notifies the instructor within the first three weeks of the beginning of the semester with the days or dates on which he/she wishes to request relief from an examination or academic requirement.