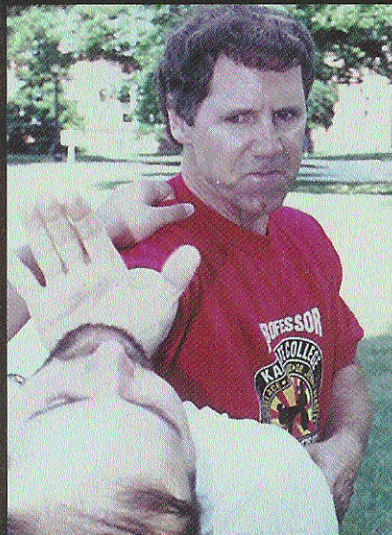


# INSTRUCTOR of the Year

## Dr. Jerry Beasley



### Helping Students Reach a Higher Level of Learning

by Adrienne Lee Bell

PHOTO BY ROBERT W. YOUNG

As a college undergraduate, Jerry Beasley was one of those students who preferred kicking and punching to studying and homework. Consequently, when he brought home his report card ... Well, let's just say the dog ate that, too.

"At first, my grade point average was very low," says Beasley, who earned his bachelor's degree in philosophy from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) in Blacksburg, Virginia. "I didn't know how to get good grades."

While Beasley was grappling with his grades, he remained a well-respected *taekwondo* black belt amongst the martial artists on campus.

"Being a black belt made me a real leader," says Beasley. "However, I wished to become a leader in academics as well. Eventually, I figured out there was a library where I could learn to study. After that revelation, I got along just fine."

After buckling down with his books, Beasley began to make headway, ultimately ending up on the dean's list. After graduating from Virginia Tech in 1973, Beasley set his sights on earning a master's degree in sociology.

While working on his thesis, Beasley simultaneously taught a myriad of martial arts classes, including taekwondo, kickboxing and full-contact karate on campus and at satellite *dojo* (training hall). After completing his master's degree, Beasley went after his doctorate in education, which focused on designing a curriculum for martial arts instructors.

"I was primarily focusing on how to design a martial arts program that met the needs of the clientele," says the 49-year-old Virginia resident. "To do that, I had to research the history of the arts and how they were taught

across the country."

After Beasley earned his doctorate in education in 1980, he became an assistant professor at Radford University in Radford, Virginia where he concentrated on teaching a variety of arts, including *jeet kune do*. As he earned academic rank at the university (he achieved full professor in 1998), his teaching assignments shifted from introductory classes to advanced martial arts theory and culture classes. The courses also feature a performance lab.

"Early in my career, I favored the physical skills," says Beasley. "Today, I place much more emphasis on teaching the Asian philosophy and culture. I guess you can say I became more of a thinker than a performer."

When Beasley started this pro-

gram, it was unprecedented on college campuses.

"Other universities offered classes in Japanese arts or Korean arts, but we were the first to offer the multicultural format," he says. "We were a trendsetter in terms of colleges and universities. That certainly put me into the forefront of this whole concept."

After 20 years, the classes are still going strong.

"We have to turn students away every semester," says Beasley. "It's always one of the first classes to fill up."

The program is popular for several reasons, he says. First, word-of-mouth spreads the good word about the class. Next, the media keeps the martial arts in the public eye. Finally, people want to learn self-defense, he says.

"It's a sign of the times," says Beasley.

After thousands of kicks and punches throughout his two decades of teaching, Beasley hasn't slowed down a bit either. Later this year, he intends to participate in a 50-round kickboxing marathon to celebrate his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. And he still mixes it up with his students so they get a nice blend of self-defense skills as well as an in-depth look at Asian philosophy and culture.

In some ways, college and the martial arts are similar because you advance from one level to the next, he says. Throughout the years, Beasley has been instrumental in guiding thousands of students to a higher level intellectually and physically, and that's exactly why he's being recognized as *Black Belt's* Instructor of the Year for 2000. ✕

*About the author: Adrienne Lee Bell is a free-lance writer based in New York.*