

DOUBLE MASTERY

A COLLEGIATE DEGREE IN THE MARTIAL ARTS

You won't find it in a college catalog. In fact, Dr. Jerry Beasley, Radford University professor and martial arts instructor, may be the only man in the United States to possess a post-graduate degree in the martial arts. Beasley's PhD was his own creation, and in this exclusive feature, he shares his experience in creating a unique doctoral program.

To the devoted student, the study of the martial arts carries with it a built-in desire for mastery. In his lifelong pursuit of perfection, the student is expected to spend long, hard hours working toward the goal. Traditionally, a true devotee would be expected to travel to the Orient in order to master the arts in their purest form, or become apprenticed to a recognized master in an Asian country to learn the secrets passed on from generation to generation.

Although many students have followed this path, there is an alternate course toward mastering a martial art. This alternate method, requiring the same rigorous study as the traditional path, takes modern methods of study into consideration.

To develop expertise in any number of occupations, one needs to simply enroll in a college or university offering programs in that specific area. Unfortunately, martial arts instruction has long been neglected as an area of collegiate study, other than simple introductory physical education or philosophy courses. However, for the enterprising individual there's always a way around such technicalities.

One martial artist who has developed mastery through the American educational system is Dr. Jerry Beasley. "I was able to design a graduate program to further my interest in the martial arts," Beasley said. His story is somewhat unique because he not only spent hours working on the physical skills, but, in addition, long hours went into research and writing. His approach was to develop the mind in equal proportion to the development of physical skill. With increased knowledge, he could more effectively develop his own physical skills rather than continue to practice only those skills already developed. "My research and evaluation resulted in new training methods that are highly suited to an American clientele," he said.

In acquiring his own martial arts skills, Beasley studied with a renown taekwon do master. He achieved the level of black belt in 1971. Within a month, Beasley (a junior in college at the time) had opened a school and was teaching under the master's direction.

Unlike many of his karate friends who complete their degrees and retired from karate practice to pursue employment else-

By L.R. Ferolino

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Jerry Beasley combined an accomplished career as a private martial arts instructor with the academic world, writing his own post-graduate degree in the martial arts. Beasley's graduate thesis concerned the occupational role of the karate instructor.

where, Beasley chose to develop a career in martial arts instruction. Although he had decided to become a professional martial artist, he was admittedly dissatisfied with his temporary lack of knowledge. He had "passable" knowledge in the Japanese and Korean systems, but he still pondered over the questions, "How were the masters able to develop different styles of martial art and how could someone else go about developing their own methods?" Perhaps these questions could be answered through further study.

By fall of 1973, Beasley had enrolled in a master's program at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University to study sociology. He maintained that his bachelor's degree in philosophy was as close as one could currently expect to get to receiving a karate-oriented undergraduate degree. Now, with the more liberal graduate programs, he could begin to focus on specific areas in martial

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arts education. He designed his graduate program around a thesis dealing with the occupational role of the karate instructor. His premise: "As it presently stood," Beasley explained, "the martial arts were dominated by an Oriental stereotype. And in order for a non-Oriental American to be an effective karate instructor, he would have to pay a lot of attention toward recreating the Oriental role model."

One of Beasley's research methods included sampling procedures using a group of pictures and the instructions, "Pick the karate instructor." He approached people on the street and showed them pictures of an American and an Asian. The vast majority, as expected, picked the Asian. Beasley also traveled to a number of karate schools and asked instructors what they felt they had to do to be effective. He found that many thought they were more easily accepted as karate practitioners when they were dressed in their gi, spoke one or more languages of the discipline, and sought to maintain the pageantry and ritual associated with the arts.

The conclusion Beasley found in defending his thesis was the non-Asian Americans were the subjects of role stress. They had the physical ability to do karate, but were often inhibited by the fact that they didn't "look the



Beasley kicks during a sparring session with the legendary karate fighter Joe Lewis. Lewis and Beasley comprise the executive board of the American Independent Karate Instructors Association (AIKIA), which serves as a forum for the exchange of ideas between instructors.

part" of "fulfill the stereotypical role expectations required of the karate instructor." Beasley recorded part of his findings in a December 1978 article entitled "How Important Is An Instructor's Image?"

The conclusions reached in Beasley's thesis greatly affected his personal involvement in the martial arts. As a result of his research, Beasley said, "I was convinced that the only way Americans could become effective role models for martial arts students was to gain control of the physical skills associated with karate." Beasley reasoned that, since most people identified karate with the skill, the people who controlled or developed the skill became the role models. The traditional skills, such as breaking boards, the kiai, superhuman power—these all surrounded by an Asian mystique—were associated with the Asian masters.

In order for the Americans to gain respect, they would either have to surpass these traditional methods or develop their own equally prestigious methods. "Fortunately," Beasley says, "the seeds of this eventual skill development had already been sown." Americans, in 1973-74, had developed their own version of karate which later became known as contact karate. Here again, Beasley shared his in a November, 1980 article for *Kick Illustrated* entitled "Contemporary Karate: The New Era of Martial Arts." The skills of contact karate were particularly interesting

to Beasley because they supported his theoretical conclusions.

Beasley's personal interest in karate was strongly influenced by his earlier studies in Western philosophy. He had sampled a number of traditional karate styles and found there was as much emphasis placed on the pageantry as on the skills themselves. "The

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value of each skill was directly associated with its traditional background," Beasley says. "Skills were being taught simply because they had always been taught, as opposed to whether or not the techniques actually worked."

In the mid-'70s, Beasley had become proficient in the contact-oriented karate and found it to be quite useful. Professionally, he concluded that contact karate would be

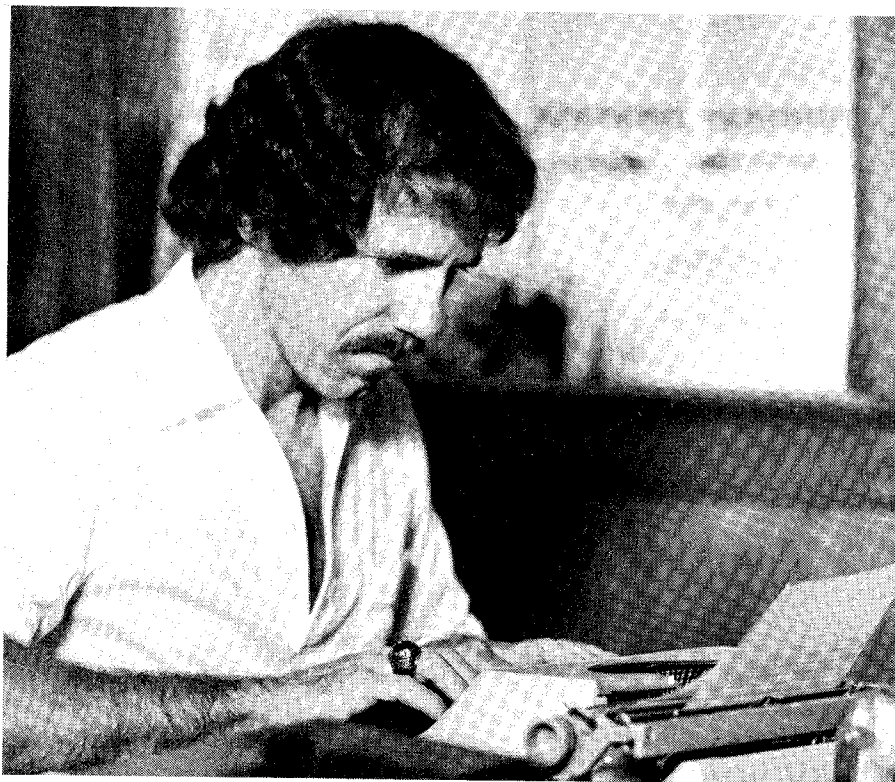
most beneficial for Americans who, philosophically, would be inclined to immediate results. In contact karate, unlike traditional karate with its long-range perspective, people are immediately put into contact situations. "It's spontaneous and thus more like self-defense," Beasley said. The development of contact karate, according to Beasley, would provide the stepping stone for the eventual domination of Americans in the martial arts.

By the spring of 1977, Beasley had completed his master's degree and received advanced black belt ranks in several arts. At this same time, he was teaching classes at Radford University as a professor in the physical education department in addition to teaching at his own studio.

By most standards, he had become quite successful as a professional martial artist. In his own opinion, however, he lacked the knowledge that links one style to another. Beasley was convinced that there was a method for developing a viable martial arts system. He reasoned that with the proper combination of physical skills and social-psychological structural components any given martial art could be redesigned to best meet the current needs of its practitioners.

It was back-to-school time again for Beasley, this time for his doctorate. He wasn't returning to school simply to study the physical skills, but to develop analytical skills and methods of research that would allow him to

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Beasley works in his Radford University office. His work has helped him become a better instructor and a more knowledgeable participant in his art.

objectively examine a karate system and evaluate *any* martial arts style in terms of its efficiency and combat utility. For Beasley, this task would require a constant battle against fatigue from the countless hours of research and writing.

First, he had to determine what it was that Americans looked for in their martial arts. His results: combat efficiency (or self-defense); physical fitness; the opportunity to meet with other people (a social function); confidence; competition (associated with sport karate); the traditional orientation of martial arts—the mystical approach. Beasley found that, generally, Americans were not very sophisticated in what *type* of punching and kicking skills were taught. They simply had to believe the techniques worked.

"After identifying a specific population [that is, who it is you're going to teach]," Beasley concluded, "an astute instructor can, in effect, personally design an effective martial arts system by using an exact measure of each structural component—pageantry, self-defense skills, sport orientation, and so on."

As an example, Beasley considers college students—both male and female. The males, he says, seem to be primarily interested in the sport (the actual contact). Some females, on the other hand, learn better with traditional values. But for self-defense purposes, contemporary contact skills are needed. His solution? Add a little pageantry and take out some of the contact skills. The point, Beasley



In his thesis, Beasley found that students were drawn more readily to an instructor dressed in a gi who spoke one or more languages of the discipline and maintained the pageantry and ritualism of the martial arts.

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said, is that you can measure ingredients (or structural components) accordingly. "In each case," he said, "the addition or deletion of structural components requires several years of experimentation and must be adaptable to changes in clientele needs."

Not every instructor has the ability to redesign a martial arts system to best suit a specific student group, Beasley said. "With few exceptions I would recommend that traditional systems be maintained. However, there's nothing sacred about the physical skills taught in traditional systems." An effective instructor, according to Beasley, should be able to adapt physical skills to specific needs without damaging the all important structure or social skills which are extremely important to successful martial arts instruction. "Unfortunately," he said, "too many instructors have mistakenly altered the social patterns, the bow, the chain of command and emphasis on respect, and thus have weakened their own systems."

ical skills have always varied."

As a professional educator, Beasley concludes that an instructor should first of all determine the needs of his students. If the students' needs are inconsistent with his methods, he should refer the client to a more appropriate school. From the start, the instructor should state clearly what it is that students will be taught in that particular school.

Beasley, who claims to be an advocate of all martial arts, said, "I think it would be dull if everyone taught the same thing." He enjoys watching the skills of the purely traditional styles, for he spent years mastering them himself. But for him, the modern day contemporary American karate (emphasizing contact sparring) is more functional. And since Americans have gained an identity as both originators and champions of contact-oriented karate, Beasley sees a bright future for the American martial arts.

To this end, Beasley has begun an assoc-

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Beasley used his professional research in his approach to developing a martial arts system which he teaches to a private or small group basis. In some cases, he assists other instructors in evaluating and redesigning their own methods. His system is designed for combat efficiency based on a short-range perspective, focusing on contact-oriented skills and just the right measure of pageantry. He places less emphasis on the kata, using it only as a tool for developing the correct karate posture. However, he maintains that the social relations and group configurations characterizing his approach are not unlike those found in the most traditional of karate styles.

"It is the social structure combined with the benefits derived from the physical skills which together benefit the development of a disciplined character," Beasley said. "For each component that we take out of a system, we have to strategically advance the benefits of another. Karate is identified as being an art of self-defense. What I've done is teach self-defense methods in a manner which is easily understood and practiced by my American students. Moreover, the components for character development are still intact. Traditions apply only to social patterns. The phys-

iation for American stylists. "The American Independent Karate Instructors Association [AIKIA]," Beasley said, "is simply a tool for the advancement and exchange of ideas among instructors who consider themselves to be free of fixed styles and ideas. Independents are the professional who add techniques and methods to their systems because they work and not because they are expected to do so. And so long as the social patterns are not significantly altered, there are no limits to possible advancement in martial arts education."

The rigorous study of the martial arts—all of the long hours spent in research and analysis—may not be suitable or rewarding for just anyone. But in order for the martial arts to gain acceptance in college curriculums, more and more students will be required to pursue research in martial arts education. Through his work Beasley has succeeded in obtaining for both himself and the people with whom he works a well-rounded appreciation for all martial arts and the analytical skills to evaluate and progress the arts for the benefit of all.



About the author: L.R. Ferolino, a freelance writer, interviewed Beasley after taking one of his karate classes at Radford University.