

# Undergraduate Research Academy (URA)

## Application for Student Fellowship

1. Name Whitney Elmore

6. Academic Major Performance Theater 7. Hours Completed 80 hrs 8. GPA 3.4

9. Nominated by Jim Dorethy and Cameron Ulrich

10. Reviewed by: (Please print)

Faculty Mentor Jim Dorethy and Cameron Ulrich  
Department Chair C. Otis Sweezey

11. Title of Research Project Exploring and Developing State Combat Methodologies

Please send the original plus 10 copies of the proposal, including budget justification and cover page.

12. Budget Summary Total: \$ 799.75  
Commodities: \$ 123.25 Contractual Services: \$ 0  
Travel: \$ 676.50 Other (specify): \$ 0

13. Valid nominations must carry all of the following approval signatures with dates:

a. Clearances (as appropriate):

Animal Care N/A Human Subjects N/A (Verified 3/20/02)

Toxic Waste N/A

b. Student Whitney Elmore's Signature 3/19/02

c. Faculty Mentors James Dorethy and Cameron Ulrich's Signatures 3/19/02

d. Department Chair Charles Otis Sweezey's Signature 3/19/02

e. Dean of College/School David Steinberg's Signature 3/10/02

f. Undergraduate Research Academy Interview Cindy Scarsdale's Signature

SIUE Undergraduate Assessment -&- The Undergraduate Research Academy  
Box 1300 voice: 618/650-2640 e-mail: [deder@siue.edu](mailto:deder@siue.edu) FAX: 618/650-3633



## Undergraduate Research Academy (URA)

### Cover Sheet

SEND TO CAMPUS BOX 1300  
BY NOON, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20, 2002

STUDENT Whitney Elmore MENTOR Jim Dorethy and Cameron Ulrich

PROJECT TITLE Exploring and Developing Stage Combat Methodologies

**ABSTRACT:** The abstract is a brief, comprehensive summary of the content of the proposal in about 150 words in plain language. Reviewers receive their first impression from this abstract. The information needs to be concise, well organized, self contained, and understandable to persons outside your academic discipline.

Since the Middle Ages, stage combat has been used in theater. Stage combat is the armed or unarmed stage effect or violence without any of the actors harming themselves or each other. Stage and film violence is prevalent in today's national and international theater and film industry. To successfully and safely perform stage combat, the actor needs to be trained by skilled professionals. Without proper training, an eager actor could sprain his ankle or break his collarbone. I intend to investigate methods of stage combat through literature, interviews, and personal work with renowned masters of the field. Following this course of study, I will assimilate this research and manipulate it through reflective workshops at SIUE and other local theater organizations. Developing these skills will enable me to assist SIUE faculty and student directors in fight choreography for Black Theater Workshop as well as additional campus shows in the spring of 2003.

Upon submitting this proposal, I verify that this writing is my own and pledge to fulfill all of the expectations of the Undergraduate Research Academy to the best of my abilities. I understand that failure to do so may result in return of fellowship money to the University and forfeiture of academic credit and honors recognition.

Whitney M. Elmore's Signature 3/19/02  
Signature of the Student

*I am able, willing, and committed to providing the necessary facilities and to take the time to mentor this student during this project. I verify that this student is capable of undertaking this proposed project.*

Jim Dorethy's Signature Cameron Ulrich's Signature 3/19/02  
Signature of the Faculty Mentors



# Exploring and Developing Stage Combat Methods

## Introduction and Significance

Stage combat has been used in theater for over seven-hundred years. Stage combat is the armed or unarmed stage effect of violence without any of the actors harming themselves or each other (Katz, 19). Today, it is hard to find a play or movie that does not require training for a fall, slap, or other means of combat. An actor needs to be trained by skilled professionals to successfully and safely execute stage combat (Penrod, 109). Serious injuries could result from the lack of proper training.

I intend to explore methods of stage combat through literature, interviews, and personal work with renowned masters in the field. Following this course of study, I will assimilate this research and manipulate it through reflective workshops at SIUE and other local theater organizations.

Developing these skills will enable me to assist SIUE faculty and student directors with improved and safer methods of conducting fight choreography for Black Theater Workshop, directed by Lisa Bandele, as well as additional campus shows in the spring of 2003.

## Literature Review

A common saying in many stage combat books is "Safety first, safety last, safety always" (Suddeth, 18). This is a basic principal of stage combat. In the Middle Ages, the combat was hardly realistic (Hobbs, 7), but now, with film special effects, people won't accept anything that doesn't look genuine. Audiences want the fight scene from Hamlet to look real without anyone actually being hurt. Choreographing a fight ahead of time will ensure that no one inflicts serious injury on themselves or each other (Oxenford, 71). James Penrod is quoted as saying, "These are specialized skills that require training under the watchful eye of an instructor or director" (Penrod, 109).

The Romans used combat in their theaters, but instead of using trained professionals in the naumachiae, or sea battles, they used prisoners or slaves. Then when the final battle scene came, the loss of life looked realistic and the victims were not missed (Brockett, 60). In the Middle Ages, mummer and pageant plays, such as *Robin Hood* and *St. George and the Dragon*,

actors were trained to use the quarter staff, two handed sword, and sword and bucklers (shields) so that they could keep their actors around for more than one performance. They even learned wrestling techniques that we now call unarmed or hand-to-hand combat (Gordon, 30-32). During the Renaissance, Shakespeare and his contemporaries used an assortment of different types of stage combat, such as fencing, broad sword, quarter staff, sword and buckler, point rapier, rapier and dagger, and short sword, to increase the amount of spectacle (Gordon, 59-83). Because the emphasis on spectacle grew, the fights lost the illusion of being realistic, but the audience was in awe of the magnificent presentation (Hobbs, 7). During the Restoration period, theater was known for its comedy of manners (Brockett, 238). Although plays were known more for their battles of wits than their battles of might, some more subtle uses of stage combat, such as slaps, trips, and falls, were used. At the same time in Asia, Beijing Opera and Kabuki theater were using the quarter staff and swords (Brockett, 604-621).

In the modern day theater, training in stage combat helps actors control their body and improve trust among fellow actors. The illusion work is also invaluable. Now instead of just swords and knives, guns are more often used and are included in stage combat (Dennis, 89, 102-103). The Society of American Fight Directors (SAFD) and the Society of British Fight Directors (SBFD) are prominent and established organizations dedicated to teaching people stage combat. Chuch Coyl, Drew Fracher, J. Allen Suddeth, David Boushey, and David Leong are renowned masters of SAFD. David Boushey and J. Allen Suddeth also belong to SBFD. J. Allen Suddeth is the author of the book on fight directing that we currently use in Thea 250, SIUE's stage combat class. Also, David Boushey, founder of SAFD, owns and conducts a stunt school from which many of Hollywood's stuntmen come (McCollum).

Many untrained actors do the combat needed in the play in order to get the part, or, in some cases, an untrained director will try to do the choreography himself. This unusually results in many bumps and bruises, such as SIUE's recent production of *Fool for Love*. The female lead only had to perform a fall, but it resulted in bruises all over the side of her leg and hip. This example is a low risk scenario. In the production of the movie *The Crow*, the main actor, Brandon Lee, was killed from a gun shot wound after the proper gun combat safety methods were not used (Johnson).

## **Hypothesis**

I want to conduct original and safe combat methods. Our university needs a person that has thoroughly explored and expanded on the safety and methods of stage combat. Anyone can fall or punch someone, but, as *Fool for Love* showed, a trained person is needed to avoid injury. Developing these skills will enable me to assist SIUE faculty and student directors with improved and safer methods of conducting fight choreography for *Black Theater Workshop*, directed by Lisa Bandele, as well as additional campus shows in the spring of 2003.

## **Materials and Procedures**

First, I will examine the fight choreography, special feature section of *Kiss of the Dragon*, *The Musketeer*, and *Matrix Revisited* on DVD. Studying these recent works will give me an insight to the latest techniques of study. Then I will thoroughly research books that have been written by masters of SAFD and SBFD (see budget for the list of books to be purchased). In July, I will travel to a stage combat conference at the University of Las Vegas, Nevada, to interview and work under Chuck Coyl, Drew Fracher, J. Allen Suddeth, David Boushey, and David Leong for three weeks in the techniques of unarmed, single sword, broadsword, and film fighting. Upon returning, I will assimilate all of the teaching styles used and modify them to teach a seminar on unarmed combat and quarter staff combat at Kaskaskia College in Centralia, Illinois. For this and other seminars, I will need ten quarter staffs for the participants. From this seminar, I will assess what worked and what did not work as teaching methods for people who know relatively little about stage combat. After consulting my mentors, one of which belongs to SAFD, and modifying the teaching methods used, I will cultivate a new curriculum to use at a seminar at SIUE.

Next, I will again modify the teaching methods used and prepare a demonstration for the American College Theatre Festival and a lesson plan for the Illinois High School Theatre

Festival. Then, I will put these reflective seminars to use by assisting Lisa Bandele, a SIUE performance theater faculty member, with the *Black Theatre Workshop* on campus. Assisting other SIUE student and faculty directors is among my main intentions. At this point, I will assimilate all of the knowledge that I have acquired thus far and prepare and demonstrate an improved version of what I have learned through my literature, interviews, working with stage combat masters, and what I have learned from applying their methods for the URA.

### **Timeline**

Review Film Choreography	May 2002
Review Books about Stage Combat by Fight Masters	June 2002
Interview and Work with Fight Masters	July 2002
Seminar at Kaskaskia College	August 2002
Review Seminar and Modify Teaching Methods	September 2002
Seminar at SIUE	October 2002
Review Seminar and Modify Teaching Methods	November 2002
Prepare Lesson Plan for Seminar at Illinois High School Theater Festival	December 2002
Prepare Demonstration for American College Theater Festival	December 2002
Seminar at Illinois High School Theater Festival	January 9-11, 2003
Demonstration for American College Theater Festival	January 2003
Review Seminar and Demonstration	February 2003
Consult for <i>Black Theater Workshop</i>	February 2003
Prepare Demonstration for Final URA Presentation	March 2003
URA Final Presentation	April 2003

## References

- Brockett, Oscar G. *History of the Theatre*. 8th ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999.
- Gordon, Gilbert. *Stage Fights*. New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1973.
- Hobbs, William. *Stage Fight*. New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1967.
- Johnson, Judy. *Urban Legends Reference Pages*. 7 Dec. 1997.  
[www.snopes2.com/movies/actors/brandlee](http://www.snopes2.com/movies/actors/brandlee)
- Katz, Albert M. *Stage Violence*. New York: Richards Rosen Press, 1976.
- McCollum, Linda. *The Society for American Fight Directors*. 3 Mar. 2002. [www.safd.org](http://www.safd.org)
- Oxenford, Lyn. *Design for Movement*. New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1952.
- Penrod, James. *Movement for the Performing Artist*. Palo Alto, California: National Press Books, 1974.
- Sabatine, Jean. *Movement Training for the Stage and Screen*. New York: Back Stage Books, 1995.
- Suddeth, J. Allen. *Fight Directing for the Theatre*. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann, 1996.
- Wise, Arthur. *Weapons in the Theatre*. London: Longmans, 1968.

## **Budget Justification**

### **Commodities**

Renting DVDs  
Blockbuster \$15.00

Ten Quarter Staffs  
(\$10 each) \$100.00  
Middendorf Woodcrafts

Commodities Subtotal: \$115.00

### **Travel**

Lodging in Las Vegas \$420.00  
University of Las Vegas, Nevada

Food during Conference \$260.00  
(\$12.40 per day)

Travel Subtotal: \$680.40

**Budget Summary Total: \$795.40**

### **Additional costs purchased ahead of time by student (no reimbursement expected)**

Airfare and Conference Fees \$1606.50  
American Airlines and SAFD

Actors on Guard: A Practical Guide for the Use  
of the Rapier and Dagger for Stage and Screen \$42.95  
By Dale Anthony Girard  
Amazon.com

Swashbuckling: A Step-By-Step Guide to the  
Art of Stage Combat and Theatrical Swordplay \$19.25  
By Richard J. Lane  
Amazon.com

Fight Direction for Stage Screen \$12.76  
By William Hobbs  
Amazon.com

<u>Fight Directing for Theatre</u> By J. Allen Suddeth Amazon.com	\$27.96
<u>Renaissance Swordsmanship</u> By John Clements Amazon.com	\$17.50
<u>Medieval Combat</u> By Hans Talhoffer Amazon.com	\$20.96
<u>Medieval Swordsmanship: Illustrated Methods And Techniques</u> By John Clements Amazon.com	\$28.00
<u>Combat Mime: A Non-Violent Approach to Stage Violence</u> By J. D. Martinez (November 1982) Amazon.com	\$23.25
<u>The Martial Arts of Renaissance Europe</u> By Sydney Anglo Amazon.com	\$31.50
	<u>My Total: \$1,830.63</u>