

Introduction to Japanese Short Staff (*Aiki-jō*)

EXCO 810: Fall '24

1 Credit, In-person.

When: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 7-8:30 pm

Where: Hales Main Gym

Instructor

- Benita Johnson: bjohnso2@oberlin.edu

Assistant Instructor

- James Frothingham

Supervising Instructors:

- Kevin Greenwood: kgreenwo@oberlin.edu
- Andrzej Siwkiewicz

Course Overview:

This traditional Japanese martial arts course will introduce the use of the short staff, or *jō* 杖. The course will cover stances and footwork; solo drills to learn basic strikes, blocks and other movements; and formal pair exercises. It will also include stretches, joint mobility, and conditioning exercises for warm-up and warm-down, and basic mindfulness practice.

Jō practice in this class derives from Aikido, a modern Japanese martial art developed in the early 20th century by Ueshiba Morihei 植芝盛平 (1883–1969), who modified traditional combat techniques to create a form of self-defense with a unique goal: to resolve a violent encounter peacefully when possible and to minimize injury to the attacker. In its better-known unarmed techniques, Aikido includes various strikes, throws, locks, and pins. However, another important aspect of Aikido involves traditional Japanese weapons such as the *jō*. *Jō* practice in this course is based on the teachings of Ueshiba Morihei, Saitō Morihiro 斉藤守弘 (1928–2002), T. K. Chiba (*Chiba Kazuo* 千葉和雄, 1940–2015), and Mitsugi Saotome (*Saotome Mitsugi* 五月女貢, b. 1937).

- No experience is necessary. Practice can be adapted to differing physical abilities but will require being able to lift and manipulate a weapon roughly the size and weight of a walking stick.
- *Jō* will be provided each class. However, for solo practice outside of class, students may check out a *jō* by leaving a \$30 deposit that will be returned at the end of the course. A final grade will not be submitted until the weapon is returned. Please note that replacement cost for a *jō* is in the \$50 to \$80 range.
- For safety, pair practice with the *jō* is not permitted outside of class.
- Wear comfortable clothes for exercising. Avoid long, baggy sleeves that might catch on your weapon. Footwork frequently requires sliding feet across the Hales Gym floor, so socks or shoes with smooth, flat soles are suggested.
- Students in the course are strongly encouraged to attend classes of the Oberlin Aikido club. Details will be provided in class.

Evaluation:

Evaluation for the course will be based on the following:

- **Attendance:** Acquiring a new skill requires practice, and each class assumes knowledge of techniques covered in earlier classes. Therefore, regular attendance is critical to gaining fluency with the techniques and passing the ExCo. You cannot cram for the final. To receive credit, you must attend the majority of scheduled classes. Only one unexcused absence is allowed; any further unexcused absences will result in failure. If you have an absence due to illness, academic or other legitimate conflict, and inform the instructor beforehand, a make-up session is possible.
- **Final Test:** The final test will involve demonstrating basic techniques of jō in both a set sequence of movements (*kata*) done solo, and exercises done in pairs. If you are unable to take the final test, please discuss the final paper option with your instructor. You may write a three-page, double spaced reflection paper on your experience in the ExCo.

Safety Considerations:

For this class, please observe the following:

- Jō are not toys and can be dangerous. While practicing, always be aware of the physical space around you to avoid unintentionally striking someone with a weapon.
- Never engage in free play or competition with jō in or outside of class.
- Treat the jō with respect and avoid damaging the weapon so that other students will be able to use it.
- Report any injury, however minor, to the instructor. If you are bleeding, stop practicing immediately and report it to the instructor.
- Jo practice requires a lot of sliding footwork. Please do not practice barefoot on the gym floor, primarily to avoid slipping but also to avoid blisters. We suggest wearing smooth, flat-soled shoes or socks.
- If you feel unsafe in any way, report this to the instructor.

Etiquette

It is said that the martial arts begin and end with “*rei*” 礼 or appreciation. Please observe these guidelines for proper etiquette.

- At the beginning and ending of class, we bow to the *kamiza*, a wooden stand that includes a photo of Ueshiba Morihei, the founder of Aikido, and a work of calligraphy by Saotome Mitsugi, the head of the Aikido Schools of Ueshiba (ASU) organization in the USA with which the Oberlin Aikido program is affiliated. Bowing represents respect for the many generations of teachers who have kept the art of Aikido alive. This is followed by a bow to the instructor.
- Be respectful of the instructor and practice sincerely what they are trying to teach.
- Bow to your partner when beginning training together in pairs. Be respectful of your classmates, and work to maintain a positive and supportive class.

Curriculum

[English provided is a mnemonic aide, not necessarily a direct translation]

Basic movements (*tai sabaki* 体さばき/ *ashi sabaki* 足捌き)

- Step (*ayumi-ashi* 歩足), forward and backward
- Slide (*okuri-ashi* 送り足), forward and backward
- Pivot (*tenkai* 転回)
- *Tenkan* 転換 (pivot and step back)

Basic jō techniques

- Kamae 構え (ready positions)
 - “Walking stick” kamae (*jō no kamae* 杖の構え)
 - Seigan no kamae 正眼の構え (middle)
 - “Chiba” kamae (*jō no kamae* 杖の構え used by Chiba sensei)
- Grips (*nigiri* 握り)
 - Junte 順手 (thumbs in same direction, i.e. “under-under”)
 - Gyakute 逆手 (thumbs facing each other, i.e. “over-under”)
- Basic strikes and blocks (*Suburi* 素振り)
 - Choku-tsuki 直突き (thrust, junte)
 - Kaeshi-tsuki 返し突き (thrust, gyakute)
 - Ushiro-tsuki 後ろ突き (step back, strike to rear)
 - Shōmen-uchi 正面打ち (overhead forward strike)
 - Kesa-uchi 袈裟打ち (diagonal strike)
 - Gedan-gaeshi 下段返し (low counter)
 - Chudan-gaeshi 中段返し (center counter)
 - Jodan gaeshi 上段返し (upper counter)
 - Makiotoshi 巻き落とし (twist down counter)

Solo Drills

- 20 Jō Suburi (Saitō Sensei) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O9U04EU_Qp8
(Further details on the 20 Jō Suburi are in the appendix below)
- 13-part Jō kata (Saitō Sensei): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7IS99e0bhk&t=75s>

Paired Drills

Selected exercises from the following will be used in this course:

- 36 Jo Basics (Chiba Sensei). This video presents an overview of the system. We will be using selected exercises from the 36.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6SLgxRE8COI>
- Kumi-jō 1-6 (Saotome Sensei):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xqbDDa_VeWM&t=105s

Schedule

(Subject to modification as needed. Each class assumes knowledge of techniques covered in earlier classes.)

Overview:

- The first 7 weeks will focus on gaining fluency with the basic techniques, both solo and in pairs, and learning the 13-part jo kata.
- Weeks 9-13, after the Fall Break, we will use the 13-part kata as warm up and technique review, then focus on pair work, both selected kata from Chiba sensei's 36 basics and Saotome sensei's longer Kumi-jō sequences.
- For the last week, week 14, we will have review and mock tests to prepare you for the final test on Tuesday, 12/10. The final test will be supervised by Andrzej Siwkiewicz sensei, 5th degree black belt, and director (*dojo-chō*) of the Oberlin Aikido Club.

Week 1

- Tuesday 9/3:
- Thursday 9/5:

Week 2

- Tuesday 9/10: [Add/Drop Deadline]
- Thursday 9/12:

Week 3

- Tuesday 9/17:
- Thursday 9/19:

Week 4

- Tuesday 9/24:
- Thursday 9/26:

Week 5

- Tuesday 10/1:
- Thursday 10/3:

Week 6

- Tuesday 10/8:
- Thursday 10/10:

Week 7

- Tuesday 10/15:
- Thursday 10/17:

Week 8

- Tuesday 10/22: **Fall Break: No Classes**
- Thursday 10/24: **Fall Break: No Classes**

Week 9

- Tuesday 10/29:
- Thursday 10/31:

Week 10

- Tuesday 11/5:
- Thursday 11/7:

Week 11

- Tuesday 11/12:
- Thursday 11/14:

Week 12

- Tuesday 11/19:
- Thursday 11/21:

Week 13

- Tuesday 11/26:
- Thursday 11/28: **Thanksgiving Break: No Class**

Week 14

- Tuesday 12/3: Review, mock test.
- Thursday 12/5: Review, mock test.

Week 15: Final Week

- Tuesday 12/10: **Final Testing**

Appendix 1

Twenty Jō Suburi: Saitō Morihito 斎藤守弘 (1928–2002)

Five Thrusting Movements (*Tsuki* 突き)

[All from “walking stick” *kamae* (ready position)]

1. **Choku-tsuki** 直突き “Direct thrust” (front hand raises jo up into rear hand, junte, slide forward thrust,) [“bayonet” and “pool cue” variations]
2. **Kaeshi-tsuki** 返し突き “Counter thrust” (rear hand grabs top of jo, gyakute, slide forward thrust,)
3. **Ushiro-tsuki** 後ろ突き “Rear thrust” (rear hand grabs top of jo, gyakute, while turning and stepping back to strike to rear)
4. **Tsuki, gedan gaeshi** 突き下段返し “Direct thrust, low counter” (front hand raises jo up into rear hand, junte, slide forward thrust, slide jō back to rear, step forward low counter)
5. **Tsuki, jōdan gaeshi uchi** 突き上段返し打ち “Direct thrust, high counter strike” (front hand raises jo up into rear hand, junte, slide forward thrust, slide back high block, front hand reaches back to grip lower part of jo while stepping forward shōmen strike)

Five Striking Movements (*Uchi* 打ち)

[All from *seigan no kamae*]

1. **Shōmen uchikomi** 正面打ち込み “Head strike, with step” (Step back jōdan kamae, step forward shōmen strike)
2. **Renzoku uchikomi** 連続打ち込み “Repeating stepping strike” (Step back jōdan kamae, step forward shōmen strike, step forward with a second shōmen strike, do not change grip)
3. **Menuchi gedan gaeshi** 面打ち下段返し “Head strike, low counter” (Step back jōdan kamae, step forward shōmen strike, followed by gedan gaeshi)
4. **Menuchi ushiro tsuki** 面打ち後ろ突き “Head strike, low counter” (Step back jōdan kamae, step forward shōmen strike, pivot and slide back reverse junte grip, ushiro tsuki)
5. **Gyaku yokomen ushiro tsuki** 逆横面後ろ突き “Reverse side-of-the-head strike, rear thrust” (Step forward yokomen strike, pivot and slide back reverse junte grip, ushiro tsuki)

Three One-handed Movements (*Katate* 片手)

1. **Katate gedan gaeshi** 片手下段返し “One-handed low counter” (Seigan no kamae, slide back gedan, step forward upward diagonal strike w/one hand, catch up high, rear hand on top)
2. **Katate tōma-uchi** 片手遠間打ち “One-handed distant-interval strike” (Seigan no kamae, slide back, raise jo over head to behind head, step forward one-arm strike, catch in rear)
3. **Katate hachiji no ji gaeshi** 片手八の字返し “One-handed ‘figure-eight’ counter” (jo in ‘walking stick’ kamae but in rear hand, step forward downward arcing strike forward w/ lower half of jo, repeat w/ other side, finish in jōdan kamae, kaeshi grip)

Five Figure-eight Movements (*Hassō* 八相)

[All from *seigan no kamae*]

1. ***Hassō-gaeshi uchi*** 八相返し打ち "Figure-eight" counter, strike (Step back *hasso* movement to *jōdan kamae*, upper hand is open, step forward *shōmen* strike)
2. ***Hassō-gaeshi tsuki*** 八相返し突き "Figure-eight" counter, thrust (Step back *hasso* movement to *jōdan kamae*, upper hand is open, upper hand slides to top of *jo* followed by lower hand, slide forward thrust but with hands in reverse *junte* grip,, i.e. thumbs toward the rear, then return to *jōdan kamae*.)
3. ***Hassō-gaeshi ushiro-tsuki*** 八相返し後ろ突き "Figure-eight" counter, rear thrust (Step back *hasso* movement to *jōdan kamae*, upper hand is open, pivot to rear, lower hand switches to top of *jo*, thrust to rear with hands in reverse *junte* grip, i.e. thumbs toward the rear.)
4. ***Hassō-gaeshi ushiro-uchi*** 八相返し後ろ打ち "Figure-eight" counter, rear strike (Step back *hasso* movement to *jōdan kamae*, upper hand is open, pivot to rear side strike)
5. ***Hassō-gaeshi ushiro-barai*** 八相返し後ろ払い "Figure-eight" counter, rear sweep (Step back *hasso* movement to *jōdan kamae*, upper hand is open, *tenkan* to rear with leg sweep, finish with *jo* to the rear)

Two Flowing Movements (*Nagare* 流れ)

[All from *seigan no kamae*]

1. ***Hidari nagare gaeshi uchi*** 左流れ返し打ち "Left side flowing counter strike" (Step back to *jodan no kamae*, step forward *shōmen* strike, pivot with *jodan* block, step forward *shōmen* strike)
2. ***Migi nagare gaeshi tsuki*** 右流れ返し突き "Right flowing counter thrust" (Step forward *yokomen* strike, *tenkan* with *jodan* block, slide forward thrust)

Some Useful Terms

- Onegaishimasu: “Please” A request to join in training, said at the beginning of class, and to your partner during pair practice.
- Domo arigato gozaimashita: “Thank you very much” said at end of class
- Sensei –The instructor of the class.
- Sempai – A senior student
- Kohai – A junior student
- Seiza – lit. “Correct sitting”. Sitting on your knees with your feet drawn up under you and back straight
- Ma-ai – Refers to the distance between you and your partner and the potential in that space
- Kuzushi: unbalancing point
- Kokyuu – Breath
- Ki – Intention, spirit
- Kiai – A shout during technique to focus the spirit and breathing
- Hanmi – lit. “half body”. Basic aikido ready stance
- Irimi – To enter
- Tenkan – To turn to blend with an attack
- Tanden – A point slightly below your navel
- Chūshin-sen (Center-line) – The line through your body that connects with the ground
- Uke – Receiver of the technique
- Nage – Executor of the technique (also *shite*, *tori*)
- Zanshin – lit. “Continuing mind”. The state of alertness following a technique
- Musubi – lit. “Tie”. To be unified with one’s partner