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Second year psychology major Dionisio Mazon (right) practices with Escrima club member Rick Beck (left) using blades as their defense here in Yosemite Hall on Feb. 24, 2009.

'Bring it on' Escrima

Teaches knife defense

By: Michael Mital

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If you thought MMA was the only exciting style of skilled hand-to-hand combat, think again. Escrima, the traditional martial art form of the Philippines, combines wooden sticks with mesmerizing hand speed to teach students how to defend themselves in ways that are both practical and effective.

For students at Sacramento State, learning this underground martial art form is as simple as showing up to Yosemite Hall and taking part of the new Filipino Martial Arts Club, which broke ground at the university on Feb. 3. For an initiation fee of \$50 for students, \$65 for non-students, the club will teach you how to "improve your self-confidence, physical fitness, and self-defense skills," with the first lesson free of charge.

The club has three main instructors: Maestro Dexter Labonog, Guro Jeff Lopez and Guro Jeff Nordstrom. Although the club is relatively new at Sac State, the club is eager to expand and is welcoming new members.

"We have a core group of approximately 10 to 12 from the class we had before coming to Sac State. We also gained about eight new student members within the first two weeks that we've been (at Sac State). We're hoping to continue to grow off of that," Lopez said.

The club teaches its members a style of Escrima known as "Bahalana," a Filipino term which translates to "come what may" or "bring it on." This fearless style of self-defense sets itself apart from other martial art forms due to the fact that it is weapon-based, with sparring sessions that can look like an epic light-saber duel from Star Wars. Members also learn how to defend themselves against knife attacks and even practice Muay Thai kickboxing.

Although the fast-paced action may seem intimidating to observers, the instructors of the club make it a point to teach its new members at a comfortable speed. By the end of each session, new members come away with a sense of newfound confidence.

"What I really liked about (the club) was the fact that the instructors were always friendly when I first came to check out the class. I also like the heritage part of it, since I myself am Filipino, and I've always wanted to learn Escrima so it was nice to find someone who did teach it," said Dinisio Mazon, psychology major and President of the Filipino Martial Arts Club.

The cultural aspect of Escrima appeals to many of the club's members, many of whom are of Filipino heritage. James Miranda, chemistry professor, became the faculty adviser for the club after training with them since 2006. When the club needed a new place, Miranda offered to bring the club to Sac State.

"I'm in a unique position where I can actually bring Escrima to Sacramento State as a faculty adviser, so I can open up a club like this and bring in all these people to study Escrima whereas they wouldn't have had that opportunity before," Miranda said.

"There is a big Filipino population here, and for those people to discover their own culture through the art of self-defense and give something that I didn't have as an undergrad, that is really rewarding to me," he said.

The club is eager to teach the art of Escrima to students of all ethnicities and ages, with instructors who create a welcoming environment for those who are new to martial arts as well as advanced fighters.

The club meets from 6 to 8 p.m. every Tuesday and from 2 to 5 p.m. on Sunday in Yosemite Hall 187.

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