



Carolina Seidokan Aikido Club

'Relaxation is the strongest posture'

Students might look askance at Doug Wedell when he tells them to clear their minds and take a fall, but if they want to learn the art of aikido, they'll do as he says.

A psychology professor, Wedell is the faculty advisor and chief instructor for Carolina's Seidokan Aikido Club. The sports club, which operates under the Campus Recreation Department, is open to all University students, faculty, and staff, and it has a student president and treasurer. Patrick Nolan, a sociology professor, also instructs.

"Aikido is one of the martial arts, and I've been interested in it for years," said Wedell, who has a black belt in the discipline. "I started the University club in 1990. Most students come to us with no prior experience, and one of the first things they learn to do is take a fall. We don't strike or kick in aikido: we make people fall to the ground, using the force of their own attack."

Tae Kwon Do and karate are competitive martial arts, he explained, and tai chi is contemplative and soothing. "We are somewhere in between. We don't compete with each other, and our movements are in real time.

"We practice how to defend ourselves from different attacks without hurting the attacker," he said. "That is one of the defining characteristics of aikido: keeping the attacker and the attacked safe. To do that, you must have an empty mind and look to harmonize with the attack.

"We practice weapon takeaways, and we also emphasize principles," he said. "We teach students to calm down. If you are perfectly calm, you are unliftable. We know that relaxation is the strongest posture. Students find that quite amazing, and they have to unlearn some of their old habits, like tensing up when attacked. You can see how this is a great way for students to relax and unwind after classes."

With 15 regular members this year, the club meets three times a week for practice sessions. If they practice regularly, students test for belts about every six months.

"But there are no competitions, since we don't want to attack or hurt," Wedell explained. "We just want to defend."