

WHERE IS THE NEXT GENERATION OF CLASSICAL FENCING MASTERS
COMING FROM?

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ABSTRACT

The future of classical fencing depends on who will teach the next generation of classical fencers. If classical fencing is to develop as a viable activity, some mechanism must be developed to train new instructors. Existing models of training fencing masters offer a framework, but methods for training classical masters must address how to make training accessible to a widely scattered, small audience. The proposed model of Classical Fencing Demonstrators, Instructors, Provosts, and Masters with training and credentialing delivered using Internet based delivery offers a possible solution, and is in its first year of delivery under the auspices of the Classical Academy of Arms.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Problem Defined

The critical issue for classical fencing is not what the pockets of classical fencers are doing today, but rather what they will be doing tomorrow. For classical fencing to survive and prosper, there must be a new generation of teachers. It seems clear that classical fencing cannot rely on modern sport Fencing Masters as its teaching pool. Comments in Fencers Quarterly Magazine have identified the focus of training of fencing masters (Pop 2003), the competency set of modern Masters (Pop 2002), the content of modern instruction by Masters (Gaugler 2000), behaviors of fencers (Evangelista 2003), and the gradual loss of knowledge of traditional fencing (Evangelista 2001) as being divergent from a classical or traditionalist approach (Anson 2001, Gaugler 2002). Where then will the new generation of teachers come from?

Current Status

Kim Moser's "Classical Fencing and Historical Swordsmanship Resources" webpage (2004) benchmarks the base of classical fencing. If we double the listings on his site, a reasonable estimate is there are approximately 50 classical fencing clubs or schools operating in 24 states. If each classical fencing group has a fully qualified classical Fencing Master as its

instructor, and each of these is training a Prevot in a traditional apprenticeship model (and these may be unwarranted assumptions), all we get is replacement.

Modern sport fencing has much the same problem, although the United States Fencing Association's Coaches College has made inroads into developing a national amateur coaching base. The pool of professional coaches remains small – recent data shows a United States Fencing Coaches Association membership of 51 Maitre d'Armes (along with 13 retired Emeritus Maitre d'Armes), 25 Prevots, and 96 Moniteurs (United States Fencing Coaches Association 2005). The oldest classically focused college based program, the Military Fencing Master Program at San Jose State University, has graduated a relatively small number of teachers (data for 1988 to 2004 is 37 Instructors at Arms, 28 Provosts at Arms, and 14 Masters at Arms) ("San Jose State" 2004). The two other formal classical fencing instructor training programs, at Sonoma State University (Sullins 2005) and the Classical Fencing Instructor program that was initiated at the University of Richmond and subsequently moved off campus, have not yet graduated a class.

Today's reality is that few people can dedicate themselves solely to learning how to teach classical fencing as full time apprentices or in a traditional residential college program, with a career expectation of making an annual income of \$20,000-\$30,000 if they are both good business men or women and lucky (see Prevot Howson's 2004 economic analysis of running a fencing salle). Preliminary data from a convenience survey of working professional fencing instructors in 2005 suggests that most paid fencing instructors today are older part time teachers who derive only a small percentage of their income from fencing (Green 2005).

As a community we need to ask is our goal to produce only a few highly qualified, technically perfect classical Fencing Masters, or is it to help people learn how to fence

classically? If perfection is the goal, we need to make it more difficult to become a Master, and elongate the rite of passage to 15 to 20 years. If the goal is to help people learn classical fencing, we need more people who are competent teachers of good technique developed through an andragogically sound process, sooner rather than later.

II. THE ROLE OF THE FENCING MASTER

This leads to a central question – what does a Fencing Master need to be able to do? If we look at descriptions of representative existing and historical models in the literature and extant documents we see a significant variety of titles and roles (Table 1). It should be noted that the system in use by the United States Fencing Coaches Association is in flux. Requirements for Moniteurs have been substantially reworked to ensure that instructors at this level are primarily competent in delivering complete, sophisticated group lessons.

It is also worth noting that most of these credentials are event related, with a heavy emphasis on the examination process. The United States Fencing Coaches Association model (see Table 2) is representative.

Table 1. Ranks and Roles of Fencing Instructors

Old English (1) circa 1580	In Ferro Veritas	Academie d’Armes Internationale	British Academy of Fencing (2)	United States Fencing Coaches Association
Scholar – <i>Student with professed interest and admitted to study under a master</i>	Moniteur d’Armes – <i>declared an interest in becoming a teacher but not yet credentialed</i>	Animateur – <i>Club assistant teaching beginning skills especially to youth and in group lessons</i>	Level 1 – <i>Beginning instructor teaching beginners basic strokes singly or in group lessons</i>	<i>(not used in the United States, although there is some interest in its introduction)</i>

<p>Free Scholar – successful public demonstration of skill with 2 weapons against other Scholars</p>	<p>Instructeur d’Armes – individuals with some teaching ability able to prepare lesson plans and teach beginner group and individual lessons at foil</p>	<p>Moniteur – Entry level professional able to teach young fencers and groups in all 3 weapons</p>	<p>Level 2 (Basic Coaching Award) – Teach technical and mechanical elements of strokes in single or group lessons</p>	<p>Moniteur – Entry level professional capable of teaching group and simple individual lessons in one or more weapons</p>
			<p>Level 3 (Intermediate Coaching Award) – teach complete range of fencing strokes and coach initial range of strokes</p>	
<p>Provost – successful public demonstration of skill with 3 weapons against other Free Scholars and Provosts</p>	<p>Prevot d’Armes – journeyman teacher capable of preparing students to fence in bouts and of developing complete courses in all 3 weapons</p>	<p>Prevot – teacher with in-depth knowledge of preparation of fencers, ability to plan education of students, prepare them for competition, and to coach at competitions</p>	<p>Level 4 (Advanced Award) – coach using exercises that develop tactical and theoretical ability</p>	<p>Prevot – ability to give complex lessons with tactical applications in all 3 weapons</p>
<p>Master – successful public demonstration of skill with 4-5 weapons against Masters</p>	<p>Maitre d’Armes – qualified to preside over the salle and to teach apprentices to become teachers</p>	<p>Maitre d’Armes – plans all activity in the salle for recreational to competitive fencers, programs fencer training and participation in competitions, point of reference for all training, instructional, and competitive issues</p>	<p>Diploma (Maître d’Escrime) – teach and coach at the highest level in 1 or 2 weapons</p>	<p>Maitre – ability to give complex lessons at a very high level</p>
			<p>Diploma (Master of the Academy, customarily termed Professor) - teach and coach at the highest level in all 3 weapons.</p>	

Note: (1) The term Usher does appear in use in some schools in England in the 1500-1600s. However, the duties of this position are uncertain. (2) I have approximated how the levels of instructor match with those of the Academie d'Armes Internationale.

Sources: Aylward 1956, Hutton 1901, Crown 2003, Piraino 2000, British Academy of Fencing 2004, United States Fencing Coaches Association n.d..

Table 2. United States Fencing Coaches Association Certifications in 2004

Rank:	Objective:	Prerequisites:	Examiners:	Format:
Moniteur	Teach a beginner sound basic technique	- First aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation - Referee (rated 10)	2 Prevots or Fencing Masters	- Written examination - Practical examination in each weapon certified
Prevot d'Armes	Complex lesson with progression of technical and/or tactical technique	- Moniteur in all 3 weapons - Moniteur for 1 year - Referee (rated 6)	3 Fencing Masters	- Written examination - Practical examination in all 3 weapons - Oral examination
Maitre d'Armes	Complex lesson at a very high level	Prevot for 1 year	3 Fencing Masters	- Thesis - Practical examination in all 3 weapons - Oral examination

Source: United States Fencing Coaches Association 2004.

The Academie d'Armes Internationale model is unusual in defining a clear knowledge base for each level through specification of training hour requirements (Piraino 2000, Academie d'Armes Internationale 2005). These guidelines (see Table 3) were not intended to replace national practices, but rather to assist new national academies in establishing their training programs and to provide a standard understanding of the capabilities of each professional rank (Bunke 2005). A subsequently published set of teaching standards (see Table 4) provides a more detailed (and slightly different) allocation of training time.

Table 3. Academie d'Armes Internationale Technical Training Levels

Topic:	Animateur:	Moniteur:	Prevot:	Maitre:	Totals:
Fencing theory	20 hours	30 hours	60 hours	60 hours	170 hours
Fencing practical	40 hours	60 hours	90 hours	60 hours	250 hours
Other content	30 hours	30 hours	60 hours	60 hours	180 hours
Continuing education		60 hours	90 hours	120 hours	270 hours
<i>Total hours</i>	<i>90 hours</i>	<i>180 hours</i>	<i>300 hours</i>	<i>300 hours</i>	<i>870 hours</i>
Apprenticeship	30 hours	6 months	12 months	24 months	42.2 months

Source: Piraino 2000.

Table 4. Academie d'Armes Internationale Teaching Standards In Hours

Topic:	Animateur:	Moniteur:	Prevot:	Maitre:	Totals:
Foil practice/theory	20	30	50	40	140
Epee practice/theory	20	30	50	40	140
Sabre practice/theory	20	30	50	40	140
Fencing rules	5	5	10	10	30
Training theory	5	5	10	10	30
Sports medicine	5	5	10	10	30
Sport pedagogy	5	5	10	10	30
Sport psychology	5	5	10	10	30
Sport organization	5	5	10	10	30
<i>Total Hours</i>	<i>90</i>	<i>120</i>	<i>210</i>	<i>180</i>	<i>600</i>

Source: Academie d'Armes Internationale 2005.

Of the models examined, one, that reported by Maitre Crown (2003) as used by In Ferro Veritas, is an essentially local effort to develop classical fencing instructors. The In Ferro Veritas model requires the candidate to meet a wide variety of experience and activity gates, as shown in Table 5.

From these schemes several elements emerge that are common to two or more of these qualification systems:

- (1) a progression of required knowledge and ability,
- (2) a four level system supporting that progression,

(3) an agreement that group and beginner level instruction precedes the development of individual lessons as an instructional skill,

(4) a progression in the number of weapons the instructor should be able to teach at various levels in the program.

Table 5. In Ferro Veritas Instructor Credentials

Requirements	Moniteur d'Armes	Instructor d'Armes	Prevot d'Armes	Maitre d'Armes
In Ferro Veritas fencing rank (1)	Scholar III	Free Scholar		
Own required uniform	Yes			
Syllabus and lesson plans		6 week, 8 week, 12 week courses	6 week and 12 week in epee, sabre, and rapier and dagger	
Lesson plans for groups		3 for diverse groups		
Individual lesson plans		4		
Teaching groups		100 hours	500 hours	500 hours
Teaching individual lessons		250 lessons	250 foil, 125 epee, 125 sabre, 125 rapier and dagger	500 lessons
Teaching movement skills	Yes			
Sports psychology			Yes	
Exercise physiology			Yes	
Program administration			Yes	
Sports law				Yes
Sports injuries				Yes
Students (1)		10 to Scholar III		
Paper			25-50 pages	Thesis
Practical examination			Panel of 3 Masters	Panel of 3 Masters

Notes: (1) In Ferro Veritas uses a system of nine ranks, Scholar I, II, and III, Free Scholar I, II, and III, and Prevot d'Escrime I, II, and III.

Source: Crown 2003.

III. PROPOSAL

If we approach the development of a new generation of classical fencing masters on a systematic and progressive model, the system described in Table 6 appears to both conform to the general principles of other systems and to be practical. This approach differs from the modern sport fencing model in making mastery of each weapon a module added as the individual progresses as an instructor. This reflects the reality that most of us fence one weapon best, and have varying capability at the others. The modular approach encourages a standard level of performance in each weapon an individual teaches, and provides that level of performance for students as early as possible.

Table 6. Ranks and Roles of Classical Fencing Instructors

Title	Role	Knowledge
Classical Fencing Demonstrator	Able to demonstrate technique, lead group drills, and supervise drills at the wall and conventional exercises in one weapon	Of safety, equipment, history, customs, rules, conduct of competitions and supporting officiating functions
Classical Fencing Instructor	Able to teach group lessons and technique and strategy in individual lessons in one weapon	Of design of group and individual lessons, sports conditioning, and of presiding
Classical Fencing Provost	Able to teach group lessons and technique and strategy in individual lessons in a second weapon	Of design of training programs and maintenance and use of records
Classical Fencing Master	Able to teach group lessons and technique and strategy in individual lessons in all three weapons	Of how to run a salle as a business and supervise development of a body of students.

This set of general objectives has been translated into the specific requirements shown in Table 7 for the Classical Fencing Instructor program, now sponsored by the Classical Academy of Arms. The intent of the requirements was to require a level of effort that part time coaches could meet, and also through careful design to ensure that completing the requirements would

result in a level of proficiency appropriate to prepare instructors to teach effectively in their salles or clubs.

Table 7. The Classical Fencing Instructor Program

Requirements	Classical Fencing Demonstrator	Classical Fencing Instructor	Classical Fencing Provost	Classical Fencing Master
Online course (1)	1 year – 41 lessons	1 year – 40 to 50 lessons	1 year – 40 to 50 lessons	1 year – 40 to 50 lessons
Weapons	Competent in foil	Single weapon	Second weapon	Third weapon
Lessons with lesson plans (2)	35 - 25 group	65 - 25 group	100 – 75 in second weapon	100 – 75 in third weapon
Workshops	2	2	2	2
Course written examination	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Oral examination		Yes	Yes	Yes
Practical examination	Group lesson, beginner individual lesson, skill demonstration	Individual lesson	Individual lesson	Individual lesson
Self and student evaluations (2)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Paper			Yes	Thesis
Officiating	Judge	President	Bout Committee	

Notes: (1) Online course lessons include study materials, guided discussion, and assigned projects, and are designed to require 1 to 3 hours a week for their completion. (2) Documented in a teaching portfolio.

Sources: Classical Fencing Instructor Program 2005.

In choosing names for the program ranks, the old terms Scholar and Free Scholar had a historical appeal, but are confusing to those new to the sport, as are Animateur and Moniteur. Maitre Crown and I had a number of lively discussions as to the best choice of names; the substantive issue was whether to retain Provost and Master. The Program determined to do so, but incorporated the use of “Classical” to clearly differentiate, and to avoid the impression that this effort is intended to develop a rival to the well established and recognized process overseen

by the Academie d'Armes Internationale and the United States Fencing Coaches Association. Classical fencing clearly needs a separate effort focused on the values and skills we believe important and on the essentially local nature of our efforts, but we gain nothing, and fencing as a whole does not profit, by creating needless controversy and hostility.

This model should produce classical Masters capable of teaching effectively in local programs in a 4 year progression. The problem is how to make it available widely enough to make a difference. Availability depends on: (1) able to be accessed anywhere in the United States, (2) delivered in time packages that are practical for working adults with limited vacation days, (3) priced at a cost that is reasonable for the student, and (4) of a predictable length. Approaches to meet these criteria might include:

- Online delivery of core knowledge – online delivery using a standard teaching platform (also termed a learning management system) ensures all participants have the same access to instruction. A teaching platform organizes discussion, makes a wide variety of supporting materials available, and provides a way to test knowledge.
- Self-directed instructional activity – fencing teachers learn to teach fencing by teaching. However, this is more than repeating the same lesson 50 times. The key to maximizing limited time is that each lesson taught must develop competencies in a logical order, with new learning, combined with intentional reinforcement of previous lessons, occurring on a regular basis. This drives the development of a structured syllabus and criteria for lessons that students can follow in their clubs – with a method for self-assessment, assessment by their students, and videotaped assessment.
- Structured workshops – not every fencer knows how to fence with classical form following a recognizable school. This drives a requirement for concentrated workshops

that provide an opportunity to refine classical form and classical teaching methods. The issue of access probably restricts these to long weekends.

- Formal evaluation – fencing masters from Rondelle (1892) to Gaugler (2000) have stressed the need for formal evaluation of individuals who will teach fencing. Three elements appear to be crucial to this process: (1) written examination to defined competencies for each rank which could be provided online, (2) oral examination to verify the written knowledge and to determine the candidates ability to communicate, and (3) practical examination of the ability to design and deliver a group and/or individual lesson, again to established standard competencies. For Masters, a written thesis has been required in practice in the United States (Crown 2003, United States Fencing Coaches Association n.d.). Maitre Crown suggests a written paper at the Prevot level as well (Crown 2003), and I believe this requirement is an excellent one.

This four level modular model is in its first year of development as the Classical Fencing Instructor Program sponsored by the Classical Academy of Arms. Its validity as an approach to fencing instructor training and credentialing depends upon the successful implementation of distance delivery (the program is experimenting with approaches to delivering even the workshops online), the amount of knowledge imparted, and the future effectiveness of its graduates in developing truly classical fencers.

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