

# 2015 Annual Update



IKAZUCHI DOJO





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It's been a great year for the dojo with many amazing accomplishments. Through our aikido training, we can all unlock our unlimited potential. The growth and development of our students inspire us to continue our efforts and increase our abilities as we seek the way of aiki.

Our goal with the programs we provide is not only to contribute to the development of our students' aikido skill, but also to gain knowledge and wisdom of *The Way*, which can bring us all great value in our daily lives.

Let's continue advancing forward and all strive to break through to the next level.

**Haruo Matsuoka**

**Chief Instructor**



With so many new developments, we wanted to find an efficient way to update our dojo members and colleagues on our progress. We decided to put together an annual update that provides a high-level summary of the year's insights and achievements, as well as the struggles and challenges we faced.

This update will be shared not only with aikido practitioners and other martial artists, but also with research scientists, entrepreneurs, professional athletes, engineers, creatives, and executives. We do this to inform, but more importantly with the hope of receiving inspiration and guidance from those with diverse backgrounds and experience.

Moving forward, we'll likely issue annual updates at the end of each calendar year. However, as a first effort, we wanted to get our 2015 update out early. We have quite a bit to share and didn't want to wait.

Thank you for your attention and support.

**Josh Gold**

**Assistant Chief Instructor**



## Our Mission



Ikazuchi Dojo is dedicated to promoting personal transformation through the art of aikido.

We seek to preserve the heritage, traditions, and spirit of the art and its founder, and we use every resource available to innovate, refine, and elevate what it means to be a martial arts dojo. We never stop questioning our assumptions and methods; we embrace how much we have to learn and grow.

We focus exclusively on programs for adults seeking the extraordinary experience of becoming a high-level martial artist. To provide a deeper understanding and appreciation for the art, we are relentlessly committed to research and development, offering comprehensive instructional systems, and providing meaningful training and cultural experiences for our members.

Our members range in age from 13-80, speak 20 different languages, draw from a variety of professional backgrounds, and include relative newcomers and decades-long practitioners. A truly diverse membership, we are united in our shared desire to cultivate a community that is open and welcoming to anyone who seeks a personal journey of development and transformation through the practice of aikido.

# The Dojo

We rang in the New Year with a remodeled dojo. With an entire team of Ikazuchi students, we completed a range of infrastructure improvements in less than one week.

The dojo now features new hardwood floors and weapon racks; the men's and women's changing rooms were updated; and a tablet-based class check-in system was integrated into the dojo.

The dojo's shomen now displays two new calligraphy pieces brushed by Seiseki Abe (1915-2011), 10th dan aikido and calligraphy teacher of Morihei Ueshiba, the founder of aikido.

Both calligraphy pieces relate to a character from the founder's favorite story in the *Kojiki*, the oldest known Japanese mythology. The character, Ikazuchi (directly translated as "thunder"), is the inspiration behind our dojo's name.

We've significantly expanded our programs and now offer classes and workshops 7 days a week.

We've begun actively incorporating physics, kinesiology, and learning sciences to inform our instruction and give us a deeper understanding of the art. Additionally, we've started providing our members numerous platforms to capture meaningful and actionable data allowing them to analyze their performance and skill in great detail. To help our members reach their maximum potential, we now offer multi-angle video capture and analysis, side-by-side video comparisons, functional movement screenings, learning styles analyses, and even body composition scans.

These elements are seamlessly and transparently woven into the training and practice of aikido at the dojo. Elevating our students' growth while maintaining a traditional dojo environment is our top priority.





*Haruo Matsuoka selecting calligraphy pieces from his collection for the shomen after the dojo remodel.*



With a resolute focus on deepening his understanding of the art of aikido, Haruo Matsuoka Sensei has spent the year focusing on research and development. Having established exchange programs with some of the world's great martial arts masters, Sensei has ongoing dialogues and training sessions with legendary martial artists Dan Inosanto (one of Bruce Lee's top students and best friends) and Kenji Yamaki (Kyokushin Karate World Champion). Guro Inosanto, Yamaki Sensei, and Matsuoka Sensei were all featured (separately) on the cover of *Black Belt Magazine* in the last 12 months.

In May 2015, Matsuoka Sensei issued his first 4th dan promotions for his most senior students. And with a history dating back to 1970's, Matsuoka Sensei was delighted to officially welcome Craig Dunn and Kihon Dojo in Taos New Mexico to his extended family of aikidoka.

Matsuoka Sensei travels to Japan annually to strengthen our connection to the Aikido World Headquarters in Tokyo and to further his own training. He continues to lead seminars in the US and internationally, but limits these events to maintain focus on his own development and that of his most senior disciples.





After receiving 4th dan from Matsuoka Sensei in May 2015, Josh narrowed his focus on designing programs and instructional methods to best transmit Matsuoka Sensei's insights, and in so doing, help each practitioner reach her/his fullest potential as a marital artist. In order to keep up with Matsuoka Sensei's pace of discovery and to respond to the diverse and changing needs of the growing group of dojo students, Josh finds himself continually challenged to enhance and extend the quality and reach of the dojo's training programs.

This year, Josh supported the launch of a new set of comprehensive training programs, initiated a new instructor development program, and rolled out a new breed of aikido programs for large organizations. At Matsuoka Sensei's direction, Josh has also assumed greater responsibility for the dojo's kyu tests and testing requirements.



# Our Instructors



Our dojo students place great trust in our instructors. For every student, the path of personal development as a martial artist presents its own unique challenges, which can seem insurmountable at times.

Mindful of this, we demand the very best from our instructors. Our team of instructors meets regularly to discuss programs, align teaching methodologies, and develop training strategies for individual students. We require our instructors to have high levels of technical, instructional, and leadership skills. In exchange for their willingness to develop themselves in this capacity, we commit to invest in their growth.

Earlier this year, we launched an instructor development program. Each instructor will participate in a two-month session in which they will be exposed to new teaching challenges and have the opportunity to develop their aikido through direct instruction from Matsuoka Sensei in a small group setting.

Ikazuchi Dojo is proud of its team of instructors. Unique in their journeys, all the instructors share a sincere commitment to the development of the dojo's students as well as a tireless quest for their own self-improvement. All of our instructors have ranked directly under Matsuoka Sensei. In May 2015, Wes Watkins and James Young were promoted to sandan (3rd degree black belt) and Anastasia Shuba and Dave Lee joined our team of instructors at the beginning of the year after receiving their shodan (1st degree black belt). This spring, Anne Lee, our yoga instructor, received her 200-hour instructor certification from Samrat Dasgupta in Hong Kong.



## Traditional Aikido

The dojo's traditional aikido program has grown in size over the last year, but it's been done with a very incremental and controlled approach. As we grew in 2013 and 2014, we found that a number of people entered classes who weren't good fits for the program. Nearly all of these people were sincere and had a genuine enthusiasm to train, however, some weren't physically prepared, others weren't ready for the level of dedication and commitment the art requires, and for some, aikido just wasn't their thing.

Students enrolled in our traditional classes are extremely dedicated and their focus is a scarce resource: they invest substantial time and energy both in their own training and the support they offer their fellow students. We recognized that it wasn't productive asking senior students to focus on the development of new students who weren't staying for the long term. We have since been more selective about new students entering the program and redirected the focus of our senior students to those practitioners who have demonstrated a commitment to long-term development and a desire to become the foundation of the dojo's future.

## Drop-In Classes

By making our core program more exclusive, we realized a potential trade-off: if our traditional program was the only entry point into the world of aikido, we might be turning away people with the potential to become great martial artists and valuable members of the aikido community. The possibility of missing the opportunity to share aikido with this group was not an option for us.

We designed our drop-in classes to reach this group and to build quality basics and movement skills that benefit even our most senior students. A number of our black belts take these classes to refine their basics and stay current on the dojo's teaching methodologies. Class participants do not need a *gi*, only regular workout clothes, and no prior martial arts or ukemi (falling) experience is required. Some drop in for a class or two and decide aikido is not for them. Some love the drop-in format and stay with it exclusively long term. Some develop the physical capabilities and mindset for our traditional program and make the transition.

We've found these classes to be a clear success. They provide greater access to the art and new ways to experience aikido. They also protect and strengthen our traditional program. The results of our women's aikido drop-in class strongly validate our strategy. Since launching the class, we've seen over 400% growth of women in the dojo. A number of women who would never have joined the traditional program have built skill and confidence in the drop-in classes and later transitioned to the traditional program as capable martial artists. A student who started in our drop-in classes graduated to our traditional program and earned her brown belt (at a high level of quality) faster than anyone in the history of our dojo.

Dylan Wang, testing for 6th kyu.





## Personal Training

After overseeing the development of over 1,000 students and analyzing the results, we've discovered the training strategies that result in the most successful development as a martial artist. We found that group classes are necessary but not sufficient to excel, because group classes, by definition, can't be tailored to the individual.

The students who progress most dramatically are those who train across three dimensions: group class participation, independent movement practice, and one-on-one training with a senior student or instructor. Not only did we see clear evidence of the effectiveness of one-on-one training; we surveyed our members and found that getting individual time with instructors and senior students was their highest priority.

Most students already receive one-on-one training with a senpai (senior student) when they prepare for kyu tests or when they seek refinement of a specific technique after class, but some wanted a more consistent format to learn directly from their instructors. We wanted to ensure that everyone who wanted this kind of individual mentorship could access it.

Since rolling out our personal training program and making dojo instructors available for personal training sessions, we have had a substantial percentage of our members taking private sessions on a regular basis. We now run between 50-100 personal training sessions a month and nearly 25% of the members in our traditional program take advantage of personal training sessions with our instructors.

## Shugyo Program

After collecting feedback from our students and recognizing the demand for more comprehensive training programs, we rolled out the *Shugyo* program (roughly translated to mean a focused, intensive period of training). The *Shugyo* program is conducted in 3-month intervals and requires its participants to embrace a period of extensive training in a focused aspect of the art.

With 8 pioneering participants, we kicked off the program in late 2014. We started with functional movement screenings (measuring balance, flexibility, form and strength) and multi-angle video recordings of the participants' aikido. After reviewing results with an instructor, each participant took part in designated mentoring sessions with one of the dojo instructors. Additionally, participants were invited to take part in a series of informational and cultural events designed to deepen their understanding of the art in an off-the-mat format. Everyone in the program developed dramatically over the 3 month period. Over the course of the session, however, we became aware of a number of ways we could improve the program.

In our launch session, we first selected participants, then spent time learning about each person's goals, strengths, and weaknesses. Once determined, we focused on tailoring training activities to maximize each student's potential. One group was comprised of practitioners with a significant variance in experience and the other group was comprised of students within a much narrower band of experience who could all benefit from the same practice - randori. After seeing the results of the later program structure, we realized the increased effectiveness of a more focused format.

We redesigned the program so each track has a specific theme, level, and focus. Students are invited to join if they have the appropriate level of experience and are in the right place in their training to benefit from the focus of the program. In this updated format, the small group sessions have become far more focused and impactful. We're currently using this structure to run two separate tracks and have seen great results. To get a better sense for the program, we've included course overviews of our October-December sessions.

# Shugyo Programs

October-December 2015



## The Senpai

*Designed for students approaching 2nd kyu and senior students wanting to update their understanding of Ikazuchi Dojo's fundamentals.*

- Session 1: Program Overview & 2nd kyu test requirements review
- Session 2: Video capture: Practice tests
- Session 3: Posture and balance
- Session 4: Movement basics
- Session 5: Ukemi basics 1
- Session 6: Ukemi basics 2
- Session 7: Mindset of the uke
- Session 8: Hand movements & attacks
- Session 9: Pins & joint locks
- Session 10: The senpai / kohai relationship
- Session 11: Updated video capture and group debrief / analysis
- Session 12: Teaching beginners

## Randori

*For senior students wanting to understand the fundamentals of randori.*

- Session 1: Program overview. Randori attitude and training spirit.
- Session 2: Randori video capture
- Session 3: Kokyunage
- Session 4: Nodotsuki and supporting techniques
- Session 5: Hand movements and attacks
- Session 6: Single attacker combinations and applications
- Session 7: Multi-attacker patterns
- Session 8: Positioning against multiple attackers
- Session 9: First cut
- Session 10: Getting caught
- Session 11: The physics of randori
- Session 12: How to lead your randori self practice



# Organizational Programs



We've had great success with our organizational programs in the last year. To select populations of the public, we wanted to introduce aikido as a training system that boosts concentration, learning capability, and leadership skills. We wanted to share how the art is able to identify and maximize an individual's potential. With these goals in mind, we designed and implemented a set of programs for larger organizations.

After pioneering and refining the program with GMI, a 1,000 employee security services company, we've been fortunate to have the opportunity to work with a number of exceptional companies, including Thales Group, a global aerospace and defense contractor with over 65,000 employees, and Blizzard Entertainment, one of the world's greatest video game companies.

Programs are designed by Josh Gold, who in addition to 25 years of aikido experience, also has 15 years executive management experience. He was a co-founder of two business consulting firms with clients that included Disney, DreamWorks, Sony, Nissan Motors, and other leading global brands.

We currently offer two types of programs:

- **On-site wellness programs** designed for team building, improving focus and self-confidence, providing tools to manage high pressure situations, and promoting proper posture and workplace ergonomics. These typically take the form of recurring 1-hour aikido classes held 2-3 times each week.
- **Experiential learning events** that are aikido themed and highly customizable. We design team building events, workshops, and seminars that align with an organization's culture, initiatives, and objectives. We create experiential learning components to support companies' existing training programs, lead conflict management workshops, and design once-in-a-lifetime executive retreats. We've successfully delivered these experiences to a number of leading organizations across the country.

Unlike our traditional aikido classes, these are newly developed programs. We believe the programs offer tremendous value, reflected in the enthusiasm and engagement of the participants, as well as in the performance metrics we collect on the program. However, we know there are many opportunities to improve. We are appreciative of the opportunity to work with and learn from leading organizations as we operate and refine these programs. We are actively seeking opportunities for growth and innovation with our organizational programs.

*With Blizzard's focus on fantasy games and their love of swords (after 5 years of service, each employee is awarded a sword), we incorporated sword training into their program.*





# Events and Workshops

Dojo members told us they were seeking greater opportunities to engage with aikido and the world of martial arts more broadly in the pursuit of expanding and deepening their understanding of the arts. This year, we made a push to respond to this request. The dojo hosted between 15-20 workshops and events: some events were open to the public, some restricted to dojo members, and some structured to accommodate a very small number of people. A few highlights are outlined below:

## Fireside Chat with Jeff Imada

Jeff Imada is one of the most respected fight and stunt coordinators in Hollywood with a resume that includes over 170 feature films and TV shows. His best known work includes *Furious Seven* (2015), *Hanna* (2011), *The Book of Eli* (2010), *The Bourne Ultimatum* (2007), *The Bourne Supremacy* (2004), *Fight Club* (1999), and *Blade* (1998). One of the top students of Dan Inosanto, Jeff is a veteran martial artist with over 40 years experience.

Jeff sat down with Matsuoka Sensei and a small group of dojo students to discuss his career, share his insights, and talk about his experience with Guro Inosanto, the Inosanto Academy of Martial Arts, and in Hollywood as one of its most highly sought-after stunt choreographers. We recorded the over 4-hour event and hope to release the transcript of the evening in the near future.



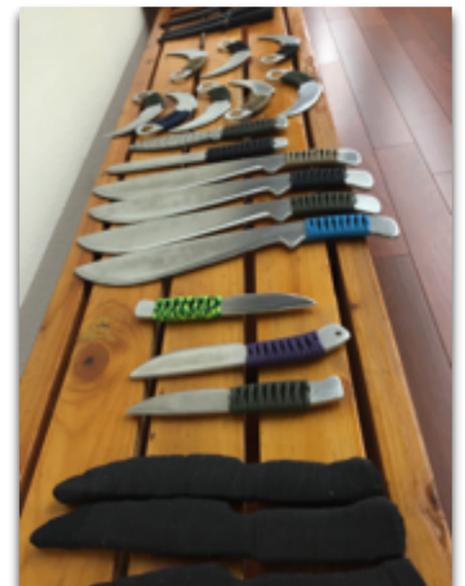
## Matsuoka Sensei's Aikido Journey

Over the course of an evening, Haruo Matsuoka Sensei shared the story of his aikido journey with us. From his first experience with aikido as a child, to his most recent discoveries, to a story about Chuck Norris, Matsuoka Sensei's discussion was both lively and insightful. An edited transcript of the discussion can be found on our website ([dojo.ikazuchi.com](http://dojo.ikazuchi.com)). The series was co-published with Aikido Journal.

## Blade Workshop with Mark Cheng

Mark Cheng, a veteran martial artist, Chinese medicine doctor, and a great friend of the dojo, hosted a blade workshop for our students. As a contributing editor for *Black Belt Magazine*, Mark has been exposed to a myriad of martial arts styles and techniques.

With an arsenal of training weapons provided by Cold Steel and PM Training blades, Mark gave our students a primer on the world of blade combat and shared ways to apply aikido movements in a range of practical scenarios involving edged weapons.







The dojo has experienced a great deal of change, growth, and improvement over the last year. Looking forward, we expect many challenges. We'll be focused on ways to increase the quality and reach of our aikido programs, as well as to enable our members to reach their fullest potential. They are the foundation and the future of the dojo.

We'd love to hear from you if you have any ideas about how we might improve our current efforts and leverage our expertise to create even higher-value programs and experiences.



**Contact Us**

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