An influx of people trained in mixed martial arts has forced law enforcement officers to prepare for and defend against that style of combat, said Joe Jumper, Department of Criminal Justice Training Physical Training and Defensive Tactics instructor. "Events like Ultimate Fighting Championship have encouraged society to watch, learn and participate in this new way of fighting," he said. "Another reason for law enforcement officers to be trained in ground defense is because of the lack of confidence in physical confrontation on the ground. With that said, officers need more ground training to increase their ability and awareness."

At DOCJT, Physical Training and Defensive Tactics instructors teach a ground defense system called Ground Avoidance Ground Escape, more commonly known as GAGE. The system is taught as part of the Pressure Points Control Tactics, or, PPCT.

"GAGE is an effective system for police officers because they are taught to avoid the ground if at all possible, Jumper said. "If ground engagement is unavoidable, the officers learn how to escape safely."

One Kentucky agency has recognized the value of this type of defense system and incorporated it into their tactical team. "We have a dedicated hands-on unit," said Independence Police Capt. Jon Lonaker, commander of the Northern Kentucky Emergency Response Unit. "We have guys on the team who are trained to, once we identify a suspect, apprehend the person and the rest of the team can move on. They also function as team members when needed, but whenever we call contact or hands on, they immediately know to go to that area. "What that does is it frees up the team members to move on to additional objectives," Lonaker continued. "A lot of times, what we have found is we go into a situation where we’d have our guns drawn and have somebody not giving up, but not resisting to the point where we can employ deadly force."

Hands-on team members have had extensive practice, training and testing in specific ground defense skills designed for a law enforcement tactical team by a former team member, Lonaker said. They do not carry rifles or TASERS when called out to a scene, he said. "So, [the hands-on team] allows us to get people who know techniques to take them down. It is safer for us and safer for the bad guy that we don’t have any accidental shootings trying to take him down with a gun in hand. If this guy is going to resist, he has two free hands and I only have one. It is not fair to the officer. It works out to our advantage."

The objective of this part of the team is not about the fight, it’s about getting the suspect out of the way of the rest of the team to handle whatever else needs to be handled on scene, whether that be victims, hostages or other suspects.

While every team may not be large enough to employ a hands-on group, Jumper encourages all officers — tactical team members and patrol officers who may be called upon for rapid deployment — to be trained in ground defense. "I suggest officers practice and update what they learn from the academy," he said. "If you have the funds, join a school that teaches ground defense. If money is an issue, ask your department for support. I recently became aware that some departments are purchasing grappling mats for their officers to practice defensive tactics techniques. This is a great way to get the entire department practicing ground defense."