



# Committee Seeks Input on GCSAA Professional Development Initiative

BY JOEL JACKSON, CGCS

**G**CSAA's Performance Development Initiative (PDI) is perhaps the hottest topic to come along since the certification program was instituted. PDI does have the potential to affect the way superintendents enter and continue in the industry. I think it can be a very good move for the profession if done fairly, affordably and inclusively, but that's just one person's opinion.

GCSAA is looking for your opinion. While there is tremendous potential for upgrading and enhancing the superintendent's profession and standing in the industry, there are many nitpicking details that need to be ironed out. GCSAA is asking, pleading, begging members for input and for chapters to request and schedule a member of the Member Services Resources Group or GCSAA staff to come to your local chapter and present the basic program as it has been developed so far.

My Central Florida Chapter was

scheduled to have MSRG member Robert Randquist, CGCS from the Boca Rio Club speak at our February meeting. Chapter visits will be available until May and then the MSRG must hunker down with all the input and feedback and come up with recommendations that can be put up for a vote at the GCSAA Conference and Show in Dallas in February. The following PDI information was taken directly from the GCSAA Website. I sincerely hope you will read it and if you have questions or concerns please contact GCSAA at 1-800-472-7878.

## Purpose

The purpose of the Professional Development Initiative (PDI) is to improve the knowledge, skills and abilities of the professional superintendent that will contribute toward improved playing conditions and the enjoyment of the game of golf.

As golf has evolved from a pure sport to a multifaceted business, the role of the superintendent has evolved from a

traditional greenkeeper to a high-level manager. Recognizing this, GCSAA will be developing a state-of-the-art curriculum that will provide superintendents the tools needed to meet the challenges they face in managing agronomic, staff and budget facets of the golf course operation. Furthermore, GCSAA will be positioned to recognize the accomplishments of the professional superintendent with a competency-based classification system.

In order for golfers and employers to truly value superintendents, we need to enhance the knowledge sets through an integrated, competency-based curriculum. Furthermore, it is important that we measure the impact of this education and its effects on the playing conditions of the golf course. We need to give employers language they can understand, a bottom-line financial impact and a return on their investment.

The Member Standards Resource Group (MSRG), a member group appointed in 1997 to focus on PDI, has

COMPARISON OF CURRENT AND PROPOSED REQUIREMENTS

Requirements	Current C	Current B	Future B	Current A	Future A	Current Certified	Future Certified
Dues	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Job Responsibilities	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Competency Assessment	No	No	No	No	Validation of competencies	Old 6-hour exam plus course attesting	Validation of competencies at higher proficiency levels than A plus course attesting
Experience	No	No	No	3 years as a superintendent	3 years as a superintendent	Sliding scale: 3-5 years depending on degree	3 years as Class A
Valid Pesticide License	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Continuing Education for Entry Eligibility	No	No	No	No	No	Yes: sliding scale	Will be required to finish at least one 3-year renewal cycle as class A
On-going Professional Development	No	No	No	No	Amount TBD and includes mandatory chapter and/or civic participation and other continuing education. Based on renewal cycle of three years. Must complete self-assessment every three years.	Yes	Amount TBD but more than Class A. Also includes chapter and civic participation and continuing education. Based on three-year renewal cycle. Must complete self-assessment every three years.
Formal Education	No	No	No	No	2-year turf or 4-year other	No; Experience and CEUs required in the absence of formal education.	2-year turf or 4-year other.

All renewals based on 3-year cycle and self-assessments must be completed every 3 years.

\*\*The required competency review self-assessment provides a reasonable assurance that a minimal standard of qualifications has been achieved. This is either by passing a simple written exam, which validates the competency, or by demonstrating performance on the job. Most important of all, the competency review provides career and educational guidance.



helped create this presentation. It contains their recommendations on how membership in GCSAA should be based on a set level of competencies, combined with formal education and experience as a golf course superintendent.

From October 1999 to May of 2000, members of the MSRG will visit GCSAA chapters to discuss the proposed classification and continuing education program. This time will be important because the MSRG will not be selling the project, but will be listening to the membership and collecting questions and concerns so that the PDI can be adjusted to what the membership needs.

#### Communications Plan

Notes: We are truly looking to the membership for their input into the PDI. As a result, we have designed an extensive program that will provide clear and consistent communication to the general membership and obtain their comments, concerns and questions regarding the PDI.

Beginning in October, members of

the Member Standards Resource Group started to visit various chapters. During our visit, we will provide a standard presentation on our proposal and then we will begin to collect input from the general membership regarding their questions or concerns on particular pieces of the plan. As of March 20, more than 50 meetings had already been set. A list of presentations that

have been scheduled is available on this site, and will be continually updated here and in *Newsline*. It is critical for this initiative to succeed that we discuss it with all members.

We will continue to make this presentation through May of 2000. During this process, the comments and concerns we collect will be systematically cataloged into a document and

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consistently given to us so we can see what the membership is thinking about this process. Next summer, the MSRG will meet to make our final recommendations.

In addition to these chapter presentations, we recognize that not all members can attend the presentations, so we will be providing several other means of communications about the PDI. For example, a Town Hall Meeting was held at Conference and Show Feb. 19 immediately after the Annual Meeting.

Obviously, we will utilize our existing publications, GCM and Newslite, to provide continual detailed updates to members. And this web site has additional features, like a list of Frequently Asked Questions. A printed publication will be released on a quarterly basis and will just address issues related to the PDI.

Finally in all publications and on the web, members will be encouraged to complete a comment card to tell us what they really think about the project. Maybe some of those concerns about accessibility and how it impacts you directly are general in nature and if we can start discussing those issues, we can show members what a valuable resource we have in the PDI.

The communication is extensive, but it is not a sales job. We will change the program according to what members want. There will be varying opinions and it will be our job on the MSRG to sort through all of the comments to come up with an answer that is acceptable to as many people as possible.

#### **Comparison of Current and Proposed Future Requirements**

We have prepared a Table of Current and Proposed Requirements. Let's focus on the requirements for Class A. As you will note, there is no change in Class C for the assistant superintendents. At this point, we do not anticipate any major changes with the exception of allowing Cs to utilize the HR Web for their career guidance.

We also see no major changes in the Class B requirements. Frankly, this is

where we see the inclusive nature of our organization being utilized. If a person is a superintendent and wants to pay their dues, they can be a Class B member. However, if they aspire to continue their professional development whether as a superintendent or seeking more responsibility, then there will be appropriate recognition for them through the branded Class A or certification program..

In order to be a Class A member, a potential member must hold the job

***In order to advance the  
image of the golf course  
superintendent, it is  
imperative for us to  
convey professionalism  
to our employers and to  
golfers who may become  
our future employers.  
Our profession is one  
that demands a  
commitment to lifelong  
learning, beginning  
with the fundamentals  
we get from a college  
education.***

responsibility of a superintendent. In this profession, we have seen lots of different names and unfortunately we have been constrained by that label. With the competency assessment, we have a good handle on what superintendents' jobs are and if a person meets that definition, they can apply for Class A status. Class A members will be required to self-assess against the competency statements and then have this

self-assessment validated. The validation process has not been totally developed.

However, there are a number of ways to accomplish this mission. For example, if you have a good relationship with your employer, enlisting their help in validating your proficiencies could be an option. But maybe it would be better handled by one of your colleagues. Our consultant, Franklin Covey, will develop various options for validating the proficiency levels for us.

The proficiency levels are currently being set by the MSRG and by members who have been involved in various focus groups.

These levels and the HR Web will be available for members next summer—two years prior to any required use. This will allow members time to experiment with the examination and with the self-assessment and get comfortable with these tools.

In addition to the self-assessment, we recommend that Class As have a minimum of three years experience in holding the responsibility of a superintendent, same as it is currently. We all know that it is great to have the formal education, but experience teaches us to apply that education practically on the course.

#### **Formal education**

And finally, let's move into formal education. We recommend that our branded Class A members possess either a two-year turf degree or a four-year college degree. We recommend this for the following reasons:

Society and thus employers recognize formal education as a requirement for a professional. In order to advance the image of the golf course superintendent, it is imperative for us to convey that professionalism to our employers and to golfers who may become our future employers.

Our profession is one that demands a commitment to lifelong learning, beginning with the fundamentals we get from a college education. Before you react, please understand that these



education requirements will apply only to new members after the date of implementation. Current members, such as ourselves, will not be required to meet the education requirement. This will be explained in more detail when we talk about grandfathering.

First, let's talk about the on-going requirements for membership. We all agreed early on that Class A members need to have some type of ongoing requirements.

We need to encourage members to maintain currency and relevancy within the profession. We believe in the adage that as a profession, we are only as strong as our weakest link. Therefore, we are proposing the following ongoing requirements for all Class A members.

First administratively, we set a renewal cycle of every three years. We selected three years for two main reasons:

- 1 - Each year new products and tech-

nologies are released into our industry and it is imperative that we keep current on those items.

2 - We also believe that by keeping the period fairly short, we would help members organize their own professional development. In other words, all of us know people who wait to recertify until the last three months of the five-year period. It becomes very difficult to complete.

By keeping the period shorter, we keep the message in the forefront of our members' thoughts. This must be something we make a priority in our professional lives.

We talked about the self-assessment requirement during the discussion of entry-level requirements.

We believe that in order to guide a member's professional development, they should have to take a self-assessment once during every renewal cycle. One thing we haven't discussed is that the HR Web will continually be up-

dated and revised to meet the evolving requirements of our jobs.

As the profession changes, we need our members to continually reassess themselves and their proficiency levels. This will help them guide their own professional development as well. In order to support that professional development, we will require some level of continuing education. Education is not going to look the same as it does today.

We are not going to be fighting to get our requirements complete because we can't get the seminar we want in our region or at C&S.

In addition, as vital as continuing education is, we recognize that there are other factors that we need to foster and one of those is some type of recognition for participation in civic, chapter and national committee work. So this type of professional development will also play a part in the on-going requirements.



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## Frequently Asked Questions About the PDI

- **How much will the PDI cost the Association?**

As indicated in the earlier response to the cost, projects of this magnitude are expensive. However, the real question is not the actual cost, but the value we believe members will receive from it when it is successful. Because it supports the foundation upon which this association was formed, education, we believe the return on our investment will be high and will result in increased job stability and higher salaries for our members.

Please note that the cost of the project never exceeds 3.2% of GCSAA's annual budget. In addition, most of the funds (90%) have been spent on improving the education program. We believe that as an organization whose main purpose is education and information dissemination, the cost to improve this service to members is wholly appropriate. The redesign of our education will provide members a state-of-the-art curriculum that will be accessible both in terms of cost and venue, benefits that will be apparent to members within the next two to four years.

Neither of the consultants, SRI nor Franklin Covey, has addressed changes in the classification issue. Their work was focused on the education portion of the PDI. Even the HR Web is primarily intended to support professional development and member education. Funds spent on the membership classification recommendations supported GCSAA's efforts to obtain as much member input into this process as possible. A separate FAQ will address the communication effort made by members of the MSRG on this project.

- **Can you earn recognized education points by just reading GCM?**

Currently, we are investigating several new methods of education to increase the accessibility of education to all members. These are still in the design phase and include the possibility of implementing an educational program called Action Learning. The action learning program provides participants the opportunity to learn by conducting a research project on a golf course. It requires the learner to first read various pieces of research (some of which may be in GCM) and then practically apply this research on the course. To have the project count toward your continuing education requirement, the results would need to be validated. The Education Committee will be considering this model as part of the newly restructured education program to be shown in 2001 to members.

- **How will the PDI impact me?**

Through the PDI, you will be provided opportunities to enhance your skills as a golf course superintendent and if you are interested, ways to develop into other careers in related fields. Current membership classification issues are still being identified. However, we are confident that we will be able to satisfy current members through a "grandfathering" process. More information on the classification system and transition plan will be available at the Delegates meeting.

- **What benefits will the PDI provide me?**

The initial goal of the PDI was to increase the recognition and salary for golf course superintendents, along with improving job stability and job opportunities. By participating in a proactive professional development plan, you will improve the knowledge, skills and abilities you need to be more successful as a golf course superintendent or to develop skills in other fields related to golf course management.

Furthermore, you will be able to document your competence through a unique tool currently called the HR Web.

- **Isn't it true that GCSAA just wants to make more money by requiring us to take more education?**

That is definitely not the case. It is true that enhancing your professional skills will require you to participate in more continuing education, but those opportunities will be provided in various alternatives, many of which will be offered at minimal cost. Currently, GCSAA offers many educational opportunities through venues such as Golf Course Management magazine and through the Web and Information Services. The HR Web is a tool to help you manage your individual development plan and will provide the recognition of these sources of education, which previously could not be documented. Your specific plan can include any of the GCSAA educational opportunities including self-directed ones such as those available through Golf Course Management magazine and the Web and even opportunities available through your local chapter and turf organization.

- **Will I lose my gold card?**

Our current thoughts are that the benefits that are currently available to Class A members would continue to be available to Class A as well as those in a "general" membership category (as long as they are superintendent members).

- **Will I have to keep taking CEUs after I get to be a Class A?**

Yes. You will have ongoing educational requirements. However, it should be reiterated that many of those opportunities may be things you currently do, such as read GCM, participate in your local turf association conference, attend a GCSAA seminar, etc.

- **Why are "they" requiring a degree?**

At this point no final decisions have been made regarding any of the proposed membership requirements. That will be completed after MSRG members present the PDI to the chapters and receive comments on the proposed model. The model proposed by the MSRG requires a two-year degree in turf or a four-year college degree. This is required to ensure that superintendents in the future have the necessary knowledge base to perform as a multi-faceted manager.

However, we are confident that all current Class A and B members will be "grandfathered" into the new system and will be required only to maintain ongoing requirements. The degree requirement would impact any new Class A and B members after the date of implementation, which at this point





is proposed to be July 1, 2002.

*(Editor's note: Unconfirmed reports suggest that nearly 80 percent of current Class A and B superintendents already have two-year or four-year degrees.)*

- **Will the PDI cost us more?**

The MSRG is still finalizing the details of the classification system. As a result, we do not know what the costs will be. However, we are committed to ensuring that the products produced will be accessible and cost effective and that those who work on golf courses with limited resources may attain Class A membership.

- **Explain what is meant by the statement that the MSRG wants an inclusive membership. How can you be inclusive when you set standards that are designed to be exclusive?**

All golf course superintendents who want to be members of GCSAA will be able to be members if they pay dues. However, as has been stated, it is important to recognize that the Class A and Certified members will be those who are marketed to employers. This "leg up" will provide the golf course superintendent with the added advantage of being "branded" within the industry.

- **Who will be grandfathered into the new system?**

The MSRG is still discussing the entire status of who will be grandfathered. The bylaws vote is not scheduled until 2001, and we are confident that all current Class A members and Certified members will be grandfathered through the entry standards. However, it is unclear if they will be required to have the same ongoing requirements as new Class A and Certified members do. Feedback on this issue will be obtained through the extensive chapter communication plan conducted by the MSRG.

- **Some of today's leading golf course superintendents don't have college degrees. I know that they, personally, will be "grandfathered" in as Class A. But what about the future of our profession. Are we effectively shutting out some of our potential leaders in the future? What if some of the potentially best people don't get a college degree? If they can't get Class A status, they might not even be able to get a good job.**

First, we should understand that the career planning and continuing education opportunity components of the Professional Development Initiative can have fairly rapid and personally fulfilling impacts for those who take advantage of them. The membership classification and employer education components, however, will take years to make meaningful changes in the marketplace.

It might help to think in terms of generations. In our parents' generation, a high school diploma was plenty of formal education for just about any job. In our generation (Baby Boomers, I mean), college education became much more widely available and much more common. In our generation, a college education is considered a basic requirement for many, but by no means all, jobs.

For our children, though, college education will become a minimum standard for practically anything better than an

entry-level job - the way a high school diploma used to be. If we don't move with the rest of the nation's workforce, the superintendent will never be recognized as a professional.

- **Is there a sliding scale for future certified superintendents for formal education?**

The Certification Committee will be reviewing recommendations from the MSRG relative to the certification program within the next year. Currently, there is no recommendation for a sliding scale. This complements what is being recommended for the Class A member.

However, the MSRG recommends that a person be a Class A superintendent member for three years before becoming certified. In order to become a Class A member, you must hold the job responsibilities of a superintendent for three years. Therefore, in order to be certified you must be a superintendent for six years - regardless of formal education.

- **Who was on the focus groups to develop the competencies that will provide the baseline for the Class A and Certification requirement?**

Last year, more than 100 superintendents participated in various interviews, surveys and focus groups to develop draft competencies for superintendents. Last spring, this data was reviewed and refined by 27 superintendents, 20 of whom were certified. The average length of membership within GCSAA was 16 1/2 years. Fourteen had at least a two-year degree in turf. The rest had some or no college or declined to provide us that information. Sixteen states were represented. Both private and public courses were represented.

- **What happens if a current Class A member without a degree lets membership lapse and then wants to reinstate? Does he have to reinstate as a general member?**

At this time, the recommendation from the MSRG is the following: Class A members who do not maintain their ongoing requirements for Class A status will be subject to classification as a Class B or general member. In order to reinstate, they would be required to meet all current Class A entry requirements.

- **What if a current Class A member without a degree is unemployed at the time he has to renew (and hence reclassify)? Will he be able to maintain his class A standing after he finds a job or will he have to reclassify as a Class B or general member?**

At this time, the MSRG has no recommendation regarding this situation. We will add it to the agenda for discussion at their meeting in the summer 2000.

- **Will changes to certification renewal requirements make maintaining certified status more difficult?**

The Certification Committee has not reviewed the recommendations from the Membership Standards Resource Group and this concern will be forwarded to them as they begin their review and restructuring of the program.

*If you still have questions about PDI, please contact our education department, at (800) 472-7878, ext. 471.*