

Competency-Based Education:

What Is It and How Will It Help Me?

Editor's Note: This article is part of a series highlighting aspects of the proposed Professional Development Initiative (PDI).

The objective of all associations' continuing education is to advance the knowledge, skills and abilities of the members. GCSAA is, therefore, developing a state-of-the-art curriculum that provides golf course superintendents the tools needed to meet the challenges they face in managing their golf courses, staffs and budgets. The result of enhancing our education program will be the elevation of the professional qualifications of our members: the golf course superintendents.

In order to develop the needed curriculum, we must identify what the employers of golf course superintendents need, want and value from the golf course superintendent.

Then, we detail the knowledge, skills and attributes required of superintendents to satisfy those needs.

Over the last two years, the Membership Standards Resource Group (MSRG) has been developing the Professional Development Initiative (PDI). The PDI is based on the belief that for golfers and employers to truly value superintendents, we must develop a mechanism to recognize their accomplishments and enhance their knowledge. The MSRG believes this can be accomplished through an integrated, competency-based curriculum. Furthermore, research indicates that we

(continued on page 30)



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must be able to 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 or, as they refer to it, a “return on their investment.”

In order to develop the needed curriculum, we must identify what the employers of golf course superintendents need, want and value from the golf course superintendent. Then, we detail the knowledge, skills and attributes required of superintendents to satisfy those needs. Education provides the means for superintendents to fill any gaps between those competencies that superintendents have and those they need.

Using a competency model will document this process. The model consists of three major components: competencies, levels of proficiency and performance statements. The competency categories, which reflect a superintendent’s skills and knowledge, are organized into appropriate clusters. Each competency category is then subdivided into proficiency levels that range from a Level 1 (novice) to Level 5 (expert). Within each proficiency level are performance statements describing the observable behav-

iors of superintendents performing at that level of proficiency. An illustration appears below.

The competencies will be managed through a unique, Internet-based program called the HR Web (more information on this program will be forthcoming). Although the HR Web is currently under development, members can view this tool by logging onto the Members Only section of www.gcsaa.org.

So how will the competency model impact education for superintendents? As you may imagine, superintendents traditionally have focused their continuing education on the agronomic skills of golf course management. However, our research indicates that superintendents’ professional demands are changing. The superintendent’s job requirements have increased the need for competencies in management skills, leadership and communication. This doesn’t diminish the necessity for good scientific education, but it does require a superintendent to “broaden” his/her expertise in various areas.

The current proposal recommended by the MSRSG requires Class A members and

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certified members to maintain some level of ongoing continuing education. These levels have yet to be defined. Many members have expressed frustration with this requirement because they do not believe they will have access to enough educational opportunities.

(continued on page 33)

Resource Utilization: Rules of Golf				
Task: Manage the Course to Accommodate the Rules of Golf				
LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access key rules information (USGA Rules of Golf and local rules) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop an understanding of how rules affect golf course setup Play golf Demonstrate basic knowledge of golfing rules and etiquette 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remain current on updates made to USGA Rules of Golf and local rules Set up course for both regular and tournament play to conform to the Rules of Golf 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct staff training on rules and course setup as it relates to the rules Play the course regularly to determine how course operation and setup affect play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Obtain the experience and training to administer rules at a state or higher-level event

At present, members can obtain “recognized” education on various topics through GCSAA seminars, self-study programs and through limited external vendors. However, in the future, local education venues (chapters, industry and extension avenues) will play an important part in meeting requirements for continuing education (either for classification or certification, dependent on the final outcome determined by members). Furthermore, the Education Department of GCSAA is planning to pilot several programs next year that provide members with education through various alternative methods. Some of these could

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include videoconferencing, online education, additional self-study programs and an experiential learning program called Action Learning. This form of education provides superintendents the ability to document on-the-job learning experiences and submit them for credit. A template to facilitate this process is in development.

The Education Department is currently completing a curriculum map of the existing programs. This involves comparing the content of educational opportunities (like seminars and courses) against the competencies that superintendents need to be successful. Performing a gap analysis tells us whether our current programs match the competencies completely, somewhat or not at all. Due to the diverse nature of our members’ jobs, we will not be able to offer all the education our members need. Therefore, we will rely on our members to tell us what they want GCSAA to develop and what should be provided via external resources.

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In October of 1999, the Education Committee adopted a new vision and mission for this program that contained several guiding principles. We will use this as our guide for developing programs for the future:


GCSAA education will be the main contributor to the professionalism and competency of golf course management and will be consistent with the best practice standards for state-of-the-art content, delivery and instruction. This will be accomplished by designing learning opportunities that are:

- Interactive.
- Accessible.
- Learner-centered.
- Available with multiple delivery systems.
- Competency-based.
- Global in scope.
- Culturally responsive.

This results in instruction that is practically transferred to the workplace and provides optimal value to all stakeholders.

All of the questions have not yet been answered, but it is clear that the education program currently available to members will be of higher quality, more diverse and available to more members in the future.





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