

DATE: September 12, 2012

TO: Sandy G. Queen, CGCS – President

FROM: Chairman Sean A. Hoolehan, CGCS and Vice Chairman Timothy T. O’Neill, CGCS

RE: Executive Summary of the 2012 GCSAA Membership Standards Advisory Group

The 2011 GCSAA Board of Directors formed the Membership Standards Advisory Group (MSAG) to strategically evaluate GCSAA’s membership standards program and determine any recommendations for the future of standards.

Specifically the MSAG was asked to:

1. Determine if the original goals of the Professional Development Initiative have, or are being met.
2. Determine if GCSAA membership standards have had any unintended consequences for the association and its members that should be addressed moving forward.
3. Make recommendations on a future course of action for GCSAA in regards to membership standards.

The MSAG met three times in 2012 (February 1st & 2nd; April 28th; and August 18th & 19th). Facilitator Harrison Coerver of Harrison Coerver and Associates assisted during the April and August meetings. In addition, GCSAA staff participated in all of the meetings and served as a source of background documents and information used during discussions.

Following the overwhelming approval of membership standards for Class A members in 2001, they were implemented in 2003. This new system of standards:

- Addressed the depth and range of skills of the superintendent
- Were intended for use by employers as a quality credential
- Were based on education and work experience
- Documented continuing education and service
- Were designed to be easily understood by employers
- Allowed GCSAA to communicate the value of a professional superintendent

The original MSRSG determined:

- GCSAA should remain an inclusive organization
- Class A should reflect the complexity of being a superintendent
- Requirements would be accessible, affordable and attainable
- There should be a clear differentiation between Class A and Certified members
- Grandfathering was necessary to assure passage and recognize the value of existing members
- Programs should be future oriented

- As a result, the standards program included:
 - Entry-level requirements
 - Pesticide license or proficiency exam
 - Ongoing requirements (education and/or service)

The MSAG used the following information to help form the basis of their recommendations:

- **Overview of the development of membership standards**
 - SRI Study that provided global strategy recommendation
 - GCSAA Bylaws
 - Standing Rules of Membership
 - Class A Code of Standards
- **Overview of membership and chapters**
 - Chapter Affiliation Agreement
 - Membership growth historical data and trends
 - Membership classification data
- **Overview of Class A and Certification since July 2003**
 - Initial Class A Renewal Cycles
 - Certification program
 - Membership and Facility data and trends
 - Salary growth and comparisons with PGA & CMAA in addition to the Employment Cost Index (ECI)
 - Conference and other education data inclusive of GCSAA and external providers
- **Avid golfer and employer surveys**
 - Years 2006, 2008 & 2011

In addition, original MSRG members were surveyed for opinions and feedback regarding Membership Standards.

- In general, the original MSRG members who we heard back from felt that membership standards and the PDI were accomplishing their goals of creating better recognition and compensation for superintendents.

Response to Original Questions and Specific Recommendations:

1. Determine if the original goals of the Professional Development Initiative have, or are being met.

The MSAG determined that the PDI has been successful in the following areas:

- Increased advocacy with government agencies and regulators
- Created an IPM Competency requirement
- Expanded educational opportunities
- Was accessible and affordable through the use of varied education providers
- Improved playing conditions

2. Determine if GCSAA membership standards have had any unintended consequences for the association and its members that should be addressed moving forward.

Certain factors were not in play at the time that member standards were being discussed and implemented

- The decline in membership during the past five years has been reflective of many factors including the economy and cannot be viewed as a direct result of membership standards. The MSRГ estimated as much as a 20% drop in membership was possible following the implementation of membership standards without any knowledge of the other impending outside factors.
- Data is difficult to analyze and connect directly to membership standards since there are as many as 1,000 fewer golf courses now than in 2003. Fewer golf courses mean fewer jobs and more competition amongst qualified individuals looking for work.
- By making education both “affordable and accessible”, members have drifted away from GCSAA and towards other providers for education and credits to attain member standards.
- Industry and other external providers positioned themselves ahead of GCSAA by taking advantage of technology to provide educational credit.

Data suggests that Class A superintendents are not receiving greater compensation and recognition.

- Over the first five years (2003-2008) following implementation of the new standards, approximately 1/3 of existing Class A members reclassified or left GCSAA altogether and a significant number (40%) simply choose to become a Superintendent Member.
- In reviewing national compensation trends, the MSAG found that Class A members actually performed below the national averages for all employment classes and SM members outperformed the same benchmark. Superintendents also lost ground to the CMAA member relative to compensation growth.

Data suggests that the value of employing a Class A superintendent has not reached employers and in too many cases, even GCSAA members.

- Larger than anticipated number of members are content to remain as Superintendent Members with no apparent motivation to attain Class A status.
- The MSRГ offered the promise of a national public relations campaign to communicate the value of the Class A standard. The MSAG considers the inability to adequately market the value of Class A membership as perhaps the biggest obstacle to a greater acceptance of the new standards.
 - The group even considered recommending eliminating standards, if GCSAA is unable to adequately distinguish the value of being a Class A member.

- Data indicates that standards have had beneficial consequences, but the “Value Proposition” has failed to materialize to a level of broad acceptance by GCSAA members.
- The MSAG recognizes that significant market forces have worked against GCSAA’S ability to adequately market the Class A credential, including the general state of the economy and the overall cost of a full-blown public relations campaign.
- Another obstacle identified by the MSAG is tied to the Chapter Affiliation Agreement which allows GCSAA SM members who have lost their Class A status retain Class A membership at the chapter level. The long standing ‘grandfathering’ clause enables non-members_of GCSAA to be Class A superintendents.
 - The MSAG is supportive of the Board’s recent action to correct the Class A classification inconsistencies with chapters relative to the Affiliation Agreement and suggest that membership standards will mean little until Class A members of GCSAA can more readily distinguish themselves from non-members.
 - The integrity of the standards should be seamless between GCSAA and its chapters and the Class A designation should be consistent at both the local and national level.
- The MSAG concluded that “Grandfathering” creates too much confusion and should be eliminated.
- A weak message combined with confusion at the local level as to who exactly can be a Class A superintendent in addition to an outdated “Grandfathering” clause has resulted in a watering down of the Class A designation.
- The classification Superintendent Member (SM) is a designation that contributes to the overall lack of success in marketing a GCSAA Class A superintendent. Employers and golfers can easily be confused into thinking that the SM member might be our highest level of achievement. After all our organization is called the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America.
- The whole GCSAA classification system should be simplified to more clearly identify/define professional members as opposed to all other membership classifications. The member classification system is not only confusing to employers; it has resulted in the creation of gaps within the membership. In fact, the MSAG identified the period between when a student graduates and their attainment of that first Assistant Superintendent position as being a major “gap” where GCSAA is losing members.
 - How is it that we have 700+ student members and only roughly 200 associate members?
 - GCSAA identifies member superintendents and assistants as “Professional Members” (Class A, SM, and C). Beyond those, we have 19 other classes of membership.
 - Shouldn’t there be ‘value’ in working under a GCSAA Class A member?

3. Make recommendations on a future course of action for GCSAA in regards to membership standards.

➤ ***The following are the recommendations being brought forward for future consideration by the Membership Standards Advisory Group:***

- A.** GCSAA membership classifications should be simplified to more clearly identify/define our professional members as opposed to all other membership classifications. Class A membership should be easily recognizable as our highest level of membership and simplifying our membership classification system would help to effectively communicate this. By eliminating the Superintendent Member (SM) classification and replacing it with a Class B designation, the use of Class A; Class B; and Class C as our three professional classifications of membership would be clearly understandable by employers and influential golfers.
 - i.** At the same time, simplifying the member classification system should also work toward filling the gap in membership between students and attaining a position as an assistant superintendent.
- B.** Due to the confusion created by the inclusion of a 'grandfathering' clause in several previous initiatives, the use of 'grandfathering' should be eliminated going forward and re-evaluated, if applicable, relative to current usage.
- C.** Standards must be continually challenged and enhanced to maintain relevance.
 - i.** Current Standards are minimal at best and too easily attained.
- D.** GCSAA should consider increasing the education to service point ratio in addition to adding an environmental and business/leadership/communications component.
- E.** Credit towards Class A should be awarded to aspiring superintendents who work for a Class A member as an assistant or technician.
- F.** The pesticide license requirement presents problems with the inconsistencies in state testing requirements.
 - i.** Regardless, this requirement should remain until another suitable measurement of environmental responsibility by superintendents is developed.
- G.** Marketing of the Class A standard is a multi-tiered process and must target members, as well as employers. During the gap period referenced above is when we should be starting to market the value of Class A to these future superintendents.
- H.** A Class A member logo needs to be developed and trademarked by GCSAA.
- I.** The GCSAA Board needs to develop a set of metrics to use as a measure of the effectiveness of Class A membership.
 - i.** The Employment Cost Index (ECI), when compared to other professionals in the golf industry, may be the best measure.
- J.** There must be cooperation between chapters and GCSAA in the creation of a shared electronic data base/cloud technology that both chapter and GCSAA can access to allow for more readily available management of membership rosters and information.