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Innovations in Masonry: Development of a Competency-Based, Masonic University in the State of Florida

Marlon S. Honeywell, FPS-Life

Abstract

This manuscript is submitted with the hope of convincing grand lodges and grand chapters to concentrate their educational efforts on the natural learning patterns of masonic students. It presents a competency-based paradigm for masonic education and highlights the positive relationship between curricular development, organizational structure, innovative teaching strategies, and assessment techniques. Further, research suggests that consistent mastery of course competencies generally results in increased comprehension, information retention, mental transmutation, and spiritual enlightenment. To this end, included within this article is the methodology used by the Most Worshipful Union Grand Lodge and Jerusalem Grand Chapter, Order of the Eastern Star, to construct a competency-based University of Instruction in the State of Florida.

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He was recently appointed as President of the MW Walter Gulley, Jr. University of Instruction and reappointed as a Grand Instructor for the Most Worshipful Union Grand Lodge of Florida.

Introduction

A competency-based, masonic curriculum provides grand lodges, grand chapters, instructors, and participants with a measurable plan and concise structure for delivering a quality education.¹ Such a curriculum serves as a prescriptive, educational guide and affords practical opportunities for participants to matriculate towards academic success and cognitive transmutation.² It also identifies specific learning outcomes and core competencies that attendants must demonstrate before eventually advancing to an era of spiritual enlightenment. In essence, for the Craft to collectively achieve spiritual enlightenment, masonic stake holders must play a communal role in developing, implementing, assessing, and remodeling a novel course of study.

Grand Master's Vision

Masonic Education Program

Understanding the significance of substantive education in the State of Florida, in Fall 2012, Honorary Past Grand Masters Leonard D. Ross and Carl Finerson, and Dr. Charlie D. Roberts, Jr., former president of Jackson State Community College in Tennessee, convened in Melbourne, Florida to discuss the development of a contemporary, masonic curriculum. This curriculum would be used to invigorate members

of the Most Worshipful Union Grand Lodge of Florida (MWUGL), Prince Hall Affiliated, to continuously study requisite masonic information, such as protocol, ceremonies, and policies and procedures and the benefits of and wisdom imbedded within masonic allegory and esoteric symbolism.^A A primary ambition of the trio, facilitation of masonic scholarship quickly became the prime objective and, with permission from Past Grand Master Anthony T. Stafford, Sr., a committee of several individuals was appointed to explore the possibilities. In Spring 2015, under the name of the Masonic Education Program, an inaugural curriculum, budget, and timeline for implementation was presented. However, acknowledging the fact that a new Grand Master would soon be elected, the program was considerably postponed by Past Grand Master Stafford until the next administration.

University of Instruction

In April 2015, Walter Gulley, Jr. was elected and installed as the 18th Most Worshipful Grand Master of the MWUGL. A seasoned educator at Booker T. Washington High School in Escambia County, Florida³, one of Grand Master Gulley's first initiatives during grand lodge session was to disclose his vision of organizing a masonic university. Deliberately expanding upon the initial tenets of the Masonic Education Program, this endeavor would include members of the MWUGL and Jerusalem Grand Chapter (JGC), Order of the Eastern Star, and offer Associates, Bachelors, Masters, and Doctorate degrees in the rudiments of masonry. Grand Master Gulley appointed and charged a committee to establish for the University a mission statement, dynamic curriculum, competency-based courses, and recurring assessment measures. Further, establishing the aforementioned goals would assure that those who voluntarily enroll in this program would receive exceptional training in the State of Florida.^{B,C} Finally, he requested that the appointed committee provide for the respective leadership teams periodic updates of progress and formal presentations of such to the MWUGL and JGC at their annual workshops. The name of this new institution is entitled, The Most Worshipful Walter Gulley, Jr. University of Instruction. An image of the Honorable Walter Gulley, Jr. may be found in FIGURE 1.



University Construct

To carry out the Grand Master's request, the University committee congregated in May 2015 and a timeline and plan of execution was constructed. During the first assembly, several subcommittees were selected, including steering, curriculum, assessment, strategic planning, registration, internet technology, intellectual

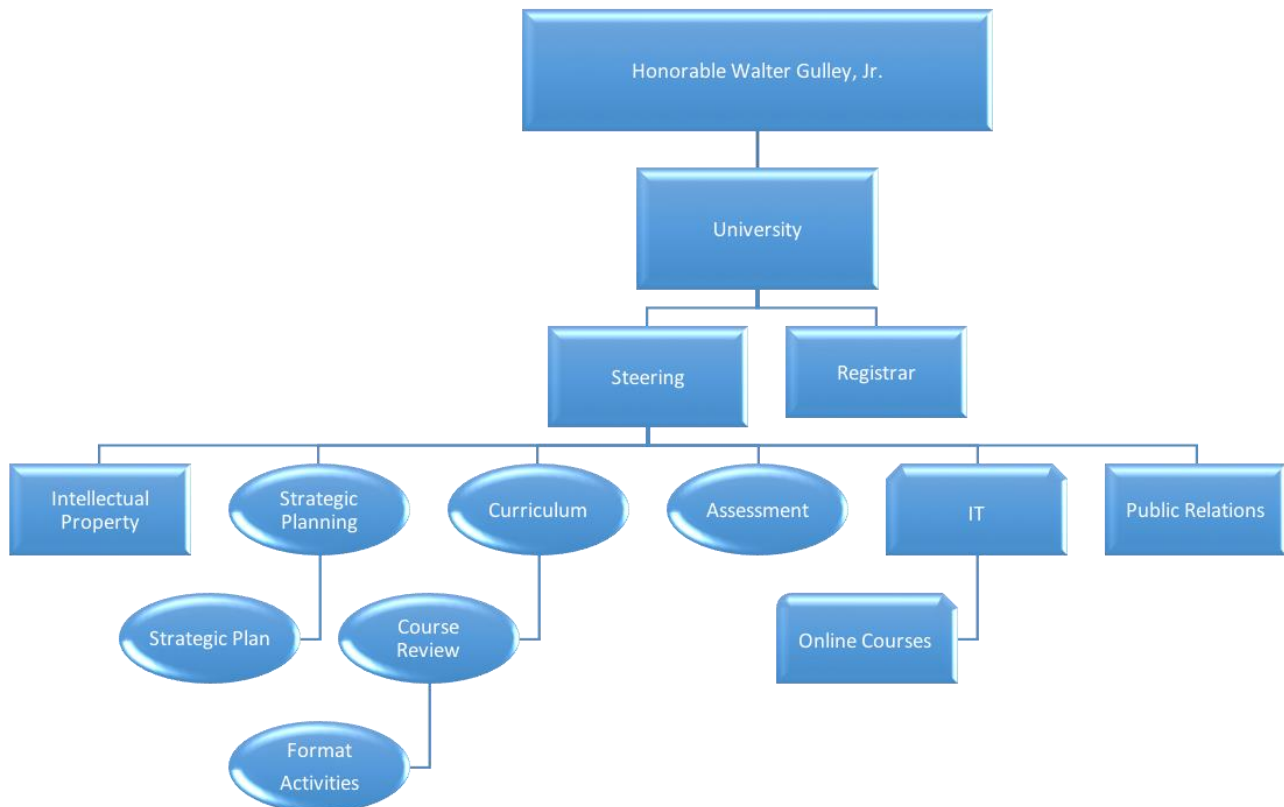
property, and public relations. Subcommittee charges were subsequently conferred and committee chairs appointed. The first order of business was to devise a mission statement for the University.

Mission Statement

Defined as a written declaration of an organization's core purpose⁴, a mission statement elucidates an entity's intended direction and delineates measurable outcomes for evaluation. With this definition in mind, developing a succinct mission statement for the University required circumspection, foresight, internal conviction, and a consolidated effort from members of the MWUGL and JGC. After much debate, the University committee presented the following mission statement for consideration: To provide every member of the MWUGL and JGC a high quality, structured masonic education by which each person may be able to obtain an undergraduate- or graduate-level degree in disciplines focused upon intellectual, spiritual, moral, social, emotional, and leadership qualities. This mission statement was unanimously approved in July 2015 by the University committee and the Grand Master.

Organizational Structure

The next step was to conceive a systematic method of deliberation and reporting as organizational structure directly affects the success of an entity's environment, equilibrium, and practicality.⁵ The approved organizational structure for the University may be seen in FIGURE 2.



Since subcommittee assignments and reporting schemes must be carefully aligned with the organization's mission, the University committee and each subcommittee were purposefully appointed to perform explicit

tasks. Derived from members of the MWUGL and JGC, University committee and subcommittee responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

1. **University:** The University committee is the body ultimately responsible for approving all educational proposals prior to consideration by the Grand Master. This committee is only convened after prior approvals have been garnered respectively from each subcommittee.
2. **Steering:** Composed primarily of executive leadership and senior advisors, the steering committee is authoritative and approves proposals or requests changes prior to consideration by the University committee. This committee is essentially responsible for scrutinizing administrative and fiscal concerns and recommending plausible mechanisms for the enactment of ideas.
3. **Curriculum:** If a curriculum is to be an instrument of change, its structure, objectives, meaning and modes of implementation must be coherent, clear and concise.⁶ Emphasis should be placed on facilitation of a superb experience for participants, delivery and inculcation of content, demonstration of objectives, and institution of consistent assessment techniques. It is extremely important that this committee collaborate to devise ingenious means by which pedagogical goals may be achieved. It must also be stressed at this juncture that the curriculum committee will be one of the most active assemblies within the University.
4. **Assessment:** Determining whether core competencies, learning objectives, and a positive participant experience have been achieved is the primary obligation of the assessment committee.⁷ Rubrics, exams, and surveys may be employed to attain vital details regarding competency comprehension, information recall, and the participant's universal experience. Moreover, the greatest duty of this committee is to communicate accurately positive and negative findings to the curriculum committee such that dynamic curricular change may be implemented in a timely fashion.
5. **Strategic Planning:** Recommending progressive or futuristic ideas is the indispensable function of the strategic planning committee.^{8,9} Conventionally, a strategic planning committee recommends programmatic advancements in 1-, 3-, and 5-year increments. However, in light of variations in jurisdictional constitutions, to plan effectively and include influential and experienced individuals, one must be aware of whether changes in masonic leadership are mandated after a certain number of years. For example, in Florida, Grand Masters and Grand Worthy Matrons may serve a maximum of 5 and 4 years, respectively. To this end, in addition to obtaining the approval of the Grand Master and the opinions and ideas of the Grand Worthy Matron, the Deputy Grand Master and Grand Associate Matron should also be contributing members of the strategic planning committee. When anticipating a constitutionally regulated change in leadership, the presence and opinions of each of the aforesaid individuals ensures that the University and its endeavors are always navigated in the right direction.
6. **Registration:** Since reliable communication and ease of registration for courses are essential for success, a registrar was appointed to oversee the registration process and graduation certification. The registrar also has the authority to designate individuals to aid in the transaction of University business.
7. **Other Committees:** Other essential subcommittees within the construct include intellectual property, internet technology, and public relations. Each subcommittee listed contributes to sustainability, profitability, and legal prudence – none of which should be considered casually in the planning stages.

Logo

A logo is a visual cue that should explain an entity's culture, ideals, and values.¹⁰ **Though many spend an exuberant amount of time in development, a logo is simply a visual reminder of the importance and functionality of an entity; an entity's product should dictate the logo design.**

The University's approved logo includes references to the MWUGL and JGC, which are the two **organizations allowed to enroll, and to the value of 'light' or knowledge to metaphysical awareness.** Also found within the logo is the Latin phrase, **Lux E Tenebris, which translates to mean light from darkness.**¹¹

Curricular Development

Competency-based, curricular development includes a variety of activities centered around the constitution of a curriculum, innovative pedagogy, and creative instructional techniques to guide student learning. Since the 1970s, the cogency of competency-based education has been corroborated by several scholarly publications.^{12,13} Incorporated within these curricula and courses should be tangible benchmarks, which must be demonstrated by participants and assessed formatively and summatively by the institution.

Curricular Construct

Curricular and course difficulty should coincide with the educational level of the degree offered. For example, introductory degrees, like the University's associates degree, should present fundamental masonic principles, such as history, protocol, constitution, etc. While in the developmental phase, the curriculum committee must be mindful that excessive competencies and course content do not equate to increased learning.¹⁴ Learning strategies must be insightful and, more importantly, impactful. The curriculum committee should pay special attention to whether mastery of competencies can be consistently demonstrated. If competencies cannot be demonstrated, inclusion in courses should not be considered.

Course Competencies

A competency is the capability to use a set of skills and abilities to perform crucial tasks in a defined setting. Competencies often serve as the basis for standards that specify the level of knowledge, skills, and abilities required for success in masonry.¹⁵ Pursuant to this rationale, the MWUGL and JGC devised several competencies for each course in the curriculum. One such course is a fundamental masonic history course.¹⁶ An example of history course competencies may be found in TABLE 1.

TABLE 1. Example of Fundamental History Course Competencies

PHA 1100: Prince Hall, MWUGL, and Jerusalem Grand Chapter History.

Upon completion of this course, University participants should be able to:

- 1. Recognize the date and place of birth for Prince Hall.**
- 2. Recognize Prince Hall's general contributions to the Revolutionary war.**
- 3. Analyze the importance of Prince Hall's decision to petition for membership in masonry and to start African Lodge #1.**
- 4. Recognize the names of the 14 of other members who united to convene the first African American masonic lodge.**
- 5. Recognize the date of and reason for conversion of African Lodge #1 to African Lodge #459.**
- 6. Recollect the chronological advancement of Prince Hall from a member to Provincial Grand Master.**
- 7. Recollect the general advancement of Prince Hall masonry from the sequential actions of Prince Hall**
- 8. Recognize the founding dates of and places for the MWUGL of Florida and Jerusalem Grand Chapter, OES.**
- 9. Recall the names of Grand Masters and Grand Worthy Matrons of the MWUGL and Jerusalem Grand Chapter, respectively.**

10. Consider the effects of the “Great Fire” in Jacksonville upon the evolution of masonry in Florida.
 11. Consider the effects of the “National Compact” upon the formation of the MWUGL of Florida.
 12. Evaluate the MWUGL of Florida’s approach to purchasing a Grand Lodge building and the benefits and consequences of property ownership.
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Masonic Teaching Strategies

Though many tend to concentrate instruction in masonic areas of expertise and comfort, University lecturers must be required to ensure that teaching strategies, participatory exercises, and exams are directly related to course competencies. Characterized as inventive methods used to deliver information in the classroom or in some alternate medium, effective teaching strategies should activate students' curiosity about a topic, engage students in learning, develop critical thinking skills, and engender sustained and useful classroom interaction. It is important to vary instruction to not only keep students' interest, but also to allow them to interact with content in a variety of ways which appeal to diversified learning styles. Contrasting teaching styles can make a lesson more interesting when attempting to reach a wide range of learners.

Traditional Lecture

Since antiquity, traditional lecture has been an acceptable means of relaying educational concepts. In recent years, the reliability of traditional lecture as a singular pedagogical method is quickly disintegrating. However, when combined with supplementary techniques, such as group exercises, a flipped classroom, and problem-based learning, traditional lectures may be extremely effective in targeted courses and populations.¹⁷

Flipped Classroom

The flipped classroom is an educational approach consisting of two parts: group learning activities inside the classroom and research and reading outside the classroom.¹⁸ The flipped classroom label is most often assigned to courses that use activities composed of lectures and problems or quizzes. For example, during a traditional lecture, students are expected to read references and research information germane to the subject prior to attending class; during class, the instructor may also provide supplemental lectures to reinforce theories. However, in a flipped classroom, there are NO lectures. In-class learning is facilitated only through interactive exercises, group presentations, and cases. Therefore, it is the collaborative efforts of the participants to solve problems that prove to be efficacious in this scenario.

Problem-based Learning

Problem-based learning is a strategy that empowers participants to conduct meaningful research, integrate theory and practice, and apply viable solutions to prominent issues. Critical to the success of this approach is the selection of comprehensive cases and a knowledgeable facilitator who guides the learning process. However, facilitators should be reminded that answers are not afforded until the end of problem-based scenarios; learning occurs only when participants collaborate to synthesize answers using deductive reasoning.¹⁹ Analogous to a flipped classroom, when individuals are empowered to take responsibility for their own learning, comprehension and information retention are dramatically increased.

Assessment

Numerous assessment programs and rubrics exist to examine the quality of masonic courses. Some assessment programs examine quality as a continuous improvement process, while others focus on effective course delivery and construct organization. Continuous improvement organizations suggest that

institutions should evaluate their programs on a regular basis and make improvements as necessary.²⁰ Evaluations must include an integral review of measurements intended to assure that students are achieving stated learning outcomes. Such measures include formative and summative assessment, group exercises, cases, written papers, tests, and projects. Formative assessment refers to activities, exams or questions which are provided intermittently during a course and summative assessment is when the same is used only at the end of a course.²¹ Though competency assessment is extremely important, it is equally important to gauge the efficacy of course design and to recommend beneficial changes to the delivery of masonic concepts and objectives.

Conclusion

Although competency-based, curricular development is common in most institutions of higher learning, its minimally existent in masonic realms of instruction. Though conventionally uncommon, The Walter Gulley, Jr. University of Instruction employs these didactic tactics with the expectation that graduates will learn cardinal masonic knowledge and skills and apply them to their daily lives. The Grand Master and University committee strongly believe that consistent, competency-based instruction on foundational topics and leadership skills and how to use them will make the State of Florida a better place to live and work. Finally, a synopsis of the intent for establishing a competency-based masonic university aligns perfectly with the wise words of Nelson Mandela: Education is the most powerful weapon which can be used to change the world.²² Ordo ab Chao!²³ SO MOTE IT BE.

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