**The Oklahoma Association of REALTORS (OAR)**

**Professional Development: Connecting the Dots to Better Education for Members**

*How OAR is creating a coherent education structure that looks at the various components of traditional education methods and introduces new technology and opportunities to become a more skilled, professional REALTOR.*

How do you bring a variety of education programs together so that a REALTOR follows a career enhancement path rather than simply taking only the classes that licensure requires? How do you structure education so the REALTORS learn how to be better business people committed to their profession? And once you have that, is the better-educated REALTOR more prepared to take on a leadership role?

These are the questions that the Oklahoma Association of REALTORS has tackled this year with the help of a leadership task force and a joint Continuing Education Task Force with members from the Oklahoma Association of REALTORS and the Oklahoma Real Estate Commission (OREC), the licensing authority for our state.

**Making required education desirable**

One of the first questions leading to this discussion was how could we make required education appealing and not remedial or redundant. That question led us to create a joint task force with our licensing board (OREC). The result is plans to consolidating a total of nine hours of required core classes - Broker Relationship Act (BRA), Fair Housing (FHR), and Professional Standards (PSC) - into three separate one-hour classes for licensees who qualify.

“The average REALTOR has taken these courses over and over in their career,” said OAR President Joe Pryor. “When we introduced the concept of reducing a required 3-hour class into one hour – for the member who has completed provisional licensing requirements – there was dancing in the streets!”

Currently, licensees have already studied these topics in depth in pre-license and post license coursework, and the group’s consensus was that a refresher at that point is adequate and likely more effective. That’s pretty much what the students who took the ‘test course’ said as well: “since 1977, I have had at least one of these classes per year; now, I want to cover just the new things,” said one student.

To look at how education is created and delivered, the OAR Professional Development Committee is now starting to look at what we can do to ‘connect the dots’ between the various educational offerings and how they are managed.

“We are grateful to have a successful GRI program in Oklahoma,” said OAR VP of Professional Development Kellian Schneider. “We strive to create a culture within that program that not only keeps our students coming back for more, but also encourages them to bring their friends with them. From these classes come a group of members who see the value of furthering their education, not only with GRI, but also with other OAR programs like our annual conference, online classes and Leadership OAR program.”

While this program benefits from first year real estate licensees satisfying their post-license education requirement, it’s also known for having an extraordinary faculty of instructors—from statewide experts to nationally recognized industry leaders. A 2-for-1 Promotion allowing existing students to refer a first-time GRI student saves them both 50% off that module, and has directly led to 43 new students entering the GRI program, 19 of which were in 2013 alone.

**A coherent structure with a flow chart replaces committees that operate in “silos”**

Next up is to work with the state’s Governance Task Force to consider streamlining how professional development is created and offered, possibly taking three separate committees and funneling the work into one oversight body with several task forces or work groups to focus on specific components. The committees under consideration for consolidation are the Professional Development Committee, Association Meetings Committee, and the Leadership OAR Committee.

“If we can do this, we’ll have connected the dots between our many education programs, brought members in to focus on specific areas such as leadership development, and opened up new avenues to leadership roles for the REALTOR who is truly committed to the profession,” said Pryor.

In other related discussions, OAR’s leaders are looking at expanding business education for members to include areas such as business planning and succession planning that, in the end, provides a value to the public and may be eligible for continuing education credit. Along with this is the possibility of increasing the number of hours for post-license education from the current 45 to 60.

**Using technology to bring education to the masses**

To further connect the dots between education programs, OAR began looking at how to bring education to the one-third of our members who are spread out around a 70,000-square-mile state, resulting in a new online education platform that brings video of the instructor side-by-side with the class presentation, effectively replacing the old “read the text, take the test” model.

At [OklahomaRealtors.com/OnlineCE](http://oar.scholarlab.com/), Oklahoma REALTORS can virtually attend classes with instructors like Amy Smythe Harris, Mike Lyon and Chris Bird on everything from risk reduction to taxation to environmental issues and more. The platform even includes the opportunity to receive continuing education credit by taking the exam online, making the entire process turnkey from start to finish. Eventually, we plan to bring GRI courses online to connect the two programs and expand our reach.

“As we work toward our ‘big idea’ of connecting the dots between our various education programs, we believe we’ll see greater acceptance by members to continue their professional development,” said Pryor. “The result will be a cadre of REALTORS who place a higher value on their membership, who are more committed to the profession, and who better serve the home buying and selling public.”

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