



Northern Rockies Blacksmiths Association: curriculum implementation

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ABANA National Curriculum projects required to pass Level I



The Northern Rockies Blacksmiths Association (NRBA) is an ABANA regional affiliate. As such, we share ABANA's commitment to training and education. A number of years ago, we were wondering if we could implement a formal education program. We wanted to be able to give official certificates to qualified members that they could then present to potential employers or clients—certificates that would give them a competitive advantage over less qualified applicants. We had heard that California has had a Curriculum Education Program in place for a number of years. So in 2012, we started talking to John McLellan, the CBA President, and to Mark Aspery, AWCB and also affiliated with the ABANA Education Committee. Their experiences with the ABANA education activities and the California Blacksmiths Association's Education Program were a big help, particularly with setting up formal procedures, e.g., safety policy, volunteer contracts, and insurance needs.

The education curriculum adopted by the NRBA is based on the California Blacksmiths Association's curriculum and on ABANA's Forging Fundamentals program. However, NRBA still faced the chicken and egg problem: You cannot certify the first student if you do not have at least one certified instructor.

To get the ball rolling, Mark Aspery agreed to come to Montana to conduct an "evaluation class." In May 2014, nine NRBA members from Montana, Wyoming, and

Idaho, all blacksmiths with more than five years' experience, forged along with Mark for a week to learn and to be evaluated. There was a broad spread of skill levels present. That meant that the evaluation class had to run through all three levels of the curriculum very quickly to see where everybody stood in order to assign the appropriate certification level to each participant. And of course, besides being evaluated, all participants learned a lot during the week! The participants volunteered to assist with further advancing the education program by demonstrating and teaching technical skills at NRBA conferences, demonstrating for school classes, and the the general public.

By fall 2014, we had all the details for Level I (of three levels) for our program ironed out. One of our members, David Osmundsen, who has operated a professional blacksmith school in Wyoming for many years, was of essential help to get operational. At NRBA's spring 2015 conference, five NRBA members who had been certified as instructors in May 2014, were given a chance to demonstrate and teach Level I technical skills. In addition, some of the certified members had been doing demonstrations for school classes and the general public.

This winter, a six session Level I Curriculum class was taught by Russell Evertz and Frank Annighofer, two of our original instructors. By the time you read this, some of the nine students should have been certified as Level I Blacksmiths. There are plans for more Level I classes, the details for Level II have been defined in the meantime and work is in progress to specify Level III. As of December 2015, the NRBA has been able to certify its first two Level I blacksmiths, five Level I instructors, and one Level II instructor. Judgment was kept rather conservative in order to build a solid basis for this new NRBA education program. The initial instructors have been tasked with developing a quality assurance program to assure that the skill levels certified by each instructor are consistent within NRBA, while also being consistent with the certificates of ABANA affiliates whose curriculum follows ABANA's national curriculum. NRBA's Level I curriculum requires proficiency in 21 skills.

"It took us three years to get this off the ground," stated Frank Annighofer, NRBA president: "We had to figure out the technicalities and we had to get our more seasoned members behind the idea. Hopefully, we will be able to certify the first students taught by our own instructors this spring." ❧

