

The Modular-Mentored Option
Master of Arts in Transformational Urban Leadership (MATUL)
Rev. 02/15/10 by R. Slimbach & V. Grigg

For the last several years, the MATUL Commission has labored to foster inter-institutional partnerships that would enable “foreign” (American and other) students to complete coursework side-by-side with “national” classmates through a hosting academic institution. This has been based on mutual reciprocity arrangements between the schools, in contrast with most international programs that are a direct download of US courses. Partnering institutions hold each other to high educational standards through the MATUL Commission.

While this type of delivery system continues to have a special appeal on a number of levels, one significant limitation has become apparent. With coursework limited to a single city-site within an expansive region (e.g. Chennai in South Asia, Manila in SE Asia, Nairobi in East Africa), prospective students serving in Kolkata, Bangkok, Cairo and many other cities hosting large numbers of slum dwellers are effectively excluded from program involvement. There are, for example, several incarnational-type mission teams in Kolkata, but no institution with partnering capabilities. Similarly, there are several Western students interested in enrolling in the MATUL in Nairobi, but the institution best prepared to host students (Carlile College) will not be prepared to do so, infrastructure wise, for one to two years. One US mission organization interested in partnering with this degree has indicated it has held back because of the need for this kind of flexibility.

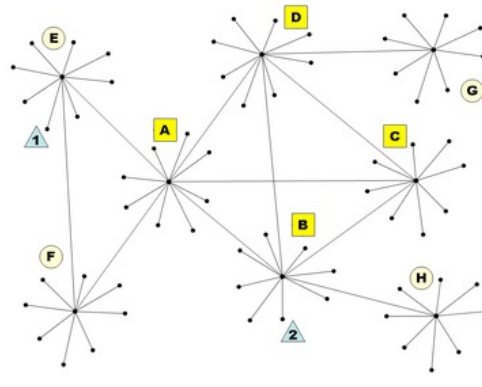
To rectify this situation, we are proposing an additional modified delivery system that supplements what has been in operation the last two years.

The “big picture”

The “modular-mentored option” is conceived as a critical component of a *global learning network* that will support urban transformation initiatives among the world’s slum-dwellers. Drawing upon social network analysis, the MATUL “network” can be mapped in terms of various “hubs” and “nodes.” The “hubs” are institutions—like APU and Hindustan Bible Institute (HBI)—that are linked together through a formal MOU and that involve regular flows of personal communication, students, educational ideas, finances, and best practices. Each of these hubs enrolls national and foreign students in the MATUL program, and their leaders are represented on the MATUL Commission. The “nodes” (Latin *nodus*, ‘knot’) in this network are the individuals and groups that are linked directly to the hubs. Thus, HBI is linked with groups of students in outlying areas of India away from Chennai.

In terms of the diagram below, HBI (“A”) enters formalizes a partnership with APU (“B”), and other national institutions (“B,” “C,” “D,” etc.) to deliver the MATUL in their respective regions. In the process, each regional partner develops its own intra-regional relationships (nodes) for extending the academic resources of the hub to other places and groups. By doing so, expert knowledge is placed at the service of powerful student learning and urban transformation.

The “modular-mentored option” seeks to establish global “nodes” for APU as a “hub” within the MATUL learning network. Students enrolled through APU in this option would complete the program in cities where there is, at present, no MATUL “hub” (partner institution). There may be locations, however, where a strategic relationship somewhat short of “hub” does exist—for example, in Nairobi (Kenya) with Carlile College <http://www.carlilecollege.org/> or in Medellin (Columbia) with University Foundation Biblical Seminary. Students enrolled in the MATUL through the modular-mentored option would benefit from APU’s institutional base (academic supervisors, support offices, library resources, etc.) but also, on a selective basis, from the faculty (mentor) and curricular (classes) resources of these institutions.



Hubs and Nodes in the MATUL Learning Network

Delivering the MATUL

Current option: *Classroom-Instructional Option*

In the semi-traditional format currently being implemented, foreign (US) and national students form a learning community within a hosting institution and complete coursework through action-reflection based field- and classroom-based processes that stretch over each semester period. Within this model, APU and partner schools have developed inter-institutional MOU's around high standard "equivalent" courses being offered at each of the institutions. Within the common program design and course descriptions each faculty develops course outlines, objectives, evaluative criteria etc that are judged by their peers to be of equivalent merit. The strong links built up through the MATUL Commission over the years has facilitated this.

Modified option: *Modular-Mentored Option*

In cities lacking an established institutional "hub," we propose a modified delivery system where APU-enrolled students complete the program under the guidance of an APU academic supervisor and one or more qualified in-field mentor(s). In this model, APU recruits and enrolls MATUL students from US, Canadian, and European-based missional structures (or as "independents"). A "modular" structure of course delivery enables students to "contract" with their APU supervisor and in-field mentors course-by-course. The lead (program) mentor networks students with local practitioners-experts in various (course-specific) sectors of urban poor life to facilitate "mentored" learning without requiring the student to relocate to a site where APU has a formal institutional partnership. The modular-mentored option encourages a higher level of flexibility, initiative, independent investigation, collaboration, intensive processing, and qualitative evaluation than is normative within the classroom-instructional model.

What is a modular course?

Modular courses are distinct, stand-alone components of a regular degree program that are delivered to individual students or student groups in dispersed locations independent of a hosting field institution. Approved students "contract" to complete individual courses that are linked to others in the program. When all courses are successfully completed, students are awarded the degree. Modular courses are typically self-paced and feature learning methods that "blend" directed reading, structured fieldwork, on-site faculty lectures, Web-based lectures (e.g. via TED, Academic Earth, and MIT Open Courseware), Web-based discussions, and CDs. Registration takes place within the term guidelines and course requirements are completed by established deadlines.

What is a mentored course?

A key structure in this learning process is the reciprocal learning relationship between a mentor and a mentee. Together they form a partnership to work collaboratively on achieving program- and course-specific goals. The mentor's job is to create a learning environment whereby students' varied community experiences can be transformed into deep knowledge and understanding. The mentor provides expert guidance and practical support, connects mentees' learning goals to community resources, offers critical feedback to mentee experience, encourages social analysis and theological reflection, and assesses learning. An effective mentor is a student of their own experience—Shon's "reflective practitioner"—who models the self-directed learning process they seek to promote in MATUL students. Rather than transferring knowledge to the mentee (as in the conventional "classroom" model), the mentor facilitates a learning relationship characterized by respect for the mentee's unique personality, background, learning styles, and field experiences. Through the mentored relationship, the mentee gains expanded perspectives on course content and a deepened self-understanding. The mentoring relationship begins with a conversation and leads to a mutual "agreement" that establishes respective roles and responsibilities, learning priorities and goals.

How a modular and mentored delivery system would work

1. Students are accepted by APU into the MATUL program and, in consultation with MATUL faculty, determine a "program site" that meets the following criteria:
 - a. The site hosts a large and growing slum population.
 - b. The city site has been adequately "mapped" to identify language coaches, host settlements, host families in those settlements, and host community organizations in the five internship sectors.
 - c. A qualified "mentor" or "city facilitator" agrees to craft a relationship that facilitates student learning throughout the degree program.
 - d. At least two APU-enrolled student-companions are placed at the site (for moral support and peer-processing of experiences and material).
 - e. There is reasonably reliable and affordable access to a computer with broadband Internet connection (e.g. through cyber-cafes, the offices of a local NGO, a local university, or an upscale hotel).
2. Students enroll in a particular course and "contract" with their APU supervisor and an in-field mentor to fulfill the requirements according to an agreed-upon schedule. An APU MATUL faculty member serves as "professor-of-record" for each course while students enter into a "learning partnership" with their mentor signified by a formalized "agreement."
3. Each course includes the following two components:
 - a. *Course profile*: general course description; 3-5 global course outcomes; negotiated region-, country- or city-specific readings; and a description of course products and assessment procedures
 - b. *Course manual*: a subject-specific "field guide" providing a continuously updated listing of region-specific electronic resources, national studies, and expanded project (fieldwork)

descriptions, along with community resources (language coaches, community organizations, mentors). (The course manual provides the structure necessary for students to maximize their day-to-day field learning.)

4. All course resources will be available at the mentor's location in the city and sent to the student on a CD or DVD prior to the course commencing. Where there is reliable web access, online resources will further enhance inputs. Registered students will automatically be sent a logon URL, student id and password. Once the student receives their logon credentials, they have access to the course functions via their student locker page. These functions include access to:
 - Course profile
 - Course manual
 - Instructor email for sending messages
 - Discussion board for posting messages to students enrolled at other sites
 - Course calendar to check for assignment due dates and "chat" times
 - Download center to download the course materials
5. Prior to the first day of class course materials are sent to students on CD or DVD. On the first day of class, professors-of-record post opening comments to enrolled students and their in-field mentors. Comments contain general information about course assignments and communication protocols, and can be updated as the course progresses. Course progression, however, is not dependent on online communication (as is typical in e-courses), but on the in-city mentoring process.
6. All MATUL courses are project-based, with each project having a deadline for completion. (Most students, especially in developing world contexts, need deadlines to stay organized and focused.) Students use a combination of structured fieldwork, "blended" informational inputs, and intensive mentoring to complete course projects, achieve learning goals, and make progress toward the MATUL degree. At any time, a student can contact the instructor via email for assignment clarification and assistance. But the students' primary learning relationship is with their mentor whose job it is to provide ongoing, one-on-one coaching and program support, and to help design, network, and continuously improve contextually relevant learning experiences.

Note on degree diversity and retention: One additional advantage of the "modular-mentored" model is that students could, at least hypothetically, complete the MATUL at more than one site. This arrangement would provide valuable cross-country comparisons of informal settlements, public policies, and "best practices" (e.g. in micro-lending, land rights, and public health). The primary issue, of course, would be *language*, although some students may already come into the program with facility in one language (e.g. Spanish) and choose to complete a portion of the program in Latin America before shifting to Africa or Asia. It would also allow students to complete MATUL requirements in two countries (e.g. Peru and Columbia) within the same region using a common language. This lends additional flexibility to students should there be any loss of delivery capacity at any of the program sites.

Potential hazards

Since the "modular-mentored" option can be implemented independent of a partner institution, it has clear advantages over the "classroom-instruction" model in terms of *student recruitment* and *flexibility of delivery*. At the same time, there are two potential "hazards":

1. *Content loss:* Students may not be able to access an amount and quality of information equivalent to that made available through classroom-based lectures. They would need clear, complete, and carefully crafted course manuals (see above).

2. *Program attrition*: Students may not have teaching-learning structures (including group accountability) that are strong and stable enough to persist in the program to completion. They would need to establish a “learning community” equivalent to that of a traditional classroom cohort.

Potential learning productivity

The integrative learning models popularized by Dewey, Lewin, Piaget, Freire, Knowles, Kolb, Buckminster Fuller, and Barr & Tagg, among others, argue persuasively that effective learning requires the interaction of the experiential and the cognitive. Direct, visceral experience in real communities addressing real problems must be joined to a process where students are asked to explain and compare, synthesize and hypothesize, evaluate and apply. *Immediate experience* becomes the focal point for learning and forms the foundation for all four modes of learning: feeling, reflecting, thinking, and acting. No one learns to cook, ride a bicycle, or exercise moral virtue merely by reading a book or listening to a lecture *about* it. Similarly, developing expertise in urban leadership requires “tacit knowledge” that is usually not directly “taught.” Tacit knowledge is *praxis (action)-oriented*, acquired by *everyday experiences* and, under the guidance of an accomplished mentor-leader, is used to *solve practical problems*. Information supplied through formal theories and descriptions (via books, lectures, film) alone is incomplete.¹

The “modular-mentored” option should not be understood as a retreat *from* brick-based learning structures and *towards* click-based online portals. Indeed, observing this generation of “digital natives” only strengthens our resolve to not unwittingly reinforce the counter-productive “study” habits of superficial skimming, page hopping, sloppy writing, and associative thinking. Students need to meaningfully engage with texts in light of their local context, to think critically, and to learn how to deliberate and act responsibly. Our pursuit is for a rational balance—a “blend”—between direct community experience, mentored processing of that experience, analytic reading, and various on-line experiences (streamed lectures, textual “chats,” etc.). The central pedagogical questions are not whether classrooms or computers are or are not to be used, but rather *What type of person do we wish to shape through the MATUL for what type of urban society?* and *What educational design will best support the development of this type of person?* Defining the “end goal” allows different delivery systems to freely compete against each other in providing an optimal set of conditions for students to grow into highly competent urban practitioners.

That said, there are significant differences between the two pedagogical models that will, over time, “deliver” the MATUL to foreign and national students. While these distinctions exist on a continuum (see table below), the “modular-mentored” model does represent a significant modification in how, where, and with whom program “content”—both experiential and cognitive—is acquired and converted into practical wisdom.

¹ Consider whether a group of live bodies, gathered within a classroom on a campus compound to listen to a stand-up lecture for 60 minutes from an informed instructor offers something significantly more of value than having a streaming video of the same lecture, given by a world-class authority, available on a computer screen via TED, Academic Earth, MIT Open Courseware, or YouTube-EDU. (See John Tagg, *The Learning Paradigm College*. Jossey-Bass, 2003.)



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Based in physical classroom ▪ Primary reliance on course outlines ▪ Primary focus on learning <i>about</i> the phenomenon ▪ Organized by academic calendar ▪ Time held constant, learning varies ▪ Directed by teacher ▪ Teacher controlled, instruction centered ▪ “Live” teacher, and “live” students required ▪ Student as passive receiver ▪ Focus on “covering” material ▪ Group paced with learners walking through the same content in the same ways ▪ Group testing of product (“right answer”) knowledge at end of course ▪ Media limited primarily to talk (lecture with discussion), text (books, articles), and visual (computer-based) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Based in multiple community venues ▪ Primary reliance on competency specifications ▪ Primary focus on learning <i>from</i> the phenomenon ▪ Organized by learning goals ▪ Learning held constant, time varies ▪ Facilitated by mentor ▪ Student controlled, learning centered ▪ “Active” learner required, but not “live” teacher ▪ Student as active partner ▪ Focus on learning productivity ▪ Individually paced for learners of different backgrounds, interests, and locations ▪ Individual testing of holistic competence before, during, and after learning ▪ On-demand access to voice (lecture), text (reading), visual (computer), and community (off-line encounters)
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Mentor’s Job Description (Tentative)

MATUL “mentors,” at both the program and course levels, enter into a “learning partnership” with student-mentees and their APU academic team in order to achieve specific learning goals and make progress toward the completion of the MATUL degree.

Organizational Relationship

The mentor reports to the mentee’s academic supervisor at APU.

Qualifications

- Knowledgeable of local urban poor realities
- A track record of engagement in urban poor ministry that shows ability to lead students into community engagement.
- Lives within commuting distance of student(s)
- Holds at least a master’s degree in a field related to students’ course of study
- Proficient in English
- Well networked and respected by those currently involved in urban poor work
- Accessible

Mentor Duties

In relation to the *student-mentee*, the mentor is expected to:

Leadership and Envisioning

- Lead student into relationship with course-specific coaches and field organizations
- Envision opportunities, possibilities and learning approaches with the student

Pastoral Care

- Become familiar with aspects of the student’s life (host family, language learning process, leisure activities) and program-related involvements.
- Assist students in setting performance goals, in project planning, in managing time, and in using community resources effectively

- Provide intellectual and spiritual encouragement

Academic Administration

- Become familiar with the MATUL curriculum.
- Discuss expectations of the mentor-mentee relationship with student(s).
- Produce a formal, written “agreement” with student-mentee(s). (A template will be provided.)
- Meet with the student every week (ideally) or every two weeks (minimum) to process fieldwork in relation to course materials.
- Network students with course-specific specialists and other resources in the local community
- Assist students in setting performance goals, project planning, managing time, and using community resources effectively.

In relation to the *APU program supervisor*, the mentor is expected to:

- Complete a one-page “report” after each mentoring session. The report documents (a) the day and place of each mentoring meeting, (b) the student’s progress in coursework, and (c) the student’s mental and physical health. The mentor sends this form directly to the APU program supervisor via email.
- Complete an “assessment” at the mid-term and final points in each MATUL course. The assessment provides (a) a self-evaluation of their mentoring performance, (b) an evaluation of the curriculum (course goals, project designs, and assigned materials), and (c) an evaluation of the student’s progress in the course.
- Meet yearly with other city mentors or program directors for up-skilling of MATUL leadership processes

In relation to the *herself/himself*, the mentor is expected to:

- Prepare for mentoring sessions prior to meeting with the student(s).
- Become more knowledgeable of the mentoring and self-directed learning processes. (Selected resources and assessment tools will be provided.)
- Set an example of an engaged and reflective urban leader (scholar-practitioner).

Selected resources

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