In April, I spent four amazing days in Austin, Texas, with a group of fantastic regulators. The Program and Education Committee gathered an impressive array of speakers for the Spring Education Meeting. In addition, there was an automobile theme for each session that speakers honored in their remarks and often in their slides.

I live in a NASCAR city—Charlotte, N.C. We have the NASCAR Museum. At the end of May, thousands of visitors will come to Charlotte for the Speed Street Festival and the Coca Cola® 600 Race. The NASCAR University is attached to the University of North Carolina. Young people flock to the area to gain entrance into the university to learn how to build the perfect racecar. There are also a number of car rallies during the year that feature special models. University graduates are able to join one of the race teams or find work at one of the automobile factories located in the area.

So—I was quite fascinated about how cultural competence and cars were referenced during the meeting. The presence of an automobile university, a large number of racing teams, several racing events year-round and the building of auto factories in driving distance of Charlotte has changed who is eligible to work in this industry. The racing families include these new graduates on their teams because they can help build a better car.

There are off-road vehicles that can be driven without a license. Accidents and injuries sometimes occur because of the inexperience of the driver. Regulatory boards often address inexperienced social workers who have no idea they are “driving in the wrong direction” or are not familiar with the service expectations of the public or the standards of the social work profession.

Drivers who follow the rules and want to increase their competence take courses, and then they take and pass the test to get a license. When drivers move to another state, they get a license for that state. But not everyone who wants a license is eligible to get one. Unlicensed drivers have multiple reasons for wanting to be licensed. The driver may need access to a car to get to work. But some drivers believe there are too many rules that are put into place that keep them from operating a vehicle.

Regulators often hear the same concerns from new social workers. Social workers want to be granted a license because they need it to work
Education, experience and exams—they all have their place, and shouldn’t be delegated lightly

In a way it was the yin and yang of licensure—legal counsel and regulation expert Dale Atkinson quoting the ASWB Model Social Work Practice Act, explaining how it’s all set out to work, and then an innocent board member being closely questioned by Bill O’Reilly (or a facsimile thereof) about why she insists on trampling on people’s rights.

The two were the opening and closing of the ASWB Spring Education Meeting in Austin, Texas. Atkinson spoke firmly at the beginning about how the principles were laid down, and that the “buck stops here” with the boards who have to go by those principles. As a wrap-up, former Texas board executive director Andrew Marks as an uninformed but opinionated interviewer fired off questions that reflected the depth of misunderstanding that regulation somehow generates. Fellow Texan Dorinda Noble, ASWB president-elect, was the board member, but her performance suffered a bit from a credibility gap since she didn’t strike the interviewer about the head and shoulders.

Between them an array of experienced regulators and others went in depth into the facts, ideas, directions and other seeming minutiae that only an audience of regulatory board members could appreciate.

The historic issues of regulation that come up in any far-reaching discussion are education, experience and exams, Atkinson said, happy with the alliteration of the three Es. (Interviewer Marks wondered if there should be a T among the initials because maybe extraterrestrials were involved.) The attorney also pointed out a few statistics that show licensure and public protection are facts of American (and Canadian) life. In the 1950s, he said, only 4 percent of jobs in the U.S. required licenses; in 2012, the number was up to 30 percent. The average state licenses 92 professions.

On the other hand, “Deregulation is a theme now,” and legitimate questions are being raised about government control and expense. “There are answers to those questions,” though, and boards that are efficient and effective can face them without difficulty.

“Regulation is about credibility,” Atkinson said. Assurance about the credibility is crucial, and not only boards but outside groups like ASWB who fulfill
part of the boards’ mandates must be completely credible as well. For credibility, “you’re not a social worker, you’re a regulator,” and the difference in function justifies board and regulation existence. “Mandatory licensure means public protection,” according to the attorney, and in any jurisdictional law “the legislature has spoken” to that effect.

A good board member should be prepared, should attend meetings, and should render decisions fairly. The purpose of the board, the social work law in each jurisdiction, and indeed the model law is to have the confidence of the public. “The public doesn’t know” what constitutes good practice, Atkinson said. With self-regulation, safe practice is up to practitioners who do know.

The model law, and jurisdictional laws, set forth criteria for licensure. The board, even if operating through its staff, has to have structures in place to be sure the criteria are met. The law requires graduation from an accredited institution, passing an approved examination, and meeting any requirements for supervised practice.

Board members can’t know whether a given educational program is good, so accreditation has to be delegated, according to the attorney. In the U.S., delegation is to the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). In Canada, it’s to the Canadian Association of Social Work Educators (CASWE). Individual boards don’t have the resources to do a legal and defensible exam, so the delegation is to ASWB (really self-delegation, since the boards are part of ASWB). More and more, rules, lists and criteria are being set up for supervision, but that too has to be delegated to someone.

“Licensure is legal discrimination,” Atkinson said. Since it has that much force, all the elements must be present and approved. Education is not just preparing someone to pass a test; it is getting students ready for a “mature life” of quality service. So educational institutions are constantly being evaluated and having to renew their accreditation. CSWE and CASWE “have all the credibility you need” to rely on, he summed up. “The role of education is separate and different” from other requirements.

The model law demands passing an exam “prescribed by the board,” according to the attorney. Board members need to be able to answer the same questions about the exam that they do about education. ASWB is a membership nonprofit; it doesn’t exist to promote the profession and is distinctly different from any organization that does. It’s not a trade association, and it doesn’t influence government by lobbying. As an assessment mechanism, the underpinnings of ASWB as an entity and the exam program’s adherence to standards of validity and reliability make it an arguable premise that passing the exam signifies sufficient knowledge to practice safely. High standards and a regular outside psychometric evaluation also bolster the delegation to ASWB.

The model act has recently updated criteria for the third E, the supervised practice. There is movement now to promote uniformity in supervision, but in any case “you had better know what you’re
doing” when the board approves what amounts to “demonstration of competency in a practical setting.”

But are most board members prepared to explain all this to the Bill O’Reillys of the world? After the spring meeting, certainly that collection of regulators had gained on this goal. As Noble explained to her inquisitor, “Regulation is not about controlling people’s lives, but protecting the public.” Continued competency, for example, is set in law because “it’s about being better in practice.”

When Marks said a bit belligerently that he believes in smaller government, Noble explained that someone has to decide whether a practitioner has the education, experience, and knowledge and ability as demonstrated on a basic competency exam. “It’s about leadership,” she said, “and credibility, justification and approval.” The board depends on those it delegates to, to be dependable and honest, ensuring that social workers practicing with the public are minimally competent. After that, what a board does with continuing competency is about encouraging licensees to build and maintain their knowledge and abilities, and become better.

Social workers deal with a lot of different human problems, and “we need people to be prepared” to do their best to take care of clients, the interview subject said. When Marks offhandedly dismissed high learning standards, saying education can be “delegated to a computer,” Noble said Web-based education is a tool, like books and lectures. Regulators have to “be concerned” about the quality of all these tools, she said, and regulations need to be up to speed on issues like social media and where public protection comes in.

In fact, board members need to work on their continued competency as regulators, she said. “They also need to grow, learn and develop.” Part of growing, learning and developing is attending conferences like ASWB’s and pondering the use of tools that can be used for continued competency. As a trapped interviewee, she took the opportunity to point out that being a regulator is a commitment, but “it’s challenging; it makes me grow.”

Really, it’s “not for everybody,” she declared, only for those who can take off their professional hats and become a “decider”—not a social worker but a regulator.
In the world of social work education, the number of faculty who are licensed social workers as of the 2011 annual survey (the most current data available) was 48.3 percent who were LCSWs, 24 percent licensed at the masters level, and 5.9 percent with “other” social work licensing, such as the LISW or LICSW. While these numbers may surprise ASWB members, these percentages are a reflection of the fact that social work faculty are teaching a varied curriculum that embraces more than practice. Faculty teach courses on human behavior and policy and research, on the macro side of the profession, as well as courses aimed at preparing students for practice. Should social work educators be licensed? Speaker Darla Spence Coffey, Ph.D., MSW, president and CEO, Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), acknowledged that the question, which she herself posed, is one of the current tensions that exist in the profession. But, she noted, “Tension—with conversation and communication—is good. Because then we have an avenue to disentangle what the different perspectives are, and every side of the conversation and our endeavor is improved in the process.” The conversation Coffey brought to ASWB at the 2013 Spring Education Conference focused on “How Educational Standards Connect with Continuing Competence,” and the relationship between accreditation and licensure.

Coffey has been serving as CSWE’s president and CEO for ten months, and her background in academia began more than 15 years ago. She was a member of the social work faculty at West Chester University, near Philadelphia, from 1998 to 2012, moving from professor of social work to associate provost to dean of graduate studies. In her career as a
The Q&A session following the presentation led off with a request for more information about whether CSWE will be involved in accrediting online learning. Coffey explained that at the time online accreditation began to emerge, that is, when programs began to move in that direction, a task force was developed to recommend a course of action. She said that the task force started out “knowing that CSWE should have accreditation standards for online learning,” but by the time the task force had finished its assessment process, the members had reversed themselves and decided that the standards already address this issue by focusing on student achievement of competencies and not on the method of educational delivery.

The question is now being brought up again, and the thinking may be shifting. Coffey’s response to the renewed concern that CSWE needs to have a role in accrediting online learning: “If ideas have changed among a number of our educators, then it’s absolutely time to look at the issue again.” People are having concerns about what is being taught online. Content-based courses, such as human behavior, theory, and surveys of theory, are types of courses that can be taught asynchronously—viewed independently at the student’s own pace—and are “appropriate for online learning.”

Coffey shared that some are asking, “But how do you teach practice online?” She said that there are some programs that are using online learning to facilitate practice classes through a synchronous experience that requires students to connect at a prescribed time when the educator can meet face to face with them via technology. “There is no program that is doing field online; all students are working with real people in real time in their field placement,” Coffey said. One of the benefits of online learning, she concluded, is that has opened up conversations about all types of teaching and learning, including the traditional, face-to-face teaching as well.

practitioner she worked in the areas of mental health, substance abuse, and domestic violence. She also has held leadership roles in professional associations, including the Association of Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors and CSWE, where she served on the Council for Leadership Development and the Commission on Educational Policy. She brings to her role as CEO an interest in understanding what the current perceptions are about CSWE, the “buzz,” so to speak, and what her organization can do to improve and clarify those perceptions.

After giving a brief overview of the history of CSWE, Coffey explained the two “arms” of the organization. In addition to being the sole accrediting body for social work programs in the U.S., Coffey is very proud that CSWE provides faculty development resources to social work educators, and she aims for CSWE to be the “premier faculty development organization bringing social work educators together to discuss common issues and supporting the deans and directors of the various programs.” A review of data from the 2011 annual survey showed that CSWE has more than 700 accredited programs, most of them at the baccalaureate level. This includes accredited programs in historically black colleges and universities (59), Hispanic serving institutions (46), and tribal college institutions (4). Although CSWE does not accredit doctoral programs, it does gather information about them. These programs are usually research oriented and primarily prepare students for research or academic positions. However, with the emergence of the advanced practice doctorate in social work, (typically a DSW), there have been conversations about what role, if any, CSWE and/or the Group for the Advancement of Doctoral Education in Social Work (GADE) should play in ensuring quality practice preparation. The topic is very new, she said, and the conversation is just starting.

As an introduction to the world of higher education, Coffey spent some time explaining what she was bringing to the conversation with social work faculty and deans and directors. This includes recognizing the call for more accountability and transparency in higher education as far as what the public is getting for the federal and state money that is being directed its way; the cost of higher education and student debt; the growth of the for-
profit sector (the private institutions) and the growing tension expressed by state institutions at being restricted in how they are using federal and state funds; and promoting and responding to the need for students to be prepared for the global community.

She expanded on another trend in higher education: the growth of competency-based education, where students today, unlike those 20 years ago, are using online learning to build their degrees outside the traditional classroom and the traditional eight-semester curriculum. This practice is also bringing into play the assessment of prior learning, such as work experience or education undertaken while in military service. Competency-based education, completed at the student’s own pace, with the student passing an assessment and moving forward, has resulted in accelerated learning at potentially less expense, especially if students take advantage of MOOCs, or massively open online courses. These courses, she explained, are free to take, but involve fees for verifying the student’s identity and for the student to take an assessment of learning. MOOCs are still in their infancy. She advised social work educators and practitioners to pay attention to the growth of and conversation about competency-based education in order to be able to determine its appropriateness for social work.

Coffey briefly discussed the process of accreditation and the role of the Commission on Accreditation (COA), which requires accredited programs to engage in ongoing evaluation of all elements of the program as they relate to the accreditation standards. The 2008 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) placed increased emphasis on academic quality through the expectation that programs specify and assess student learning outcomes and report program improvements based upon assessment findings. In order to achieve and maintain accredited status, programs are required to prepare a self-study every eight years. While ongoing self-examination is expected regularly, programs are encouraged to use the self-study process as an opportunity to evaluate what is working and what the program would like to improve. Moving to a more in-depth description of EPAS, Coffey explained the process by which the standards are developed by CSWE’s COA and Commission on Educational Policy (COEP). Every seven years, the EPAS undergo a review by the COA and the COEP. The new EPAS are presented to CSWE members for their review and comment a year ahead of when the final draft of the policy is presented to the Board of Directors, which triggers the development of the accreditation standards by the COA. The next iteration of EPAS will be ready in 2015.

In 2008 there was a shift away from prescribing content in social work programs to articulating competencies that graduates are expected to demonstrate. With this shift to a competency-based model, the emphasis became what students could do rather than what they knew. Four areas were defined for institutions: the mission and goals; the explicit curriculum, or how the program’s courses map to the ten core competencies and whether the curriculum and field work (the signature pedagogy) are integrated; the implicit curriculum, which includes diversity, student development, resources, faculty development, and
administrative structure; and assessment, or the outcomes of the explicit and implicit curriculums.

Coffey said that including Dwight Hyman, ASWB deputy executive director, on CSWE’s Commission on Educational Policy has been “extraordinarily helpful in building a more explicit link between educational policy and practice through the lens of ASWB and the world of regulation and licensure.” Members of the commission are appointed by CSWE’s board chair and number around 15. The commission receives feedback on EPAS through focus groups and surveys. Feedback to the 2008 EPAS, Coffey said, indicates that competency was the right direction, but that there were too many competencies and practice behaviors. Assessing each of the 41 practice behaviors in the ten core competencies turned out to be a burden. Finally, identifying what it means for the field instruction to be the “signature pedagogy” created challenges, because it became apparent that the field supervisors and liaisons need more support if they are expected to be the ones judging students’ performance with clients.

By way of bringing the conversation back to how education and licensure converge and diverge along the path of preparing students for practice, Coffey shared the results of a survey conducted in 2007 that asked social work programs about licensure. Although only 34 percent of programs responded, they represented 41 states. The survey revealed the educators “got” what licensure was about: protection of the public; increasing professionalization of the field; increasing salaries; and adding credibility.

However, Coffey returned to discussing how licensure and education are dissimilar, by making an analogy to the difference between a mirror and a light. The licensure exam, she said, is the mirror, reflecting current social work practice and being based on a rigorous practice analysis. Education, on the other hand, is the light, with its need to look further into the future and prepare students for jobs that might not even have been created yet. And while preparing students for practice involves providing field experience, education should not promote teaching to the test.

So what similarities are to be found between licensure and accreditation? Both are concerned with minimal competency. Both are advocates for excellence. Both seek a path for continued learning. Both licensure and accreditation recognize that a benchmark and a baseline must be set for a beginning social work practitioner entering the profession. Boundaries that exist between licensure and accreditation include the recognition that the licensing exam should not be construed as an outcome measure of academic programs, meaning that schools must not rely on pass rates alone to prove their worth. CSWE asks for additional measures of competency when assessing social work programs. Not teaching to the test, as discussed earlier, was a second boundary, although Coffey stressed that education “should certainly be informed by practice.”
In closing, Coffey returned to the ways that ASWB and CSWE can partner in their shared interest in preparing students for practice. She again acknowledged the importance of ASWB’s participation on the Commission on Educational Policy and the shared interest with NASW and ASWB in providing lifelong learning opportunities to practitioners through continuing education. She agreed that there is more to be done, with ASWB’s help, to educate students and faculty about the pathway to licensure and the importance of licensure and regulation. And, she reached out to ASWB’s membership to join the conversation at the local level. She encouraged board members to open communication with their jurisdictions’ schools of social work to build relationships through which there can be discussions about what programs are doing to prepare students for practice within the jurisdiction. Coffey’s presentation is available on ASWB’s website.
The online superhighway is getting crowded with social work programs, but Texas State’s was first

Should a social work license be granted to an applicant who achieved his or her degree online? As more universities and continuing education providers develop online programs to make education more accessible to a broader student base, the question will only be asked more frequently by regulatory boards. The answer, said Dorinda Noble, ASWB president-elect and director of the School of Social Work at Texas State University-San Marcos, is that online education is a valid educational medium if it’s done properly. And she is quick to point out that face to face classes also have to meet the same criterion of “being done properly” to be considered valid. The quality of the coursework, not the delivery method, needs to be the subject of scrutiny as regulatory boards review whether educational programs meet their needs for licensure, she said. The MSW online program at Texas State is one teaching model among many options using the Web to deliver courses. How the model works was the topic of the panel discussion titled “How Does This Newfangled Car Perform on the Road? Social Work Education and the Online Superhighway” that was moderated by Noble and featured faculty from the school describing its various components.

The Texas State School of Social Work’s online MSW program has been in operation for nearly a decade, and it continues to innovate.
engaged because the computer counts how often they participate,” she said. Courses are tightly woven, interactive, and fast moving, with multiple learning methods including activities, videos, mini-lectures, virtual reality segments, and synchronous discussion. They are designed this way for two reasons: the short attention span of adults, and the research showing that the brain integrates information better when it is delivered in “random units of learning that are quick.” All faculty members on the panel agreed that the online teaching experience has shaped—and improved—their face to face classes as well.

Course design

First to speak on the panel was assistant professor Christine Norton, Ph.D., LCSW, who described how an online course is designed. She used as her example an interviewing and counseling course taught as the final practice class for foundation MSW students before they go into the field. She started her discussion by sharing her surprise that online courses were far from being dull, non-interactive courses that would prevent her from forming relationships with her students. These were the myths of online learning. As she began developing her own courses, she was “inspired to understand that there is no disadvantage by teaching online programs.” Moreover, she noted, some of the research has shown no significant difference between student outcomes of face to face courses compared to online courses, as long as materials and teaching methodologies were held constant.

Norton explained that one of the disciplines she learned from developing an online course was to be much more intentional as an educator, to focus on the outcomes she wanted her students to achieve. Another discipline learned was to set boundaries, such as establishing online office hours—something that helps both student and instructor disconnect from the continual demands of email and other electronic media. However, she also noted that she encouraged students to phone her, because she believes in the “importance of voice communication.”

Online courses at Texas State are taught in both synchronous (real-time) and asynchronous (at the student’s pace) modes through the TRACS site. In order to participate in the synchronous modules, Texas State students and faculty must have computers and microphones for real-time communication with faculty and other students. Synchronous modules are conducted using Adobe Connect software. Norton spent some time describing the different types of teaching involved in these two interaction modes, and then shared how other schools are using these methods in their online programs.

In moving through the components of the sample course, Norton showed how group work and collaboration give students the tools they need to work as an effective team. The learning modules of the sample course are provided in a weekly framework. The first sessions of the syllabus review tech help and administrative issues. Learning modules include an interview assignment that the student videotapes and posts; peer review of the videos in forums by other students, who present questions for advancing the interview to the next stage; responses to the
peer reviews written by the videotaped student; and evaluation by the instructor. Students choose from eight case scenarios for the interview, to ensure the experience is uniform. During the role playing, the student is expected to cover a set of topics with the “client” and the evaluation is based on those criteria. The peer review encourages students to engage in critical thinking to give feedback and develop rationales for their input.

What emerges from this interactive experience, Norton says, is valuable both in terms of helping students to learn to assess client safety and in terms of seeing the many ways that feedback can be derived, whether from research and data or from life experiences. “Everyone gets to have a voice and share their experiences, and it creates a rich and powerful dialogue.” (Norton’s presentation is available on ASWB’s website.)

Field placement

Through these experiential learning opportunities students are prepared for the most experiential component of social work programs: field work. David Henton, LMSW, assistant field coordinator, took over from Norton to describe the field placement program. In his opening remarks, Henton described the first cohort of online students—rural Texas child welfare workers who were part-time students—and their experiences in the field. He noted that because they were already working in the communities where they were doing their field work, it was very easy to establish internships for this group of students. As the program grew to national and even international scope, the search for field internships became more labor intensive, but the school has developed resources for placement opportunities and Henton admits: “We are territorial about our placements.”

Henton shared that the online program has never had a failed field placement among the 100 students in the program. He noted in comparison that the on-campus program had a failure rate of 2 to 3 percent, and placements outside the local area were as high as 25 percent failure rate, which he defined as the student having to leave the agency for another agency. Henton attributed the success of the online field program to a number of factors. Foremost, however, he acknowledged the fact that most of online students are working in their communities, have an expertise in their practice communities, and are well networked and know their partner agencies.

Field seminars are conducted weekly but are completely asynchronous on the TRACS site. Students post reflective logs in which they discuss how they are integrating and what they have learned. Their colleagues are invited to respond with substantive posts. The school attempted a number of times to conduct synchronous seminars but found this modality didn’t work because of the geographic and time differences encountered. Students also provided feedback that they found asynchronous learning was more effective. Students have research projects and respond to assignments in which they discuss ethical dilemmas.
Henton said that because of the geographic distances and the rural locations of the field placements, the school has gotten “really innovative about supervision.” It is a rare occurrence to have a student who cannot find a field instructor. In those cases, a faculty member often will volunteer to serve in that capacity. Active duty service members receive their field placements at military bases; their dependent spouses may find placements through the VA, the USO, or the American Red Cross.

Faculty make face to face visits to students in field placements in Texas and other states to ensure that things are going as planned—to see that the student hasn’t set up a fake website and is hanging out by the pool. For international placements, the faculty check in with students using Connect, Skype, and Oovoo. These communication methods are also used by supervisors and students who are in different communities, and when students or supervisors want to connect with faculty.

The students in the online program, Henton says, are “self-motivated, great at time management, and passionate” about the internship opportunity. Their interaction is at a much higher level in the interactive seminar. They are much more responsive and proactive in the research project. “There’s a real sense of esprit de corps,” he said. “When students post questions on the research forums, I will hang back about 48 hours before giving feedback. It’s amazing how robust and dynamic the learning experience is.” Henton attributes this partly to the students and partly to the modality of the online approach. Like Norton, he too acknowledges the importance of setting boundaries and limiting availability at certain times.

Virtual Reality Lab

Scott Smith, Ph.D., LCSW, assistant professor and director of the virtual reality lab spoke next. He admitted to discovering his own obsolescence when he made a reference to the movie “Ferris Buehler’s Day Off” to engage his students and none of his students “got it.” When a student Googled the reference, her actions validated for him the importance of technology as a source of learning to these students. Virtual environments provide a place where students can engage in clinical settings where they normally otherwise wouldn’t be able to. In the virtual reality lab at Texas State, students can experience three modes of interaction. In full immersion, the students put on a headset and are able to interact completely in the setting with avatars. The next step removed is 3-D format, where the student still can interact but not as fully. The third mode, the 2-D environment, is more user friendly and cost effective for students and treatment programs.

Smith said that testing is conducted at all three levels so that strategies and techniques work in all three environments. The sample training video Smith showed was a re-creation of a school setting in which students learn class management and how to deal with behavioral issues. The training program is used in the classroom or online in 2-D, accessed through computers; students can role play either the teacher or the student. In 3-D format, the video is displayed on a wall, meaning
that students must be in the classroom for the experience. In the social work program, the virtual lab is used for teaching students diagnosing, interviewing, and clinical skill development. Scott mentioned that for building skills, 3-D is more effective than 2-D.

Returning to his Ferris Buehler experience, Smith said that he learned that he was not connected to “what that generational culture uses in terms of learning. They are the most plugged in population in the United States.” In order to reach this generation, he said, we need use that strength and help them engage their skills learning the social work pedagogy. “Virtual reality is a new concept that is evolving,” Smith concluded, “and as it evolves, we need to evaluate how effective it will be in the classroom as well.”

Wrap up

Angela Ausbrooks, Ph.D., LMSW, MSW coordinator, provided a wrap-up to the session. She focused on providing a summary of key points. Some of the highlights are provided here:

• Of primary importance was the recognition of how much the development of the online program had impacted the face to face courses in terms of content delivery. She likened the online program development to the old lesson planning books used in teachers had in public schools. Besides a weekly outline, the development of online program has to include the learning objectives and outcomes wanted. The planning has to include how the method ensures the outcomes.
• With online programs, it’s no longer possible to “wing it.”
• People can’t hide in the online environment. If the student is not engaging, then it may be that a life issue is occurring. The issue is not occurring because an introverted nature is taking over. Faculty can then touch base earlier in the semester to ask why the student is checking out.
• Relationship building is key to creating a community environment.
• The online experience can be an isolating process. Students want lots of feedback and quick response to email.
• Although students are engaged with technology and social media, they are not familiar with academic technology, such as developing PowerPoint presentations. Additional instruction may be needed to help make the transition.
• Up front, front end planning is key to a successful online program. Feedback is needed from other people, not only students and faculty but other programs.
• An awesome IT department is key to success, as is ongoing evaluation of everything the program is doing.

In closing, Noble stressed that the Texas State program is an interactive, online, Web-based program. Faculty members are given significant course release to develop the online programs, which
translates into significant cost. But although it’s an expensive program, Noble said, “it has been successful for us.” Noble noted that over the last decade the school has doubled both its faculty and its student bodies as a result of its online offering. Additionally, both the face to face and online programs have received accreditation from the Council on Social Work Education through 2020.
For years, a huge issue in the Canadian regulation of social workers has been the AIT, the Agreement on Internal Trade. Designed to remove barriers to the movement of goods and people, including registered professionals, across jurisdictional lines, the AIT is often cited as the reason a particular province doesn’t have the final say on professional requirements within its borders.

Determined to get a handle on the AIT, the Canadian Council of Social Work Regulators (CCSWR), incorporated in 2010, commissioned what amounts to a social work job analysis. All the Canadian provinces did participate in the last analysis done by ASWB as the foundation for the examinations, but this one was all Canada.

A quick, concise report on the process and the results was delivered at the ASWB Spring Education Meeting in Austin by Dr. Charles Ungerleider, director of research and managing partner, Directions Evidence and Policy Research Group, LLP. His group carried out the project, which included a survey of 5,000 practicing social workers.

Ungerleider’s credentials are impressive, the process was painstaking, and the results were a major overlap with the ASWB practice analysis. He described gathering a great deal of source material, including the master list of tasks done by ASWB for its survey, a similar compilation of competencies undertaken by Québec, the websites of the ten Canadian regulatory bodies, their statutes, codes of ethics, and more. The blocks of competencies were reviewed by two online panels, and then there was an online survey of social workers recruited by the CCSWR. As was done with the examination job analysis, the survey was first piloted and adjusted.
The approximately 5,000 practitioners who replied responded to questions about performance expectations, ranking each task on whether it must be performed on the first day of a new job, and its importance and frequency.

There were also 848 written responses, Ungerleider said, and the consensus was that the current level of preparation for social workers was insufficient. The explanation was that the focus of post-secondary education had shifted from practical skills and knowledge to more theoretical policy or advocacy-oriented topics—important areas, according to the speaker, but the shift to them was at the expense of more practical skills.

If the result of the work was mapped onto the ASWB profile, Ungerleider explained, “there is significant overlap.” Pressed to give a percentage, he said there are differences, but the overlap was perhaps 90 percent.

A motivation for the project was to have a basis for discussion of social work regulation in the face of the AIT. A problem is that while most provinces require a bachelor’s degree, some register social workers with a lesser educational credential in combination with experience, or after three years of university study.

The speaker presented some approaches to certification that might be able to extend across jurisdictional lines. His list:

- Accredit programs leading to certification and accept the recommendation of the dean or director of such a program as evidence that the standards have been met
- Accept the award of a degree or diploma as evidence that the standards have been met
- Evaluate the coursework completed to determine if it provides evidence of the standards being met
- Accept that standards have been met based on the recommendation of specially approved members of the profession who have supervised the applicant
- Use some form of examination to determine whether applicants possess the competencies
- Some combination of the above

There is much that is controversial here, Ungerleider said, and much that can never be considered absolute. The list of competencies can be disputed; some will argue that less daily, direct practice-oriented knowledge about things like social justice and advocacy should be added; educational programs, courses, and faculty can change; there are competing statutory responsibilities to be met.

An examination is the least complicated and costly approach, and the least intrusive, in the speaker’s opinion, and a properly constructed exam is the fairest. But there are major questions in adopting an using any of these approaches. Which exam? At what level?

Accreditation of social work programs is already in place through the Canadian Association of Social Work Educators (CASWE). But if
a more detailed education-based standard is used, what courses, or what
deans, and which programs?

The real force of the Entry-Level Competency Profile, the speaker
explained, is to “get ahead of the curve and ensure that social workers
continue to meet the high standard of competency” needed to enter the
profession.
Continuing education is “deeply flawed,” so much so that it cannot properly support the development of health professionals, a committee looking into redesigning CE concluded in a 2010 report. “CE has become structured around health professional participation instead of performance improvement,” the report added.

David Swankin, president and CEO of the Citizen Advocacy Center (CAC), told participants in the spring ASWB meeting that the language is blunt, but that in his viewpoint it’s accurate. And it should be—the report is from the Institute of Medicine, an independent, nonprofit organization that exists to provide unbiased advice to decision makers and the public.

Swankin, whose CAC has long emphasized the need for changes in CE, spoke as part of a panel on “The Big Picture of How Continued Competence Can Advance Practice.” Also on the panel were Lise Betteridge, director of professional practice with the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers, and Susan Layton, chief operations officer of the Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy (FSBPT). The latter two described efforts in their own organizations to move away from mere participation to actual performance improvement.

David Swankin: The neglect of continuing competency

Genuine continued competence is an odd thing to neglect, Swankin said, because thinking historically about many of the activities people undertake to make their living, it’s obvious that there has been a progression from apprenticeship, to journeyman, to master craftsman. If you’re a carpenter, anyway; not so much if you’re a health care professional. Attention has been on licensing and the accreditation of schools, not on what happens once the degree and license are acquired.
“Licensure should mean something beyond the day you got it,” he said. The speaker expressed some disappointment that social work isn’t one of the leaders in ensuring competency; but in general and in keeping with the car and travel theme of the conference, almost everyone is “just starting on the road to ensuring competence.” If the trip is New York to California, maybe competence is around Brooklyn.

The public has a right to safe, quality health care, he said, and conventional continuing education is in no way an assurance of that. Clients or patients looking at “a piece of paper on the wall” might assume it means current competency, but it doesn’t. “All health professionals should move to demonstrating periodically that they are competent.”

Education is a tool, not the end itself, as the law tends to treat it, Swankin declared. The way CE is delivered, in many cases a professional can sign in and then head to the hotel pool, or that same professional can actually sit through an offering that meets all requirements but is in an area that has no real connection with his or her practice. There is no assurance that the tool is being properly used. Some professions have gone farther, the speaker said, but in general, continuing education is looked on as an easy fix by legislatures and efforts have stopped there. Demonstrating current competence is an issue that is never raised.

There are exceptions, according to Swankin, who is also an attorney. The American Board of Medical Specialties, made up not of licensing boards but of certifying boards, insists on demonstrated continuing competence. To get and maintain a certification, doctors have to submit to testing. “It took 10 years, and there was tremendous resistance,” he said, but pushback is probably inevitable and standing up to it as far as possible at any given point is important.

Continuing competence programs that are getting at what they need to get at use assessments, long-range plans for making improvements, various forms of education as tools, and then finally some way of demonstrating that the improvements have happened—and it’s the last one that is meeting the most resistance, he explained. He noted that the CAC, which emphasizes training for public members of boards, is frequently critical of medicine, but “medicine is way ahead of current competence.” The barriers to most programs are professional resistance, but the key is to proceed with “what’s doable” rather than doing nothing.

Swankin advised consideration of a lot of lead time, grandparenting, and other means of going slow. “Let’s go to the next generation” of professionals if necessary to improve public protection, he said.

Swankin’s presentation is available on ASWB’s website.

Lise Betteridge: Ontario’s competency initiative

Lise Betteridge described the Continued Competency Program (CCP) now used by the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers. She emphasized the tremendous amount of ongoing education and communication that is an essential part of the CCP, over and above a structured program of assessment, planning, and improvement. “We support and enhance compliance,” she said, rather than policing and enforcing.
Key words for the professions in Ontario are the ideals that practitioners be professional, ethical, qualified and accountable, and “CCP is one of the ways they demonstrate that they are following these four words.” The program ensures that members are familiar with the standards of practice, because they have to use these standards in the program.

Launched in 2009, the CCP was designed after much consultation with stakeholders, and it’s mandatory for active and inactive members. It was structured to be meaningful, feasible, acceptable and cost effective, Betteridge said. But while it’s built on trust and the desire of social workers to be the best they can, there are teeth included. Certificates can be inspected for non-compliance.

The CCP is founded on research on adult learning, on tendencies in self-assessment, and on research about individual approaches to assimilating information. People identify their own improvement needs, and in essence are doing lifelong learning, but the learning can’t be random. The program helps social workers and social service workers identify learning, document it and track it over the years. What they come up with is a portfolio model of continuing education, involving worksheets for self-assessment, based on the eight principles in the standards of practice, identified learning opportunities, and the development of goals and target dates that can be defended.

The college offers a range of resources including workshops, webcasts, tutorials, newsletter articles, and even e-bulletins. Betteridge tries to be available to people who need help or advice, and she also offered to be available to anyone associated with ASWB who would like to contact her at lbetteridge@ocswwsw.org. Her presentation is available at the ASWB website.

**Susan Layton: A health care competency model**

In the United States, apparently the physical therapists are in the forefront on this topic. Layton discussed a multi-faceted program now in its sixth year. The effort grew out of the commitment from FSBPT member boards to spend money and time on getting a continued competency system into place. The overall requirements are simple: 30 continued competence units during a renewal cycle, with 15 in certified activities.

The intent, according to Layton, is to allow licensees to demonstrate competence in ways that are meaningful to them, while providing flexibility and avoiding over-regulation. The Practice Review Tool (PRT) includes an objective self-assessment tool that evaluates ability as compared to entry level, provides feedback, and includes a “next steps” worksheet. The PRT is administered at a secure testing location, to be sure it is a true measure of where licensees are on the scale of competence.

The review tool is very different from the multiple choice licensure test, Layton said. It is scenario-based, clinical in nature, and emphasizes interactivity with the patient. Score reports go to the physical therapists or physical therapist assistants themselves, and they give areas to focus
on. In the planning phase, licensees can target improvement in their biggest areas of need.

Another part of the program is “aPTitude,” which allows the practitioner to enter any learning event or task that is directed toward the “next steps” improvements. All records can be tracked there, and there is more included than just information entered by the licensees. The FSBPT has committed major resources toward connecting licensees with the jurisdictions where they hold licenses, and keeping them apprised of where they are in terms of deadlines, requirements, and changes in their own jurisdictional laws.

There are opportunities for interaction with other practitioners, vendors and regulators, and there are no charges assessed to practitioners. Costs are involved with a third part of the program, ProCert, which certifies some continuing education offerings using consistent standards for continuing competency activities with consistency across states.

The huge investment in resources was apparent in Layton’s screenshots, showing an accessible and comprehensive site for all things PT.

Layton’s presentation is available on ASWB’s website.
Commitment to public protection means that a determination of entry level competency is needed

Mayr reveals his past as a professional “denturist” who worked hard promoting the profession

When it comes to exams and public protection, John Mayr has been there, done that.

Mayr, registrar of the British Columbia College of Social Work, has been firmly on the other side of regulation as a promoter of a profession, has witnessed a practical exam in which a candidate kicked a theoretically dead patient to encourage him to get up off the floor, and done battle with an examination contractor that owned the exam but was taking no responsibility for investigating exam security violations. He described his “journey of understanding” to other regulators at the ASWB Spring Education Meeting.

Of great importance to an ASWB audience is that BC is about to become the first Canadian province to require an entry level examination, a beginning that Mayr hopes will start a domino-like effect in the rest of Canada. Speaking from his depth of experience with exams, he delivered an unsolicited testimonial to ASWB’s own test, saying its validity and strength make it an easy choice for social work regulators.

Mayr, who spoke as part of a panel on high-stakes examinations, said he began his professional life as a denturist, a clinical dental technician with a scope of practice than includes making dentures. He quickly took on a professional advocacy role, “pushing denturists,” and went from there to regulation.

In one stage of his regulatory functioning, he inherited an exam complex—six stand-alone, paper-based exams that had been around virtually unchanged since the late ’70s. The five-day practical exams that were given had

John Mayr
issues, such as examiners wandering through the testing room whistling “The Impossible Dream.” At that point, “I started thinking and talking,” with a goal of looking at developing a proper examination, given by computer from a database, that would make fair licensing decisions.

The first multi-choice exam he was involved with introducing wasn’t valid because there weren’t enough people taking it; but the learning curve started from there. Mayr went to work with the regulation of licensed (well, licenced in Canada) practical nurses, finding that the nurse subject-matter experts were doing all the work for an exam but that their product was owned by a testing company. The company even expected the nursing group to investigate misconduct on the exams.

With this background, “you need to appreciate how valuable ASWB is as an organization and how valuable a valid exam is,” he said. There were exam options for the BC college, but “we do entry to practice, and that is what the ASWB exam reflects.” Because of that, Mayr declared, “in the next year or year and a half, we’re going to use the exam.” The college is mandated to act in the public interest, “and part of that is setting minimum standards for public protection.”

In the province, there are applicants from a wide variety of educational programs, and Mayr said that the programs already have an accreditation process through the Canadian Association of Social Work Educators (CASWE). But to date there has been no measure of minimum competency.

Mayr is expecting some resistance to instituting an exam, and he realizes the term “high stakes” fits. It’s high stakes for the college and for students; it’s high stakes for schools; and “it’s high stakes for the public who receive services.”
Test scores are all about the evidence behind a case for validity

Trying to explain what a test score means isn’t easy, but Dr. Gregory Cizek gave it his best shot during a panel discussion on high-stakes exams at the ASWB Spring Education Meeting in Austin, Texas. Cizek, who did the most recent independent analysis of ASWB’s exam program in 2008, is professor of education measurement and evaluation with the School of Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Apparently his effort succeeded, if another testing expert can be believed. The next speaker, Charles Ungerleider of British Columbia, said Cizek’s presentation was about the best explanation for the layman (translation: people not into psychometrics) he had ever heard. Ungerleider is the director of research and managing partner of Directions Evidence and Policy Group and professor of sociology and education at the University of BC.

So it was an opportunity for those from social work regulatory boards at the meeting to really understand what it’s all about when their candidates for licensure are sent to take the examination.

Test scores are a validity question, Cizek explained. The score itself doesn’t have meaning, but the interpretation does. He likened the social work exam to a tuning fork—the tuning fork must be sensitive enough to detect social work competency. A bit fanciful, perhaps, but he was able to work with it.

If the test is making inferences about competency, “what evidence do you have that the intended inference is valid?” he asked. Is it in fact doing what ASWB states it is for, “to measure the minimum competency acceptable to practice social work within a scope of practice” so that the public will be protected?

First, the speaker said that validity is ongoing; you can never say that’s it, the test is good to go forever. Constant work, attention, and vigilance are needed. Building
a valid exam is like presenting a court case, Cizek said, with a jury weighing the evidence of validity versus the evidence that validity isn’t there. For high-stakes examinations like ASWB’s, a favorable verdict is a matter of searching out the confirming evidence from the details of the program.

Speaking like the professor he is, Cizek listed three general sources of evidence: test content, internal structure, and relationship between variables—the test and its standing among other factors contributing to proven competence.

**Test content**

Content translates into a long list of tasks. First, there is the practice analysis, surveying large numbers of practicing social workers to see what they do and how important it is. Then there is the analysis of the surveys, the formulation of the Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs) that questions are to be in alignment to ask about, setting the pass score by psychometrically approved means, the selection and training of qualified people to write exam questions, and the extensive edits and reviews of the questions by volunteer experts. Those reviews include relevance, bias, importance, focus, language, and content.

All this, done properly, is “confirming evidence” that the tuning fork is properly calibrated in that first category, test content, Cizek said.

**Internal structure**

Internal structure is less complex; it’s about how the test is packaged and how conclusions are reached. Tests can be graded on a continuum, with percentages like 70 or 75, or they can be evaluated as pass-fail, as ASWB now does.

Pass-fail is good, he explained. When a cut score is established, and a candidate achieves it, “you’re talking over some line” to make a decision over practicing or not practicing. All that content development is aimed at having the mark set so that competent social workers pass and not competent ones fail. The goal is that not a lot of people will fall into the area close to the cut score, that decisions will be clear-cut, but the cut score has to be valid.

Cizek did come out firmly on the side of not making diagnostic subscores generally available; although for structure purposes questions are grouped, the groups have overlap and are not rigid enough to accurately delineate where a candidate may fall short.

**Relationship between variables**

The third in his trio of evidence sources is the relationship between variables—how the examination should relate to textbooks, to academic coursework, to evaluations of supervision, while not relating to gender or other variables, including particular, specific training programs. Each of the variables is a part of the road to practice. Hurdles include education, supervision and more; good character is a part of the decision to license.

Granted, Cizek said, all the decisions are not necessarily correct, but they have to be made. “If you didn’t have a test, you would still have to...”
make a decision” over who could practice. “If a student graduates, that’s a decision.” A good examination is aimed at making sure people who are credentialed have the KSAs to practice. They may have those KSAs, and still not practice ethically or safely.

That’s where the relationships come in, the education, the supervisor’s conclusion that someone can practice clinical social work independently.

A brain surgeon may have great technical skills, but it’s also good if he or she has a bedside manner that soothes rather than terrifies. And maybe good boundaries and no addiction problems. Figuring out everything about a licensee is beyond a test, but a properly calibrated tuning fork is a place to start.
After a year of study by a task force, ASWB has decided to stay with the status quo in its handling of the examination pass-fail rates of schools of social work.

When candidates register to take an exam, they list a code identifying the educational program from which they received their social work degree. From this data, pass-fail rates for each school can be compiled. It has been the policy of ASWB to release these rates only on request by member boards or by the schools themselves.

Because there have been suggestions that all school rates should be made public so that prospective students would have that information about schools before they enrolled, the task force was formed to consider the pros and cons of public listing of all rates.

Association Secretary and task force chair M. Jenise Comer reported at the Spring Education Committee in Austin, Texas, that the decision has been made to continue with the current handling of the score reports. That is that member boards can request the rates for all schools inside their jurisdictions, or educational programs can ask for (and pay for) a detailed report on their own statistics.

Comer made the report as part of a panel on examination issues. She said the deciding factor for the task force was the incomplete nature of the data.

Although part of the strategic plan approved two and a half years ago was the need to increase ASWB’s visibility and transparency, the group concluded that making information that is incomplete and built on unknowns and variables probably is not a good approach to genuine transparency. Because of the uncertainty of the data, there had always been caveats with the school data releases to individual schools, including that the information was not to be used in advertising, but the caveats were frequently misunderstood.

The chair explained that what makes the reports unusable is not only the way the information is collected, but also the many differences across jurisdictional lines in who has to take the exam and when.
Comer said, all graduate may not take the exam, and the data reflect only the exams administered. In addition, the school programs are self-reported, and there may be confusion over bachelors versus masters programs, or even departments that are not social work.

Comer said the data for a small group can vary greatly; a new program with four graduates can have two pass and two fail, giving a rather meaningless 50 percent pass rate. “We also don’t know when the students take the exam,” she added. In some jurisdictions a graduate can practice without taking the exam at some levels. The person may then take the exam several years later, upon moving to another state, and list the school many years removed from the education.

Again, there is variation in who takes what exam. Many students go right from a BSW to an MSW program, while others may work for a while; students can take the Masters exam immediately to go to work while obtaining supervision. Others may work as a BSW for a long while before sitting for the Masters.

Some jurisdictions do get the rates on a regular basis, but others prefer not to have them because once in state offices the pass-fail listings are available to anyone who asks under the Freedom of Information Act. Schools of social work can request the scores of other schools in their jurisdiction, or even outside if they wish to know how programs outside of their boundaries are faring.

Using the other option, schools can order individual score reports from ASWB. The cost varies by the number of years requested and the number of exam categories wanted.

Only about 10 percent of schools ask for the information, and the majority of boards do not get it. In Virginia, the board not only asks for the in-state school pass rates, but posts them on its website, but that is a major exception.

The task force sent out a survey to board administrators and board members, and met several times for discussion. Besides Comer, members were Dorinda Noble of Texas, now president-elect, Amanda Duffy Randall of Nebraska, a former ASWB president, and Fran Franklin of Delaware, a director at large.
In the Approved Continuing Education (ACE) Program, “strong standards support continued competency,” ACE Committee chair Anwar Najor-Durack said, putting in ASWB’s personal plug toward the end of the spring conference focused on continued competency.

The multiple sessions during the conference tried to hone in on ways to make continued competence a personal responsibility for social workers. Just the requirement that a certain amount of hours every license renewal period be spent in workshops or in skimming a book or article doesn’t work, speaker after speaker said. They all did agree that kinds of education, from presentations to online courses to texts, are “tools” that can be wielded in lifelong learning. The consensus seemed to be that the basis for effective learning is self-assessment.

Najor-Durack quickly made the point that if someone wants tools to fill in the gaps in self-assessment, ACE is the place to go. A greatly enhanced, accessible Web presence gives approved providers the chance to put in their own information about available courses. A social worker in Michigan who has concluded she needs help in a particular area, say the handling of suicidal ideation, can go to the ACE site and order up a listing of offerings on crisis situations or involuntary commitment that are convenient to a given location, say Ann Arbor. And if there is nothing there or even in Detroit, the ACE list can include online courses.

The chair is from Michigan, where licensing is relatively new, Najor-Durack explained, and since CE was new to the board there ACE was a welcome service available from ASWB. “One of the things ACE tries to do is to make sure that quality CE” is identifiable when it has the ACE seal of approval, she said. A committee of volunteers works very hard, reviewing materials including applications that may run to 30 pages without counting the supporting documents, to be sure those “strong standards” are met.
There are two face-to-face meetings each year, and monthly conference calls that last about two hours, she said. “The rigorous process makes providers think about what CE should be like.” Criteria are posted on the website, and the process is very open. Providers know what they’ll be asked to do, and they are coached through the steps to making sure they are keeping proper records, making appropriate use of a social work consultant, doing post-tests as needed, not overstating anything on their promotional materials, providing proper learning outcomes, and much more.

Because of the geographic, ethnic and practice diversity represented on the committee, the discussions are great, according to the chair. “I feel confident that nothing is missed on an application.”

The ACE program was begun in 1998, as part of the association’s goal of working toward more standardization across jurisdictions. Thirty-eight jurisdictions now accept ACE approval, and there are more than 150 approved providers and some individual approved courses. In the search for continued competency, “ASWB has a role, schools have a role, NASW (National Association of Social Workers) and CSWE (Council on Social Work Education) have roles, and social workers do, too.”

ACE discussions have recently covered more interactive learning experiences. A look has been taken at poster presentations as CE, and new ways to use technology to engage people. The work includes audits to be sure providers keep the qualities that got them accepted in the first place. If the CE is good, and it fits in with an identified need, it has a place in lifelong learning, development, and genuine competency.
Well, yes, the cyberworld is convenient, and someone getting ready to take the ASWB examination can go right to the ASWB Candidate Handbook on the association’s webpage with a couple of clicks. The handbook is easy to glance through and easy for a candidate who is taking the exam in a month or so to determine the next step.

But the flip side of that ease may be that candidates don’t read much of the handbook beyond finding the phone number to call or form to submit online, and they don’t understand the wealth of information that is there. Even worse, explanations and directions for its use may not be clearly conveyed—some candidates don’t even know there is a Candidate Handbook, now that having it mailed to them isn’t an automatic step on the stairway to licensure.

It was different when the handbook was a hard-copy booklet. The first versions fit in a business-size envelope, and boards sent the booklet out to potential test-takers early in the licensure process. At that time, it was less than four standard size pages of information, with a content outline for the category of the exam being taken, lists of school codes, forms—and a mailing envelope for returning the forms.

Since then it’s grown to an 8½-inch by 11-inch booklet, about 35 pages in all. It still includes forms, content outlines, and school codes, but it also does an examination walk-through. Beginning with an introduction and a short explanation of who and what ASWB is, it guides the candidate through preparing to take an exam, making sure of eligibility, registering for the test, scheduling it, actually sitting for it, and then receiving the results.

It tells the candidate what to expect to pay ASWB and explains that there are usually other fees involved to be paid to the jurisdictional licensing board in order to become licensed. Hours of the registration center are given, and there is an admittedly long list of information that the candidate will be asked to provide when registering. The importance of doing any preliminary work required for special accommodations or arrangements for English as a Second Language is stressed.

Anyone who reads through the handbook will understand how essential the information it contains is to the licensing process. Early on, it directs “Read this handbook,” admitting it may not be a page-turner,
but “all the rules are clearly laid out,” especially the often difficult ones about canceling or changing test appointments. Candidates are clearly instructed about what they need to write down during any telephone contacts, what they will need when they come to a testing center, and exactly what to expect when they get there.

For example, anyone who has read the handbook will not be taken by surprise by the palm scanning—not a secret handshake, but a method of identification that is actually more accurate than fingerprinting. There will be no indignation about leaving cell phones and even watches in a locker, and candidates will be clearly warned that they cannot return to their cars because of the security controls during a high-stakes exam like ASWB’s.

Because the handbook is online, there’s a live link to the exact text of the candidate agreement that has to be signed. And should there be difficulties with the equipment or the environment, test-takers can be forearmed with the knowledge of the established remedies and how to be sure they are available in a particular case. As a bonus, there are even some sample questions.

To get people to this pretty much all-inclusive resource, it’s important for jurisdictions to promote it via their websites, newsletters, and in any mailings to registrants.
FARB makes verifying a practitioner’s license simple

Have you ever Googled your accountant? Your optometrist? Your dog’s veterinary technician? You might find something interesting in those Google searches, but even the great search behemoth can’t help you figure out whether those professionals are licensed and in good standing.

FARB, the Federation of Associations of Regulatory Boards, of which ASWB is a governing member, has a new tool to help protect the public: www.lookupalicense.org. Launched in April, this new website is a one-stop resource for consumers trying to track down licensing information on a wide range of professionals—including all the professions represented by FARB’s governing members. Lookupalicense.org serves as a data portal with links to pages on the governing members’ websites that make it easy for consumers to find out whether a particular professional has a license. ASWB was among the first of FARB’s governing members to make this online verification of licensure status available.

Consumers searching for licensing information on social workers click on a magnifying glass icon on lookupalicense.org that points to www.aswb.org/SWL/lookupalicense.asp, the Web page ASWB created in support of FARB’s initiative. This page provides links to social work regulatory boards in all the U.S. states and territories and all the Canadian provinces that offer online access to verify the status of individuals licensed in their jurisdictions. Consumers select the jurisdiction of interest to them and can then look up the license status of any social worker. If a state or province doesn’t have an online service for looking up a license, the consumer can request a manual confirmation of licensure. ASWB has tracked similar information for several years, but until this FARB initiative, had never listed all this information in a single place.

The magnifying glass logo that FARB designed for Look Up a License serves as a universal symbol for this service. The magnifying glass appears on the lookupalicense.org site, on the websites of other FARB governing members, and on ASWB’s Web page dedicated to Look Up a License.

“It is essential that members of the public are provided with a convenient mechanism to verify that practitioners are currently licensed and in good standing” says FARB Executive Director and ASWB Legal Counsel Dale Atkinson. With lookupalicense.org, FARB and its governing members are making it easier for the public to find reliable information about the practitioners they depend on—from pediatricians to long-term care administrators—to social workers.
Special exam arrangements are her specialty

If an examination candidate has a hearing impairment and needs an American Sign Language interpreter to take the test, Tanya Carpenter is the person at ASWB to get in touch with. If a physical condition means someone needs something to eat to get through the exam, Tanya’s the one to start with. And if a candidate has failed the exam and suddenly comes up with a physical or mental problem without history or precedent requiring all sorts of extras, it all stops with Tanya.

Tanya Carpenter has grown up with ASWB. She started working for the association in 1993, assisting then-Executive Assistant Charlene Newton. She helped with letters and member board contracts, and even with the Braille tests and recordings needed under the rather new Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). She’s gone from a very young woman who was a fast learner to a still young woman who has a strong command of the ins and outs of special exam arrangements, and who is a fierce advocate for providing what people need (and not providing what they don’t need). She’s worked with three different exam contractors and several executive directors, done everything from working as receptionist to handling contracted question writers and managing member contracts. She also acts as sometime arbitrator on the often emotional questions of waivers, excused absences, and complaints.

In the almost 20 years she’s been with ASWB, she’s worked with several psychometricians and learned about exam statistics and Knowledge, Skills and Abilities (KSAs), as well as the vagaries of content outlines. Like most of ASWB’s staff, she cannot help being fascinated by the exams, their combination of hard numbers and behavioral signs.

There are, in fact, two Tanya Carpenters, which seems like a good thing sometimes when her workload is considered. There is the southern-accented woman who reminds some people of Julia Roberts (she’s tall, slender, and smiles a wide smile a lot) and there is the firm-voiced Coordinator of Examination Services who explains what the law is to those phone callers who are hoping it is a bit more lax than it is. She works constantly toward that level playing field; but for her, level doesn’t mean slanting some other way. Since her work requires coordination with member boards and the test contractor, she works closely with both when coming to conclusions about what has to be done for each candidate.

A native of Culpeper, she is used to kidding from association contacts about the accent, but the softened vowels fade when a strong position...
has to be taken. She wasn’t long out of high school when she came to the then American Association of State Social Work Boards as a temp. Her uneven career to that point had included a try at waitressing (“worst waitress ever!”) and being a bank teller, before she signed on with the temp agency to see what she might like to do long-term.

The owner of the agency knew a good employee when she saw one and had Carpenter working directly for her on and off. She sent Carpenter to the association as a placating effort when another temp didn’t work out. She found herself interested as she began to learn about regulation, examinations, and the ADA. ASWB also knew a good employee and quickly discovered that she was a killer proofreader, an excellent typist for the sometimes tumultuous Exam Committee’s editing sessions, and finally the real keeper of expertise about many facets of administering the exams. She’s been involved with contracting, education program score reporting, final review of exam forms, policy changes, and exam security.

Along the way she has learned about ESL arrangements, found out about some of the differences in Canadian disability laws, and discovered the extent to which Candidate Registration Center problems can escalate in the arena of what is—to those who take it—a sometimes painfully high-stakes exam. ASWB began making accommodations before they were absolutely required, and Carpenter is very much for the policy of working out the best for every candidate.

She’s also gone back to school for an associate’s degree in applied science, specifically computer information systems, and she and her husband, Russell, have become the parents of two daughters, 11-year-old Emily and Haley, 7. She’s a country person, living on a back road in neighboring Madison County, an outdoor camper, a dog lover, and a dedicated and rather joyful parent. (She recently discovered on vacation that Hawaii is really the place to live, but Madison will have to do for now.)

Carpenter realizes that what she does for a living could be stressful, but it has a good side, too. “I hope I make a difference” in that playing field, she says. “People can be very nice and thoughtful—they’ll call and say they passed, and thank me.” She gets occasional notes of gratitude; and if she has to occasionally make someone angry because the person’s documentation of a disability falls short, she’s ready to do that.
In ASWB profiles, we highlight one or more ASWB member jurisdictions and get them to answer some basic questions about how things are going and what’s in store, and to get some basic facts about social work regulation in their neck of the woods. Get to know your fellow boards—chances are, you have more in common than you think!

This issue: Texas

Name of board: Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners

Number of board members: There are nine governor-appointed members of this independent board (six of them are professional members).

Licensure levels offered: There are three categories of licensure in Texas: Licensed Baccalaureate Social Worker (LBSW); Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW); Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW).

Texas also offers two types of specialty recognitions for independent, non-clinical social work—which despite popular belief, are not separate license categories but which are modifiers on the category of license held. These include non-clinical advanced practice and non-clinical independent practice recognition. They are called: Licensed Master Social Worker-Advanced Practice (LMSW-AP); Licensed Master Social Worker-Independent Practice Recognition (LMSW-IPR); and Licensed Baccalaureate Social Worker-Independent Practice Recognition (LBSW-IPR).

Number of licensees: 21,816

Biggest achievement in the past 12 months: Regulation in an anti-regulatory climate requires resiliency and creativity. This board continues to be highly focused on its mission of public protection while also proving, once again, to be highly adaptive, innovative, and wise. Each member’s sense of humor doesn’t hurt, either.

Biggest lesson learned in the past 12 months: The only constant is change.
Biggest challenge facing the board: The thing I find most frustrating as the administrator for the board is constantly hitting up against resource limitations, especially related to public education.

(complete the sentence) “I would really love to hear about how other jurisdictions . . . find cost-effective ways to engage in public education campaigns. I would be especially grateful to learn more about what other jurisdictions do to address common gaps between what some applicants learn in school about professional practice and what all licensees need to know about professional regulation.

Completed by: Carol Miller, LMSW-AP, Executive Director

Useless (or not) tidbits about your jurisdiction: Six countries have ruled Texas. Can you name them all?

(Spain, France, Mexico, the Republic of Texas, the Confederate States of America, and the United States of America.) Secession remains a popular topic of discussion, given the independent spirit and culture of many Texans.

Particularly interesting history stirred up in the editors (who didn’t realize the French went that far west) by the list of six countries: From 1685 until 1688, a French colony, Fort Saint Louis, existed near what is now Inez, Texas, USA. Explorer Robert Cavelier de La Salle intended to found the colony at the mouth of the Mississippi River, but inaccurate maps and navigational errors caused his ships to instead anchor 400 miles (650 km) west, off the coast of Texas near Matagorda Bay. The colony faced numerous difficulties during its brief existence, including hostile Native Americans, epidemics, and harsh conditions. Although it lasted only three years, its existence established France’s claim to possession of the region that is now Texas, and later supported the claim by the United States to the region as part of the Louisiana Purchase.

Plus, one effort to bring European values to the Native Americans in the area involved providing flannel pajamas.
Boundary violations and engaging in dual relationships make up a large proportion of allegations of wrongdoing on the part of licensed professionals. This may be especially true regarding practitioners involved in the provision of mental health services, including social workers. Allegations of boundary violations require establishing the existence of a current or, perhaps, former professional relationship. Different professions and jurisdictions may have diverse views on when it is appropriate, if ever, for a mental health practitioner to engage in a personal relationship with a former client. Personal relationships with current clients appear to be universally prohibited.

In addition to prohibitions and limitations on personal relationships with former clients, a practitioner may also be subject to regulatory board action based on his or her mental fitness. Consider the following.

A clinical social worker licensed by the Massachusetts Board of Registration of Social Workers was employed by a private company to assess employees’ mental health when the company had concerns. In October and November of 2008, the licensee had six meetings with an employee and determined that he did not suffer from mental illness; instead, the two discussed general life matters. Over the following two months, the social worker began experiencing weight loss, insomnia, and delusions and eventually was admitted to a residential psychiatric facility where she spent a week. After her release, she followed a treatment plan that required sessions with a psychiatrist and a regimen of medications to treat severe anxiety, bipolar disorder, depression, and posttraumatic stress disorder.

Shortly after her meetings with the employee ended, and continuing during her own residential and outpatient treatment, she repeatedly contacted him by email and telephone, and through letters. Her communications were personal in nature and often referred to delusions from which she was suffering. She also provided professional services to other individual clients during this time. In April of 2009 she opened a professional office within 100 yards of the employee’s workplace, prompting him to call the police, who then notified the board.
The board suspended the social worker’s license to practice for five years, citing numerous violations of the practice act, including attempting to engage in an improper or dual relationship with a client, performing professional functions while impaired, and general unprofessional conduct. The board included in its order that after three years she could petition for a stay of the remainder of her suspension upon demonstrating fitness to practice. The licensee appealed, and a single justice of the state Supreme Court affirmed the board’s decision.

On appeal to the entire court, the licensee argued that she did not provide social work services to the employee because she did not “treat” him and that he therefore was not a “client.” Thus, she could not have violated laws governing the social worker-client relationship. The board regulations define “social work services” as “the application of social work theory and specialized clinical knowledge and methods to assess, diagnose, prevent and treat mental, emotional or behavioral disorders, conditions or addictions.” The licensee claimed that the regulation requires her to have performed all of the actions included in the definition in order to qualify as having engaged in social work services. Given that the employee was found to not be suffering from mental illness, she did not “treat” him and therefore could not be found to have provided social work services.

The court was not convinced and noted that “[I]t is unreasonable to interpret the regulation to mean that a social worker who meets with an individual and determines that the individual does not have a mental disorder has not provided social work services.” The regulation clearly provides a range of services that a social worker might provide in the course of his or her practice. The licensee was hired to meet with the employee and assess his mental health, which satisfies the definition of social work services.

The court also found the licensee’s argument that the board’s decision lacked evidentiary support to be meritless. Her communications with the employee after their sessions ended clearly lacked any professional basis and she should have foreseen that it could cause the employee distress. The resulting distress was supported by the fact that her actions resulted in the employee contacting the police. Also, the licensee stipulated that she was suffering from mental health issues while treating other clients, thus ending the debate as to whether she was practicing social work while impaired.

One notable procedural issue was highlighted in the court’s opinion. The licensee claimed that because the hearing officer did not recommend a sanction (the five-year suspension) and the sanction was first referenced in the board’s final order, she was entitled to a separate hearing on the sanction. While the court found that no procedural due process error occurred, in the interest of more apparent fairness it encouraged the board to make a statement early in the proceedings as to the sanction being sought. Alternatively, the board might consider separating the proceedings into adjudication and sanction stages.

This opinion highlights the role of regulatory boards to consider not only the treatment provided by licensees, but licensees whose own
health concerns necessitate professional intervention and can result in misconduct due to impairment. A determination of misconduct, particularly in the arena of boundary violations, may turn on whether a professional relationship existed to begin with.


Dale Atkinson is a partner with the Illinois law firm that is counsel to ASWB. He is also executive director of the Federation of Associations of Regulatory Boards (FARB).
JERRY SATTERWHITE of Alabama and his wife JEAN have found a nice, calming activity for their retirement. About a year ago they became foster parents; so far they’ve had seven children, mostly temporary or emergency. But in August they were given a three-week-old, very premature, malnourished, and tiny. He’s now seven months old and weighs 18 pounds, JERRY says. “Give him to the SATTERWHITES and they will fatten him up,” he said. The child is about to be adopted, and his foster parents are already missing him terribly—but they’ve been promised grandparent status by the adoptive family. It was easier 50 years ago, JERRY admits. (He’s served multiple terms on the Alabama board, and was chair of several ASWB committees during those years. He was also on the last Practice Analysis Task Force.)

News about the Kansas Behavioral Sciences Regulatory Board comes from LESLIE ALLEN, assistant director and licensing manager. The new guy is MAX FOSTER, and he started in the beginning of March, replacing TOM HAWK, who was elected to the Kansas Senate.

And the new executive director/registrar of the Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers, replacing the retired RICHARD HAZEL, is . . . ALISON MACDONALD, the former assistant registrar in Alberta. ALISON, who served a term on the ASWB Board of Directors as director at large and has been involved with the association in many ways and on many committees, is very excited about moving to Regina and taking on her new position. With her will go all three of her dogs and probably a sort of foster dog.

ASWB staff welcomed some familiar visitors to the booth at the Baccalaureate Program Directors (BPD) conference in Myrtle Beach, S.C. Exam Committee co-chair MONICA ROTH DAY of Minnesota and item development consultant NANCY SIDELL of Pennsylvania were both presenting, as was BILL ANDERSON, also of Minnesota, who was on the ASWB Board of Directors in the ’90s. West Virginia board member JODY GOTTLIEB came by; she teaches at Marshall. Two members of the ASWB Board of Directors, M. JENISE COMER of Missouri and JOHN MCBRIDE of Louisiana, attended the meeting, as did former secretary and now Exam Committee member SAUNDRA STARKS of Kentucky.
Other presenters with ASWB connections were GLORIA AGUILAR of Florida and STEVE MARSON of North Carolina. Executive Director MARY JO MONAHAN and Deputy Executive Director DWIGHT HYMANS presented a session on “A Changing Landscape, Trends in Social Work Regulation.”

***

JOHN has a great Myrtle Beach story. Musician RONNIE MILSAP had a theater there a while back, and JOHN and his future wife, STEPHANIE, were there for one of his shows. RONNIE invited JOHN onstage to propose, and the rest is history—including four adopted children and a lot of foster children.

***

LINDSAY SCHROEDER, a student at the University of Central Missouri who was with her program director, ASWB Secretary M. JENISE COMER, won the conference’s big poster contest. Her project was about producing brochures providing information about older adults and long-term care, an area that she felt was not properly covered for families who needed to find out how to navigate through the transitions that accompany aging. Her brochures, including one in Spanish, are being distributed to various facilities in Springfield, Mo.

But even more exciting than the win for LINDSAY was the conference experience. She said she had been told by her sponsor, MARLYS PECK, that the greatest thing about social work conferences was being surrounded by so many people who have the same passion, “and I did not really understand until I was there.” The whole conference was very encouraging, she said, and “I think the thing I learned most... was that I am so incredibly ready to be a social worker!”

***

BARBARA MATZ, who was president of the association in 1992–93, and most recently served as a board services consultant, has now retired. She sent a letter to former Executive Director DONNA DEANGELIS congratulating her on her own retirement, and said it had been “an honor and privilege” to work with her and ASWB. BARBARA, who was from West Virginia and then from Pennsylvania during her time with the association, retired some years ago from Bryn Mawr and now lives by the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland.

***

The 2012 recipient of ASWB’s SUNNY ANDREWS Award for board service, MARK OLDHAM of Oregon, is running for regional board representative of Region XII of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). MARK has been both treasurer and president of the Oregon NASW chapter.

***

The baby count continues to go up for the ASWB Examination Committee. BYNIA REED-CLARK, until recently a committee co-chair, writes that her new baby daughter, SKYLAR ALYX CLARK, was born in late February. SKYLAR’s big brother CAMERON is now 2½, and his mom says he’s being helpful and adjusting well.
Another exam committee faithful, LEANA TORRES, is moving from North Carolina to Arizona. Her husband, ERIC, received orders to Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson. Between the stress of getting ready to move and a recent serious health scare, LEANA has been preoccupied but took the time to get in touch with ASWB, where she has lots of friends. The good news is that her family is in Phoenix.

***

Item writing consultant DAN WHEELAN of Rhode Island is a crazed soccer fan, so it was a memorable event when his grandson ANDREW acted as the escort for JIMMIE NIELSEN, goalie for Kansas City, as the team went onto the field for the Revolution game at Gillette Stadium between Boston and Providence, R.I. That’s JIMMIE in the pink jersey.

***

Turns out that the staff of ASWB may not have been responsible after all for the large earthquake that hit during the Annual Fall Meeting in November of 2011 in Oklahoma. (The very unusual 5.6-magnitude quake was just a couple of months after the even more unusual 5.6 quake near Culpeper). News came out in March that the Nov. 6 earthquake near Prague, Okla., may have resulted from the pushing of oil drilling wastewater deep underground.

The theory was advanced in a study by a team of university and federal scientists, but Oklahoma’s state seismologists say the quake was natural. The waste was from traditional drilling, not from the hydraulic fracturing technique called fracking.

***

Good news from a North Dakota board member. MEGAN DARDIS-KUNZ just passed the Masters examination. She’s fairly new on the board but has already been busy with ASWB—she attended Board Member Training in 2012, attended the 2012 Annual Meeting in Springfield, Ill., and came to the spring meeting in Austin. She reported the exam was hard, but she had prepared.

***

Celebrating Woman Power! The photo might be a bit fuzzy, but it’s clear enough to see that it’s ASWB Executive Director MARY JO MONAHAN sharing a photo op via her iPhone with GLORIA STEINEM. MARY JO was attending the National Association of Social Workers Executive Leadership Meeting on “The Feminization of Poverty,” where GLORIA was a speaker.