



Professionalism starts on the Path to Licensure

Creating synergy between the worlds of social work education and regulation

For social work students, where does becoming a professional begin? With education or licensure...or both?

The question was discussed by regulators and educators from the St. Louis area who were invited to learn more about regulation and licensure at the ASWB 2014 Spring Meeting during a breakout session that included lunch.

The host of the session was the ASWB Board of Directors. The presenters were Dorinda N. Noble,

ASWB Board president, and Mary Jo Monahan, ASWB CEO.

“The Path to Licensure campaign is aimed at helping students not only learn the beginning steps in licensure,” said Noble, director of the School of Social Work at Texas State University (TXST). “It is also helping students learn how to have prudent, successful, accountable careers. We use the word ‘prudent’ because it relates to protecting yourself as well as your client. If you do the prudent thing, you take care of yourself and your client.

“The Path to Licensure program is all about public protection,” said Noble. “The great need today is to ensure that educators have the supports they need to communicate to students how to be licensed, how to maintain licenses, and the importance of regulation to the profession and in protecting the public.”

Noble played a video developed by TXST and ASWB as a teaching tool for students. The vignette demonstrates the investigation process once a social worker has been reported to the board. The video is based on a true story of a social worker who called herself a “pastoral counselor” and used faith-based methods with her clients.



Michael Daley of Alabama asks a question during the Path to Licensure breakout session. In addition to social work regulators, local educators of social work programs were invited to attend.

An investigator is sent to the social worker's office to question her concerning a complaint. Noble plays the role of the social worker, and students play the roles of the investigator and others.

Following the video viewing, discussion focused on the investigator and the language used during the fact-finding, specifically whether the investigator's approach was totally objective. Comments from participants expressed how important it is for investigators to treat situations and social workers with respect, to never make a judgment, and to never offer personal opinion.

Speaking specifically about the content and context of the video, Noble said that the purpose of the video is to stimulate questions, enlighten students, and ultimately prepare them for their real, accountable, professional lives.

The conversation with attendees expanded to the wide world of social work, including:

Where does regulation fit with practice as a social worker?

Do social workers have opportunities for increased learning, particularly learning from their own mistakes, as well as the mistakes of others?

Why is there a general misunderstanding about what boards and colleges do?

How can we correct the perception that regulatory bodies are akin to undercover investigators or the police?

The consensus of the group was that education, forging international partnerships, and sharing information were the keys to overcoming these issues.

Dawn Hobby, who runs the Office of Ethics and Professional Review at the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), said, "I'm excited that we're finally doing this. We have more in common than differences ... What frightens me is the lack of information ... I wish we could work better together to educate each other and to promote ethical practice and knowledge about regulation so we produce stronger social workers."

Learn more about the [Path to Licensure](#).

DVDs of the Spring Education Meeting can be ordered at no cost. Send your request to info@aswb.org.