



# The who, what, when, and how of exam development

*The first exams given, in March 1983, were administered to 464 candidates. At the end of 2014, the number of exams administered was 39,778.*

During the Examination Committee report at the Annual Meeting of the Delegate Assembly in Ft. Lauderdale, more than 120 attendees had many of their questions answered about the exam program that is the reason for ASWB's existence. Exam Committee co-chairs Greg Winkler of Wisconsin (Clinical exam committee), Mary Stebbins of Virginia (Bachelors exam committee), and Brent Meyer of Georgia (Masters exam committee) shared the stage, presenting a comprehensive explanation of the role and purpose of the committee, reviewing the past year's performance, and having some interactive fun with the audience, who were asked to help critique some sample questions.

Leading the co-chairs into their discussion, ASWB Executive Vice President Dwight Hymans covered some of the basic "nuts and bolts" of the exam program, including the structure of the exams and how they are administered to maintain security. He also offered some highlights of the year and concluded by providing an explanation and timeline one of the most critical review processes that ASWB undertakes to ensure the exams reflect current social work practice: the practice analysis. (See related [story](#).)

Co-chair Greg Winkler answered the "who" and "what" questions, noting that in 2015 there were 17 subject matter experts serving on the committee. Committee members are selected to reflect



demographic, geographic, and practice area diversity, and all are former item writers. Committee members serve one-year terms, which are renewable up to three years. In 2015, seven new committee members joined those already serving, and five committee members completed their appointments. Winkler then reviewed the responsibilities of the committee, what it does and what it is responsible for. The primary focus is reviewing, editing, and approving questions that will be tested to see if they perform well enough to be added to the banks of scored items after psychometric statistics are gathered and analyzed.

Answering the “how” and “when” questions was co-chair Brent Meyer. He described the meeting process and what the committee does when it reviews items. In 2015, Exam Committee members met four times and reviewed a total of 1,149 new test questions. They approved 829 for pretest, returned 29 to writers for revision, deleted 26 items, moved 3 items to a different exam, and reviewed in pairs 205 items, which will be considered by the committee as a group in the future. The committee

also reviewed 594 test questions that had been flagged for statistical concerns or content reasons. Of those items, 112 were approved as is; 352 were revised and approved to be pretested again; and 130 were archived.

Co-chair Mary Stebbins explained how the items get selected for the exams, or forms, a process that is managed by former Exam Committee members who are called form reviewers. These veteran volunteers review and approve the forms, which include the 150 scored and 20 pretest items. Form reviewers met four times in 2015 and approved 13 forms for release (one each quarter for Bachelors, Masters, and Clinical exams, and one exam form for Advanced Generalist). They reviewed 1,950 scored items and 1,297 pretest items during the year.

Closing out the report, Lavina Harless, ASWB exam development manager, gave an overview of the exam program in 2014, going into greater detail about the whole program and the year-end statistics. More information about the 2015 Exam Committee and other volunteers and consultants can be found in the [Exam Program Yearbook](#).