



## Key participants, few distractions

*Out of a record number of applicants, new item writers selected and trained to write questions for the exams*

A few questions:

In the lifecycle of a question on the social work licensing exam, who is the FIRST social worker involved?

- a) The examination committee chair
- b) The item development consultant
- c) The item writer
- d) The Director of Examination Development

What is the MOST IMPORTANT factor in selecting item writers for the social work licensing exams?

- a) Demographics that reflect the profession
- b) A wide range of practice areas
- c) Geographic diversity
- d) All of the above are equally important

At a two-day training held in Washington, D.C., June 24–26, a social worker is trained to write questions for the social work licensing exams. During the training, the social worker meets with an item development consultant. What should the social worker do?

- a) Establish a rapport with the item development consultant
- b) Review the standards for writing high-quality questions without extraneous information
- c) Gain an understanding of how the Examination Committee reviews questions
- d) All of the above

Keys: C, D, D.

Disclaimer: It is not good psychometric practice to include “all of the above” in multiple-option test questions. The Examination Committee would never approve these for pretest.

Luckily, 19 social workers were trained to write much better questions at

this year's item writer training. For two and a half days, social workers from throughout the U.S. and Canada learned from ASWB staff and consultants about item development and writing—from finding solid references to eliminating unnecessary “window dressing.”

This year's class of item writers was drawn from 147 applications submitted at the end of 2015. The social workers learned about the entire life cycle of a question, or item. They also reviewed the Item Writer Guide, developed by ASWB to prepare licensed, practicing social workers to craft examination questions.

While there was plenty of time learning from presentations by ASWB staff and item development consultants, the new writers also had many opportunities to work on sample items. That experience “helped me to sense how long it takes to develop an item,” said one writer in the training evaluation. Another reported that working collaboratively with the item development consultant and fellow writers “fostered an environment of support and comradery that set a positive tone and learning environment.”

Lavina Harless, manager of examination development (now director), kicked off the training with a welcome and overview of the item development process, assisted by Executive Vice President Dwight Hymans (now chief operating officer). The item development consultants spent time meeting with and coaching the new writers. They are Amanda Duffy Randall, Bynia Reed, Monica Roth Day, and Nancy Sidell. For the first time, two sign language interpreters assisted to accommodate an item writer trainee who is hard of hearing.

Evaluations of the training from the new writers were overwhelmingly positive. “Training was excellent,” wrote one. “One of the best I have attended throughout my career. It's apparent that a lot of thought has been put into planning, organizing, and continuous improvement.” Another said “Love the humor, flow, and organization...the focus on the process in addition to the specific content.”

“I look forward to working with ASWB for quite some time,” said a third. Since successful item writers can complete multiple contracts and often transition to serving on the Examination Committee, it seems likely that this crop of new writers will continue to influence the examination program into the future.

New item writers for the Bachelors exam are: Cardinal Fomradas (AB), Julia Lopez (MO), Rae Marsh (NC), Marcy Shaarda (CA), and Tara Smith (AZ). New item writers for the Masters exam are: Sohani Cooray (TX), Janeen Cross (PA), Jessica Davis (IL), Ernest Garrett (MO), Rikki Gonser (ID), Ruben Mina (NY), Wai (Fiona) Miu (OR), Rene Perales, II (WI), Vanna Thuston (TX). New item writers for the Clinical exam are: India Anderson (IN), Ophra Ashur (CA), Tarrington Hunter (NB), Deborah Massey (GA), Susie Moya (IL).

## Let the number crunching begin!

The ASWB practice analysis survey was launched on April 5 and remained open until May 16. The targeted sample was made up of more than 200,000 social workers from the U.S. and at least 20,000 from Canada.

The Practice Analysis Oversight Panel met on June 2, 2016, at the HumRRO offices in Alexandria, Virginia, to review the preliminary data. ASWB staff will be reviewing the data in more detail with HumRRO in the coming weeks.

The ASWB Exam Committee and Practice Analysis Task Force (PATF) volunteers just completed a linkage survey aimed at determining the connection between the social work task statements and knowledge statements used in the survey. ASWB will be awarding each participant who completed this challenging task a \$50 gift card.

The final meeting of the PATF is scheduled for September 16–17, 2016, at the HumRRO offices. During the meeting, the task force will be charged with balancing the data obtained from the survey and their own subject matter expertise to create the blueprints for the new ASWB examinations scheduled to be launched January 2018.