



Analyzing practice, implementing results

With the finish line in sight for the 2017 practice analysis, ASWB's exam development team implements a new item development system

ASWB's analysis of the practice of social work is the cornerstone of the social work licensing exam program. Every five to seven years, ASWB works with psychometricians to conduct a major survey of social workers from throughout the U.S. and Canada. The current analysis broke records for ASWB, with more surveys sent and a higher number of responses than any previous analysis. The data gathered has been analyzed and the technical report is nearly complete.

"This analysis will be the association's most extensive to date," says Examination Development Director Lavina Harless, LCSW. "We are working from our largest-ever sample size, and the process is incorporating responses from both early-career social workers and more experienced social workers." Drawing on expertise of psychometricians at the consulting firm HumRRO, this practice analysis also added an oversight committee, a group of social workers familiar with the examination program who helped translate the work of the practice analysis task force to the ASWB exams.

Now that the practice analysis research is done, ASWB will be publishing the technical report and the revised blueprints this spring. ASWB expects to implement the new licensing exams in early 2018.

Meanwhile, lots of work remains to be done. Exam questions—*items* in the parlance of exam development—needed to be reclassified to match the new blueprints. Next is the passing score study, an intense meeting of 60 volunteers who will help identify the pass points on the exams. Even that step, which will take place in May, is exceeding expectations, with hundreds of applications from social workers for the 60 available positions in the study.

A new online practice test reflecting the new blueprints will also be released this year in advance of the new examinations. Subject matter experts (social workers participating in the exam development process) will need to review content for the revised practice test and draft rationales for each question. The *ASWB Guide to the Social Work Exams* will need to be updated to reflect the new content.

Meanwhile the current exams, which are administered nearly every day at test centers all over the world, require ongoing care and feeding. Item writers trained by ASWB are still writing new items. Exam development consultants continue to review new items. The Exam Committee will meet and approve items for pretest later in the year. Volunteer subject matter

experts will review the new forms that go online quarterly.

“The job of exam development is to recognize what’s working,” says Harless, “and keep things running smoothly, but always to be scanning for potential improvements.” One improvement just implemented is a proprietary database system for item development. Working with a consulting firm to develop the software, ASWB’s Exam Development department piloted the new system last year with teams working on the Bachelors exam.

Questions will go directly into the database from the item writers, examination development consultants can use the system to review items and provide feedback to the writers, and exam committee members will use the system to review items during their meetings. The new system, called ITEMS, streamlines the process of item development, from initial submission until a question is approved for pretesting, while providing extensive security measures to keep the items confidential.

“Activities like our item writer training program and our Examination Committee meetings remain strong,” says Harless. The new software system gives ASWB’s exam development program “a technical infrastructure that is state-of-the-art,” she says.