



Heads together

*ASWB committees
enhance each
other's work*

The official theme for the 2017 Education Conference is “Beyond CE: Regulating Competency in a Dynamic Profession.” But another theme from the conference development process is *collaboration*.

Throughout the planning process, ASWB staff have worked across departments and ASWB committees have collaborated to develop this conference—from the hotel logistics to the speaker lineup to the overall concept behind the conference.

In fact, the Continuing Competence Committee for 2017 will get its marching orders from the proceedings of this meeting. As part of the agenda, ASWB will continue to offer interactive sessions to synthesize the ideas raised early in the conference. With specialized “think tank” discussions on Saturday, conference participants will help identify the key issues in continuing competency for social workers. These key issues will provide the focus of the work of the Continuing Competence Committee later in the year.

The Regulatory Education and Leadership (REAL) Committee has drawn on the past work of the Continuing Competence Committee to develop the content of this conference. The opening session will be presented by members of the 2016 Continuing Competence Committee, who will report on their work and offer an overview of the state of continuing competence in social work regulation.

Review the full agenda for the conference at the conference website, www.beyondce.org.



Technology practice standards ready for rebirth

NASW announces plans to publish updated technology practice standards this spring

In 2015, ASWB published Model Regulatory Standards for Technology and Social Work Practice based on the work of the International Technology Task Force, which included representation from social work practitioners, regulators, and educators across the world. These model standards served a dual purpose: 1) as a resource for regulators considering amendments to rules and regulations related to electronic social work services and 2) as a resource for the profession as ASWB and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) considered updating the 2005 practice standards. The task force convened in March 2015 by NASW to update the practice standards is close to completing its work. NASW has announced that publication of the technology practice standards is expected later this spring.

The practice standards task force included members from NASW and three other social work organizations in the United States: ASWB, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), and the Clinical Social Work Association (CSWA). ASWB President M. Jenise Comer and CEO Mary Jo Monahan served on both the International Technology Task Force

and the practice standards task force. Monahan noted the benefits gained through collaboration and continuity: “The regulatory standards and practice standards complement each other and are grounded in the values of the social work code of ethics. Both task forces were led by Dr. Frederic Reamer, whose knowledge of this subject helped task force members think through the many nuances and potential trouble spots of electronic social work services. It has been productive and rewarding to participate in these collaborative projects that have included regulators, educators, and practitioners in the process.”

The soon-to-be-published standards have gone through a thorough vetting. The draft practice standards were posted online in summer 2016 for public comment. More than 100 comments were received, according to Mirean Coleman, clinical manager at NASW. As a result of the comments, a sub-task force of social work technology experts was formed to review the draft. Their comments were incorporated into the final document. The published standards will be available through NASW Press.



Taking a stand against deregulation

BRUCE BUCHANAN, former ASWB president and former Iowa board chair, testified at a hearing against a bill that would have deregulated many professions in Iowa, including social work. Thanks in part to overwhelming opposition from the public and practitioners of the professions threatened with deregulation, the bill died in subcommittee.

BRAHNA WILCZYNSKI took ASWB staff members CARA SANNER and JAYNE WOOD on a delightful side trip to Los Poblanos Inn and Organic Farm in Albuquerque, where they were greeted by a peacock in full display. The historic inn and restaurant are surrounded by acres of farmland where lavender and heirloom varieties of vegetables are grown organically.



Booth travels

The ASWB booth is on the move in 2017, scheduled to make stops in eight jurisdictions this year. Social Work Month is always the busiest travel time, and four of the eight events took place in March. ASWB traveled to Williamsburg, Virginia, for the NASW-VA chapter conference, where Virginia board member JOE SALAY and executive director JAIME HOYLE stopped by to say hello. In Albuquerque, at the NASW-NM chapter conference, ASWB's booth was within shouting distance of the booth staffed by the New Mexico regulatory board staff and members. And in Minneapolis at the Minnesota Social Services Association conference, BILL ANDERSON, former

association asides

Minnesota board member, stopped by and the Minnesota board made a great presentation.

Former exam development volunteers stopped by the ASWB booth in Albuquerque to say hello, including ELI FRESQUEZ, an Exam Committee chair, and EMMA ORTA, an item writer for the Bachelors exam. PAT TYRELL, retired NASW-NM chapter executive director, also stopped by to express appreciation for a visit by COO DWIGHT HYMANS in 2016 to discuss regulatory changes being considered for draft legislation.



Pausing for a photo op at the NASW-NM conference: Cara Sanner (ASWB); Joe Maldonado, board administrator; Jayne Wood (ASWB); Brahna Wilczynski, board chair; and Carmen Noble, board staff.

More about Social Work Month

ASWB was a sponsor of Social Work Day on the Hill in Washington, D.C., which enabled regional member boards to attend the events. ROBIN JENKINS of Washington, D.C., and JAIME HOYLE of Virginia joined ASWB CEO MARY JO MONAHAN, COO DWIGHT HYMANS, and JENNIFER HENKEL. They also had the opportunity to gather for lunch to discuss regulatory issues with ASWB staff.

Taking the Mobility message to NABSW

President M. JENISE COMER and FRAN FRANKLIN of Delaware brought ASWB's Mobility message to attendees at the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) conference in April. The session, titled Mobile Families—Mobile Workers: Policy Change Needed to Strengthen Families, explained how achieving practice mobility supports the profession and showed available ASWB resources and how they can be used.

**Your name could
be featured here!**

Send all news and pictures to
Jayne Wood,
newsletter editor,
at jwood@aswb.org
or call Jayne at 800.225.6880,
ext. 3075.

We need your input!

What we heard... at New Board Member Training in Orlando

BETH LITTLE of Mississippi was ecstatic over the Mississippi State win over undefeated UConn in the women's college basketball Final Four championship. JENNIFER HENKEL, a diehard UConn fan, reported that she cried. BETH also brought her daughter with her, and the two enjoyed two trips to Universal Studios.

SANDRA HARKER of British Columbia said she drives 10+ hours to get to board meetings. Talk about dedication!

DANA ZAIS of Massachusetts gets the hat trick as a good regulator, mother, and daughter. She attended training, entertained her daughter who is at college in Tampa and drove over to visit, and stayed on to spend some time with her own mother, who lives in Florida.

RICHARD SILVER and MICHEL de OLIVEIRA had the same idea for escaping the cold, wintry conditions in Québec: Beach it! They each found a few days to enjoy sand and sun while in Florida.

SUE-ELLEN MERRITT of Ontario gets the "déjà vu" award. She was a member of the Ontario college when it was first formed and she's serving again.



Guam member MYRNA LEON GUERRERO appeared upside down in her video feed during a recent Zoom conference session with ASWB staff. It was a relief to meet MYRNA right side up in Florida, JENNIFER noted.



Praise for ASWB's Candidate Services Center

A social worker who is transgender stopped by the ASWB booth at an NASW conference to share how impressed he was by the professionalism of the ASWB representative who assisted him. He called to request a name change and anticipated that the request might be met with surprise or awkwardness. Instead, he said, there was no hesitation and he was treated respectfully.

Busy day at the Candidate Services Center

ASWB's Candidate Services Center had an extraordinary day on March 6! On an average Monday, we have a staff of eight to ten happy voices to answer the phones – however, the flu struck, leaving just four to handle the normal call volume. Throughout the day, 383 calls were successfully answered by our amazing team: LAUREN WILLIAMS, TESSA JONES, MICHELE SMITH, and VICKI SETTLE!



Shining a light on the invisible work of regulators

ASWB seeking nominations for 2017 awards

“There’s a limited awareness of the work being done” by social work regulators, says ASWB Chief Operating Officer Dwight Hymans. “If one were to ask a social worker or a member of the public to explain the regulatory process or who does that work, most would not be able to do so accurately, if at all.”

To bring the important work of social work regulation to the fore, ASWB instituted an awards program for volunteer regulators and for staff members of regulatory agencies. “Offering awards is one way of recognizing the contributions made by these relatively unknown defenders of the public,” Hymans says. “With so many volunteers and staff involved in public protection, these awards are one small way of saying ‘thank you’ to some of these folks.”

The ASWB Board of Directors looks forward to receiving nominations for two board service awards that will be presented at the Annual Meeting of the Delegate Assembly in Atlanta, Georgia, in November. Anyone who is a member or staff member of an ASWB member board may put forth a name for consideration.

By nominating a regulatory volunteer or administrator, you can draw attention to that individual’s great

work, and you will help ASWB shine a light on the often invisible work done by social work regulators. “It may encourage others to get involved in the regulatory process,” says Hymans, “and it’s the right thing to do for those who give time, energy, and their knowledge for the greater good.”

The Sunny Andrews Award

This annual award recognizes an individual board member’s outstanding commitment to his or her individual social work regulatory board. Named for past ASWB President Sunny Andrews, the recipient of this award will be someone who demonstrates support of the member board. The nominee may have shown [suitability for] this achievement by giving selflessly of personal time and effort, by enforcing ethical performance, or by upholding the integrity of that board’s functioning and processes.

The Glenda McDonald Board Administrator Award

Since last year, the Board Administrator Award for Outstanding Commitment to Social Work Regulatory Board Service has been called the Glenda McDonald Board Administrator Award in memory of McDonald, who served as registrar for the Ontario College of

Social Workers and Social Service Workers and was active on many ASWB committees.

The recipient will be a staff member, administrator, or registrar who has shown exceptional commitment to social work board service in his or her jurisdiction. This person is someone who has educated the public and the profession on legal regulation; facilitated a fair, efficient, and responsible process for legal regulation in a member jurisdiction on behalf of a member board; or promoted the ethical, responsible, and effective functioning of a member board.

The deadline for both award nominations is July 21, 2017.

If you have questions you may call Melissa Ryder, the volunteer engagement and outreach senior manager, at 800.225.6880, Ext. 3060.

You may complete a nomination form on the ASWB members website, members.aswb.org, or request one by sending an email to mryder@aswb.org.



Be READY to go Beyond CE



Mary Jo Monahan, MSW, LCSW
ASWB Chief Executive Officer

I am most pleased to share a preview of “**BEYOND CE: Regulating Competency in a Dynamic Profession**,” April 27-29, 2017, in Henderson, Nevada. The ASWB Board of Directors chose this theme so that together with our members, volunteers, approved CE providers, and other collaborators, we can grapple with the emerging awareness that as regulators, we may need to go *Beyond CE* in order to fulfill our mission to truly protect the public.

To put this in context, I offer the following story:

Years ago, I was conducting a session for MSW students on legal regulation and ethical practice. I focused on the profound influence that they, even as beginning students, have on their clients. I spoke of their ability to harm clients if they did not become aware of—and learn to understand, embrace, and manage—their power in the professional relationship. One student expressed her horror at this power concept and worried that she might harm a client.

I then spoke of the influence, authority, and responsibility that regulatory licensure boards would have when they became licensed. At this point, most of the students expressed their

horror at this realization and one nervously asked in a startled voice, “Professor Monahan, how do I protect myself?”

And that day I gave some pretty good advice. I said, “Every day when you wake up and look at yourself in the mirror, proclaim out loud and with strong conviction: “Today, I will be a safe, competent, and ethical social work professional.”

The awareness I instilled in this class of students was a starting point—for them and for any discussion of what continuing competence means and how it is measured.

Continuing competence can be defined as maintaining and enhancing competence throughout one’s career, fueled by a dedication to lifelong learning. Experts regard it as a process of thoughtful self-reflection on practice that requires regular self-assessment. Continuing competence is holding oneself accountable to acceptable practice standards; becoming more adept at applying ethical judgment; and “going beyond” by engaging in continuous professional development activities, such as supervision, making professional presentations, being published, and committing to independent learning.

As regulators, we hope that licensed social workers are enhancing their skills and knowledge; but how do we really know that licensees are engaging in continuous competency post-licensure? What is the regulator's obligation to the public to oversee, monitor, or measure the continuous competence of licensed social workers? Moreover, what is the obligation of licensed social workers, employers, professional associations, and educators to ensure the continuing competency of the profession as a whole?

The REAL (Regulatory Education and Leadership) Committee members planning this education conference have prepared a multi-dimensional learning experience for attendees to explore these critical questions and develop thoughtful, strategic responses. Participants will engage in:

- information sharing with continuing education and continuing competency experts
- interactive panel discussions with social work education, practice, and regulatory leaders
- demonstrations of innovative professional learning assessment models
- analysis of current data on the state of CE/CC across jurisdictions

The panels and sessions over the two days will move from current state to emerging trends, to the regulatory role and response.

As social workers, we live by a code of ethics that establishes competence as both a core value and an ethical principle. In our personal and professional lives, we can and should remind ourselves daily of our commitment to these values and take the steps necessary to advance our skills and knowledge. Self-assessment and self-awareness, however, cannot be the final arbiters of competency; it must be measured externally—which is where regulation, education, and practice intersect.

This conference will engage all three (the “pillars of the profession”) and provide the unique perspectives of each to help in defining through a collaborative process what continuing competency means for the social work profession. We have devoted the last session to a strategic and generative Think Tank, where we invite discussion to integrate our learning.

In the Think Tank we will brainstorm ideas for how ASWB membership moves forward regulating competency, decide what research is still needed, and determine how ASWB staff can support members in this dynamic new territory. As one of our presenters, Dr. Gary R. Schoener, has said: “Boards pick up the pieces from failed training, preparation, supervision, and agency management. Whether through empirical research or ‘think pieces,’ it would be very helpful to look for keys to improving the field and share them with relevant parties.”

I look forward to finding out what emerges “Beyond CE” from our collective work together.



Policy or Rule: Delegate and Litigate



By Dale Atkinson, Partner,
Atkinson & Atkinson

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).

Social work licensing boards are legislatively created and delegated with the authority to regulate the profession by enforcing the practice act to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the public. This legislative mandate and synopsis of why regulatory boards exist should be known to and recited by social work board members and staff on a regular basis.

Central to the legislative delegation of authority is the need for and reliance on populating regulatory boards with “experts”—generally licensees in the profession. As the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) emphasizes in its meetings and board training sessions, such licensees must separate professional promotion from public protection.

In another form of delegation, social work boards also may choose to rely on other entities for programs and services where expertise may be needed. For example, the ASWB examination program provides its member boards with a uniform, legally defensible mechanism to assess entry-level competence of applicants seeking licensure. Not only does the use of a uniform exam program create significant economic benefits to state boards, it promotes uniformity, thereby enhancing the mobility and

portability opportunities for boards, practitioners, and consumers. Of course, ASWB is an organization whose membership is composed of the boards that use such programs, ensuring direct participation in the development, deployment, and maintenance of these essential services.

Relevant law also requires applicants for licensure to meet certain education criteria. The use of “outside” accrediting entities to recognize academic programs as satisfying an education component in law may also provide benefits and economies of scale. However, when dealing with organizations where no state board membership and direct participation is involved, the legal issues can be complex. Recognition of programs and services should be implemented through the promulgation of regulations. Failure to do so may create legal challenges. Consider the following.

In 2008, the General Assembly of Pennsylvania adopted amendments to the Insurance Company Law addressing insurance coverage for the diagnosis and treatment of individuals under the age of 21 who are or may be on the autism spectrum. Through this legislative enactment, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania imposed licensure requirements on “behavior specialists.”

In order to qualify for licensure as a behavior specialist, applicants must demonstrate that they have “received a master’s or higher degree from a board-approved, accredited college or university...” that included a major course of study in counseling psychology.

Through the insurance law, the legislature expressly authorized the State Board of Medicine (Board) to “promulgate regulations providing for the licensure or certification of behavior specialists.” The Board, consistent with the legislation, promulgated regulations that applicants for licensure as a behavior specialist shall demonstrate that they have “received a master’s or higher degree from a Board-approved, accredited college or university.”

However, the Board did not promulgate any regulation that identified or defined what is an approved or accredited college or university or how it would determine who would be deemed to have satisfied this criterion. Rather than promulgating regulations addressing the education issues, the Board issued informal statements of policy in letters denying licensure to applicants that “Board approved, accredited” schools were only those colleges and universities recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and the United States Department of Education (USDOE).

In March 2013, an applicant (Applicant) filed an application with the Board for licensure as a behavior specialist. The Board provisionally denied the application. The application was then assigned to a Hearing Examiner, who convened a hearing. After the

hearing, the examiner evaluated the evidence and found that the Applicant held a Bachelor of Science degree in counseling from Carolina Christian University and a Master of Science degree from Emmanuel Baptist University. The examiner also found that the Board on October 21, 2013, denied the application for licensure based on the Applicant not having obtained a master’s degree or higher from a Board-approved, accredited college or university.

Specifically, the examiner found that the noncertified transcripts from Emmanuel Baptist indicated that the university was accredited by the Southern Association of Christian Schools, the American Association of Theological Institutions, and the American Accrediting Education Association of Christian Schools. He further noted that the Emanuel Baptist School was closed and no longer in existence. Thus, the Applicant could not prove graduation from a Board-approved, accredited school at the time she completed her degree.

The record also established that the Applicant was employed and had excelled at her job as a behavior specialist from 2005 through 2013, worked with autistic children, and exhibited expertise in working with autistic children through employment and raising an autistic child.

From the above facts, the Hearing Examiner held that the Applicant failed to sustain her burden of proving that she obtained the relevant education degrees from Board-approved, accredited schools. Consequently, the examiner recommended denial of the application. The Board accepted the recommendation and entered

an order of licensure denial on November 18, 2015. The Applicant appealed the decision to the Commonwealth Court.

On appeal, the Applicant argued that the Board’s policy of recognizing only CHEA and USDOE schools violated her substantive due process rights because these measures were arbitrary and lacked a rational relationship to a legitimate government purpose. She also argued that the application of the law violated additional constitutional rights as it was applied retroactively against her rights. Finally, the Applicant argued that the Board’s requirement of CHEA and USDOE recognition of an educational program was applied with force of law but without being duly promulgated as a regulation and as required by applicable administrative procedures.

The standard by which the court reviews such appeals involves determining whether the decision is arbitrary and capricious. Administrative decisions are arbitrary and capricious if they are unsupported on any rational basis because there is no evidence upon which the action may be logically based. The court then engaged in an analysis of previous licensure cases involving chiropractic and engineering applicants for licensure. In both such cases, the relevant courts found the actions in denying licensure as arbitrary and capricious.

Applying such analyses to the current facts, the court sided with the Applicant. It noted that in all three cases, the legislature granted the boards the authority to determine the merits of particular educational programs. With such statutory authority, the Board in the current case chose to rely

exclusively on a designated institutional body to determine which school would be accredited. The Board had an opportunity to examine the accrediting bodies that recognized the Applicant's education. It also had the opportunity to assess the transcripts and coursework completed by the Applicant. However, the Board did neither.

Even more troubling to the court was the manner in which the Board chose to recognize CHEA and USDOE. Instead of promulgating regulations addressing the education criteria, the Board used a statement of policy. It also applied such policy with force of law and used it to form the basis of licensure denial. Distinguishing between regulations and policy, the court cited a relevant Pennsylvania Supreme Court opinion. In addition, the court noted the administrative procedures necessary to duly promulgate regulations that will be used with the force of law.

The Board did not follow such procedures that are designed to provide opportunities for notice, input, hearings and discussions prior to promulgation as a means to protect the process and sustain decision-making. Finally, the court noted that substance applies over form and that referencing a board process as a policy does not bind the court to such a conclusion. Indeed, the conclusion of whether a policy is actually an unpromulgated regulation is a question of law to be determined by the court.

The court held that the Board provided no basis for recognizing only CHEA and USDOE as Board approved, accredited schools and that such lack of justification was fatal to their exclusive recognition. Thus the court held that the Board policy was an unpromulgated regulation that could not be enforced against the Applicant. Under an arbitrary and capricious analysis, the court held that no reasonable set of facts could support the Board decision. Accordingly, the court reversed the Board decision and remanded the matter to the Board with instructions to issue the license to the Applicant.

Social work boards must understand the legal processes used if they rely on outside entities to determine a mandatory criterion of eligibility for licensure. Accredited education is a shining example of reliance on an outside entity over which the boards have little or no participatory rights. To provide legal sustainability to this type of reliance, differentiating between policy and regulation is essential. Further, when promulgating regulations, boards must adhere to the administrative procedures.

Cary v. Bureau of Professional & Occupational Affairs, State Board of Medicine, 2017 Pa. Comm. LEXIS 14, 153 A. 3d 1205 (Comm. Ct 2017)



Social workers as architects

After a two-year analysis of social work practice, ASWB releases its findings and announces new exam blueprints that will take effect January 2, 2018

Over the years at ASWB, many analogies have been used to explain the mysterious yet matter-of-fact process of developing the high-stakes social work licensing examinations: concocting a witch's brew, piecing a jigsaw puzzle together, drawing blueprints. The final analogy has stuck. When talking about exam content, the term *blueprints* is most frequently used at ASWB—and in the professional testing industry—to describe the

outlines comprising the knowledge, skills, and abilities statements (or KSAs) that are the underpinnings of exam questions and reflect the essential elements of minimum competency for the occupation being assessed. Beginning January 2, 2018, ASWB exams will be defined by new blueprints following the sixth and latest practice analysis.

The content of the 2018 blueprints is being released now—concurrent with the release of the *2017 Analysis of the Practice of Social Work*, also called the technical report—to give exam candidates time to acclimate to the changes as they prepare for a career making-or-breaking examination. The good news: “The changes are relatively minor,” said Lavina Harless, ASWB exam development director. “What candidates will find are average adjustments of one to two percent among various content areas. The majority of the changes have to do with reorganization of content areas, along with an attempt to create greater uniformity on content terminology across the Bachelors, Masters, Advanced Generalist, and Clinical exam categories. While each of these exams tests different parameters of social work knowledge and skills, the tests now share a similar set of descriptive terms describing content.”



Greg Winkler (WI) and Bynia Reed (MD), item development consultants, participated in the reclassification task, where live test questions were assigned to the 2018 blueprint content areas.

Blueprints: More consistency than change

The Bachelors, Masters, and Clinical exam category blueprints retained four content areas each, and changes include predominantly minor structural and editorial modifications for comprehensiveness and currency. For example, in the Bachelors and Masters blueprints, “the content area of Direct and Indirect Practice was renamed Interventions with Clients/Client Systems to more accurately reflect the practice of social work with diverse clients and client systems,” said Harless.

The Advanced Generalist exam blueprint had the most extensive changes, being restructured from five content areas to four. As a result, overlapping or redundant competencies were eliminated and the total number of competencies being tested in the Advanced Generalist exam was reduced from 28 to 14.

One change that was consistent across all exam categories: an increased emphasis on professional values and ethics, indicating the importance of demonstrating competence in this content area for safe and effective practice.

A [complete listing](#) of all four content outlines with competencies and KSAs is available.

Technical report: A detailed look at process and outcomes

The [technical report](#) describes the process used by ASWB to conduct the practice analysis survey, the methodology, and the outcomes that were used to update the exam blueprints maintained by ASWB. The report contains the full practice analysis surveys and background

questionnaires in English and Canadian French as well as the results of the surveys and the data analysis conducted by Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO), the psychometric consulting firm that partnered with ASWB in this process.

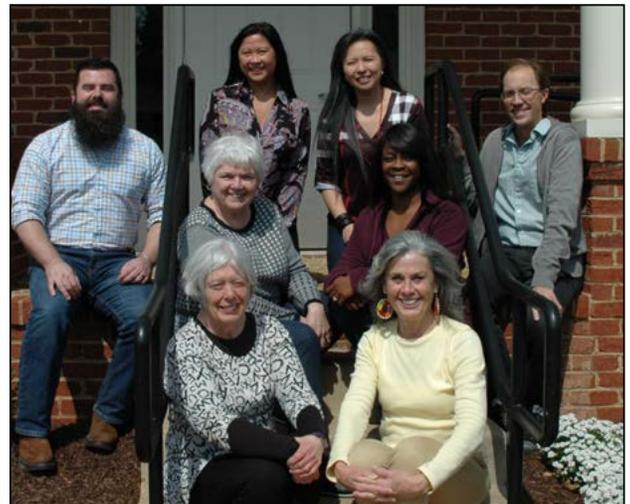
Contributing to the validity of the study, diverse panels of social work subject matter experts (SMEs) provided oversight. These experts were selected for their understanding of the ways the profession has and will continue to evolve as well as the minimum knowledge required in knowledge areas. The five-member Oversight Panel provided guidance and direction as the project activities were carried out, and the 20-member Practice Analysis Task Force was responsible for developing the survey content and establishing test specifications for the exam blueprints.

Participation in the practice survey was the largest in the history of ASWB’s practice analyses, with more than 23,000 responses (compared with approximately 5,000 in the previous analysis). U.S. respondents were licensed in every U.S. state and territory, with the exception of Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands. In addition, all 10 Canadian provinces were represented. For the third consecutive practice analysis, statistical comparisons of the survey responses indicated minimal differences in ratings between the U.S. and Canada. This means that

the blueprints for all categories of licensure exams reflect a valid, reliable interpretation of the social work profession across North America.

“This analysis is especially powerful because of the impressive level of engagement we received from the social work profession,” said Harless. “We built the blueprints on an analysis of nearly five times the survey responses used for the previous study, and were pleased to find that this much larger sample revealed that no major changes were necessary for the content of the next round of exams to be released.”

Because of their direct link to current knowledge, practice analyses are crucial to the legal defensibility of licensure examinations. The practice analysis is critical for ensuring that the content of each exam is relevant to current professional practice and reflects the opinions and expertise of a diverse



Form reviewers met in March to finalize the questions for the four anchor exams that will be used during the passing score study in May. These emeritus Exam Committee members included (from left to right, starting at bottom row): Nora Jessome (BC), Bachelors exam, Debby Jones (BC), Clinical exam; Jane Matheson (AB), Masters exam, Keeva Hartley-Stouffer (MN), Clinical exam; Brent Meyer (GA), Masters exam, Leana Torres (AZ), Advanced Generalist exam, Susanna Sung (MD), Advanced Generalist exam, and Carl Hokanson (MN), Bachelors exam.

group of stakeholders. To ensure that knowledge tested on the exams is necessary for the successful performance of critical tasks, a linkage exercise was carried out by 42 SMEs recruited from the task force, oversight panel, and ASWB exam development volunteers. This exercise provided additional content validity.

Next steps

Releasing the technical report and the new exam blueprints is a significant milestone for the work done to date. But before new exams based on the updated blueprints are ready to be launched on January 2, 2018, passing scores must be determined. More than 1,300 social workers responded to the call for 60 volunteers to participate in the passing score study scheduled to take place in May. This panel will review anchor exams for each category, take the exams, rate each test question for probability that it will be answered correctly, and discuss minimum competence in the content measured by the exams. The point on which pass-fail determinations are made, called the cut score, will be computed based on these activities.

Next, ASWB exam materials will be updated to reflect the new blueprints. “We understand how important it is for candidates to have earlier access to our supplemental exam products,” said Harless. “We plan on providing the new blueprints with the *ASWB Guide to the Social Work Exams* this summer and hope to roll out new versions of the practice tests later in the year.”



Moving on up

*As department expands,
new director brings
long familiarity with
ASWB's needs*

Normally, “explosion” and “IT” are not words you want to see in the same sentence. But for ASWB, that combination is a good sign. In the last month, the IT department—it’s now a separate department—has hired three new software developers and a project manager. These hires reflect a 200% growth in the department: an explosion.

“When I started as a systems administrator, I was in a cubicle up front,” says Dan Sheehan, who was recently promoted to information technology director. “The servers were actually in my cubicle—and back then, they were super loud and put out a lot of heat.”

Sheehan joined ASWB in 2000 as a call center representative, taking registration calls part-time on the evening shift while he studied systems administration full time. “I started helping out with the computers [at ASWB],” he says, “and that eventually led to a full-time position.” Over the intervening years, there’s been another type of explosion, this one in technology itself. At the time Sheehan became systems administrator, ASWB had many desktop computers that were networked and connected to the Internet, and an email server (one of the ones in Sheehan’s cubicle, in fact).

Now, senior staff members often travel with compact laptop/tablet hybrids that dock into the network when they are in the office and connect through a secure VPN (virtual private network) when they’re on the road. Plus, the expanded ASWB staff all have IT equipment—from PCs, monitors, and printers, to tablets and smart phones. Even the desktop phones are actually computers, Sheehan points out, connected to a phone system server that routes calls and tracks statistical information on call center volume and wait times.

Sheehan describes a big part of his career at ASWB as “keeping all our systems happy and working,” but now, he’s moving on to more strategic work. Sheehan will be managing his staff, as well as contractors, while collaborating with other department directors at ASWB to set priorities for the association’s technology and to participate in strategic planning.

Why an explosion of software developers? Sheehan explains that ASWB now has more than 45 custom programs running to serve its members. “There are a lot of development needs here,” he says. “We’ve had one developer who was a contractor for a very long time. She’s done a fantastic job, but the workload got too big for one person.”

Between online and desktop programs, ASWB runs dozens of proprietary software systems, all of which need to be upgraded to keep pace with the association's needs and changing technology. "There are a lot of development needs here," Sheehan says. "We've needed in-house development for a long time, plus project management expertise." The new project manager will work with other ASWB departments to develop software requirements, then coordinate that work within the IT department. "We need someone who can work closely with the developers on staff as well as the end users."

"We want to enhance what we're doing online now," Sheehan says. "We've developed programs that serve our members and they're functional, but we really want to make them even better." Sheehan sees his job to help the association set technology priorities "according to what our members need—they're our customers."

While ASWB has had good luck with outsourcing programming in the past, Sheehan sees that bringing the software development in-house will give ASWB several key advantages. "It's better to have people onsite," Sheehan says, where they can work with end users directly. "Having that relationship helps move things along. They can talk to each other, they know each other, and they're responsive."

Sheehan has seen this dynamic first-hand with the addition of Mark Evans, who was hired as a software developer in 2016. Evans specializes in desktop applications and works directly with ASWB's Member Services staff on projects like application processing software, and specialized

database systems for the Approved Continuing Education (ACE) program. The other three software developers will round out this staff, with another desktop programming specialist, one who focuses on web development, and a third who works in both environments. "I see the potential for even more growth," Sheehan says. "It depends on where ASWB decides to go with services to our members. No matter what, our increased IT team will improve systems for ASWB staff and members."

Going from a one-person staff in 2015 to a total of six in 2017 is a big jump, Sheehan admits, but he sees the potential to not only tackle important software projects, but to find better technology solutions for the association and its membership. "Now we'll have six different people with different perspectives," Sheehan says, "to approach our members' needs and figure out how things can be done differently or better."

What's coming next

Sometimes, custom software is just what's needed. There's nothing on the market, for instance, that can provide the customization and security of ASWB's online registration system for exam candidates.

But sometimes, there's no need to reinvent the wheel. ASWB is moving forward in 2017 with implementation of an association management system, NetForum Pro. NetForum is a comprehensive system that will make it easier for ASWB to integrate data about our members and volunteers. With NetForum, ASWB is replacing at least three different systems within the organization—meetings, contact management, and email communication.

Melissa Ryder, volunteer engagement and outreach senior manager, has been steering this implementation. Cara Sanner, member services specialist, has been working with the software company to transfer ASWB's complex data into the new system.

When the implementation is complete later this year, NetForum will enhance many of the functions on members.aswb.org, the specialized subdomain for ASWB members and volunteers.