In their own words

*Thank you to REAL Committee members for sharing their insights*

ASWB’s 2017 Education Conference, “Beyond CE: Regulating Competency in a Dynamic Profession” showed the complexity of a challenging topic. From what’s happening in CE now, to how a focus on lifelong learning and evidence-based practice is moving the needle toward continuing competence models, the conference engaged attendees. A panel discussion with Darla Spence Coffey, president and CEO of the Council on Social Work Education, Fred Phelps, executive director of the Canadian Association of Social Workers, and ASWB CEO Mary Jo Monahan provided insight into how the perspectives of the “three pillars of the profession”—educators, practitioners, and regulators—can help define continuing competence for social work. Figuring out what is working and where regulation needs to go “Beyond CE” was the discussion at the Think Tank session concluding the two days of learning.

The sessions moderated by members of the Regulatory Education and Leadership (REAL) Committee are summarized here, written by the moderators. Presentations are available for download at www.beyondce.org.
Brian Gilman, LMSW, and Keith Welsh, LCSW, gave a dynamic presentation on the innovative way the Department of Veteran Affairs (DVA) has stayed on the cutting edge of providing continuing education (CE). They explored the Hall of the Past, Hall of the Present, and Hall of the Future.

Hall of the Past: Traditionally CE was synonymous with face-to-face learning. It was perceived that this was the best environment for learner engagement and interaction. This type of CE proved to be costly with decreased availability to learners. There was no means to determine if application of knowledge was used by the learner in practice.

Hall of the Present: With the availability of technology and acceptance of this modality, the delivery of CE changed. Within the DVA, distance-learning has become the second most common way to receive continuing education and is defined as “the right learning, anytime, anywhere.” The DVA is now able to provide continuing education across multiple disciplines, offering clinician-specific CE and multidisciplinary opportunities. The cost of providing CE has decreased and accessibility to learners has increased. The DVA uses the TRAIN Learning Network platform to provide continuing education. Courses on TRAIN must be developed following the course development/instructional design process established by DVA. Courses must meet all accreditation criteria and requirements. TRAIN will provide learners with certificates on completion. Currently TRAIN has more than 100 courses approved through ASWB’s ACE program, with more to come. TRAIN is accessed online, www.train.org, at no cost to the learner. You do not need to be a DVA employee to use TRAIN.

Hall of the Future: Gamification! The DVA has demonstrated that using gamification in CE has increased engagement, application of learning, and productivity. Gamification has also been linked to increases in job performance and job satisfaction. New social workers coming into the field are increasingly tech-savvy. They are accustomed to receiving information using technology. The Veterans Health Administration is currently using virtual classrooms, virtual medical advisors, and provider research virtual libraries.

Brian and Keith touched on the future of social workers using gamification as a way to obtain continuing education. Through gamification, social workers can explore outcomes/consequences in a safe but realistic environment without harmful or damaging client outcomes. This encourages risk taking and creative problem-solving in the training environment. Gamification requires application of knowledge, critical reasoning, and judgment. Currently, there is no social work content in the DVA gamification platform. The DVA is in the process of developing the platform for social workers. Sounds like a good opportunity to have Brian and Keith back to present at a future education conference!

Brian and Keith’s presentation was well accepted. They remained through the rest of the conference and made themselves available to answer questions. Keith Welsh, LCSW, is the DVA division director for the Employee Education System. Brian Gilman, LMSW, is the DVA accreditation specialist for the Employee Education System.
This session included two guest speakers: Annie Rickett, RSW, senior advisor for the Community Services and Crime Prevention Branch of the New Brunswick Department of Justice and Public Safety, and Sharri Black, LMSW, deputy director for assessments, permanency, and training for Kansas Department for Children and Families/Prevention and Protection Services. Both presented unique perspectives of their employer professional development models.

Annie’s presentation, titled “Employer’s Role in Assuring Workforce Competency”, informed participants about the ways in which New Brunswick’s Department of Justice and Public Safety workplace interacts with and operates parallel to regulation/licensing bodies. Both are committed to professional development and best practice standards. Both work together to enhance the public safety of Canadian citizens. As an integral component of the employee performance review and development process and in consultation with their immediate supervisors, employees are asked to take ownership in creating a meaningful learning and development plan. Self-directed learning was a motivating interest to many. The plan must include an assessment of the employee’s own skills, strengths, values, interests, and developmental needs. Individualized plans also are expected to include the employee’s specific, measurable, attainable, and relevant learning objectives or activities. The objectives are listed in three learning categories: Job-Specific/Mandatory, Job-Specific/Specialized, and Career-Related. Annie is already working on “next step” professional goals in these specific areas: Self-assessment (tool), documentation/evidence of continued competence, and peer feedback process. She emphasized how important it is for employers to identify “next step” improvement goals. Annie also stressed that continued competency and learning is an ongoing process for everyone!

Sharri’s presentation, titled “Establishing a Competency-Based Training System in Child Welfare”, informed participants of the department’s newly launched 2017 Kansas Child Welfare Professional Training Program (KCWPTP), which was modeled after the Ohio Child Welfare Program (OCWP). The systematic training program provides comprehensive competency-based in-service training (CCBIT) for all child welfare employees. CCBIT promotes best practice standards by providing the “right training” to the “right people” at the “right time.” When integrated with management strategies and interventions, CCBIT is a powerful tool in promoting professional competencies. CCBIT also emphasizes the importance of identifying individual learning needs, which is believed to be an essential condition in determining effective and relevant core-level competencies training. Sharri introduced the concept of a Universe of Competencies: including post-core training and specialized and related skills. This concept sparked attendees’ interest in how challenging it can be to evaluate different levels of continued competencies in complex work environments. Sharri began with the quote, “Professional work in public child welfare is one of the most difficult, psychologically demanding, publicly scrutinized, but important jobs in the service of families in need,” which engaged the audience and set the stage for learning about competency-based in-service training. (2003, Alberta J. Ellett, Ph.D.)

Annie’s and Sharri’s presentations were well-received and certainly sparked the interest of many. Both presentations were outstanding examples of employer professional development models and clearly demonstrated a commitment to excellence in professional development and competency training. Annie and Sharri emphasized that, along with educators and regulators, the workforce shares a vital role in professional development and competency training. Participants left with innovative ideas and continued competency methods to eagerly explore in their own jurisdictions and workplaces.
Presenters: Tim Brown, LCSW, ACSW, of Texas, Chelsea Cooledge, BA, BSW, MSW, RSW, of British Columbia, and Abi Gaskins, MPA, of Colorado

by Merri-Lee Hanson, REAL Committee chair

This session included three presentations regarding continuing professional development programs. It highlighted the implementation of a jurisprudence exam in Texas, a self-directed professional development program out of British Columbia, and the approach out of Colorado regarding continuing professional competency.

The first of the three presentations was given by Tim Brown. Tim has an MSW from Baylor University and is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in the state of Texas. Tim is the associate chief social work at VA North Texas Health Care System. He is the chair/presiding officer of the Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners and is the president-elect of ASWB.

Tim provided the group with information regarding the Sunset Commission review, which was completed in 2005. At that time, licensees reported not knowing the statute and rules that govern their practice; the goal was to reduce the number of complaints against social workers. Senate Bill 415 was passed, requiring applicants to pass a jurisprudence exam of state laws and rules as a condition of licensure. Tim explained that there was a need to familiarize social workers with the practice act and rules under which they are allowed to work. He outlined considerations that the board had to address in developing the exam, such as specifics regarding the questions to be included, the format of the exam, and stakeholder assistance. He spoke about the implementation process and provided metrics regarding those who have taken the test, stating that, overall, developing the jurisprudence exam was a positive process leading to a positive outcome.

The next speaker presented British Columbia’s Continuing Professional Development (CDP) program, which is based on a self-directed, reflective learning and output model of planning and recording. Chelsea Cooledge, the presenter, has worked with the British Columbia (BC) College of Social Workers since 2012 in the role of director of professional practice. She was recently appointed to the position of registrar and CEO.

Chelsea spoke about the guiding framework that the BCCSW used. It included reflective learning, flexibility, adult learning style, as well as the values of social work. Registrants need to identify learning goals, engage in activities that meet those goals, keep a record of all activities, complete a statement of learning, and submit this information each year. There is a distinct need to link an activity to the outlined continuing professional development goals set at the beginning of the year. Chelsea outlined the logic model used and the details regarding a survey that was conducted of the BCCSW membership.

Participants were able to grow in their familiarity of the strengths and challenges of implementing a fair and effective professional development program for a unique profession in a vast and diverse geographical region.

The final presentation was by Abi Gaskins, MPA, who is the division-wide programs manager, Colorado Department of Regulatory Agencies (DORA). She manages division-wide programs in the Division of Professions and Occupations (DPO) for DORA, including continuing competency programs such as social work.

Within this presentation, participants were able to hear about Colorado’s approach to continuing professional competency for social workers. Abi provided a brief overview of Colorado’s Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Program, reviewed the Professional Practice Rubric for social workers and looked at Reflective Perspectives in Continuing Professional Development Programs.
Self-Assessment Tool (RSAT) forms utilized by other professions in Colorado. As a result of the presentation, individuals were able to understand how Colorado’s Professional Practice Rubric and several other Reflective Self-Assessment Tools are used to create learning goals for licensees. Abi outlined how people are able to create learning goals that are specific, measurable, agreed-upon, realistic, and time-based. She also outlined various learning activities such as coursework, consultation, supervision, presenting, volunteer service, publication, and independent learning.

Participants felt this was a very interesting session. The feedback provided within the evaluation of this session was very positive, and the feedback spoke specifically to how various professional development models have strengths and challenges.
As regulators, I think we would agree that one of our most important and challenging responsibilities is complaint resolution. It involves both ensuring public protection and assessing competence. The objectives of this session can be paraphrased as “remediation: opportunities and limitations and when and how might it be effective.”

Presenters for this session were Gary R. Schoener and Richard Silver. Gary is a licensed psychologist from Minnesota who has served as director of the Institute on Consultation & Training of the Walk-In Counseling Center in Minneapolis for 37 years. He has done extensive consulting and training in professional boundaries for more than 40 years. Richard is a social worker and attorney from Québec who practices as legal counsel to the Ordre des travailleurs sociaux et des thérapeutes conjugaux et familiaux du Québec. He has been on staff at the Order since 2001 and has served on the ASWB Board of Directors since 2012.

This session was very well attended, and feedback indicates also well-received. Participants noted it was helpful to have both Canadian and U.S. perspectives and asked many questions. Learning objectives included the ability to identify and understand 1) elements of an assessment process aimed at rehabilitation options; 2) potential components of a remedial boundaries training course; 3) opportunities for the remediation of social workers subjected to the discipline process; and 4) limitations of remediation in both the Québec and United States context.

Case examples were shared from Québec to illustrate the order’s new approach to promote remedial measures through the discipline process. Discussion included complaints resulting in disciplinary action by the order in which remediation methods were used, including “refresher training,” required courses, and supervised practice. As regulators, it was very helpful to look at the cases through the lens of when does remediation work, what are the challenges for the order or board, and how to provide a relevant and effective remediation while ensuring all legal requirements are met.

Remediation within a “rehabilitation and return to work model” was also presented. This model stressed the importance of conducting a thorough evaluation, including determining what factors were the root causes of the violation or misconduct, conducting an evaluation of the sanctioned licensee, and incorporating information from the board and the parameters of the disciplinary order. Rehabilitation may take many forms with a goal of improving the licensee’s personal adjustment and professional performance. It seems remediation in this model is a process requiring a sound evaluation, cooperation and insight from the sanctioned licensee, application of different remediation tools appropriate to the case, reevaluation for possible reentry to practice, and coordination between the board and the evaluator. It may also be the outcome that remediation may not be effective in some cases. Gary provided a handout, “Assessment & Rehabilitation for Social Workers Impaired or Under Disciplinary order,” as a tool.

This session lived up to its objectives “remediation: opportunities and limitations and when and how might it be effective” and gave participants remediation strategies to consider in their home jurisdictions to better meet our collective public safety missions as regulators.
This session included critical competencies for the supervisor of post-education and pre-licensed individuals as well as the competencies for supervising sanctioned licensees. Presenters Laura Taylor and Nancy Gordon also addressed supervising social workers as a component of lifelong learning.

Laura and Nancy copresented this session. Nancy Gordon, LCSW, has been supervising MSW students for more than 30 years and has been an adjunct faculty member at the University of Southern Florida as well as associate professor for social work at Smith College. Laura Taylor, Ph.D., LCSW, is the clinical assistant professor and director of MSW field placements at the University of Memphis department of social work.

The goal of the session was to ensure that individuals could understand competencies needed for supervising social work students and candidates for licensure and identify strategies to build competencies with social workers who have been sanctioned. Additionally, they focused on common supervision issues that interfere with social work competency.

Throughout the session, information was shared outlining how both the supervisor and the supervisee share responsibility for carrying out their roles in the collaborative process that is “supervision.” General qualifications were outlined, including active license, accredited school of social work degree, specified coursework in supervision, minimum number of years in practice, continuing education hours, and being free from sanction in any jurisdiction. Additionally, experience and expertise in practice as well as competence in theories and treatment modalities were identified as essential.

Some of the challenges to ensuring competence in supervision include an individual’s inability to see personal limitations; lack of familiarity with rules, policy, and procedures of state regulatory boards; and supervising outside of an individual’s scope of practice. Concerns about competency also arise when a supervisor fails to challenge a supervisee who is operating outside the scope of practice, exhibits a lack of proper planning, or is unwilling to address ethical dilemmas or concerns about competency.

In order to ensure improved supervisory competence, evidence-based supervision practices should be adopted. Client outcome monitoring should be adopted as a way to measure competent supervision and, further, creating consistent methods for assessing supervision across states would be very helpful. A commitment to lifelong learning and supervision is essential to ensure that supervisors are competent.

Feedback received from the evaluation highlighted that this presentation contained rich content. Others stated that this session highlighted the awareness of the challenges of recruiting, training, and engaging effective supervisors and the special considerations for supervision strategies for sanctioned social workers. Additionally, participants reported feeling this was a relevant topic for all professionals planning on providing supervision, especially the clear need to have continuing competency training for all jurisdictions.