

*From 2015 to 2016, the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) conducted its sixth analysis of the practice of social work to update the content and weighting of the blueprints for the social work licensure exams. **Beginning January 2, 2018, all exam categories will reflect the new blueprints.***

## Why analyze practice?

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 group of stakeholders. Survey responses shape the blueprints for the exams—the content areas in which questions are asked—and the number of questions in the content areas. The four blueprints, a separate one each for the Bachelors, Masters, Advanced Generalist, and Clinical examinations, become the basis for the licensing exams until another practice analysis is done.

## Subject Matter Experts selected for diversity

ASWB staff were assisted by staff from Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO), a nonprofit personnel research and consulting firm. In addition, ASWB appointed subject matter experts (SMEs) who were selected for diversity in gender, race and ethnicity, practice setting, and geographic location. The different SME groups and their roles included:

**Oversight Panel:** This panel of five highly experienced social workers provided guidance and direction throughout all phases of the practice analysis process. Panel members had backgrounds in social work education and/or clinical practice and were familiar with the social work examinations, exam development process, exam blueprints, and current professional issues.

**Practice Analysis Task Force:** This 20-member task force, selected from more than 300 U.S. and Canadian social work applicants, developed the survey content and reviewed wording and format of the survey's 164 task and 229 knowledge statements. The task force also reviewed the survey results and established content percentages for the examination blueprints.

**Linking Task Members:** Recruited from the Practice Analysis Task Force, Oversight Panel, and ASWB Exam Development volunteers, this group of 42 SMEs performed a task-to-knowledge linking exercise, ensuring that knowledge tested is necessary for the successful performance of critical tasks.

**Reclassification Task Members:** Seven SMEs recruited from the Oversight Panel and ASWB Exam Development volunteers reassigned live test questions to the 2018 blueprints.

**Exam Form Reviewers:** Eight SMEs recruited from the Oversight Panel and ASWB Exam Development volunteers selected the questions for the four test forms that became the anchor exams for the new blueprints.

**Passing Score Study Panel:** 54 SMEs from the U.S. and Canada recruited via email and social media assisted in determining the cut score for the anchor exams.

The Association of Social Work Boards is the nonprofit association of social work regulatory bodies in the United States and Canada. Members include 50 states, Washington, D.C., the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and all 10 Canadian provinces. ASWB's mission is to strengthen protection of the public by providing support and services to the social work regulatory community in order to advance safe, competent, and ethical practices.

## The Process

Invitations to complete the survey were sent via email; other touch points included announcements on regulatory board websites, social media platforms, and outreach within the Canadian provinces. Follow-up reminders were sent using all of the above electronic channels.

The finalized survey was accessible to any respondent with access to the Internet. The survey instrument included two sections: a background questionnaire to collect demographic information and the survey itself. For the first time, the survey was split into a job tasks component and a knowledge component. All respondents answered the background questionnaire and were then assigned to complete either the task survey or the knowledge survey based on their answers.

HumRRO staff conducted analyses of the task and knowledge survey sections, reviewing the data from the survey responses and computing sample size and percentage of responses. Following a task-to-knowledge linking exercise, HumRRO staff computed linkage estimates based on the average rating across the 42 SMEs participating in the exercise. The Practice Analysis Task Force reviewed the survey results and established content percentages for the examination blueprints. The Oversight Panel had a final opportunity to evaluate the task force's recommendations and make any needed adjustments.

Next, a passing score study was conducted. The 54-member panel reviewed anchor exams for each exam category, taking the exam, rating each test question for probability that it would be answered correctly, and discussing minimum competence in the content measured by the exams. Judgments were discussed and averaged, and averages were used to compute the cut score—the point on which pass-fail determinations are made—on the anchor exam.

After the anchor exams were set, additional exam forms were assembled and calibrated to reflect the same overall difficulty level. Statistics are gathered every time a question appears on an exam form, and each

*Participation in the survey was the largest in the history of ASWB practice analyses. More than 23,000 licensed social workers responded from every U.S. state and territory (except Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands) and all 10 Canadian provinces.*

question has a difficulty level assigned to it. Through equating—knowing exactly how difficult a test is, given the compilation of questions on it—each test form is assigned a raw passing score. If the form contains many difficult questions, the raw score (the number of questions a test-taker must answer correctly out of the 150 scored questions on the form) is lower; if the questions on the form tend to have a lower difficulty, the raw score is higher.

*The addition of the knowledge component to the survey allowed more in-depth information to be collected about the nature and scope of social work.*

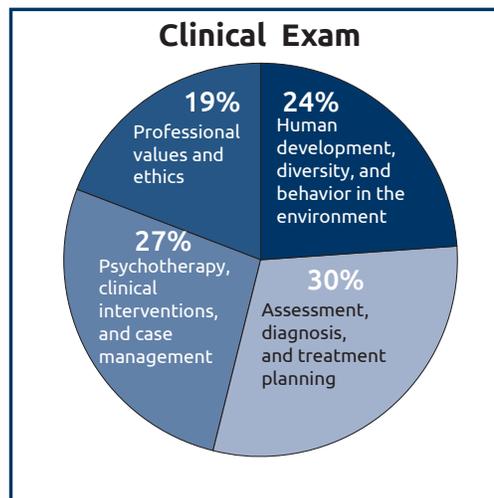
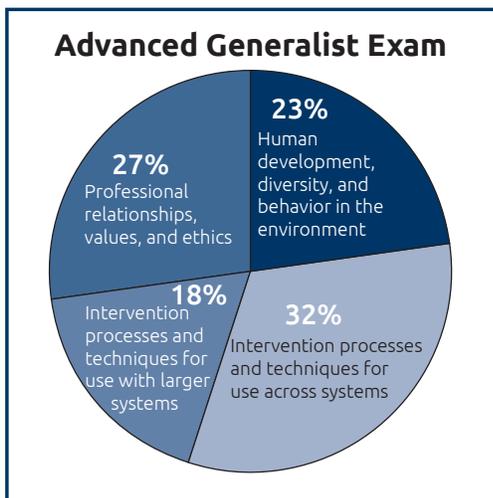
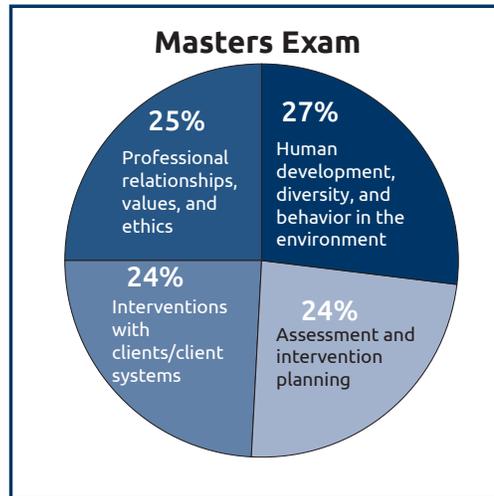
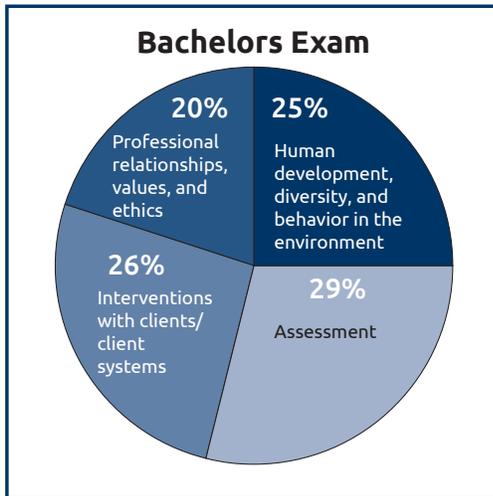
Download the  
*2017 Analysis of the  
Practice of Social Work* at  
[www.aswb.org/2018exams](http://www.aswb.org/2018exams)

## New Content Outlines

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.

The content areas and percentages of questions about each area that will be asked on each form of the examination appear below. A complete listing of the content outlines with competencies and KSAs is available at [www.aswb.org/2018exams](http://www.aswb.org/2018exams).

*The content areas and the percentages derived from this practice analysis are generally consistent with the 2008-09 study outcomes. Changes are relatively minor, reflecting an average of 1–2 percentage points among the various content areas.*



**Exams reflecting the new content outlines will be administered beginning January 2, 2018.**

## 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. The Advanced Generalist exam blueprint had the most extensive changes, being restructured from five content areas to four.

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.

## The Practice Analysis impacts all ASWB examinations

**Associate** — A few jurisdictions administer the Bachelors Examination to candidates who do not have degrees in social work for an Associate License. A lower passing score is used.

**Bachelors** — The examination intended for use by individuals with a baccalaureate degree in social work.

**Masters** — The examination that is intended for individuals who hold an MSW degree, but who do not have post-degree supervision.

**Advanced Generalist** — The Advanced Generalist exam is designed for advanced practitioners who do more macro-level, generalist, administrative, or management work. It is one of the two exams intended to be taken by social workers with an MSW or higher degree, plus the required postgraduate supervised experience.

**Clinical** — The Clinical exam has more emphasis on the provision of direct, micro-level mental health services. It is the second of the two exams (along with the Advanced Generalist) intended to be taken by social workers with an MSW or higher degree, plus the required postgraduate supervision.

The Advanced Generalist and Clinical examinations are considered on par due to the advanced level of practice knowledge and experience expected of someone taking either exam. But they each emphasize different areas of practice as noted in their descriptions.

### Valid, reliable exams

The degree to which a licensure examination measures knowledge, skills, and abilities related to the job or profession for which the license grants entry is referred to as *content validity*.

Professions change over time, so new practice analyses must be conducted to reexamine job-related knowledge, skills, and abilities. A carefully structured practice analysis provides a snapshot of what practitioners of a profession are actually doing at a given point in time and how important those activities are to competent entry-level practice.

ASWB policy mandates that a practice analysis be conducted every five to seven years. This is the sixth such study for ASWB—the first analysis was completed in 1981 and subsequent studies were carried out approximately every five to seven years thereafter.

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An extensive report on the practice analysis, *2017 Analysis of the Practice of Social Work*, is available from the association as an electronic document at [www.aswb.org/2018exams](http://www.aswb.org/2018exams).