The Enhanced Examination for Professional Practice in Psychology

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The Association of State and Provincial Psychology Boards (ASPPB) is the association of all of the governmentally regulated licensing boards for psychology in the United States and Canada. ASPPB’s primary mission is to assist its member boards in their mandate of public protection. One of the requirements for licensing boards is to ensure that the professionals they license are competent.

Competence is comprised of the integrated use of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. For over 50 years, candidates’ knowledge of psychology has been assessed successfully in almost every jurisdiction in the United States and Canada with the Examination for Professional Practice in Psychology (EPPP). However, psychology licensing boards have not had a standard, universally accepted assessment of determining licensure candidates’ skills.

What is the Enhanced EPPP?

The enhanced EPPP is a two-part exam that includes the EPPP part 1, the knowledge-based exam that is in use now, and the EPPP Part 2, a skills examination with a computer-based administration. This examination is meant to augment the current EPPP, the test of foundational knowledge needed to practice psychology independently. Part 2 of the EPPP is based on the 2017 ASPPB Competencies Expected of Psychologists at the Point of Licensure. The final model was developed based on a 2016 ASPPB Job Task Analysis that included input from licensed psychologists throughout the U.S. and Canada, and that provides the blueprint for the Part 2.

Why is ASPPB developing a skills portion of the EPPP?

ASPPB is developing Part 2 of the EPPP to offer licensing boards a standardized, reliable, and valid mechanism to assess skills, so that along with the EPPP Part 1, licensing boards will have the up-to-date means necessary to assess information about knowledge and skills that signify competence and readiness for licensure. Thus, the enhanced EPPP will provide licensing boards a snapshot of a candidate’s ability to practice independently.

Including a skills portion to the EPPP is part of a natural progression of the evolving nature of psychology education and training, and licensing assessment practices. There are a number of conditions that have occurred, and that are occurring, that have encouraged ASPPB to develop this examination at this time. These conditions include:

Competency Models

An essential agreement among many groups, including the American Psychological Association’s Commission on Accreditation (CoA), the Mutual Recognition Agreement of the Canadian Colleges and Boards of Psychology (MIRA), the Canadian Psychological Association Accreditation (CPAA), and ASPPB on what are the necessary competencies to practice independently. These groups have developed a number of different models of competency; but, although there are differences in the structure of these models, there is now substantial agreement regarding the foundational and functional elements of competency across these models. With this professional agreement, ASPPB is able to clearly provide guidance to licensing boards regarding the competencies that need to be assessed for independent practice.

Technological Advances

Advances in affordable technology have made it possible to assess most of the skills competencies in the ASPPB model via a computer-based examination, rather than using a more costly and time-consuming examination using either real patients/clients or standardized patients/clients.

Lack of Standardization of Graduate Education

There have been significant concerns expressed about the lack of standardization of graduate education in psychology, including differences in practicum and foundational education. This variability in graduate education results in EPPP pass rates from APA-accredited programs ranging from 13% to 100%. This variability also results in students accruing anywhere from a few hundred hours, to several thousand hours, of practicum experience. Even the APA and Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) accreditation systems do not require a prescribed course of education and training. ASPPB values these accreditation systems, and in fact has endorsed APA or CPA accreditation as a minimum requirement for doctoral level licensure for health service psychologists. It should be noted, however, that accreditation systems accredit training programs, not individuals. Licensing boards license individuals. It is the duty of licensing boards to assure the public that each individual psychologist that is licensed is competent to practice. Further, not all academic programs are APA/CPA accredited, thus some applicants who become licensed are from programs that have not been reviewed by an external agency. Students from these non-accredited academic programs typically underperform on the EPPP when compared to the average student from an accredited doctoral program, supporting the need for these programs to be reviewed. Because of the great variability in the current educational system in psychology at both the doctoral as well as internship levels, ASPPB is developing the Part 2 to help boards better assess students graduating from such a system.

Supervisor Evaluations

It has been noted that supervisors experience difficulty in writing critical or constructive letters of evaluation. This issue of the accuracy, or validity of supervisor evaluations, is not new, nor is it particularly debatable. The reliability and validity of supervisors’ assessments has been questioned for years, and it has been demonstrated that supervisors tend to overestimate their reports of supervisee competence, perhaps due to an inherent conflict of being in the gatekeeper and mentor roles simultaneously. Part 2 of the EPPP will offer psychology licensing boards a standardized, reliable and valid assessment of many of the skills needed to practice independently.

Clearer Understanding of Competency Assessment

Thanks to the evolution of the culture of competency in psychology, we have a better idea of how to assess that competency has been achieved. Regarding the assessment of competency, a number of articles have described how to go about assessing competency.

Doctoral Professions’ View of Competency Assessment

All other doctoral level health professions use a skills examination as a step toward determining competency. These other professions have focused on their own cultures of competence for many years.
The EPPP Part 2 skills examination is a next step to fully bring the profession of psychology into the culture of competence.  

**ASPPB Membership Support**

The ASPPB membership (psychology licensing boards in the U.S. and Canada) has discussed competence and the need for a skills-based assessment for many years. Each time licensing boards have been asked to respond to surveys indicating their level of support for a skills examination, they have consistently supported such an examination.

**In Summary**

As can be seen, there are many factors that have influenced the development of a skills element to be included as Part 2 of the EPPP. Taking these factors into account, Part 2 of the EPPP is being developed to complement Part 1, the current test of knowledge, and this enhanced EPPP will provide licensing boards a more advanced means to assess an applicants' readiness to practice independently. This advancement in competency assessment will enable licensing boards to better fulfill one of their primary functions: ensuring that those they license can practice competently.

**Developing Part 2 of the EPPP**

As noted before, Part 2 of the EPPP is based on the 2017 *ASPPB Competencies Expected at the Point of Licensure*. After the ASPPB 2016 Job Task Analysis, a blueprint for this skills examination was developed. This blueprint describes the percent of test items that will be from each of the ASPPB Competency Model clusters. The blueprint can be found on the ASPPB website at [www.asppb.net](http://www.asppb.net). The goal in developing Part 2 of the EPPP is to offer a test where candidates for licensure will actually have to demonstrate that they “know how” and can “show how” to perform aspects of the competencies listed in this competency model.

**Writing EPPP Part 2 Items**

Over 120 psychologists have volunteered to write items for the Part 2 and over 50% of these item writers are early career psychologists. ASPPB has been training these psychologists how to write items that will appear on the test. A variety of item types will appear on the EPPP Part 2. There will be 1) traditional multiple-choice items, 2) multiple select items (e.g., items that allow the candidate to select two of five possible options), 3) scenarios with several pieces of information that will assess the candidate's ability to make decisions about an evolving case. These scenarios will include exhibits which could be test protocols, interviews, or other relevant information, and 4) other non-traditional types of test questions such as “point and click” items (e.g., the candidate will select areas of presented material such as a letter or test protocol) and “drag and drop” items that will allow candidates to match multiple pieces of information. Through these various item types, the EPPP Part 2 will test a licensure candidate’s ability to display a snapshot that s/he knows how to do the appropriate things when practicing psychology. The content of the items is drawn from situations that can be encountered when in practice; for instance, how to go about assessing a client or how to intervene in a specific situation. Some item content has also been drawn from the ASPPB Disciplinary Data System and the American Psychological Association Insurance Trust, which will provide descriptions of situations where psychologists were disciplined for their professional behaviors. The goal in using these resources is to provide candidates with realistic situations that have caused psychologists difficulty in navigating their professional lives.

**When Will the EPPP Part 2 be Launched and What Will it Cost?**

Two versions of the EPPP will be available beginning in January 2020. The Enhanced EPPP will be available to any jurisdiction that has decided to use both parts of the EPPP. Some jurisdictions have chosen not to implement the most recent version of the EPPP at that time. The process of evaluation will remain the same as the current process in those jurisdictions. The cost of the EPPP Part 2 will be as follows: January 2020-December 2021 - $100 per examination during the Beta testing window (approximately 2 months) $300 per examination administration after the Beta testing window January 2022 moving forward - $450 per examination administration

The Beta testing process allows time to gather psychometric data on all items. Items that do not perform up to psychometric standards will be eliminated. Candidates will receive a delayed score based on the items that have functioned well.

ASPPB is recommending that jurisdictions that adopt the Enhanced EPPP also consider an Early Entry Option for their candidates. This allows candidates to apply to their jurisdictions to take the EPPP Part 1 after all coursework has been completed (excluding internship and dissertation). This model is in line with other professions that have adopted a competency-based assessment and is an appropriate time for candidates to consider taking the exam.

**Conclusions**

ASPPB has responded to the movement in psychology towards a “culture of competence.” The Enhanced EPPP provides licensure boards with a universal standard that will be a valid, reliable, and a legally defensible method of assessing both the knowledge and skills of licensure candidates. This is a more modern method of assessment that meets the needs of regulators and is in line with methods used with other doctoral level professions. Candidates are encouraged to visit the ASPPB website ([www.asppb.net](http://www.asppb.net)) for updates and answers to your questions.

**References**


