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Setting the Record Straight: 6 Common Misconceptions About the BACB

Through conversations with colleagues and observations of online commentary, it is clear that there exist a number of misconceptions about the BACB. What follows are six common misconceptions and our responses to them in an effort to set the record straight.

1. The BACB is chiefly motivated by financial concerns.

The BACB is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation that exists solely to provide credentialing programs for behavior-analytic practitioners. Our examination application fees are modest, especially relative to the cost of other credentials, and certificants' renewal and recertification fees have not been raised from those established when the BACB was formed in 1998. These fees are used to fund the many and varied activities necessary to improve and maintain the quality of the credentialing programs. There is also a misconception that the BACB makes money on CEUs. The BACB charges Type 2 CEU providers modest one-time application and annual renewal fees, which have never been raised. These providers then receive 100% of the fees they charge certificants for CEUs.

2. The BACB's standards for certification are too low and have remained unchanged.

As was illustrated in the [January 2011 issue of the BACB Newsletter](#), the BACB has operated according to the principle of constant incremental improvement since its inception in 1998. For example, since the first iteration of the BCBA program, the number of required graduate courses has been increased, the types of acceptable master's degrees have been restricted, the number of supervised experience hours has been increased, the credentials of supervisors have been raised, coursework in ethics and professionalism has been added, etc. Incremental improvement ensures that standards are raised without jeopardizing availability of training programs. Just as today's certification standards are more rigorous than those of previous years, the same statement will be able to be made in years ahead.

3. The BACB does not take disciplinary action against certificants.

The BACB's Guidelines for Responsible Conduct for Behavior Analysts and Professional Disciplinary and Ethical Standards were developed expressly to define appropriate and ethical practices that protect consumers and the public from harm. The BACB's disciplinary-review committees consist of senior behavior analysts selected for their knowledge and independence. These committees evaluate on an ongoing basis complaints regarding certificants accused of violating disciplinary standards. Resulting disciplinary actions are reported online.

Disciplinary Complaint Form: [click here](#)

Summary of Disciplinary Actions: [click here](#)



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4. Most applicants for BACB certification obtain their coursework via online programs.

Only 12.8% of all Approved Course Sequences are offered online and only about one-third of applicants for recent BCBA and BCaBA examinations used online coursework to satisfy course requirements.

5. The BACB's examinations are norm-referenced, not criterion-referenced.

With a norm-referenced examination (i.e., "curved"), one's likelihood of passing depends on the performance of others who took the examination, not on a set performance standard. We have heard claims that the BACB passes, for example, the top 70% of test takers. In fact, the BACB's examinations are criterion referenced with specific passing scores that are established by passing-score study panels conducted every few years. (See following article.)

6. The Association of Professional Behavior Analysts (APBA) was founded by the BACB.

APBA was not created by the BACB, nor is it a subsidiary of the BACB. APBA is an entirely independent organization that was founded to support the needs of behavior-analytic practitioners. The BACB sponsored an organizational membership during APBA's first year of operation to allow certificants to become acquainted with the organization. Initially, two of the BACB's Directors served as liaisons on APBA's Board of Directors. Currently, the BACB only has one liaison (a former director) on the APBA board. Although the BACB strongly supports APBA's mission, the two organizations operate independent of each other, just as the BACB operates independent of the Association for Behavior Analysis International.

It is understandable that misconceptions will arise from time to time. We plan to stay in touch with our certificants and to continue to clarify and set the record straight. In this process, if you have questions or concerns about the BACB's policies or practices, please contact info@bacb.com for clarification.

Our Recent Passing-Score Study

In accordance with established psychometric practices and the BACB's accreditation by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies, the passing scores for the BCBA and BCaBA examinations must be reviewed every few years. The BACB uses the modified Angoff method for establishing passing scores. The modified Angoff method is a criterion-referenced method that relies on the judgment of a panel of subject matter experts who all hold BACB certification. The panel members are carefully selected to be representative of the certificant population based on a variety of factors, such as expertise, experience, type of employment, and geographic region.

In early October 2011, 16 subject matter experts dedicated a weekend of their time to review the recent examinations and help establish the new BCBA and BCaBA passing scores. The session began with an orientation to standard-setting and a thorough discussion of minimal competence. The subject matter experts were given an orientation to the modified Angoff method for standard setting and participated in several practice item ratings with discussion prior to rating items from the examinations. Following the rating procedure, the subject matter experts provided global ratings for the passing score and failure rates. The subject matter experts then participated in a discussion to reach consensus on a recommended passing score. They carefully considered the results of their ratings, the averages of their global ratings, and the impact of various recommended passing scores on actual candidate performance. Discussion with the panelists revealed that they all agreed that passing a candidate who was not qualified had more serious consequences than failing a candidate who should have passed.

The panelists recommended specific percentage scores for the BACB Board of Directors to consider. For the BCaBA examination, they recommended 75% correct (99 items out of 132.) For the BCBA examination, they recommended 77.33% correct (116 items out of 150.) The BACB Board of Directors reviewed the results of the passing score study and the



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impact of the recommended passing scores on the failure rate for each exam. The Board voted to accept the panel's recommendations.

The September 2011 BCBA and BCaBA examinations are now the new "base" examinations for all administrations offered through 2014, at which point a new base examination and passing score will be developed for the Fourth Edition Task List. New base examination forms are created approximately every five years or whenever there is a significant change to the examination content, such as the introduction of a new Task List. The prior base examination was created in 2005. Periodic replacement of the base examination is required to ensure that the items on the base examination do not become over-exposed to candidates. Items that become over-exposed may no longer accurately measure the candidates' knowledge of the required content.

New examination forms are created for each testing window using a sample of items from the base examination and additional items from the BACB item bank. Every effort is made to ensure that the new forms are equivalent to the base examinations. In order to ensure that all candidates have an equal chance to pass the examination regardless of which examination form they take, new examination forms are statistically equated to the base examination form. The equating process uses the sample of common items to "calibrate" the new examination forms and place them on the same scale as the base examination thus identifying the equivalent passing score on each form. This is much like converting inches to centimeters; the length of the item being measured does not change. This process ensures that any differences in difficulty level are taken into account.

As a result of the equating process, the pass rates generally remain quite stable throughout the life span of each base examination form. At the conclusion of every testing window, the BACB psychometrician conducts an item analysis on all examination forms. As part of this process, the KR-20 statistic is calculated to assess the internal consistency of the items (i.e., how well they correlate with each other). Examinations are usually considered to have acceptable reliabilities when the KR-20 is over 0.85 (it can range from 0-1.0). The KR-

20 indices for the BACB examinations typically exceed 0.90. The BACB psychometrician also calculates the Brennan-Kane decision reliability index which estimates the degree to which the exam consistently classifies people as passing or failing. The BACB examinations usually have high values for this index as well.

Supervision Frequency

We have recently received requests for clarification regarding Guideline 5.06 of the BACB Guidelines for Responsible Conduct of Behavior Analysts. The guideline states that "The behavior analyst provides feedback regarding the performance of a student or supervisee at least once per two weeks or consistent with BACB requirements." This guideline applies not only to instructors and supervisors of students who are obtaining their experience requirement, but also to certificants who are supervising others during the course of their ongoing service delivery. For example, this guideline would be relevant for a BCBA who supervises a group of in-home therapists. In order to be consistent with Guideline 5.06, the BCBA would need to provide performance feedback to the in-home therapists at least every two weeks. We encourage all BCBA to review their service-delivery system and work to ensure that it complies with Guideline 5.06. Please feel free to contact the BACB if you have any questions regarding this clarification.

News and Notes

A Heartfelt Word of Thanks

The BACB wishes to extend our sincere gratitude to the overwhelming number of you who took the time to share with us your condolences on the passing of the BACB Founder and Retired CEO, Dr. Gerald (Jerry) Shook, BCBA-D. An exhaustive list of all of the condolences and tributes to Jerry would be impossible to compile. We make special note, however, of upcoming tributes that will appear in *Behavior Analysis in Practice*, *The Behavior Analyst*, and the *FABA Newsletter*, and events scheduled at the spring APBA and ABAI conventions, among others. We thank you all for your sentiments and understanding during this difficult time.



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The BACB Office Has Moved

The BACB office has moved to a new location. Correspondence should now be mailed to:

1929 Buford Boulevard
Tallahassee, FL 32308

We have arranged for mail forwarding, so if you mailed something to our previous address, we should still receive it.



Examination Pass Rates Now Available from Universities

For a number of years, each graduate program with an Approved Course Sequence has been provided examination pass rates for its students. These data were provided as a feedback mechanism to training programs and were not permitted to be shared publicly. However, the BACB Board of Directors has recently revised the examination pass-rate release policy to permit the publication of pass-rate data for programs that had at least six students take an examination in the prior three years. Although not mandatory, these graduate programs may now share their examination pass rates in promotional and informational materials.

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Per Capita Certificants in the United States

The following analysis was provided to us by Richard B. Graff, Ph.D., BCBA-D of the New England Center for Children. The data, which are based on the most recent U.S. census (April, 2010), indicate that the largest per-capita concentrations of BACB certificants are located in the northeast, Florida, and California.

Number of BCBA's per 100,000 residents

- - More than 4
- - 3-4
- - 2-3
- - 1-2
- - less than 1

