

## **CRC® Examination Standard Setting Procedure**

A passing point study for the *Certified Retirement Counselor®*(CRC®) Examination was conducted in January 2013 with the help of Professional Examination Service (ProExam). Eleven subject-matter experts worked with InFRE and ProExam staff to apply the modified-Angoff passing point procedure (Angoff, 1971) and the Hofstee method (Hofstee, 1983) to a new CRC exam form. The subject-matter experts are selected to be representative of the various geographic locations in the United States and the various occupations in the practice of retirement counseling. They are to have knowledge of and the characteristics of the “just qualified” CRC candidate.

The modified-Angoff method is the most widely used criterion-referenced passing point technique within the credentialing industry (Sireci & Biskin, 1992; Fidler, 1996) and is based on the judgments of content experts regarding the expected test performance of candidates who are minimally competent. The modified-Angoff method is an absolute method that employs systematic procedures to elicit expert judgments from subject matter experts concerning the amount of knowledge (skill or ability) required on a test to be considered a passing examinee. The method focuses on the importance and criticality of content tested and the difficulty of the items with regard to the “just qualified candidate”. The standard set is independent of examinee performance and does not predetermine the percentage of candidates passing the examination. Best practice dictates that multiple rating iterations are conducted in standard setting to arrive at the most reliable results and provide the most information to decision-makers.

The first activity performed at the standard setting meeting was a review of the test forms by the panel of judges. The goal of this phase of the meeting was to acquaint the subject-matter specialists with the content of the examinations. After this was completed, judges discussed the performance characteristics that distinguish a minimally qualified entry-level retirement counselor practitioner from an individual who is not qualified (i.e., should not be certified). The judges reached consensus on these distinguishing characteristics using the performance domains of the job analysis.

ProExam staff then reviewed the modified-Angoff standard setting technique with the judges. The modified-Angoff technique requires content specialists to answer the following question for each test item, **"What percent of the candidates who are just barely qualified for certification as retirement counseling practitioners will answer this item correctly?"** After considering each element of this question, judges practiced the technique on a subset of items from the examination form. After discussing these practice ratings and addressing questions from the judges, ProExam staff asked participants to independently rate the entire examination according to the modified-Angoff Standard Setting procedure. To arrive at the passing scores using the modified-Angoff technique, the content specialists' ratings were summed across items and then an average was calculated across judges

The Hofstee Standard Setting Method followed the completion of the modified-Angoff ratings. The Hofstee method is a “relative-absolute” method that blends the characteristics of normative and absolute methods. The participants were asked to determine the highest/lowest acceptable passing

point and the highest/lowest acceptable passing rates that they thought were reasonable for the examination.

But, standard setting is not finished after the Modified Angoff results are obtained, and ultimately the standard-setting Judges do not themselves set standards (Cizek, 2006). The modified-Angoff and Hofstee procedures cross-validated the pass point results. Then, the estimated pass point and passing rates from the Hofstee method, the statistics resulting from the modified-Angoff setting method, the pass point history on previous exams, and the results from the first exam administration were all considered by the InFRE Board of Standards and Policy Development to determine and approve an exam pass point.

It is not uncommon for a group of content experts to modify the pass point based on reasonable evidence for the modification. The measurement literature contains comparatively far fewer details for adjusting standards than for setting them in the first place (Cizek, 2006):

*The results of standard-setting studies are typically reviewed by the bodies with authority for setting the cut scores, and these bodies may modify or reject a cut score if it does not seem reasonable (Mehrens, 1986). These bodies may also take into account additional issues such as adverse impact, pass rates, and relative harm of classifications, which may go beyond the mandate given to the panelists in the standard-setting study..... It is essential that any changes in the cut score not be made casually or capriciously, if the integrity of the process is to be preserved (Geisinger, 1991).<sup>[1]</sup>*

In conclusion, the psychometric procedures for standard setting using a legally defensible method to set the CRC passing point standard were carried out with fidelity and any adjustments to the standard were based on policy consideration and the concern about perceived relative cost regarding false positives and/or false negative decisions (not awarding a credential to someone who is qualified because the score is too high and/or awarding a credential to someone not qualified because the score is too low).

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<sup>[1]</sup> Kane, M.T. (2001). So much remains the same: conception and status of validation in setting standards. In G.J. Cizek (Ed.), *Setting performance standards: concepts, methods, and perspectives*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 67.