

PRESIDENT'S PAGE

by Erica Moeser

“**T**ime marches on,” to coin a phrase. Sometimes time manages to accelerate, or that is how it seems when I consider the significant turnover that has occurred within the ranks of bar admission administrators over the past few years.

In many jurisdictions, and particularly in those in which bar examiners are term-limited off their boards after relatively short tenures, it is the bar admission administrator who guards the flame of institutional memory. Institutional memory is especially important for a licensing agency that works in the relative isolation of the judicial branch of government. And institutional memory takes a hit when key administrators leave.

A spot check of the 50 states and the District of Columbia reveals that of these 51 jurisdictions, 22 have experienced turnover at the top of the bar admissions agency over the course of the last five years. The reasons for the turnover vary, with retirements accounting for a fair share. I count 10 of the 22 recent departures in that category: Bedford Bentley of Maryland, Marlyce Gholston of Oregon, Mary Godsey of Indiana, Jane Hefti of Illinois, Marcia Mengel of Ohio, Charlotte Nelson of Oklahoma, Keith Richardson of Iowa, David Stamm of Connecticut, Stephen Townsend of New Jersey, and Elaine Vietri of Massachusetts all have concluded their careers.



To combat the substantial loss of institutional memory and job knowledge, we at the National Conference have created a mini-seminar, as we call it, that is designed to help bring new bar admission administrators up to speed. We offered the third in a series of such seminars to 10 of the newest administrators in Madison this October. Using a broad range of staff resources at our headquarters, we took a full day to work through testing and test security

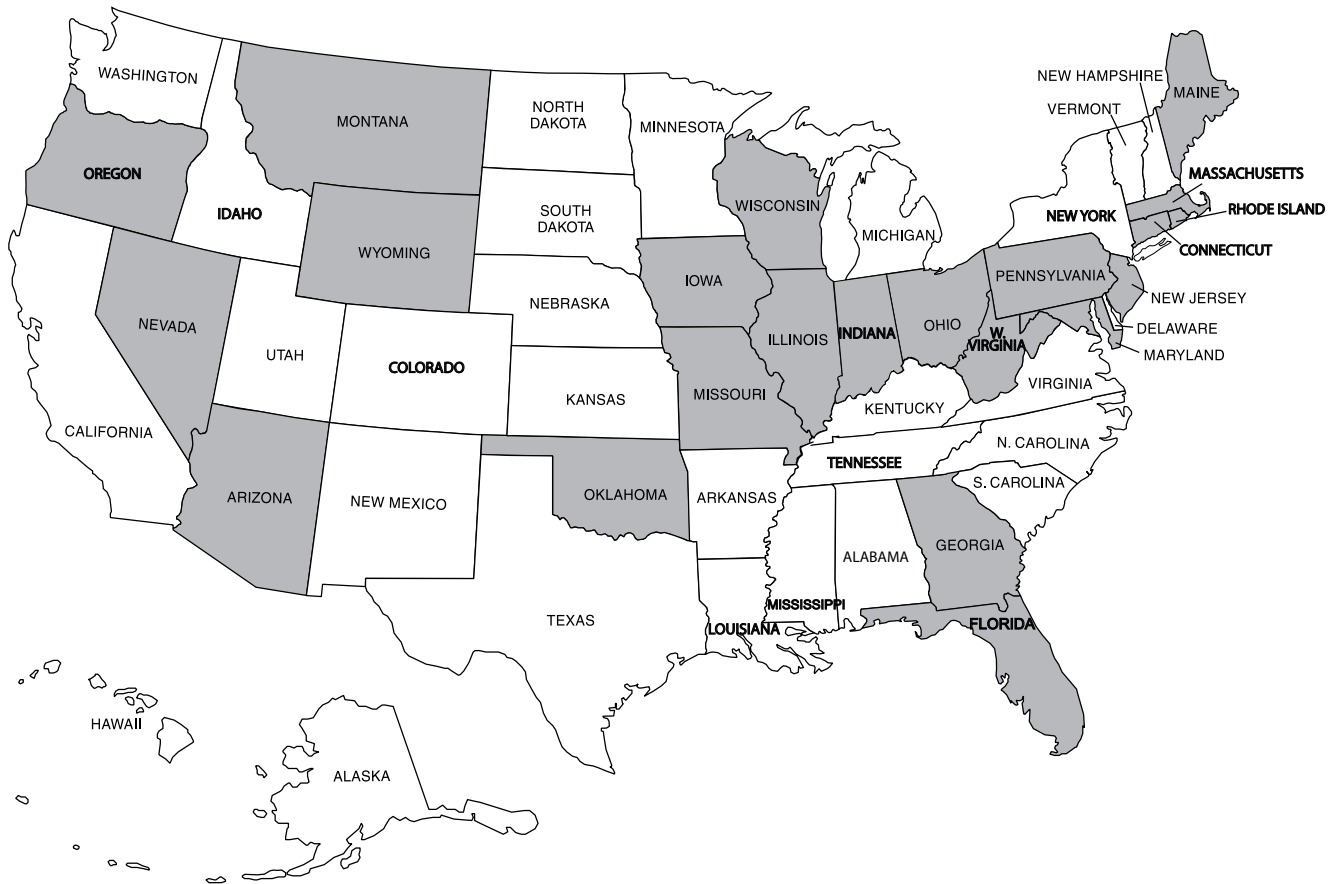
issues as well as basics about the Americans with Disabilities Act and the fundamentals of performing background checks and using technology. At the very least, the mini-seminar approach introduces new administrators to the issues and challenges that face bar examination boards and staff, and familiarizes them with colleagues around the country who are experiencing similar learning curves.

In assessing the impact of staff turnover, we recognize that there are always advantages to adding new blood to the mix. The recent additions to the ranks show great promise. There is something to be said for having new sets of eyes behold old problems and devise fresh solutions.

But as one of the “old dogs,” I also trust and value the wisdom that the experienced hands among the administrators bring to the table. Two noteworthy examples are the gentlemen who have each devoted more than 35 years to their agencies, Scott Street of Virginia and Fred Parker of North Carolina.

Bar Admission Administrator Turnover since January 2006

Jurisdictions with recent turnover are shaded.



They have counseled and taught many who followed in their footsteps. This includes the members of their boards and courts as well as their colleagues around the country. Scott and Fred were present in 1974 for the birth of the CBAA—then the Committee of Bar Admission Administrators and now the Council of Bar Admission Administrators—and they are still strong members of the administrator community.

As law licensing becomes more challenging and complex, a phenomenon with which few would disagree, the costs and perils of inexperience at the helm

are that much greater. The best hopes for success lie with the support staff at each board, the willingness of jurisdictions to invest in educating key staff members, and the well-established generosity of seasoned bar admission administrators such as Scott and Fred—and other 20-plus-year veterans such as Peg Corneille of Minnesota, Linda Knight of Mississippi, Carol McDonald of Idaho, Penny Miller of North Dakota, and Alan Ogden of Colorado. They demonstrate over and over again that they are willing to share what they know as promising newcomers arrive on the scene. 