National Conference of Bar Examiners

Building a competent, ethical, and diverse legal profession.

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Joe E. Covington Award for Research on Testing for Licensure
2027 Call for Proposals

The National Conference of Bar Examiners (NCBE) announces the 2027 Covington Award for Research on Testing for Licensure. The award honors Joe E. Covington, a former dean of the University of Missouri–Columbia School of Law, who was NCBE's first Director of Testing. The Multistate Bar Examination was created and launched largely through his vision and perseverance.

This award is intended to provide support for graduate students in any discipline doing research germane to testing and measurement, particularly in a high-stakes licensure setting. Though research or a literature review on any issue in testing will be considered, this year we remain especially interested in the following topics:

- Subscore analysis and reporting
- Statistical methods and applications for test security analysis
- Psychometric properties of model selection and equating on testlet based tests
- Item response theory models for tests involving raters
- Use of AI or other natural language processing models to inform rubric development and/or validation for essays or short-answer questions

Each recipient is expected to work with a faculty advisor at their institution and with NCBE staff to complete a project over a period of about 6–12 months; the exact time frame is flexible and can include the summer (for students seeking summer support). The proposed project need not focus on licensure testing, but relevance to bar examinations will be a consideration in the final selection.

The student conducting the research must be enrolled in a doctoral program and have completed at least one year of study toward the PhD.

Students who are just completing their PhD are also eligible. The faculty advisor must be willing to work with the student on the project and supervise their progress. Each student recipient will be awarded a stipend of $8,000, and the advisor will be awarded a stipend of $1,000.

Given the rough time frame of 6–12 months, we expect most studies to be fairly modest in scope or to be a part of a larger study. The application should include (1) the student's curriculum vita; (2) a letter of intent from the student's faculty advisor; (3) a brief proposal of up to four pages (this component may be very brief for those proposing a literature review); (4) a recent scholarly writing sample; and (5) a cover letter. Email submissions must be received by Monday, December 21, 2026. The award committee will review all applications and announce the award(s) by January 29, 2027.

Submissions and questions should be addressed to:

Dr. Daphne Mills
Email: dmills@ncbex.org

Dr. Bob Schwartz
Email: bschwartz@ncbex.org

NCBE reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to withhold the award for any year in which the Covington Award Committee determines that no submissions merit the award. More than one award may be made in a given year.
The National Conference of Bar Examiners is a not-for-profit corporation founded in 1931. The mission of the Conference is to work with other institutions to develop, maintain, and apply reasonable and uniform standards of education and character for eligibility for admission to the practice of law; and to assist bar admission authorities by providing standardized examinations of uniform and high quality for the testing of applicants for admission to the practice of law, disseminating relevant information concerning admission standards and practices, conducting educational programs for the members and staffs of such authorities, and providing other services such as character and fitness investigations and research.