Determining Individual Exam Question Minimal Pass Level (MPL)

The University of Illinois College of Medicine utilizes the Angoff method of setting cut scores for each test item. According to this method, a test item is assessed based on a prediction whether a minimally competent or borderline student will answer the item correctly.

Process
- Only faculty familiar with the content should rank an exam item.
- Each exam item should be ranked based on the likelihood that the minimally competent student will answer the item correctly.
  - A rank of 1 indicates that the minimally competent student is likely to correctly answer the question (indicated Yes in Benware).
  - A rank of 0.5 indicates that the minimally competent student has a 50-50 chance of correctly answering the question (indicated as 50-50 in Benware).
  - A rank of 0 indicates that the minimally competent student is not likely to correctly answer the question (indicated as No in Benware).
- An average of the rankings of multiple faculty members will constitute the MPL of an exam item.
- Once an exam item is used in an exam, its MPL is locked and cannot be changed for that academic year.

Defining the Minimally Competent Student

A minimally competent or borderline student is one who is just on the cusp of failing. This student’s knowledge-base borders on the edge between competence and incompetence.

The minimally competent student:
- Has a good fund of information.
- Can define terms, recall factual information and key findings, and make simple connections to previous and concurrent material.
- Is familiar with common diseases and conditions.
- Can answer questions based on uncomplicated or common clinical vignettes to do the following:
  - Formulate a differential diagnosis, identify the most likely diagnosis, outline the mechanism of disease, make clinical correlations, and determine subsequent actions to be taken such as next test, management and treatment options.

The minimally competent student has difficulty:
- Following complex problems with a large amount of data.
- Recognizing rare conditions or complicated presentations of common diseases.
- Comparing and contrasting similar disease states.
- Answering questions based on complex or uncommon clinical vignettes to do the following:
  - Formulate a differential diagnosis, identify the most likely diagnosis, outline the mechanism of disease, make clinical correlations, and determine subsequent actions to be taken such as next test, management and treatment options.
- Connecting and integrating concepts.
- Explaining the meaning of findings, how they relate to each other, and how they manifest clinically.
- Interpreting lab tests or explaining when it would be appropriate to obtain certain tests.
The incompetent or failing student:

- Lacks content knowledge or cannot recall information.
- Cannot make connections and integrate knowledge even with assistance.
- Lacks insight that they need help (does not know what they do not know).
- Has difficulty picking up on cues provided in the exam item or clinical vignette.
- Cannot analyze or differentiate between common conditions even when clear data is provided.