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**Standard for Qualifications for Forensic Anthropology
Practitioners**



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Standard for Qualifications for Forensic Anthropology Practitioners

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Foreword

Anthropology is a broad discipline dedicated to the study of humanity in both the past and present. Forensic anthropology is a specialized subdiscipline focused on the search, recovery, and analysis of human remains within the context of the medicolegal death investigation system.

Currently, uniform qualifications do not exist for forensic anthropologists, leading to variability in competency to practice. This standard provides minimum qualifications for forensic anthropology education, training, certification, ethics, and professionalism in the United States of America.

This document supplements ASTM 2917-24 *Standard Practice for Forensic Science Practitioner Training, Continuing Education, and Professional Development Programs*. This standard is of value to 1) forensic anthropology students and practitioners as they acquire and maintain their knowledge, skills, and certification; 2) institutions and organizations, both within and outside of academia, in their development of student and professional educational, training, and certification programs; and 3) forensic anthropology service providers and consumers in their evaluation of forensic anthropology competency.

The American Academy of Forensic Sciences established the Academy Standards Board (ASB) in 2015 with a vision of safeguarding Justice, Integrity and Fairness through Consensus Based American National Standards. To that end, the ASB develops consensus based forensic standards within a framework accredited by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), and provides training to support those standards. ASB values integrity, scientific rigor, openness, due process, collaboration, excellence, diversity and inclusion. ASB is dedicated to developing and making freely accessible the highest quality documentary forensic science consensus Standards, Guidelines, Best Practices, and Technical Reports in a wide range of forensic science disciplines as a service to forensic practitioners and the legal system.

This document was revised, prepared, and finalized as a standard by the Anthropology Consensus Body of the AAFS Standards Board. The draft of this standard was developed by the Anthropology Subcommittee of the Organization of Scientific Area Committees (OSAC) for Forensic Science.

Questions, comments, and suggestions for the improvement of this document can be sent to AAFS-ASB Secretariat, asb@aaafs.org or 410 N 21st Street, Colorado Springs, CO 80904.

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Keywords: *forensic anthropology; education; training; qualifications.*

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Standard for Qualifications for Forensic Anthropology Practitioners

1 Scope

This standard provides the minimum qualifications and requirements for forensic anthropology practitioners, including education, training, experience, certification, ethics, and professionalism.

2 Normative References

The following reference is indispensable for the application of the standard. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies. See Annex C, Bibliography, for informative references.

ASTM Standard E2917-24a, *Standard Practice for Forensic Science Practitioner Training, Continuing Education, and Professional Development Programs*.

3 Terms and Definitions

For purposes of this document, the following definitions apply.

3.1

chain of custody

chronological record of the handling and storage of an item from its point of collection to its final return or disposal

3.2

competency

forensic science practitioner's acquisition and demonstration of necessary specialized knowledge, technical skills, and abilities to successfully perform examinations and analyses prior to independent practice

3.3

ethical conduct

behavior that conforms to relevant published standards of professional conduct (e.g., follows applicable Codes of Ethics for the discipline)

3.4

forensic science service provider

FSSP

organization or individual that provides forensic science services

3.5

human remains

human soft, osseous and dental tissues or derived samples (e.g., hair, fingernails, cuttings for DNA or isotopic testing, extracts derived from a primary source)

3.6

internship

in-depth educational or training program that offers a period of supervised practical experience in a forensic science setting

3.7**medicolegal death investigation authority**

person or persons whose duty it is to perform medicolegal death investigations for a designated jurisdiction and ensure certification of cause and manner of death (e.g., Coroners, Medical Examiners, Justices of the Peace)

3.8**professional development**

mechanism through which a forensic science practitioner improves personal skills, successfully handles increasing responsibility, makes contributions to the profession, and reinforces ethical behaviors

3.9**proficiency testing**

evaluation of participant performance against pre-established criteria using interlaboratory comparisons (ISO/IEC 17043:2023)

3.10**quality management**

coordinated activities to direct and control an organization concerning quality

NOTE Direction and control with regard to quality generally include the establishment of a quality policy and quality objectives, quality planning, quality control, quality assurance, and quality improvement

3.11**training**

formal, structured process of teaching and assessment outside of academic coursework, often at a laboratory or other non-educational institution, but also includes continuing education opportunities

NOTE Often results in a certificate or formal documentation of completion

3.12**technical record**

all pertinent items created or used to support findings of a forensic anthropological examination.

NOTE Technical records may be field or laboratory notes documenting tests undertaken, photographs and medical imaging forming the basis for analysis or technical conclusions, test records, antemortem medical and dental records, and other documentation (e.g., bench notes, inventories, observations, diagrams, sketches, charts)

4 Qualifications**4.1 General**

Forensic anthropologists shall have discipline-specific expertise to conduct forensic anthropological examinations.

NOTE Sections 4.2 through 4.6 describe minimum qualifications for forensic anthropology education, training and experience, certification, continuing education and professional development, and adherence to ethical and other professional standards.

4.2 Education

4.2.1 Forensic anthropologists shall have a graduate degree in anthropology from an accredited college or university. This degree should be a Ph.D. with an educational curriculum that includes a broad foundation in anthropology and a focus in forensic anthropology.

NOTE 1 The discipline of forensic anthropology does not currently have a standardized curriculum addressing the competencies in Annex A comparable to other forensic specialties. Therefore, the academic transcripts of forensic anthropologists are variable.

NOTE 2 It is preferred that all competencies in Annex A be gained through formal educational coursework. To ensure educational programs meet the needs of future forensic anthropology practitioners, standardizing curricula is recommended. If all competencies are not acquired through formal coursework, see 4.3.

4.3 Training and Experience

4.3.1 Forensic anthropologists shall supplement their education with discipline-specific training and experience, as outlined in ASTM Standard E2917, *Standard Practice for Forensic Science Practitioner Training, Continuing Education, and Professional Development Programs*.

NOTE Forensic training can be obtained through internships, postgraduate fellowships, continuing education coursework, and other types of professional mentoring (see Annex B).

4.3.1.1 Experience shall be a component of building and maintaining competency as a forensic anthropology practitioner. Experience shall include both practical (i.e., direct observation and participation) and theoretical aspects of the discipline.

4.3.1.2 Forensic anthropologists shall have experience working with medicolegal death investigation authorities, including observation of casework in a medicolegal setting (e.g., medical examiner/coroner facility) and observation of courtroom testimony when possible and appropriate.

4.3.2 Although the length and depth of training and experience are dependent on the scope and setting of work to be performed, they shall focus on addressing the competency areas listed in Annex A.

4.3.3 Forensic anthropology practitioners shall demonstrate and document training and related experiences.

4.3.3.1 All training and experience should be supervised by a certified forensic anthropologist

4.3.3.2 All training and experience should be documented in a training log verified by a subject matter expert.

4.4 Certification

In addition to the minimum qualifications established in 4.2 and 4.3, forensic anthropology practitioners shall obtain certification from an accredited body that assesses expertise and competence in forensic anthropology, when eligible.

NOTE 1 Certification is a necessary component of professional development, in part because it provides an objective means of demonstrating competence to practice. It is a key indicator to stakeholders (e.g.,

employers, medicolegal community, legal practitioners, families of decedents, and the public) that an individual is a competent practitioner in the area(s) in which they practice. It also mandates adherence to a code of ethics and a recertification program.

NOTE 2 Certification assesses competency to practice. Competency in a discipline is assessed through the demonstration of the requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities in areas specific to that discipline (see Annex A). It is typically established by passing professional certification exams.

4.5 Continuing Education and Professional Development

4.5.1 All forensic anthropology practitioners shall remain current in their discipline through continuing education and professional developmental activities, with the goals of maintaining competency and broadening their knowledge, skills, and abilities. These activities are available in multiple forms and should include professional involvement in formal and/or informal programs and activities, such as:

- research, including publication in peer-reviewed volumes and/or presentation at professional meetings;
- teaching of forensic anthropology, forensic science, and associated topics (e.g., archaeology, anatomy, osteology, introduction to the forensic sciences);
- attendance and active participation at professional meetings, seminars, and workshops;
- professional service, including participation in professional forensic committees in the discipline;
- international initiatives in forensic anthropology;
- short courses or other continuing education opportunities at an advanced educational/training level;
- presentation of invited lectures;
- visiting scientist or scholar positions;
- internships/fellowships/postdocs;
- mentoring and peer-review;
- reading peer-reviewed journals containing forensic anthropology research; and
- participation in communities of practice in forensic anthropology.

4.6 Ethics and Professionalism

4.6.1 Forensic anthropologists, as forensic science service providers (FSSPs), shall conform to a code of professional responsibility that includes strict adherence to a code of ethical conduct.

4.6.2 As forensic scientists, forensic anthropologists shall adhere to the National Code of Professional Responsibility for Forensic Science and Forensic Medicine Practitioners (see Annex C for website address).

4.6.3 Forensic anthropologists who are members of professional forensic science organizations shall also conform to their organizations' codes of ethics.

5 Documentation of Qualifications

5.1 Forensic anthropology practitioners shall maintain documentation of all qualifications, including education, training, certification, and continuing education and professional development.

5.2 Documentation of all forensic anthropology qualifications listed in 5.1 shall also be maintained by the FSSP's internal quality management program(s) governing forensic anthropologists' work, including proficiency testing, competency testing, and memoranda indicating training completion and ability to perform supervised or independent casework.

6 Unacceptable Practices

Forensic anthropology practitioners shall not:

- misrepresent education, training, qualifications, or experience;
- fail to maintain certification in the discipline;
- fail to seek/maintain current and accurate records of education, training, and/or certification in the discipline; or
- violate codes of ethical conduct and professional responsibility for the practice of forensic science.

Annex A (normative)

Competency Areas for Forensic Anthropology Practice

Forensic anthropologists, at a minimum, shall be competent in the following areas:

- human osteology, musculoskeletal anatomy, comparative osteology;
- bone biology, human variation, skeletal growth and development;
- laboratory methods for processing human remains (e.g., maceration);
- determining medicolegal significance of remains (e.g., determining human, non-human, or non-osseous);
- evaluation of commingled assemblages;
- estimation of the biological profile;
- personal identification comparative methodology (e.g., evaluating medical and/or dental imaging);
- skeletal trauma, the role of bone biomechanics in trauma interpretation, and the timing of injury;
- evaluation of microscopic, histological representations of bone;
- evaluation of pathological conditions (including description and interpretation of the healing process) and anomalies of the skeleton;
- taphonomic modifications;
- estimating the postmortem interval/time since death;
- field search, recovery, and scene and evidence documentation and handling;
- evidence handling (e.g., chain of custody) and documentation (e.g., creation and management of technical records);
- professional standards and ethical conduct in forensic anthropology;

190 — medicolegal system, including legal terminology, expert witness testimony, relevant court
191 rulings, and familiarity with medicolegal authorities and jurisdictions;

192 — statistics (univariate and multivariate).

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Annex B **(informative)**

Recommended Areas of Education, Training, and Experience

Forensic anthropologists are encouraged to have education, training, and/or experience in the following areas:

- general knowledge of forensic science disciplines and their relevance to and impact on case analysis;
- bone histology (e.g., sampling and preparation) and light microscopy;
- biomolecular and chemical methods of skeletal analysis [e.g., X-ray fluorescence (XRF), X-ray diffraction (XRD), Fourier-transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR), stable isotope analysis, DNA]
- bone and cartilage tool mark characteristics for classification;
- photography (e.g., effective lighting/exposure, orientation/distance, and scale/case number placement);
- laboratory management;
- quality management including quality assurance;
- laboratory accreditation;
- Geographic Information System (GIS);
- unidentified decedent databases (e.g., NamUs, NCIC, NCMEC);
- human factors (e.g., cognitive bias and its effect on forensic anthropology).

Annex C (informative)

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