



B59 Certification in Criminalistics: Where It Was, Where It Is, and Where It Is Going

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After attending this presentation, attendees will be briefed on the certification in criminalistics.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by providing understanding of the past, present, and future of certification in the criminalistics field.

Perhaps the idea of professional certification was captured best in the Hippocratic Oath of antiquity...“I will preserve the purity of my life and my art.” Today, doctors, nurses, C.P.A.s, information technology professionals, and a host of other professionals are certified. As applied to forensic science, certification is a voluntary process of peer review by which a practitioner is recognized as having attained the professional qualifications necessary to practice in one or more disciplines of criminalistics *The Past:* Certification in the field of criminalistics began with the Criminalistics Certification Study Committee (CCSC). From 1975 to 1979, there were more than 25 individuals from all regions of the U.S. and Canada who were active in the CCSC; however, they were not able to establish a formal certification program. The American Board of Criminalistics (ABC) was incorporated in 1989 in response to a need perceived by many criminalists for a national certification program. Since incorporation, more than 50 persons have served on the Board and the Examinations Committee, and almost 200 forensic scientists have served on Peer Groups, and Examinations or Proficiency Committees. The first ABC examinations were given in Boston in February of 1993 and by 2005, over 600 persons have been awarded ABC Diplomate status, and over 100 Fellow and Technical Specialty status. In 1998, the ABC program of professional certification was extended to include a new category of certification: Technical Specialist. The Technical Specialist certification – first offered in early 2000 – recognizes the changing nature of forensic laboratories throughout the world. Consistent with the emphasis and need for accreditation, ABC became the first forensic science certification organization to be accredited by the Forensic Specialties Accreditation Board (FSAB) of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS) in 2004.

The Present: A review of the data collected from ABC test takers over the past several years reveals some critical information with regard to certification. Statistical analysis of demographic (including education, experience, geographic region, personnel) and test score data reveals correlations and relationships important to the understanding the larger context of certification in criminalistics. The analysis begins to answer the questions of the importance of experience, and the relevance of specialized forensic science courses and training.

Part of these analyses address the importance of the relationship of certification testing with forensic science education programs. ABC began work in 2005 with the Forensic Science Program Accreditation Commission (FEPAC) to implement a national Forensic Science Aptitude Test (FSAT) to assess the academic competency of forensic science students. Continued refinement of the FSAT is expected to show strong correlations with the content of forensic science curricula, and this will certainly be the subject of additional research in the future.

The Future: ABC is also targeting 2007 for redesigned versions of the specialty exams in the disciplines of forensic biology, drug chemistry, fire debris, trace evidence, and nearly created general criminalistics discipline. Also, ABC is continuing to evaluate workshops and training seminars for continuing education and double points for ABC recertification. The relationship between forensic science educators, primarily through FEPAC, and ABC will continue to strengthen through the design and use of the FSAT. This will help to ensure the continuous improvement of the quality of forensic science education and eventual certification.

As some forensic laboratories are requiring certification for their employees, and more courts and attorneys are acknowledging the importance of professional certification, certification like many other quality initiatives has become part of the forensic science landscape. Many of the forensic science disciplines, including toxicology, anthropology, odontology, pathology, and fingerprint identifications to name a few, support the view that some form of professional certification has become an integral and necessary part of the forensic science world.

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