



Physical Anthropology Section – 2011

H58 Proficiency and Competency Testing — What They Are, What They Are Not

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After attending this presentation, attendees should be able to understand the basic differences between competency and proficiency test programs. Attendees will learn the basic concepts and procedures related to competency and proficiency testing, especially as they relate to the human identification discipline, and how to meet the criteria and expectations of laboratory accreditation agencies. Additionally, drawing from experiences and lessons learned from the JPAC Central Identification Laboratory, participants will learn best practices and practices to avoid. Attendees should be able to utilize the material presented to formulate and manage competency and proficiency test programs for their staff.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by advancing quality assurance in forensic laboratories and forensic programs. It will allow human identification laboratories to expedite the planning and implementation of competency and proficiency test programs in their organizations. These programs, when properly established and managed, will ultimately strengthen and elevate the forensic profession as a whole.

Quality assurance programs in forensic laboratories and activities have been a growing trend over the past decade. The publication of the National Academy of Sciences Report, *“Strengthening Forensic Science in the United States: A Path Forward”* and its recommendations have made quality assurance programs and accreditation relevant and thus an increasing priority for forensic human identification laboratories. Since 1999, the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, Central Identification Laboratory (JPAC-CIL) has implemented a stringent quality assurance program to ensure the scientific integrity of its casework. The CIL's quality assurance program ultimately led to its accreditation by the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors Laboratory Accreditation Board (ASCLD-LAB) Legacy Program in 2003—the first forensic skeletal identification laboratory to be so credentialed. In 2008 the CIL was re-accredited under the ASCLD-LAB *International Program* using ISO 17025 (*General Requirements for the Competence of Testing and Calibration Laboratories*) and criteria from the ASCLD-LAB supplement, *Supplemental Requirements for the Accreditation of Forensic Science Testing and Calibration Laboratories*.

Informal surveys and queries within the human identification discipline including discussions during sessions of the Scientific Working Group for Forensic Anthropology (SWGANTH), reveal that there are many misconceptions and misunderstandings about competency and proficiency test programs. During its accreditation efforts, the CIL gained vast experience with competency and proficiency testing programs. While these programs are a key component to any successful quality assurance program and its accreditation, at the same time they have the potential to negatively consume resources if not properly understood and effectively managed and administered. To that end, the CIL recognizes that it is imperative that laboratories first understand the basic differences between competency and proficiency testing programs—what they are, and what they are not. As such, this presentation will demonstrate the differences between competency and proficiency test programs from a standpoint of their intents and purposes, discuss minimal program requirements that human identification laboratories need to meet for ASCLD-LAB accreditation, outline criteria and considerations for training, testing, and corrective action, as well as discuss similarities between the two programs.

Administration and management considerations of competency and proficiency test programs are also addressed. For example, competency and proficiency test programs need to strike a reasonable balance between their intended outcomes, the resource expended, laboratory productivity, and satisfying accreditation requirements.

Competency Test, Proficiency Test, Quality Assurance