



## Anthropology Section - 2016

---

### **A127 The ANSI-ASQ National Accreditation Board (ANAB) Accreditation of the Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences' Forensic Anthropology Division**

*Christian Crowder, PhD\*, Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences, 1885 Old Spanish Trail, Houston, TX 77054; Michal L. Pierce, MS, Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences, 1885 Old Spanish Trail, Houston, TX 77054; and Luis A. Sanchez, MD, Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences, 1885 Old Spanish Trail, Houston, TX 77054*

---

After attending this presentation, attendees will: (1) understand the choices available for forensic agency accreditation and the differences between International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 17025 and ISO 17020; and, (2) learn the challenges faced by professionals practicing forensic anthropology when striving to have their facilities, procedures, and casework meet ISO 17020 standards.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by discussing the importance of incorporating quality assurance programs and personnel into departmental operations and introducing forensic anthropology laboratory accreditation under the ISO/International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) 17020 standard.

Following the publication of the 2009 National Academy of Sciences Report, *Strengthening Forensic Science in the United States – A Path Forward*, establishing quality assurance programs and achieving accreditation has become a priority for forensic anthropology practitioners. Until recently, there has been a lack of interest for accreditation boards to develop a program that recognizes forensic anthropology as a named accreditation program. The avenue for accreditation for medicolegal operations is under the National Association of Medical Examiners' (NAME) Standards. While forensic anthropology is mentioned in these standards, it does not specifically provide standards for the practice. The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), formally known as the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command-Central Identification Laboratory (JPAC-CIL), developed a quality assurance program that ultimately led to the laboratory's accreditation by the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors/Laboratory Accreditation Board (ASCLD/LAB) in 2003, making them the first credentialed forensic skeletal identification laboratory. In 2008, the laboratory was re-accredited under the ASCLD/LAB-*International* Program in Crime Scene and Trace Evidence using the ISO 17025 Standard. It has been questioned if placing the discipline of Anthropology under a trace laboratory rubric is the most appropriate fit; however, until recently, there were no other options available.

There are currently two ISO standards being used by accrediting bodies to accredit forensic science agencies: (1) ISO/IEC 17025 General requirements for the competence of testing and calibration laboratories; and, (2) ISO/IEC 17020 Conformity assessment-requirements for the operation of various types of bodies performing inspection.

While ISO/IEC 17025 has been widely accepted by crime laboratories for more than a decade, ISO/IEC 17020 has recently gained popularity with crime scene investigation units. The difference between the two standards, and therefore the focus of the respective accreditation programs, is mainly that one addresses analytical instrumentation and data more heavily than the other. ISO/IEC 17025 is geared toward laboratories whose experts report results based on data generated by analytical equipment, while ISO/IEC 17020 recognizes an expert's professional judgment as the means for determining function and acceptability. The latter is more suitable for anthropological examinations.

In 2013, The Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences (HCIFS) identified a path toward achieving accreditation for forensic anthropology. This path involved building a quality assurance program that followed the American National Standards Institute-American Society of Quality (ANSI-ASQ) ANAB ISO/IEC 17020 Forensic Inspection Agency Accreditation program. Although the ANAB program recognizes a forensic anthropologist as one who reaches conclusions based on functional testing and professional experience, the program also calls for standardization of the work process and examination report. A challenge in building this program internally was finding a way to introduce new training, validation, and record-keeping requirements to experienced staff, who have been using standard methods for several years, without diminishing their sense of professionalism.

In 2015, the HCIFS became the first credentialed forensic anthropology laboratory under this program. Successfully attaining accreditation was a direct result from the Forensic Anthropology Division working closely with the agency's Quality Management Division on a daily basis to build, implement, and maintain the quality assurance program. Using separate quality assurance personnel who do not perform casework and are knowledgeable in basic accreditation requirements is ideal when working toward accreditation. It is recommended that other agencies assign quality assurance staff to assist with implementing and monitoring new quality programs in order to ensure that the proper checks and balances are in place.

Copyright 2016 by the AAFS. Unless stated otherwise, noncommercial *photocopying* of editorial published in this periodical is permitted by AAFS. Permission to reprint, publish, or otherwise reproduce such material in any form other than photocopying must be obtained by AAFS.



## Anthropology Section - 2016

Considering the growing momentum of the recently formed Organization of Scientific Area Committees (OSAC) and the continued integration of anthropology in medical examiner/coroner offices, the importance of quality assurance for the anthropology program and surety measures directly related to casework should be emphasized in any agency that utilizes this type of service. The milestone reached by the HCIFS Forensic Anthropology Division will hopefully pave the way for other practitioners to obtain accreditation for their services.

---

### **Quality Assurance, Accreditation, Forensic Anthropology**