## A71 The American Board of Forensic Anthropology (ABFA) Examination Turns 40: Historical Perspectives and Current Trends in Certification for Forensic Anthropology

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**Learning Overview:** The goal of this presentation is to highlight the history, development, and future of forensic anthropology board certification through the ABFA. Attendees will gain a better understanding of the role of the ABFA in certifying forensic anthropology practitioners and how the certification process has changed in recent years.

**Impact on the Forensic Science Community:** This presentation will impact the forensic community by providing a historical perspective on forensic anthropology board certification in the United States and Canada, as well as recent developments by the ABFA aimed at ensuring a transparent and fair examination process and the highest-quality practitioners.

The ABFA was founded in 1977, five years after the formation of the Physical Anthropology Section (now the Anthropology Section) through the American Academy of Forensic Science (AAFS). The ABFA was incorporated "as a non-profit organization to provide, in the public interest and the advancement of science, a program of certification in forensic anthropology" (www.theABFA.org). Certification through the ABFA is considered the highest level of qualification in forensic anthropology. The ABFA is the only forensic anthropology certifying body in North America and is currently the only organization in the world that is accredited. In 2008, the ABFA received its accreditation through the Forensic Specialties Accreditation Board (FSAB), with re-accreditation cycles occurring every five years.

As of 2018, 119 individuals have been awarded Diplomate certificates. Of the 119 total Diplomates, 79 (66.4%) are considered in an active status. Inactive members represent Diplomates with retired status ($n$=16), those who were decertified due to inactivity ($n$=6), or those who are deceased ($n$=18). From 1977–1978, certification was awarded to the first 22 applicants through a grandparenting process, representing 18.5% of the total awarded certificates. Beginning in 1979, applicants were required to sit for a written and laboratory practical examination. Successful passing of both sections with a score of 80% or higher is required to achieve Diplomate status. Growth of ABFA membership was initially slow, with 25 certificates being awarded in the late 1970s, 18 during the 1980s, and 16 during the 1990s. However, significant growth has occurred in the last two decades, with nearly one-third ($n$=37) of the active membership added since 2010. These recently certified Diplomates represent more recent PhD's who bring newer perspectives, skills, and experiences to the Board.

Although many aspects of the ABFA certification process have remained intact since the beginning, several significant changes have emerged in the past few years. The majority of changes reflect efforts to make the certification process more transparent, fair, and compliant with FSAB accreditation. During the application process, all submitted case reports must be redacted of any identifying information prior to submission. This allows the Board of Directors to evaluate case reports in the blind. For the board exam, each examinee selects a random identifier to also allow exams to be graded in the blind. For the written examination, the format was changed in 2011 from a series of essays to a multiple-choice format to facilitate more objective grading. Although exam questions have historically been solicited from all active Diplomates, recently, questions have been solicited from an Examination Question Committee composed of a representative number of Diplomates. Submitted questions must follow the provided multiple-choice template and are then screened by the validation committee and the vice-president. In addition, consistency in exam question structure and difficulty has been validated by an outside impartial entity to improve the structure and content of the exam. The test is generated from validated questions representative of key concepts in forensic anthropology, including the biological profile, determination of medicolegal significance, taphonomy and the postmortem interval, trauma analysis, assessment of pathological conditions and anomalies, legal procedures, personal identification, skeletal processing methods, scene recovery, analysis of commingled remains, specialized applications, laboratory procedures, statistics, and general skeletal biology. Examinees are now provided with a master list of key concepts and references as part of the study guide. The ABFA continues to improve its application and examination procedures to reflect new developments and to ensure the highest and fairest standards for forensic anthropology certification.

**ABFA, Forensic Anthropology, Certification**

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