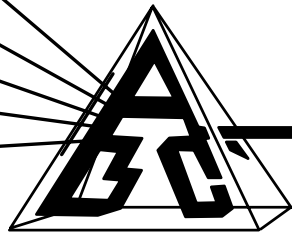


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Certification News

Volume 6 Issue 1 Summer 1999

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

ABC Update – A Time of Extension

Technical Specialist Certification in Drug Analysis and Molecular Biology

In June of 1998, the Board of Directors and Examination Committee for the American Board of Criminalistics began formally deliberating on the possible extension of certification for another category of forensic professionals. As you know, the ABC offers two specific strategies for approaching certification:

1. Professional forensic scientists can demonstrate competency by successfully challenging the General Knowledge Examination, after demonstrating successful completion of a baccalaureate in a physical or natural science and gaining two years or more full time experience in a forensic laboratory. Those who meet this challenge are certified as Diplomates of the ABC, and have objectively demonstrated the ability to understand, manage and direct multidisciplinary casework in criminalistics. The honorific "D-ABC" denotes attainment of this certification.

2. Forensic scientists who have achieved Diplomate status and wish to further demonstrate competence in a forensic discipline may achieve professional certification as a Fellow of the ABC. Fellow certification is earned by Diplomates after successfully challenging a Specialty Examination, completing a proficiency test in the specialty, and

demonstrating experience in the specialty in an operating lab. Fellows have not only objectively demonstrated that they can understand and manage multidisciplinary casework in forensic science, but have also demonstrated technical competence in one or more forensic discipline(s). The honorific "F-ABC" denotes attainment of this certification.

The ABC plans to offer a certification process leading to the designation of Technical Specialist

For some time, certain practitioners in forensic science labs have asked the ABC to consider development of a third category of certification. These practitioners find themselves serving as specialists. In some of these situations, the practitioners have been organized into specialty Units which may stand quite apart from other forensic practitioners providing other services for the agency. Many of these specialists may have little or no formal interactions with case investigators, and/or the nature of the samples provided for examination to the Unit do not routinely provide the opportunity for recovery of information through other forensic analyses.

The most common examples of these situations occur for specialists providing analyses to identify and quantify controlled substances ("Drug Analysis"), or working in molecular biology (DNA) testing labs. In the absence of "manufactured" opportunities to interact with other forensic scientists, or attainment of advanced education in forensic science – with the common internship requirements - these specialists

President's Message (Continued)

are less likely to be able to successfully challenge the traditional ABC certification process.

It could be argued that all practitioners in any laboratory with the name "forensic" in its title should be expected to pursue opportunities to gain a well-rounded competence in understanding and managing multidisciplinary casework. This is in keeping with the tradition of broad experience and cross-training which characterized most laboratories in the past, and still characterizes some forensic labs today. However, there is no arguing that a substantial number of forensic practitioners do not find themselves in this situation today.

The American Board of Criminalistics has always been a peer-based organization, and we believe that our peers have spoken. After careful consideration of the status of the field, and a comprehensive survey of current Diplomates and Fellows, the Board of the ABC has determined that a new certification process will be implemented. Beginning January 1, 2000, the ABC plans to offer a certification process leading to the designation "Technical Specialist – Drug Analysis" and "Technical Specialist – Molecu

lar Biology". Successful completion of requirements for both types of Specialists will be designated by the

President's Message (Continued)

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honorific “S-ABC”. There are several fundamentals of the new certification category which warrant specific mention:

1. The Technical Specialist Examination will comprise a single examination administered in one sitting.
2. Technical Specialist Examinations will comprise a Specialty Examination Component and a “Forensic Science Core” set of questions reflecting essential Knowledge, Skills and Abilities of forensic scientists practicing in that specialized discipline.
3. The “single sitting” Technical Specialist Examinations will comprise two blocks of time separated by a brief administrative instruction / waiting period.
4. In order to sit for a Technical Specialist Examination, an applicant must meet eligibility requirements for Diplomates (as noted above) and provide documentation of successful completion of an appropriate Proficiency Test within the previous 12-month period.
5. Annual and 5-year recertification requirements for the Technical Specialist will be identical to those for a Fellow in the same forensic discipline.

Development and Expectations for Technical Specialist Certifications

In developing the Technical Specialist Examinations, the ABC Examination Committee will maintain the reputation of ABC examinations for providing credible, traceable, consensus- and peer-based objective measurements of competency. The examinations will continue to be one important part of the overall measure of accomplishment necessary to become certified as a professional criminalist.

Technical Specialist Examination questions will be linked to peer-based, agreed-upon Job Description elements for such specialists. Each Job Description element will continue to be defined by objective Knowledge, Skills and Abilities of the specialists, and have a literature source provided in advance to those who wish to challenge the certification process. All questions will be sensitivity tested to remove gender, cultural and other forms of inherent bias, and blue-ribbon panels of experts will be asked to assess the examinations prior to full implementation.

The demonstrated competencies and reasonable technical expectations to be held for Diplomates, Fellows and Technical Specialists are different. Therefore, the certification process and examinations

are different. But there is no question that those who successfully challenge the Technical Specialist certification process will have demonstrated significant accomplishment. Technical Specialists certified by the ABC will be recognized for having gained a level of competency believed by their peers to be necessary for a forensic practitioner who is fully accomplished as a specialist in Drug Analysis or Molecular Biology. Those who have not gained the appropriate knowledge, skills and abilities – as defined by their peers – are not expected to be successful in their pursuit of Technical Specialist certification.

It also follows that the other significant benefits of certification will accrue to those who successfully participate. For example, when you engage in the certification process, you are implicitly promising to pursue continuing professional development. This development not only benefits the certified criminalist, it also improves the laboratory and the forensic community. The network of professionals to whom certified scientists gain instant access is another resource for the professional and her or his laboratory made available through certification. Recognition gained through certification assists managers when making hiring and promotional decisions, and can be a factor in court qualification.

In the end, challenging the certification process as a Technical Specialist, Diplomate or Fellow

President’s Message (Continued)

should not be considered as an end in and of itself. Rather, the process of challenging certification invariably enhances your understanding of your own specialty and others in the forensic laboratory. It establishes a promise to yourself that you will endeavor

REMINDER

When adding your certification accomplishment to your signature block, the ABC encourages you to use

**D– ABC for Diplomate
and
F-ABC for Fellow**

Let these marks of distinction bring you recognition for the effort you put into meeting the certification challenge.

ABC CALENDAR

PLEASE POST ON YOUR LAB BULLETIN BOARD

Date/Deadline	Event	For More Information, Contact:
August 28, 1999 <i>Deadline 6-28-99</i>	All ABC Exams – IAFS Meeting Los Angeles, CA	Greg Matheson 213/847-0043
September 13, 1999 <i>Deadline July 13, 1999</i>	GKE Exam, ASCLD Annual Meeting Las Vegas, Nevada	Mike Haas 715/845-3684
September 24, 1999	GKE Private Offering: US Customs NFSTC, St. Petersburg, Florida	Kevin Lothridge 727/341-4409
September 29, 1999 <i>Deadline July 29, 1999</i>	All ABC Exams, SAFS Meeting Myrtle Beach, South Carolina	Terry Mills 404/244-2500
September 30, 1999 <i>Deadline July 30, 1999</i>	Special Offering – All ABC Exams Honolulu, Hawaii	Jennifer Mihalovich 510/238-3386
October 14, 1999 <i>Deadline August 14, 1999</i>	All ABC Exams, NEAFS Meeting Sheraton Hyannis Resort, Cape Cod, MA	Judy O’Conner 718/558-8745
October 16, 1999 <i>Deadline August 16, 1999</i>	All ABC Exams, CAC Meeting Ontario Hilton Hotel, Ontario, CA	Pete Barnett 510/222-8883
October 20, 1999 <i>Deadline August 20, 1999</i>	All ABC Exams, MAFS Meeting Holiday Inn Cape Girardeau, Missouri	Dan Bergman 651/642-0700
February 21-26, 2000 <i>Deadline December 21, 1999</i>	All ABC Exams, AAFS Meeting John Ascuagas Nugget Hotel Reno, Nevada	Mike Haas 715/845-3684

To arrange to sit for an examination, you must contact the Registrar by letter or fax (715-845-4156) by the deadline listed.

Local contacts are provided for conference information only.

To arrange for ABC Exams to be administered in your laboratory, contact your regional representative.

**American Board of Criminalistics
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to continuously develop as a professional. And once achieved, it leads to unique access to - and recognition by - your scientific peers, in a manner that can only be gained through this objective process.

An Extension of ABC Service, NOT a Replacement

As a responsive organization, the American Board of Criminalistics endeavors to provide the products and services that our field's practitioners demand. Professional forensic practitioners deserve the right to have objective certification available. Over the past 10 years, the ABC has provided certification to more than 450 Diplomates and 145 Fellows. The time has come to extend this service to many more scientists who desire objective recognition of professional competence, yet do not readily fit into the mold of forensic practice challenged by the Diplomate and Fellow certification process.

The certification of Technical Specialists does not replace the certification pathways for Fellows in Drug Analysis or Molecular Biology. The ABC fully expects that professionals in forensic laboratories will choose the certification pathway that best reflects their work situation and expectations for future career development. In addition, as specialists are afforded the opportunity to advance their understanding of the full complement of forensic disciplines throughout the lab, they may choose to pursue Fellow certification. A mechanism to allow for this transition is under development and is expected to be available by July, 2000 (well before it is likely to be needed).

Over the next few months, the Examination Committee will be completing their work. Look for updates on Technical Specialist certifications in re-

gional and national forensic organization newsletters. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact your organizational representative (see box on page 2). As your representative to the ABC, this person wants to help all interested scientists participate in the certification process, and would like to hear your comments and suggestions. You may also contact the ABC Registrar - Mike Haas - by phoning (715) 845-3684, by FAX at (715) 845-4156, or via e-mail at abcereg@dwave.net.

The recognition of your peers as a professional who has "achieved the standard" is a worthy goal. The pursuit of continued professional development is an important component of life as a professional criminalist. We welcome the addition of Technical Specialists in Drug Analysis and Molecular Biology to the family of professionals who may objectively demonstrate that they meet the strict competency standards of their peers, and desire a structured professional development process. Thank you for your input into enhancing the ABC's service to the profession, and for your support and participation.

Carl

New Representatives Join the Board

The President's Perspective

As an organization led by volunteer, professional peers, the ABC has the routine pleasure of welcoming new professionals to the Board of Directors and Examinations Committee. The commitment that your representatives have shown to the design of a credible professional certification is absolutely wonderful. As each representative provides their expertise and vision to the whole, the complexion of the ABC changes to reflect the modern thoughts. More experienced representatives offer a sense of historical perspective, while newer representatives appropriately challenge the organization to question its programs and services, and constantly improve.

We recently welcomed Ted Anderson as the new MAAFS representative to the Board. His article on the "early days" on the ABC Board is found in this newsletter. We have also just been informed that Faye Springer will be leaving the Board as the representative of the California Association of Criminalists, to be replaced in this role by Jennifer Mihalovich of the Oakland Police Department Criminalistics Laboratory. We were thrilled that CAC identified such an experienced chemist, and look forward to the contributions Jennifer will make to enhance the ABC programs of professional certification.

(continued on page 5)

(Editor's Note: The following article summarizes a Master's Thesis dissertation prepared by Kevin Lothridge – ASCLD Representative to the ABC Board – on the subject of Professional Certification. Originally prepared in the early 90's, at a time when the ABC was completing plans for the first offering of its certification process for Criminalists, this article provided insight which was important at the time, and remains valid today.)

Abstract

THE IMPACT OF IMPENDING CERTIFICATION ON THE ATTITUDES OF CURRENT FORENSIC SCIENTISTS AND LABORATORY MANAGERS

Lothridge, Kevin L.

Purpose: This research studies the perceived attitudes that forensic scientists and laboratory managers have about impending American Board of Criminalistics (ABC) certification. The results of this research will help the ABC board of directors address these possible attitudes and shed light on how to smoothly implement the certification program.

Methods: A 22 question survey was employed, the survey contained eight demographic questions, 40 attitudinal questions based on an ordinal scale, and four open end questions. The survey was distributed to 168 forensic scientists at the 1991 American Academy of Forensic Sciences meeting. The survey results were compiled and chi-squares were calculated.

Results: The use of chi-square analysis on the 10 attitudinal questions yielded only two questions that had a chi-square with four degrees of freedom and a significance level of 0.05. For these questions the results appear to be due to more than chance. This also shows that the managers and non-managers have similar attitudes about certification.

Conclusions: The findings that only two questions were not due to chance show that managers might get more information about certification than their employees. The ABC Should work hard to better inform the field of forensic science about certification and proceed with the program.

Results

Demographic Characteristics:

A total of 168 questionnaires were distributed with 60 being returned. Of this sample, 46 were managers and 14 were non-managers.

Discussion of Findings:

The results compiled from this survey are very interesting to the researcher for two reasons. First, many non-managers feel that management feels differently about certification than they do. This can affect the attitudes they have about certification. Secondly, it shows that managers have similar attitudes about certification as the people that they supervise. Also for the two questions that the chi-square test shows significance this might be due to the fact that managers get more information about the certification process than the people who work for them. This is an area that needs to be addressed before the ABC goes forward with the certification process. The ABC board of directors must realize that they now have an obligation to proceed with the accreditation process. They now know that they will not get a consensus opinion about the work that they have completed. These findings about attitude and perception fall in line with

the work of Levinson and Rokeach (all cited in Schermerhorn & Hunt & Osborn; 1988). The body of their work shows that what a person has experienced in the past forms the foundation on which future perceptions and attitudes are formed.

THE IMPACT OF IMPENDING CERTIFICATION ON THE ATTITUDES OF CURRENT FORENSIC SCIENTISTS AND LABORATORY MANAGERS (Continued)

Recommendations

Dealing with the Problem:

For the current certification proposal to overcome the perceived negative attitudes against the process, the ABC must do three things:

- 1) Educate the forensic scientist who will be taking part in this certification.
- 2) Get people to buy into the program by getting them involved in peer groups and question review groups.
- 3) Make sure the certification serves its purpose of setting minimum standards of competence and helps promote growth within forensic science.

Further Research:

Future research on certification in forensic science should include information that the ABC deems necessary and relevant to the cause and possible alternative funding means to help keep the process alive. Any information collected on attitudes of forensic scientists and managers could provide useful information for persons involved with the certification process.

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New Representatives Join the Board (Continued)

It was our pleasure to have Faye Springer serve as the CAC representative during her tenure on the Board. She provided significant historical perspective and was a dedicated participant. I believe that she effectively represented CAC's positions, and sought constructive solutions when unanimity was not immediately available.

The entire Board offers its thanks for the work that Faye performed. She took the task of advocacy seriously and worked very constructively to improve the ABC. Her credibility with her peers was important to our success as an organization.

I would hope that the ABC will continue to be served by such competent, respected Diplomates and Fellows in its organizational leadership positions. The thoughtful selection of representatives by Organizational Member Boards and Presidents continues to be our greatest source of innovation and credibility. If you have ever thought of taking a more active role in leading the ABC in the future, please contact your Association Board or President, or the ABC, to express your interest. Thank you!

A New Representative Joins the Board **The Rookie Member Perspective**

It is the intention of this brief article to serve two functions. First, it allows me to introduce myself as one of the newest members of the Board of Directors (BOD) to the Fellows, Diplomates, and Affiliates of the American Board of Criminalistics. Second, it provides me with an opportunity to discuss how and why I became a member of the BOD and share my impressions and experiences as a rookie member.

My name is Ted Anderson. I am a forensic DNA analyst at the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (Rockville, MD). I have been working in this field for approximately 5 years. I am a Diplomate of the ABC, a member of the AAFS, and a member-at-large of MAAFS. I have always felt that education and continuing education are paramount to the successful application of science to any profession. In addition, I have always fostered a keen sense of volunteerism. These qualities have served me well and I hope that they will serve the members of the BOD and in turn the Fellows, Diplomates, and Affiliates of this organization.

It was through my participation in MAAFS that I became a member of the BOD. I learned that the MAAFS representative to the ABC BOD (Julia Dolan, BATF) was planning to vacate her position. Therefore, I expressed my interest in this position to the president of MAAFS. I was subsequently

appointed to assume this position and represent the interests of MAAFS to the ABC. I attended the ABC BOD meeting at the AAFS Meeting in Orlando, FL (February 1999) at which time I was accepted as the new MAAFS representative to the ABC BOD.

There are many members of the ABC BOD who contributed, directly, to the philosophy and history of the organization. These members are critical to maintaining uniformity in the certification process. However, as with any organization, it is necessary that new ideas are introduced to facilitate evolution and growth and that new people are tasked with duties to which they may contribute great enthusiasm. I feel it is my responsibility to learn the history and philosophy of the ABC, to provide input that may shape the future of the ABC, and to lend my energy and enthusiasm to achieving the goals of the ABC. In addition, I must represent the interests of MAAFS and the forensic community.

To date, I have found the members of the BOD to be open to suggestion, amenable to change, and eager to entertain new ideas, while at the same time, profoundly interested in maintaining and improving professionalism in the forensic sciences. I look forward to the challenges of serving this organization and thank all those responsible for giving me the opportunity to do so.