

## HISTORY OF ABC

The ABC program is based in large part on the work done by 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. They represented many disciplines, all regional associations, and a diverse array of laboratories. They studied and deliberated over the problems associated with testing and certification, and surveyed the profession on its views. Despite an affirmative vote of almost 50% for their program by the members of professional associations polled, no certification program was implemented by the CCSC.

Building on the CCSC work and philosophy, the California Association of Criminalists (CAC) developed a certification program. The initial stage of the CAC program was the development of an examination designed to assess the overall competence of certification candidates. Those candidates who passed the examination, and who met other requirements, were issued a Certificate of Professional Competency in Criminalistics. Their program recognized that the changing nature of the work required increasing specialization, but maintained a strong commitment to a solid foundation in the full range of criminalistics.

The ABC was incorporated in 1989 in response to a need perceived by many criminalists for a national certification program. Since incorporation, more than 40 persons have served on the Board and the Examination Committee, and almost 200 forensic scientists have served on Peer Groups, and Recertification, Credentialing, or Proficiency Committees. These persons have been drawn from a broad cross-section of working criminalists, supervisors, and laboratory directors from government and private laboratories in the U.S., Canada, and the U.K. Each has brought his/her own view of certification to create the program now offered by the ABC.

The first ABC examinations were given in Boston in February of 1993 and the CAC examination was retired. The outset of the ABC Certification process began with the development of a two-tier process recognizing that the Forensic Sciences require both individuals who serve as active practitioners (Specialists) and those who support the bench practitioners (support staff, trainees, management, faculty, etc.). While both groups require foundational knowledge of the Forensic Sciences, Specialists require a much greater in-depth training, experience, and knowledge/proficiency in a particular analytical area. With these concepts in mind, the ABC initially required all applicants to first pass a General Knowledge Examination (GKE), leading to Diplomate status, with Specialists subsequently taking one or more Specialty Examinations, leading to Fellow status, which also carried the requirement of annual proficiency tests. This bifurcated process remained

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in place from 1993 through 2007.

Reflecting changes in laboratory operations, the certification program of the ABC has evolved over time. Even during the years from 1993-2007, the professional community pushed to acknowledge practitioners in disciplines whose roles leaned far towards specialization. Thus, in 2000, the ABC began Technical Specialist Examinations (TSEs) in the disciplines of Drug Analysis and Molecular Biology, leading to a Drug Analysis Technical Specialist (DA-TS) status or Molecular Biology Technical Specialist (MB-TS) status. While the TSEs did not require a separate General Knowledge test, the concept of knowledge, skills, and abilities common to all forensic science disciplines was maintained within the TSE program. Then, in 2004, the Board of Directors decided to integrate this paired general and specialized scheme across all Certification Examinations. All ABC examinations adhere to a common format: 40% general knowledge material common to all forensic disciplines and 60% specialized knowledge specific to each specialized discipline. With this change, the General Knowledge Examination was phased out in 2008, and the separate Specialty Examinations became the foundation for Certification.

When the certification scheme changed in 2008, current certificate holders had their certifications modified to the new scheme. All certificate holders who had taken and passed the General Knowledge Examination were given the option of submitting a proficiency test, thereby changing their certification status to a Fellow in General Knowledge. All certificate holders who had passed a Specialty Examination remained a Fellow in their specialty area, but were given the option to change their certification status to diplomate in their specialty if they no longer performed proficiency testing. The original Specialty Examinations were retained through 2009 to ensure that certificants who passed the General Knowledge Examination prior to 2008 had an opportunity to complete their desired certification path. In 2021, the Fellow and Diplomate paths were discontinued and the credential designation was modified to reflect this change.

Throughout the history of the ABC, the examinations have been crafted and updated as the disciplines have grown and changed. The examinations and examination performance are reviewed periodically and updated as needed.