

Since the Technical Specialist Examination serves as "one important part of the overall measure of accomplishment necessary to become certified as a professional *criminalist*"(5), and since "many of these specialists may have little or no formal interactions with case investigators, and/or the nature of the samples provided for examination"(5), how does the Technical Specialist in drug analysis or molecular biology become a criminalist after successful challenge of the Technical Specialist Examination? For example, it can be argued that the responsibilities of a Technical Specialist employed in a forensic DNA laboratory and one employed in a research DNA laboratory are similar with the only difference being the nature of the workplace.

The introduction of this route of certification contradicts the original goals and objectives of the ABC. The ideological fault of this certification procedure is that it places the principles of criminalistics secondary to those of the specialty area. This aspect of the examination procedure is upsetting. Since the proposed Technical Specialist Examination contains a "Specialty Examination Component" and a "Forensic Science Core," one wonders what the difference is between this examination route and the one already established, which is the combination of the GKE with the Specialty Examination (SE)?

We sincerely hope that we have conveyed to you our deepest concern at the direction the ABC is taking with the introduction of the Technical Specialist Examination. Our concern is selfish in that we do not desire to see the esteemed field of criminalistics reduced to a mere patchwork of scientific disciplines where falsely proclaiming criminalists tarnish the reputations of those who are truly knowledgeable. The introduction of this new examination cannot strengthen criminalistics, but has the potential to cripple it.

References

1. Certification Process, American Board of Criminalistics, Inc., ABC 102 3/97.
2. ABC Manual Section A, 11/97, Page 1 of 5.
3. De Forest, PR, Gaensslen, RE, and Lee, HC, Forensic Science: An Introduction to Criminalistics (McGraw-Hill, 1983), page 4.
4. Certification Process, American Board of Criminalistics, Inc., ABC 102 3/97.
5. ABC Certification News, Vol. 6, Issue 1, Summer 1999.

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ABC Response

Sir:

I thank the authors for taking the time to express your concerns and address your questions regarding the American Board of Criminalistics' Technical Specialist Certification program. I am grateful that we have had the opportunity to discuss this in person, as your sentiments are strongly felt and deserved the reasoned discourse that only face-to-face conversation allows.

As we discussed, there is no doubt that the provision of certification for Technical Specialists (TS) in both Molecular Biology and Drug Analysis represents a departure from the current ABC programs of certification. In fact, in all communications regarding TS certification, the Board has insisted that distinctions between the Diplomate, Fellow and Technical Specialists must be made clear to both practitioners and criminal justice stakeholders.

Ultimately, the ABC Board decided that the provision of TS certification appropriately extended professional certification to a category of forensic practitioners for whom certification was desired and appropriate. These practitioners are just as strongly defined as criminalists as are Diplomates and Fellows of the ABC. However, they are different in their demonstrated scope and level of competency with respect to managing multidisciplinary casework.

The differences embodied in the descriptions of Diplomates, Fellows and Technical Specialists do not denigrate the field of criminalistics. Indeed, by rejecting a narrow definition of criminalistics in favor of one that incorporates the realities of today's forensic science laboratories—in which we criminalists work—the ABC believes that the extension of certification to Technical Specialist will ultimately result in a stronger profession. Having more professional criminalists meet the objective, peer-based challenge of certification will absolutely improve the credibility of the entire field.

It is a policy of inclusion and comprehensiveness that has guided ABC to this point. ABC is jointly managed by its member organizations. We recognize our joint responsibility to provide professional certification pathways for as many varieties of criminalists as possible, because we believe that certification is the best objective means to consistently gauge professional competency and foster true professional development among practitioners.

It is my sincere hope that you will continue to contribute your passion for this process by becoming active in Board and Examination Committee governance and subcommittee activities. When future calls for nominees and volunteers are made, your representation of NEAFS or other forensic organizations to which you may belong will help assure the on-going vitality of the ABC and the field of criminalistics.

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