

Certification Programs for Criminalists — Historical Development

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ABSTRACT: Certification is the process by which individual practitioners of a profession are deemed competent, by a peer review process, to practice that profession. Criminalistics is a rather young profession, and until the recent publicity occasioned by a myriad of television dramas and documentaries, a rather obscure one. There has been little oversight of the profession and little call for such oversight until the 1970s. The calls for oversight primarily came from those outside the profession and with only a peripheral interest in the profession. In response, the profession itself began to consider the development of a process of self-review and to establish certification criteria (a) by which the competence of practitioners could be assessed in a way that would be acceptable to practitioners; (b) equitable to the diverse jobs requirements of various practitioners; useful for external evaluation by users of professional services; and, above all, (c) be a realistic method to evaluate the ability of the practitioner to engage in the professional practice of forensic science. Professional certification of criminalists was first suggested at a meeting of the California Association of Criminalists (CAC) in 1975. This initial proposal was taken to the broader national criminalistics community through the efforts of the Criminalistics Certification Study Committee (CCSC) beginning in 1976. Subjected in 1978 to a national referendum of practitioners, CCSC's proposal was rejected. Undaunted by national rejection, in 1986 the CAC renewed efforts to develop a certification process for its members, which resulted in the offering of the first certification examination in 1989. Since the initial certification examination by the CAC, certification of criminalists has evolved through the activities of the American Board of Criminalistics (ABC). Efforts have been continuously made to refine the process to more closely reflect the demands of the profession. The evolution has been slow, sometimes painful, and not always successful; however, a major revamping of the certification examination process was taking place in 2007.

KEY WORDS: Certification, criminalistics, criminalists, forensic science, forensic scientists.
