

Introduction

There are currently few available guidelines and no standards for the qualifications of a forensic anthropologist. As such, there is great diversity in the individuals currently practicing forensic anthropology and the actual qualifications of practicing forensic anthropologists. To date, the perceptions of needed qualifications for forensic anthropology have never been investigated. In this presentation we explore how qualifications, education, and training are defined as well as what practicing forensic anthropologists view as necessary qualifications within the discipline.

Qualifications - Professional education or training requirements necessary to provide individuals with adequate knowledge to perform discipline-related tasks
Education - The formal coursework from an accredited school, college, or university
Training - The formal, structured process of teaching and assessment at a laboratory or other non-educational institution

Materials and Methods

A digital survey was generated addressing forensic anthropologists' backgrounds, as well as their perceptions of the need for qualifications, and what criteria should be required to practice forensic anthropology. Prior to distribution of the survey, it was reviewed and approved by the Internal Review Boards (IRB) of both authors' institutions (Western Carolina University and University of Nevada, Reno). This survey was distributed electronically, with prior permission, on a number of biological and forensic anthropology listservs and to the members of various professional organizations. Participation was open to any adult individual (age 18+ years) who received the survey link. Overall, approximately 216 individuals answered the majority of relevant survey questions. Responses have been tabulated and color coded in the following tables:

What Makes YOU Qualified to Practice Forensic Anthropology		
Trait	Frequency	Percent
Experience	131	79%
Education	100	60%
Training	48	29%
Professional network	25	15%
ABFA Certification	16	10%
Related-research	13	08%
Staying up-to-date with methods	10	06%
Being ethical	3	02%
Certification other than ABFA	2	01%

Knowledge Areas Respondents Think Should Be Required For Forensic Anthropology		
Topic	Frequency	Percent
Human osteology	169	97%
Forensic anthropology methods	164	94%
Skeletal trauma	164	94%
Archaeological methods	161	93%
Taphonomy	155	89%
Human variation	151	87%
Human decomposition	145	83%
Bone biomechanics	140	80%
Gross anatomy	138	79%
Statistics	138	79%
Intro to forensic anthropology	137	79%
Dental anthropology	134	77%
Growth and development	133	76%
Paleopathology	127	73%
Ethics	125	72%
Research methods	117	67%
Radiology	113	65%
Zooarchaeology	112	64%
Bioarchaeology	108	62%
Laboratory management	92	53%
Archaeological theory	73	42%
Evolutionary theory	66	38%
Molecular anthropology/genetics	62	36%
Chemistry	49	28%
Cultural anthropology theory	47	27%
GIS	40	23%
Pedagogy	22	13%

Courses Taken by Respondents During Graduate School		
Course	Frequency	Percent
Human osteology	177	88%
Statistics	166	83%
Archaeological theory	148	74%
Forensic anthropology methods	148	74%
Archaeological methods	139	69%
Bioarchaeology	136	68%
Human variation	130	65%
Evolutionary theory	125	62%
Cultural anthropology theory	124	62%
Gross anatomy	118	59%
Intro to forensic anthropology	112	56%
Paleopathology	111	55%
Skeletal trauma	93	46%
Growth and development	91	45%
Zooarchaeology	87	43%
Taphonomy	68	34%
Molecular anthropology/genetics	62	31%
Ethics	41	20%
GIS	37	18%

Experiences Respondents had while Attending Graduate School		
Experience	Frequency	Percent
Assisted faculty with lab-based casework	155	82%
Assisted faculty with field-based casework	142	75%
Attended forensic anthropology short-course	88	47%
Internship at coroner/ME office	58	31%
Internship in academic bio-anthropology laboratory	50	26%
Worked as forensic anthropologist at coroner/ME office	39	21%
Assisted with human rights related casework	39	21%
Visiting scientist at a medical examiner's office	31	16%
Internship/Forensic Science Academy at the DPAA	18	10%
Postdoc in forensic anthropology within academia	17	09%
Postdoc in forensic anthropology at coroner/ME office	14	07%
Worked as medicolegal death investigator	12	06%

Experiences Respondents Think Should be Required for Forensic Anthropologist		
Experience	Frequency	Percent
Some work supervised by a certified forensic anthropologist	128	74%
Master's degree in anthropology	104	60%
Graduate education supervised by certified forensic anthropologist	100	58%
Some amount of continuing education	98	57%
Membership in relevant professional organization	95	55%
Advanced applied training	92	53%
Certification	87	50%
PhD in anthropology	78	45%
Some period of at coroner/medical examiner's office	75	43%
Professional service to the forensic anthropology community	67	39%
Peer reviewed publications in a forensic anthropology journal	51	29%
Work in an accredited laboratory	33	19%

Most common reasons for not pursuing ABFA certification		
Reason	Frequency	Percent
Certification is not necessary to practice	23	29%
ABFA organization/certification-process is flawed/biased	10	13%
Lack of casework to apply	10	13%
No time to prepare for ABFA examination	7	9%

Conclusions

As forensic anthropology grows as a discipline, the standardization of qualifications will become increasingly important, both in terms of setting requirements for education and training as well as for the certification of practitioners. Professional organizations need to be relevant and accessible, and the current system for ABFA certification should be addressed. Further, there need to be clearer standards for education and training, which are currently lacking in the discipline.

No other specialization of biological anthropology currently has a certification, or other credentials available to its practitioners. Such credentialing is key as it ensures a minimum standard for individuals who claim to represent a profession. While forensic anthropology has improvements to make, it should act as a model for the professionalization of all specializations within biological anthropology.