

Global Certification

The Difference Between ASCP and ASCPⁱ Certifications and why United States Laboratory Professionals Should Familiarize Themselves With the International Credential

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The international ASCPⁱ certification was designed in recognition of today's global demand for a reliable health care system that will preserve patient safety and will standardize and ensure excellence in laboratory practice throughout the world. International certification is intended to provide medical technologists (MTs, CLTs, BMSs)¹ in foreign countries with the opportunity to distinguish themselves among their peers when competing for laboratory positions in a saturated foreign market. However, due to the biomedical laboratory science workforce shortage in the United States, some ASCPⁱ certificants have decided to investigate how this certification could assist with their immigration efforts. Foreign-trained medical technologists already residing in the United States have also chosen to take the ASCPⁱ examination as opposed to completing the necessary experience requirements or additional training needed to meet eligibility requirements for the United States version of the ASCP BOR examination. As ASCP meets and surpasses goals set for globalization that began in 2006 with the new international designation of ASCPⁱ, United States laboratory directors should educate themselves on this new certification option for internationally-trained applicants.

Before international certification is approved for a particular country, the ASCP Globalization Committee carefully reviews the content and structure of all MT/CLS/BMS programs and determines their equivalence to United States programs. ASCPⁱ certification is only extended

to countries whose educational structures and clinical laboratory programs are comparable with those of the United States. As of April 2007, South Korea and the Philippines are the first 2 countries approved for international certification. Hong Kong, Singapore, and others will follow in the near future. Preliminary discussions have begun in Guyana.

International Categories

- MT(ASCPⁱ)
- MLT(ASCPⁱ)
- MP(ASCPⁱ)
- PBT(ASCPⁱ)

Similarities and Differences: What Laboratory Directors Should be Aware of When Considering an ASCPⁱ-Certified Individual

International eligibility routes are designed to mirror national ASCP eligibility routes as closely as possible; therefore, applicants found eligible for international examination categories are still required to meet a similar high standard. For example, foreign individuals certified as MT(ASCPⁱ) are required to have completed a 4-year degree or the equivalent of a United States bachelor's degree as compared with United States MT(ASCP) applicants. All international examinations, like their United States national counterpart examination, contain 100 questions, are scored by computer adaptive testing (CAT), and have the same time limit restrictions for examination. The integrity of ASCPⁱ examinations is dependent on the security of our international testing centers; for this reason, all

international examinations are administered at ASCP-contracted secure Pearson VUE sites around the world. Comparable with our national United States examinees, international applicants are required to provide two forms of valid identification and an admission letter. They are photographed and fingerprinted at the testing site. ASCPⁱ exams are administered only in English. English is the international language of medicine; moreover, should the individual choose to emigrate to the United States, it is imperative that the candidate demonstrate competence in interpreting English.

The only significant difference between the United States versions of ASCP and ASCPⁱ certification examinations is that international (ASCPⁱ) examinations do not include United States governmental policy and procedure questions (eg, OSHA, CLIA, HIPPA); rather, questions specific to the United States are replaced with international safety questions (from ISO 15189, an internationally-recognized document of medical laboratory standards). Otherwise, all other international examination questions are drawn by the CAT process from the same pool (eg, 1,200 to 1,400 questions used for the United States version of the ASCP BOR examinations). ASCPⁱ certification demonstrates competence that is equivalent to the ASCP-certified individual testing in the United States in each of the other specified areas mandated for competency within the medical laboratory. For a content outline for MT(ASCPⁱ), MLT(ASCPⁱ), and PBT(ASCPⁱ) examinations, go to: www.ascp.org/certification/CertifyingExaminations/international/content.

¹ MT's, Medical Technologists; CLT's, Clinical Laboratory Technologists; and BMS's, Biomedical Laboratory Scientists, are all used to describe the same medical laboratory profession dependent upon location.

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Although the ASCPⁱ examination proves the individual competent in each of the sections of the medical laboratory, it does not require a test of English as a foreign language (TOEFL) score. TOEFL scores are required for immigration purposes through VisaScreen; however, because not all emigrating applicants are required to go through the process of VisaScreen, laboratory directors considering employment of ASCPⁱ-certified applicants are responsible for evaluating the applicant's ability to verbally communicate.

Converting ASCPⁱ Credentials to ASCP Credentials

In recognition of the multitude of similarities between the ASCPⁱ examinations and their United States counterparts, ASCP is preparing a "bridge" examination for ASCPⁱ-certified individuals who

are interested in immigrating to licensure-mandated states. The bridge examination will test solely on the United States-specific governmental policies and procedures not tested on the ASCPⁱ examination—in short, an examination that allows certificants to convert ASCPⁱ to ASCP (after meeting any additional eligibility requirements for the United States). ASCPⁱ applicants who successfully pass this bridge examination will become ASCP certified. A tentative release date of Fall 2007 has been set for the bridge examination.

The practice of individuals certified with the credentials ASCPⁱ abroad as well as the immigration of these internationally-certified individuals to the United States has created a need for a better understanding of this new international designation by educators, practitioners,

and employers within the United States. As the need for health care to be globally competitive evolves and to ensure that only the highest-quality individuals are employed to safeguard patients, ASCP is now providing certification for international laboratory professionals using the time-tested proven gold standard examination questions in an international format with international credentials. The ASCP BOR continues to promote the health and safety of the public by certifying competent laboratory professionals and maintaining a roster of certificants across all borders within the world.

More information on international certification can be found at the international section of the ASCP BOR Web site, www.ascp.org/international ■