ASCP BOARD OF CERTIFICATION

Advancing Military-Trained Laboratory Professionals Through ASCP BOC Credentialing to Improve Patient Care and Workforce Sustainability

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Introduction

Military-trained medical laboratory professionals play a vital role in ensuring diagnostic accuracy and medical readiness across military and civilian healthcare systems. However, despite high levels of training and experience, these professionals often face challenges translating their military education into civilian-recognized credentials, which can limit career advancement and impact workforce stability. The Air Force, Army, and Navy now all require an MLS(ASCP) credential for commissioned officers serving in each service's laboratory manager /director designated career field. Additionally, most major branches of the military recognize American Society for Clinical Pathology Board of Certification (ASCP BOC) credentials as eligible for the Credentialing Opportunities Online (COOL) funding program, which provides up to $2,000 for education and credential-related expenses. Many ASCP BOC credentials qualify for this funding opportunity, reinforcing their role in professional development, retention, and transition planning for military laboratory personnel (**Figure A**).

Methods

This ongoing study addresses the recognition gap for military laboratory personnel through a multi-pronged approach, including collaboration with military and Department of Defense (DOD) stakeholders, analysis of wage and role data from the 2023 ASCP Wage Survey, ASCP BOC examination and credential data, and advocacy for federal policy changes to improve credentialing pathways. Methods include:

- Mapping military laboratory training to ASCP BOC eligibility requirements (**Figure B**).
- Promoting access to ASCP BOC credentials via the COOL program.
- Analyzing 2023 ASCP Wage Survey data for laboratory professionals to assess current occupational roles, education levels, and salary ranges (**Figure C**).
- Incorporating findings from ASCP BOC's advocacy efforts with Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), including the successful 2023 Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA) high-complexity personnel rule changes that expanded degree equivalency options and recognized military laboratory training programs for high-complexity testing eligibility.

These combined efforts aim to enhance the professional mobility of military laboratory professionals within the armed services and during transitions to civilian careers.

Results

Findings from the 2023 ASCP Wage Survey (n = [X]) show that the ASCP BOC is the leading credentialing organization among military laboratory professionals, with 86.9% of respondents holding an ASCP BOC credential. Among these, 44% are in supervisory roles and 51.8% in staff roles (**Figure D**).

In contrast, 13.1% of military personnel hold an American Medical Technologists (AMT) credential—54.2% in supervisory roles and 45.8% in staff roles. Other credentials, such as American Association of Bioanalysts (AAB) and Department of Health Education & Welfare/ Department of Health & Human Services (HEW/HHS), appeared infrequently, underscoring ASCP BOC's clear value (noting that respondents may hold more than one credential, resulting in some overlap among credentialing bodies) (**Figure D**).

This suggests that credentialing opportunities could serve as a catalyst for career progression, enabling these individuals to advance into leadership roles and obtain promotions within the military and DOD systems. Educational attainment among this group primarily includes associate and bachelor's degrees, highlighting the importance of degree equivalency recognition as outlined in the updated 2023 CLIA regulations.

Further, the ASCP BOC's advocacy efforts with CMS, outlined in the 2023 CLIA rule memo, led to critical policy updates that directly impact military laboratory personnel, including:

- Establishing degree equivalency requirements.
- Eliminating physical science as a qualifying degree for high-complexity testing.
- Clarifying training and experience requirements for high-complexity testing.
- Updating degree nomenclature for medical laboratory science.
- Recognizing military laboratory training programs as meeting high-complexity testing personnel requirements.

These policy wins, combined with the military-wide recognition of 22 ASCP BOC credentials through the COOL program, underscore the role of credentialing in supporting career mobility, promotion eligibility, and workforce sustainability for military laboratory professionals.

Figure A: COOL Coverage - ASCP BOC Credentials

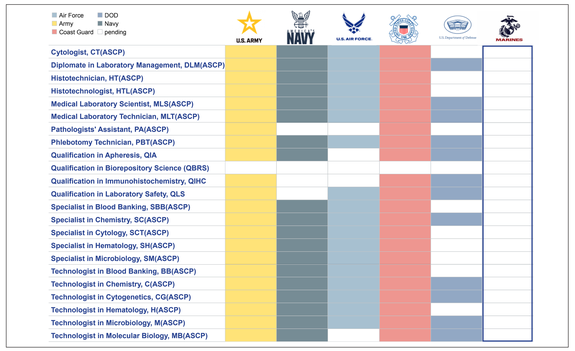


Figure B: Percentage of Examinees per ASCP BOC Military Route MLT and MLS

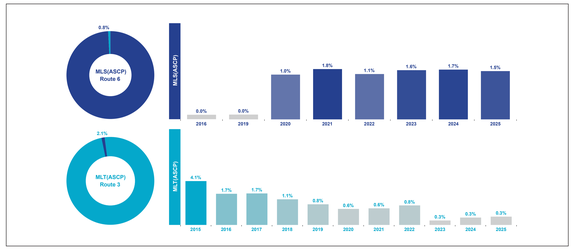


Figure C: Mean Hourly Wage of ASCP BOC Credentialed Professionals vs Non-Credentialed Professionals

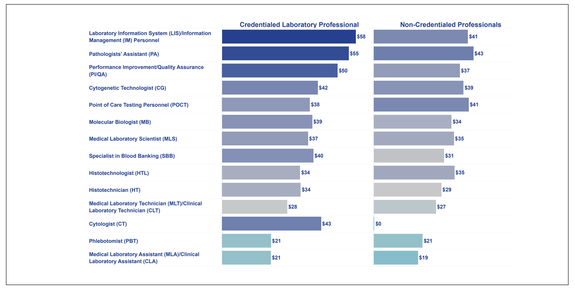
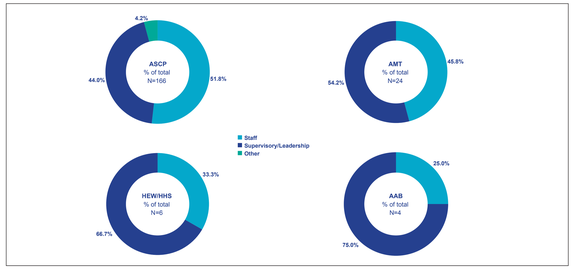


Figure D: Credentialing by Occupational Level - Military Percentages



Conclusion

The integration of ASCP BOC credentials into military career pathways, promotion structures, and the COOL funding program demonstrates significant progress in bridging the gap between military laboratory training and civilian credentialing standards. These early outcomes affirm the value of aligning ASCP BOC credentials with military personnel development strategies, supporting career mobility, credential portability, and long-term workforce stability. Expanding access to credentialing and maintaining ongoing partnerships with military and federal stakeholders will be essential to strengthening the laboratory workforce and ensuring continuity of high-quality diagnostic care across military and civilian healthcare settings.

This work also establishes a foundation for future research opportunities, including evaluating pathways that may have enabled more military applicants to qualify for alternate MLT(ASCP) examination eligibility routes. Additionally, it opens avenues for collaborative advocacy with U.S. Office of Personnel Management to modernize outdated standards and align job classifications, as well as continued engagement with CLIA and CMS to address regulatory barriers affecting military-trained laboratory professionals transitioning to the civilian sector.

650,000+ credentials attained worldwide since 1928

289,000+ MLS(ASCP) credentials attained since 1931

Air Force, Army, and Navy require MLS(ASCP) credentials for commissioned officers

113,000+ MLT(ASCP) credentials attained since 1969