

THE POWER OF CREDENTIALING:

How ASCP BOC Credentials Elevate Student Success at Mass General Brigham)

Jennifer Nicoloro, PhD, MLS(ASCP)^{CM}, is a leader in medical laboratory science education and serves as the Director of the accelerated hospital-based Medical Laboratory Science (MLS) program at Mass General Brigham (MGB). Her work has been instrumental in advancing laboratory medicine education, workforce development, and patient care.

In this interview, Dr. Nicoloro discusses the impactful initiatives she has spearheaded within the MGB MLS program, highlighting the significance of ASCP Board of Certification (BOC) credentialing in student success and professional growth.

In the world of medical laboratory care, ensuring a well-trained and credentialed medical laboratory workforce is critical to patients, laboratory efficiency, and healthcare outcomes. At MGB, one of the nation's premier healthcare institutions, the accelerated hospital-based MLS training program is making a significant impact in workforce development and student success. A key factor in this success is the synergy between students and ASCP BOC credentials.

A Program with a Mission

Launched in response to national and local staffing shortages, the MGB MLS program provides intensive education and hands-on training in just 10 months. Backed by the Mass General Brigham Pathology Department, the program is deeply invested in preparing the next generation of medical laboratory scientists. According to Dr. Nicoloro, the overarching goal is clear: "We want all of our graduates to sit for the exam, pass it, and secure meaningful jobs in the field."

ASCP BOC Credentials: A Pathway to Excellence for Faculty & Students

ASCP BOC credentials are an integral part of MGB's medical laboratory career pathway. Credentialing is not just encouraged; it is a requirement for career progression. "At MGB, credentialing through the ASCP BOC is required for mobility up the career ladder. If you want to move up into senior positions or more technical roles, you need to be credentialed," Dr. Nicoloro explains.

Since launching the MLS generalist program in January 2023, MGB has integrated credentialing preparation into the curriculum to ensure students are ready to sit for their exams immediately after graduation. Through rigorous training—

including theoretical instruction, practical laboratory sessions, clinical rotations, and weekly multiple-choice assessments that mirror the BOC exam format—the structured approach has resulted in high credentialing success rates and seamless workforce integration. To date, MGB has graduated three cohorts totaling 20 students, with 18 taking the MLS(ASCP) exam within their first year post-graduation. Of these, 17 successfully passed, achieving a 94% pass rate. Additionally, MGB maintains a 100% job placement rate, with more than 80% of graduates employed within the MGB system.

Transforming Student and Workforce Success

The value of ASCP BOC credentials extends far beyond passing an exam. Dr. Nicoloro emphasizes that credentialed graduates enter the workforce with a high level of competence and confidence. "Employers know that hiring an ASCP BOC credentialed laboratory professional means getting someone who is ready to perform on day one. Credentialing proves that an individual has the necessary knowledgebase and hands-on skills to excel in the field."

The success of the program is evident. Since its inception, the MGB MLS program has helped reduce vacancy rates across the health system. It offers an internal categorical training program for current MGB employees who meet CLIA high-complexity testing requirements but lack credentialing. These employees receive structured training to prepare for their categorical credentialing exams, allowing them to move up further along in their career pathways. One standout success story involved a chemistry categorical student who transitioned from an entry-level role to a senior technical position within six months of obtaining ASCP BOC credentials.

Service to Patients and the Healthcare Field

Ultimately, credentialed laboratory professionals contribute to the highest standards of patient care. "Laboratory professionals play a critical role in healthcare decisions, and ensuring they are credentialed means ensuring that patients receive accurate and timely diagnoses," says Dr. Nicoloro. The MGB MLS program also promotes early awareness of the field through its Junior Laboratory Ambassadors (JLab) Program, introducing high school students to careers in laboratory medicine. This initiative ensures that the next generation of medical laboratory professionals understands the importance of laboratory science and credentialing from an early stage.

Looking Ahead: Strengthening Credentialing and Career Pathways

The success of the MGB MLS program has prompted discussions on expanding training opportunities to include phlebotomy and histotechnology, areas where credentialing and career advancement are equally essential. MGB is also focused on supporting continuing maintenance of credentials (i.e., Credential Maintenance Program [CMP] renewal), ensuring that laboratory professionals stay current with industry standards and best practices.

“Our system values and invests in credentialed professionals because we see the difference they make,” Dr. Nicoloro states. “Credentialing is not just a milestone—it’s a foundation for career growth, professional credibility, and, most importantly, patient safety.”

For aspiring medical laboratory professionals, earning an ASCP BOC credential isn’t just a step forward—it’s a transformative milestone that paves the way for a rewarding career and a stronger medical laboratory system.

About Jennifer Nicoloro, PhD, MLS(ASCP)^{CM}

Dr. Jennifer Nicoloro is an accomplished medical laboratory science educator with over a decade of experience in both academic and clinical settings. As the Director of the MGB MLS program, she has been instrumental in advancing workforce development through hands-on education and career pathway initiatives. Her leadership has led to the establishment of a fully accredited training program, the creation of a dedicated laboratory training space, and the implementation of initiatives such as the JLab Program and workforce development grants. With a strong commitment to fostering the next generation of laboratory professionals, Dr. Nicoloro continues to shape the future of laboratory medicine through innovation, education, and advocacy.

Jennifer Nicoloro, PhD, MLS(ASCP)^{CM}, Director of the accelerated hospital-based Medical Laboratory Science (MLS) program at Massachusetts (Mass) General Brigham (MGB)



WHAT IS PDAC?

The Program Director’s Advisory Committee (PDAC), made up of volunteers with several years of program experience, manages the [ASCP BOC Program Director’s Facebook page](#). This is a group for Program Directors, educators, faculty, and education and clinical coordinators, of National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Sciences (NAACLS), Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP), and Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools (ABHES) accredited programs whose students seek ASCP BOC credentials. In addition to managing this Facebook group, PDAC hosts live events that focus on “hot topics” in the field of education and laboratory sciences and provides networking opportunities. Watch the Facebook group, the ASCP BOC social media channels, and your email for additional details about these offerings.

The cover of the "Program Director's Guide to Certification" booklet. The top half features the ASCP BOC logo (a circular emblem with "ASCP" and "BOC" inside) and the text "ASCP BOARD OF CERTIFICATION®". The bottom half has a white background with a blue and green diagonal graphic. The title "PROGRAM DIRECTOR'S GUIDE TO CERTIFICATION" is centered in blue capital letters. At the very bottom, a blue bar contains the text "Group by ASCP Board of Certification".