Basic Guide to Credentialing Terminology

Joan Knapp, Larry Fabrey, Mickie Rops, Nancy McCurry

October 2006

Institute for Credentialing Excellence™

ICE Board of Directors and NCCA Commissioners

ICE Board Of Directors

President
Cynthia Durley, M.Ed., MBA
Executive Director, Dental Assisting National Board

President-Elect
Francine Butler, Ph.D., CAE
Executive Director, Biofeedback Certification Institute of America

Immediate-Past President
William Kersten
Senior Vice President, Operations, National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence

Secretary/Treasurer
Margaret Gallagher
Board Member, Certification Board of Infection Control and Epidemiology, Inc.

NCCA Chair
Lawrence J. Fabrey, Ph.D.
Vice President, Measurement Research
Applied Measurement Professionals, Inc.

Sustaining Member
Richard Goldberg, Esq
Principal, Richard Goldberg & Associates

Elected Board Members
Christopher Damon, J.D.
Executive Director, American Medical Technologists

Carol Hartigan, RN, MA
Certification Director
American Association of Critical Care Nurses Certification Corporation

J. David M. Rozsa, ACA
Manager, Education & Certification
National Concrete Masonry Association

Ex Officio Member
Jim Kendzel
Executive Director
Institute for Credentialing Excellence

NCCA Commissioners

Chair
Lawrence J. Fabrey, Ph.D.
Vice President, Measurement Research
Applied Measurement Professionals, Inc.

Co-Chair
Cynthia Miller Murphy, RN, MSN, CAE
Executive Director
Oncology Nursing Certification Corporation

ICE Board Appointee
William Kersten
Senior Vice President, Operations
National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence

NCCA Appointees
Reed A. Castle, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Development
Schroeder Measurement Technologies, Inc.

Paul D. Naylor, Ph.D.
Psychometric Consultant

Elected Commissioners
Lynn Anderson
Executive Director
Joint Commission on Allied Health Personnel in Ophthalmology

Ida Darragh
Director of Testing, North American Registry of Midwives

Denise Fandel, MS, ATC
Executive Director, Board of Certification, Inc.

Jan Towers, Ph.D., NP-C, CRNP
Director
American Academy of Nurse Practitioners Certification Program

Public Member
Rebecca LeBuhn
Chair, Board of Directors, Citizen Advocacy Center

General Counsel
Philip O'Neill
Jacobsen Holman PLLC

Introduction

The Institute for Credentialing Excellence (ICE, formerly NOCA) has as its mission to promote excellence in competency assessment for practitioners in all professions and occupations. One way in which ICE intends to accomplish that mission is to provide resources for ICE members and the general public, to further an understanding of the intended purposes of credentialing programs and to help differentiate among various types of programs.

Credentialing programs can serve many purposes, but the ultimate purpose of most credentialing programs is **protection of the public**. This public protection is normally provided through establishing standards, identifying the competencies needed in the profession, and providing information to consumers about the individuals who have demonstrated a sufficient level of mastery related to the competencies. Since the primary purpose of this document to clarify terms, it may be helpful for the reader to understand that credentialing is an umbrella term that includes the concepts of accreditation, licensure, registration, and professional certification.

The intent of this document is to clarify terms that are used in relation to programs that are used to grant formal recognition to individuals or entities in what can be described as a credentialing process. This basic guide combines definitions from two sources:

The Glossary from the *National Commission for Certifying Agencies Standards for the Accreditation of Certification Programs*, approved in 2002 and published in 2004 by the Institute for Credentialing Excellence (ICE), hereafter referred to as the *2004 Standards Glossary*

The ICE Guide to Understanding Credentialing Concepts, primary author Cynthia C. Durley, M.Ed., MBA, published by the Institute for Credentialing Excellence, hereafter referred to as the *2005 ICE Guide*

This basic guide is intended to provide a brief resource for any interested reader; those who are interested in the credentialing process are advised to consult the two resource documents for more complete information. In addition, interested readers are encouraged to investigate the advantages of membership and participation in ICE. The definitions in this basic guide are primarily drawn from the *2004 Standards Glossary* as approved by ICE; those that were originally defined as a part of the *2005 ICE Guide* are identified.

Terminology

Accommodation—
A reasonable modification in an assessment instrument or its administration made to compensate for the effects of a qualified disability without altering the purpose of the assessment instrument.

Accountability—
Responsibility of a certification board, governing committee, or other sponsor of a certification program to its stakeholders to demonstrate the efficacy and fairness of certification policies, procedures, and assessment instruments.

Accreditation—
1. General use: Approval of an educational program according to defined standards.
2. As related to NCCA: Status awarded to a certification program that has demonstrated compliance with the *Standards for the Accreditation of Certification Programs* set forth by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies.
3. From the *2005 ICE Guide*: The voluntary process by which a nongovernmental agency grants a time-limited recognition to an institution, organization, business, or other entity after verifying that it has met predetermined and standardized criteria. *2005 ICE Guide.*

Administrative Independence—
An organizational structure for the governance of a certification program that ensures control over all essential certification and recertification decisions without being subject to approval by or undue influence from any other body. See Autonomy.

Applicant—
An individual who declares interest in earning a credential offered by a certification program, usually through a request for information and the submission of materials. See Candidate.

Assessment Instruments—
Any one of several standardized methods for determining if candidates possess the necessary knowledge and/or skill related to the purpose of the certification.

Autonomy—
Control over all essential certification and recertification decisions without being subject to approval by or undue influence from any other body. Autonomy in the management and administration of certification enhances the ability of certification programs to serve stakeholder interests, primarily those of consumers of professional services. See Administrative Independence.

Bias—
IN THE CONTEXT OF SCORING: a systematic error in a score on an assessment instrument.

IN THE CONTEXT OF EXAMINATION FAIRNESS: may refer to the inappropriateness of content in the
assessment instrument, either in terms of its irrelevance, overemphasis, or exclusion.

IN THE CONTEXT OF ELIGIBILITY AND RECERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS: may refer to the inappropriateness or irrelevance of requirements for certification or recertification if they are not reasonable prerequisites for competence in a profession, occupation, role, or skill. See Fairness.

Candidate—
An individual who has met the eligibility qualifications for, but has not yet earned, a credential awarded through a certification program. See Applicant.

Certificant—
1. An individual who has earned a credential awarded through a certification program. *2004 Standard Glossary*
2. The holder of a professional certification. *2005 ICE Guide*

Certificate program –
A training program on a topic for which participants receive a certificate after attendance and/ or completion of the coursework. Some programs also require successful demonstration of attainment of the course objectives. One who completes a professional certificate program is known as a **certificate holder.**   A credential is usually NOT granted at the completion of a certificate program. There are three types of certificate programs: **knowledge-based certificate, curriculum based certificate,** and **certificate of attendance or participation.** *2005 ICE Guide.*

Certificate of attendance or participation –
Issued after an individual attends or participates in a particular meeting or course. Usually, there is no knowledge assessed prior to issuing this type of certificate. A certificate of attendance or participation is **not a credential**, because the recipients are not required to demonstrate competence according to professional or trade standards. *2005 ICE Guide* driven process, based on existing legal and psychometric requirements. (This is the definition of 'professional certification' in the 2005 ICE Guide.)

Certification—
1. A process, often voluntary, by which individuals who have demonstrated the level of knowledge and skill required in the profession, occupation, role, or skill are identified to the public and other stakeholders. *2004 Standards Glossary .*
2. The voluntary process by which a non-governmental entity grants a time –limited recognition and use of a credential to an individual after verifying that he or she has met predetermined and standardized criteria. It is the vehicle that a profession or occupation uses to differentiate among its members, using standards, sometimes developed through a consensus-driven process, based on existing legal and psychometric requirements. (This is the definition of 'professional certification' in the *2005 ICE Guide.*)

Certification Agency—
The organizational or administrative unit that offers and/or operates a certification program.

Certification Board—
A group of individuals appointed or elected to govern one or more certification programs as well as the certification agency, and responsible for all certification decision making, including governance.

Certification Committee—
A group of individuals appointed or elected to recommend and implement policy related to certification program operation. (See governing committee.)

Certification Program—
The standards, policies, procedures, assessment instruments, and related products and activities through which individuals are publicly identified as qualified in a profession, occupation, role, or skill.

Commentary—
Comments, remarks, and observations that clarify terms, provide examples of practice that help explain a standard, or offer suggestions regarding evidence that must be documented to demonstrate compliance.

Content Domains—
The set of organized categories characterizing subject matter under which knowledge and skills may be represented in specifications for assessment instruments.

Consumer—
See "Public Member."

Continuing Competence—
The ability to provide service at specified levels of knowledge and skill, not only at the time of initial certification but throughout an individual's professional career. See Recertification and Continuing Education.

Credentialing –
The umbrella term that includes the concepts of accreditation, licensure, registration, and professional certification. Credentialing can establish criteria for fairness, quality, competence, and/or safety for professional services provided by authorized individuals, for products, or for educational endeavors. Credentialing is the process by which an entity, authorized and qualified to do so, grants formal recognition to, or records the recognition status of individuals, organizations, institutions, programs, processes, services, or products that meet predetermined and standardized criteria. *2005 ICE Guide.*

Curriculum based certificate –
Issued after an individual completes a course or series of courses and passes an assessment instrument. The content of the assessment is limited to the course content, and therefore, may not be completely representative of professional practice (and therefore it is not as defensible to use this or the knowledge-based type of certificate for regulatory purposes as compared to a professional certification). *2005 ICE Guide.*

Cut Score—
A specific score on an assessment instrument or instruments at or above which passing decisions are made and below which failing decisions are made.

Discipline—
A formal, published process for the enforcement of standards governing the professional behavior (i.e., ethics) of certificants.

Eligibility Requirements—
Published criteria, often benchmarks for education, training, and experience, with which applicants must demonstrate compliance in order to qualify for certification.

Equating—
A statistical process used to convert scores on two or more alternate forms of an assessment instrument to a common score for purposes of comparability and equivalence.

Essential Element—
A statement that is directly related to a Standard and specifies what a certification program must do to fulfill the requirement of the Standard.

Fairness—

The principle that all applicants and candidates will be treated in an equitable manner throughout the entire certification process. See Bias.

Grandfathering—

The process by which individuals are granted certification without being required to meet a formal examination requirement. This process is frequently invoked when a certification program is initiated, as a way of recognizing the experience and expertise of long-term experts, and/or to allow grandfathered individuals to develop the initial form(s) of the certification examination. Individuals initially certified through grandfathering may, in the future, be required to pass a form of the certification examination they did not participate in developing in order to maintain certification.

Governing Committee—

A group of individuals appointed or elected to formulate and implement policy related to certification program operation. The NCCA uses this term to denote those committees that are given complete authority over all essential certification decisions.

Incorporation Status—

Legal recognition granted by states to organizations; determines IRS classification as for-profit or nonprofit.

Item—

A general term referring to problems and/or questions that appear in assessment instruments and to which candidates must respond.

Item Bank—

The system by which test items are maintained, stored, and classified to facilitate item review, item development, and examination assembly.

Item Type or Format—

The structure of a problem or question in an assessment instrument (i.e., multiple choice, open-ended).

Job/Practice Analysis/Role Delineation Study—

Any of several methods used singly or in combination to identify the performance domains and associated tasks, knowledge, and/or skills relating to the purpose of the credential and providing the basis for validation.

Knowledge-based certificate –
Recognizes a relatively narrow scope of specialized knowledge use in performing duties or tasks required by a certain profession or occupation. This certificate is issued after the individual passes an assessment instrument. *2005 ICE Guide.*

Licensure –
The mandatory process by which a governmental agency grants time-limited permission to an individual to engage in a give occupation after verifying that he/she has met predetermined and standardized criteria, and offers title protection for those who meet the criteria. *2005 ICE Guide.*

Parent Organization—
The legal entity under which a certification program is established when the certification program is governed as part of a larger organization.

Performance Domains—
The set of organized categories characterizing a role or job under which tasks and associated knowledge and/or skills may be represented in the job/practice analysis.

Psychometrics –
The science and technology of mental measurement, including psychology, behavioral science, education, statistics, and information technology. *2005 ICE Guide.*

Psychometrician-
A practitioner of psychometrics; an individual who normally holds a doctoral degree in measurement or a discipline of psychology (such as educational or industrial/organizational psychology) who can understand, apply, and describe the science and technology of mental measurement. Based on *2005 ICE Guide* definition of Psychometrics.

Public Member—
A representative of the consumers of services provided by a defined certificant population, serving as a voting member on the governing body of a certification program.
See also "Consumer."

Publish—
Make available in hardcopy, electronic, or web-based formats and easily accessible and available on request. The degree of accessibility may be a function of the level of confidentiality of the information.

Recertification—
Requirements and procedures established as part of a certification program that certificants must meet in order to ensure continuing competence and renew their certification. See Continuing Competence and Continuing Education.

Registration –
1. The governmental process by which a governmental agency grants a time-limited status on a registry, determined by specified knowledge-based requirements (e.g., experience, education, examinations), thereby authorizing those individual's to practice, similar to licensure. Its purpose is to maintain a continuous record of past and current occupational status of that individual, and to provide title protection. *2005 ICE Guide*
2. A listing of practitioners maintained by a governmental entity, without educational, experiential, or competency-based requirements; for example, maintaining a list of practitioners on a state 'registry.' *2005 ICE Guide*
3. A professional designation defined by a governmental entity in professional regulations or rules. However, the governmental regulatory body does into itself maintain a listing or registry of those who purport to meet registration requirements. Verification and authentication of such individuals are left to the employer of the individual claiming to be registered. *2005 ICE Guide*

Reliability—
The degree to which the scores on an assessment instrument are free of measurement error.

Role—
A more specific or narrower set of knowledge and skills than may be encompassed by the term *profession* or *occupation*, and may also be the focus of certification for a particular product or service to the public.

Self-Assessment—
A process by which an assessment instrument is self-administered for the specific purpose of providing performance feedback rather than a pass/fail decision.

Stakeholders—
The various groups with an interest in the quality, governance, and operation of a certification program, such as the public, certificants, candidates, employers, customers, clients, and third party payers.

Standard—
An accreditation requirement that must be met by a certification program submitting an application to the National Commission for Certifying Agencies.

Standardization—
IN THE CONTEXT OF ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS: ensuring that the process is conducted according to a specified plan in order to provide the same conditions for all candidates.

IN THE CONTEXT OF SCORING: ensuring that candidate responses are judged using predefined criteria in order to provide a consistent basis for evaluating all candidates.

Technical Report—
A summary of psychometric procedures and their results as implemented in the assessment instruments used in a certification program, often addressing such issues as content validity, item writing, test assembly, reliability analysis, cut score development, scoring, and equating.

Undue influence—
Control of decision making over essential certification policy and procedures by stakeholders or other groups outside the autonomous governance structure of a certification program.

Validity—
The degree to which accumulated evidence supports specific interpretations of all components of a certification program (e.g., education, experience, and assessment instruments).