

American Fisheries Society: Revised Professional Certification Program

Introduction

A fisheries professional is an individual with specialized education in the sciences and technologies involving the structure, dynamics, and interactions of habitat, aquatic organisms, and humans. He or she may be a generalist in fisheries resource management or a specialist in one or more allied disciplines, such as aquatic biology, limnology, oceanography, aquaculture, biometrics, physiology, pathology, genetics, economics, and engineering among others. Although areas of specialization may be varied, the individual's professional responsibilities must involve fish. Fisheries professionals are dedicated to high quality service and the achievement of specific goals and objectives. They promote conservation-- optimization of benefits for society while maintaining the integrity, diversity, and sustainability of aquatic systems--through research, education, management, and administration. Fisheries professionals strive for high standards of competence and integrity in order to establish mutual confidence and respect and to bring credit to their profession, employer, and community.

Certification is widely practiced by the professions as one means of setting standards and guidelines for professional competence. It serves to upgrade the professional image and is a mark of accomplishment. Certification also is a mechanism to demonstrate responsible peer evaluation. The specific objectives of certification are as follows: (1) to provide governmental and nongovernmental agencies and organizations, private firms, courts, and the general public with a definitive standard of experience and education for fisheries professionals; and (2) to foster broader recognition of fisheries professionals as well-educated and experienced, acting in the best interest of the public.

The American Fisheries Society has worked to advance conservation of fishes and aquatic resources in North America for more than a century. With more than 8,000 members, the society promotes educational, scientific, and technological development of all facets of fisheries science and management.

Certification Description

The American Fisheries Society (AFS) offers professional certification to anyone who meets specific education and experience requirements. Three tiers of certifications are available:

Tier I - Fisheries Professional Associate (FP-A) - an applicant who satisfies coursework degree requirements (indicated below) but has insufficient or no experience may become an Associate Fisheries Professional;

Tier II - Fisheries Professional Certified (FP-C) - in addition to satisfying coursework and degree requirements, an applicant must have the requisite number of years of qualifying experience and the requisite number of professional development quality points (PDQPs) to become a Certified Fisheries Professional;

Tier III - Fisheries Professional Emeritus (FP-E) - an applicant who has held the FP-C designation for at least twenty (20) years (need not be consecutive) and is employed less than full time or is retired, may become a Fisheries Professional Emeritus (FP-E). This allows them to maintain their FP-C status without the renewal requirement.

Although the same application form is used for FP-A or FP-C, applicants must designate their choice of the certification for which they are applying. If uncertain (because of coursework variances, questions about qualifying/non-qualifying experience, professional development, etc.) as to the tier for which they qualify, a third choice may be indicated. This choice means

that the applicant accepts the level of certification (FP-A or FP-C) granted by the AFS after its review.

There is a separate application for FP-E. Applicants for FP-E must verify their employment status and information on their status as FP-C.

Associate Fisheries Professional certification may be retained for a maximum of eight (8) years, at which time the requirements for a Certified Fisheries Professional must be met and applied for in order to retain any AFS certification. The FP-A must submit a new application with all requested information, with the exception of the course list and transcripts (unless further education has been acquired).

Certification renewal was added to the program with the 1998 revision. To retain competency in any field, professionals must remain active in that field and stay abreast of current developments. Most other professional fields that have a certification or licensing program require periodic recertification to demonstrate continued professional competency. Therefore, through renewal, certified fisheries professionals are required to demonstrate continued enhancement of knowledge and skills throughout their career. Every five years an FP-C must submit evidence of continued activity and professional development to maintain their certification.

Minimum Degree and Experience Requirements for Certified Fisheries Professionals

The number of years of full-time qualifying experience required is dependent on the highest level of education acquired by the applicant.

<u>Degree</u>	<u>Experience Requirements</u>
Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Arts or equivalent degree	five years of full-time qualifying experience, post-bachelor's degree.
Master of Science, Master of Arts or equivalent degree	four years of full-time qualifying experience, post-bachelor's degree.
Doctor of Philosophy or equivalent degree	two years of full-time qualifying experience, post-bachelor's degree.

Qualifying experience is that in which the candidate applies current knowledge in the fisheries sciences within the context of fisheries management, research, education, or administration. Qualifying experience generally requires that the candidate use independent judgment and action. Because the fisheries profession is so varied in specialization, identifying qualifying experience cannot be easily generalized. Below are types and examples of qualifying experience in each area:

Management involves the application of fisheries science principles (e.g. population dynamics, aquatic biology, limnology, habitat assessment and manipulation, human dimensions, fish culture, biometrics) toward the accomplishment of specific fisheries management goals and objectives. The candidate should have responsible charge or supervision over the planning, implementation, and assessment of projects. Responsible charge or supervision is defined as the direction of work such that the successful completion of the work is dependent on decisions made by the professional with limited oversight, direction, or approval of others. Projects include recreational and commercial fisheries investigations and management, fish culture, environmental assessment, habitat restoration or enhancement, and fish disease management. Qualifying experience requires that the candidate use independent judgment and action.

Research involves responsible charge or supervision of field or laboratory fisheries research projects. Qualifying experience includes oversight responsibility for design, implementation,

analysis, and report writing. Research projects should either be published in a recognized peer reviewed journal or used by the employer for the purpose of improved scientific methodology, regulatory decision-making, or resource management practices.

Education involves college-level teaching of various facets of fisheries management, research, and administration. Education may also involve development and delivery of educational programs in fisheries for dissemination to the general public or particular stakeholders.

Administration involves direct-line authority over other fisheries professionals engaged in activities or programmatic responsibilities over activities that qualify for certification described under headings of management, research, and education given above. Candidates must have responsibility and decision-making authority of such magnitude as district, regional, statewide, or national fisheries programs. Independent judgment and consequences of actions must be present.

Education Requirements (Required for FP-A and FP-C status)

Subject Area	Graduate before July 1, 2002*	Graduate after July 1, 2002
A. Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences.	Four (4) courses; two of which must be directly related to fisheries science.	Four (4) courses; two of which must be directly related to fisheries science and at least one must cover principles of fisheries science and management. 12 semester or 18 quarter hours
B. Other Biological Sciences.	When added to the above courses must total 30 semester or 45 quarter hours.	When added to the above courses must total 30 semester or 45 quarter hours.
C. Physical Sciences.	Must total 15 semester or 22 quarter hours.	Must total 15 semester or 22 quarter hours.
D. Mathematics and Statistics.	Must include college algebra or calculus and one course in statistics.	Must include one calculus and one statistics or two statistics courses.
E. Communications.	6 semester or 9 quarter hours. Must total 6 semester hours.	6 semester or 9 quarter hours. Must total 9 semester or 13 quarter hours. Three semester or five quarter hours may be taken in communication intensive courses if officially designated as such by the college or university.
F. Human Dimensions.		6 semester or 9 quarter hours

* The revised educational requirements for certification apply to those who complete their B.S./ B.A. (or equivalent) degree on or after July 1, 2002. Those who graduated prior to that date will be evaluated based on the earlier criteria regardless of when they apply for certification. Those graduating on or after July 1, 2002 may only apply under the new criteria. Applicants who graduated prior to July 1,2002 may choose to apply under either criteria. In no case may applicants select parts from each system.

A minimum grade of C is required to receive credit. If courses are taken as pass/fail (S/N or P/F), the applicant must provide a course syllabus that indicates that an S or P grade is equivalent to a C or better.

Because university programs at non-U.S. institutions sometimes differ in the structure of their courses and curricula, applicants with courses from such institutions will be evaluated on an individual basis. There may be occasions when the Certification Board will not be able to accept these courses from non-U.S. institutions.

Individuals who have established themselves as active fisheries professionals may become Certified Fisheries Professionals without satisfying the minimum course requirements. In such cases, qualification for the FP-C is based solely on experience and professional development. The experience requirement is five years of full-time qualifying experience with a Ph.D. (or equivalent), seven years with an M.S. or M.A. (or equivalent) or nine years with a B.S. or B.A. (or equivalent). The professional development requirement is 40 PDQPs over the previous two years or 100 PDQPs over the five years prior to application. The education-dependent experience requirement was implemented July 1, 1998, before then it required 20 years of full-time qualifying experience to waive coursework requirements.

* this information was obtained from the American Fisheries Society website (www.fisheries.org)