

Path to and Benefits of Board Certification in Forensic Psychology

Danielle Rynczak, JD, PsyD, ABPP



In 2016, four years after graduating with my doctorate in clinical psychology, I obtained my board certification in forensic psychology. To be honest, the path was cobblestoned with sacrifice; it was long, challenging, and arduous. While colleagues were enjoying their first taste of freedom from being a student and trainee, I took part in yet another round of interviews and participated in yet another match process to secure a postdoctoral fellowship. I sacrificed a higher paying job, when I moved to the fifth state in my educational career to participate in a year-long postdoctoral residency in forensic psychology. And then during my first formal job outside of training, I spent the first two years interlibrary loan requesting articles and books the forensic board recommends in preparation for the written examination because, as an early career psychologist, I could not justify spending so much money on supplies. I did not have a mentor who was boarded so there were no wise words to guide me, and when I turned down social activities to focus on outlining readings and studying, there was no boarded mentor to encourage me. Yet, with hard work, I passed through the stages; first, I passed the written examination. Soon after I submitted writing samples

which were approved. Due to a long line of applicants, I was initially going to have to wait almost a year to take my oral exam, only to be surprised with an invitation to take it earlier when someone withdrew. And I passed! Despite the sacrifices made and time spent, the benefits far outweigh the now seemingly insignificant missed social opportunities. Board certification was likely the best career decision I made and the biggest steppingstone in my career as a forensic psychologist.

First, as a board certified forensic psychologist you are awarded with membership to an exclusive listserv where you can learn from, share ideas with, and pose questions to, what we boarded forensic psychologists affectionally call the “brain trust,” or the most brilliant members of our field - with the likes of Dave Matteo, Randy Otto, Barry Rosenfield, and Joel Dvoskin, to name a few, - welcoming you as a colleague, and willing to provide consultation, guidance, mentorship, words of wisdom, and practical resources. The comradery, the respect, and the knowledge shared is invaluable, and truly one of the best environments for an early career psychologist.

Second, jobs and opportunities abound. Board certified colleagues are often willing to refer clients/cases to other boarded forensic psychologists because the certification speaks to one’s credibility, substantive and procedural knowledge, expertise, professionalism, and hardworking nature. Despite being new to the field, I was referred cases that allowed me to maintain a small private practice in addition to my full-time job. Within years, Ira Packer, a giant in our field, offered me a position at the University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School. Staff trusted that with my board certification I would easily be able to transition from juvenile to adult evaluations and have valuable expertise to serve as faculty in one of the longest continuous APA accredited internship programs. I have also had an opportunity to teach residents, forensic psychiatry fellows, and forensic postdoctoral fellows. Being boarded translated to a very easy inter-state professional license transition and allowed me to forego some aspects of the Massachusetts state specific certification process to become a forensic examiner. Other doors that I thought would be closed to an early career psychologist were opened to me, including committee work, invitations to provide local and national trainings, and offers to collaborate on projects and scholarly work.

Finally, my board certification has given me confidence. As an early career psychologist, one can be burdened by a sense of overwhelm, and the nagging imposter syndrome, especially in forensic psychology where your work is submitted as evidence and scrutinized by opponents in an adversarial system. My confidence grew exponentially as the opportunities I was granted led to my earning a professional early career achievement award, serving as an early career ambassador in forensic psychology for the American Board of Professional Psychology, and volunteering as a mentor for the American Board of Forensic Psychology. If one is even considering this process, take a chance. There are now scholarships that reimburse costs for early career psychologists, as well as diversity scholarships, and many mentors, including myself, who can serve to guide and encourage you on your journey. You will have no regrets.



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