

**27 NCAC 01D .1720      MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR CERTIFICATION OF SPECIALISTS**

(a) To qualify for certification as a specialist, a lawyer applicant must pay any required fee, comply with the following minimum standards, and meet any other standards established by the board for the particular area of specialty.

- (1) The applicant must be licensed in a jurisdiction of the United States for at least five years immediately preceding his or her application and must be licensed in North Carolina for at least three years immediately preceding his or her application. The applicant must be currently in good standing to practice law in this state and the applicant's disciplinary record with the courts, the North Carolina State Bar, and any other government licensing agency must support qualification in the specialty.
- (2) The applicant must make a satisfactory showing according to objective and verifiable standards, as determined by the board after advice from the appropriate specialty committee, of substantial involvement in the specialty during the five calendar years immediately preceding the calendar year of application. Such substantial involvement shall be defined as to each specialty from a consideration of its nature, complexity, and differences from other fields and from consideration of the kind and extent of effort and experience necessary to demonstrate competence in that specialty. It is a measurement of actual experience within the particular specialty according to any of several standards. It may be measured by the time spent on legal work within the areas of the specialty, the number or type of matters handled within a certain period of time or any combination of these or other appropriate factors. However, within each specialty, experience requirements should be measured by objective standards. In no event should they be either so restrictive as to unduly limit certification of lawyers as specialists or so lax as to make the requirement of substantial involvement meaningless as a criterion of competence. Substantial involvement may vary from specialty to specialty, but, if measured on a time-spent basis, in no event shall the time spent in practice in the specialty be less than 25 percent of the total practice of a lawyer engaged in a normal full-time practice. Reasonable and uniform practice equivalents may be established including, but not limited to, successful pursuit of an advance educational degree, teaching, judicial, government, or corporate legal experience.
- (3) The applicant must make a satisfactory showing, as determined by the board after advice from the appropriate specialty committee, of continuing legal education in the specialty accredited by the board for the specialty, the minimum being an average of 12 hours of credit for continuing legal education, or its equivalent, for each of the three calendar years immediately preceding application. Upon establishment of a new specialty, this standard may be satisfied in such manner as the board, upon advice from the appropriate specialty committee, may prescribe or may be waived if, and to the extent, creditable continuing legal education courses have not been available during the three years immediately preceding establishment of the specialty.
- (4) The applicant must make a satisfactory showing, as determined by the board after advice from the appropriate specialty committee, of qualification in the specialty through peer review. The applicant must provide, as references, the names of at least ten lawyers, all of whom are licensed and currently in good standing to practice law in this state, or in any state, or judges, who are familiar with the competence and qualification of the applicant as a specialist. None of the references may be persons related to the applicant or, at the time of application, a partner of or otherwise associated with the applicant in the practice of law. The applicant by his or her application consents to confidential inquiry by the board or appropriate disciplinary body and other persons regarding the applicant's competence and qualifications to be certified as a specialist. An applicant must receive a minimum of five favorable peer reviews to be considered by the board for compliance with this standard.
  - (A) Each specialty committee shall evaluate the information provided by an applicant's references to make a recommendation to the board as to the applicant's qualification in the specialty through peer review. The evaluation shall include a determination of the weight to be given to each peer review and shall take into consideration a reference's years of practice, primary practice areas and experience in the specialty, and the context in which a reference knows the applicant.
- (5) The applicant must achieve a satisfactory score on a written examination designed to test the applicant's knowledge and ability in the specialty for which certification is applied. The examination must be applied uniformly to all applicants within each specialty area. The board shall assure that the contents and grading of the examination are designed to produce a uniform level of competence among the various specialties.

(b) All matters concerning the qualification of an applicant for certification, including, but not limited to, applications, references, tests and test scores, files, reports, investigations, hearings, findings, recommendations, and adverse determinations shall be confidential so far as is consistent with the effective administration of this plan, fairness to the applicant and due process of law.

(c) The board may adopt uniform rules waiving the requirements of Rules .1720(a)(4) and (5) above for members of a specialty committee, including advisory members, at the time that the initial written examination for that specialty or any subspecialty of the specialty is given, and permitting said members to file applications to become a board certified specialist in that specialty upon compliance with all other required minimum standards for certification of specialists.

(d) Upon written request of the applicant and with the recommendation of the appropriate specialty committee, the board may for good cause shown waive strict compliance with the criteria relating to substantial involvement, continuing legal education, or peer review, as those requirements are set forth in the standards for certification for specialization. However, there shall be no waiver of the requirements that the applicant pass a written examination and be licensed to practice law in North Carolina for five years preceding the application.

*History Note: Authority G.S. 84-23;*

*Readopted Eff. December 8, 1994;*

*Amended Eff. August 27, 2013; August 23, 2012; March 8, 2012; March 10, 2011; March 3, 2005.*