



D33 Forensic Science Continuing Education in the Classroom

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The goal of this presentation is to discuss the content and experience of providing longstanding continuing education to the adult public in forensic science and serve as a starting point concerning forensic science education in adult classrooms in their jurisdictions.

There is current widespread educational interest in forensic science as evidenced by numerous listings that contain "forensic" in their titles of academic offerings found by an Internet search. Continuing adult education courses offered by the School of Continuing Studies at the University of Toronto (www.learn.utoronto.ca) remain unique in the field of forensic science education.

Traditional university degree programs in forensic science provide a formal basis for the full-time student to seek experience and employment in forensic science. Continuing education is also available in specialized courses for the forensic practitioner at professional society meetings or other locations with a specific topic within the field. Education is also available through some criminology or criminal justice programs where an instructor with an interest in forensic science imparts information to the student geared toward employment within the criminal justice system. A few "on-line" courses are also available to the public. Continuing education classroom-based courses in forensic science at the School in Toronto are available to the public. Students of these courses may be involved in the aforementioned educational areas, or alternatively, be spawned to become involved in them or other areas such as law or law-enforcement. The courses are also attended by lawyers and law enforcement officers to enhance their knowledge of forensic science.

The School in Toronto has annually provided courses in forensic science to adults in the public domain since 1981. The core course, entitled "Forensic Scientists at Work," consists of nine two-hour evening classroom presentations and concludes with a final evening tour of a forensic laboratory with a multidisciplinary panel discussion with students. The course begins with an introductory presentation about forensic science and the judiciary, followed by forensic aspects of scene/exhibit identification, biology, chemistry, document examinations, coroner investigations and inquests, pathology, toxicology, and major case investigations. The last area incorporates several aspects of forensic science that were utilized by police in an actual investigation that was fully processed by the courts. Nine instructors, each a specialist by academic training and professional experience in their respective areas of forensic expertise, are engaged in the course, and include four active forensic scientists with government and/or consultant practices, two qualified medical practitioners, and three law enforcement officers. The Course Coordinator instructs the first class and another in their area of forensic expertise. The Coordinator also provides additional presentations on supplementary and/or timely topics, as well as engages questions in the classroom with the other instructors and students.

In 1998, the School in Toronto began to provide additional courses on an annual basis entitled "Special Topics in Forensic Science." It currently offers a series of three additional courses with two-hour evening presentations that provide other topics over a three-year cycle. Scientists have presented on forensic aspects of anthropology, entomology, geology, climatology, firearms and toolmarks, blood splatter interpretation, hair and fibers, fires, explosives, digital evidence (computers), gaming machines, engineering, quality assurance, drug analyses and clandestine preparation sites, alcohol in forensic casework, drug facilitated sexual assault, poisoning, and workplace drug testing. Medical/health practitioners have presented on forensic aspects of psychiatry, psychology, dentistry and odontology, sleep and fatigue in human performance, memory, and nursing. Law-enforcement officers and other specialized investigators have presented upon forensic aspects of criminal profiling, sexual assault, fraud, arson, motor vehicle collision reconstruction, video animation, and independent public investigations of police officers. Other presentations have included forensic social work and legal aspects of expert witness testimony, the latter involving a prosecutor and defense attorney.

Forensic practitioners engaged in teaching the public can hone their presentation and critical thinking skills by being involved in an academic interactive group format with students which may further their effectiveness in testifying to a jury at a trial. Students learn from instructors and other students in a classroom setting, and are provided by the instructors/Coordinator with supplementary resources for further information on topics of interest.

The strengths of the format at the School in Toronto include presentations from many actual forensic practitioners in their field of expertise, an interactive classroom format of delivery, an in-class Course Coordinator for technical/administrative support and additional presentations as required, and a tour of a forensic laboratory followed by a multidisciplinary panel discussion

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