



## Physical Anthropology Section – 2003

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### H49 Fifteen Years of Forensic Anthropology Short Courses at the National Museum of Health and Medicine/AFIP

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The goal of this presentation is to describe the development of the curriculum of a forensic anthropology course and present a demographic profile of the course participants.

The National Museum of Health and Medicine, Armed Forces Institute of Pathology (NMHM/AFIP) has offered a short course in forensic anthropology for the past 15 years. As the only forensic anthropology course offered in the U.S. to carry CME credit hours, it must meet the Essential Areas and Policies of the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME). From the beginning, the course was designed to present the basic tenets of forensic anthropology to military and civilian medical examiners, coroners, law enforcement personnel, forensic odontologists and other medico-legal investigators.

In February 1988, the first annual forensic anthropology course was offered by the NMHM/AFIP. Since then, nineteen courses have been successfully conducted including courses held in Albuquerque, New Mexico; Mexico City, Mexico; and Bradford, England. Currently, the annual course is held each spring in Bethesda, Maryland at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USUHS) and is accredited for a maximum of 30 hours in Category 1 credit towards the AMA Physician's Recognition Award.

The format of the course has essentially remained the same over the years with morning lectures by the faculty and afternoon hands-on lab stations. The lectures provide the methodological basis of the osteological techniques that will be covered in the afternoon lab session. Lectures also introduce additional applications of the field that vary each year dependent upon the expertise of the visiting faculty. Core topics covered include age, sex, stature, and ancestry assessment of skeletal remains; distinguishing forensic from non-forensic remains; body search and recovery techniques; forensic taphonomy; forensic odontology; and trauma analysis. From the beginning, the course has covered the special application of forensic anthropology in mass disasters. This continues today with the inclusion of topics such as media relations during mass fatality incidents, deployments of the Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Teams, and the role of the National Transportation Safety Board.

The afternoon lab sessions are a hallmark of the course and provide an opportunity for the participants to interact one-on-one with the faculty. The lab session give the participants an opportunity to practice the osteological techniques discussed in the lectures and to view actual examples of skeletal pathology and trauma. Over 100 museum skeletal specimens are used in the lab stations, and often faculty will bring examples from actual forensic cases. The USUHS Anatomy Teaching Lab provides additional support by allowing access to their articulated and disarticulated study skeletons and anatomical models. In recent years, the final lab session has consisted of six simulated forensic cases that the course participants must analyze and identify from a list of missing persons.

The course has been marketed through a variety of avenues including the AFIP newsletter, a course brochure, and advertising in medical journals. Since the late 1990s, the AFIP has maintained a web site through which potential participants can not only access the course syllabus but also register directly on line. The web site has become an increasingly important marketing venue, accounting for over 20% of the registered participants in the most recent course. The board based marketing approach has resulted in a diverse participant profile. Civilian, military, and other federal employees attend the course. Scientific disciplines are well represented with pathologists, dentists, archaeologists, and physical anthropologists representing the bulk of the participants over the years. Other, less traditional, professions have also been served by course including writers and high school science teachers.

From the beginning, the NMHM/AFIP forensic anthropology course has been well received. Course evaluations indicate high level of satisfaction with the course content and the quality and professionalism of the faculty. The evaluations have played an important role in the development of the course curriculum. Comments from the course participants have directly impacted the structure and content of the course. The 1993 course held in Albuquerque, New Mexico included in a mock field recovery exercise as a result of comments from the 1991 and 1992 students. Similarly, lectures on DNA forensic identification have become a core topic since 1992. Student evaluation has also influenced the inclusion of occasional lectures in radiographic identification, forensic anthropology in

the courtroom, and human rights cases, among other topics. In addition, the organization of the course manual has been modified and improved due to the input of the participants.

#### **Education, Participant Demographics, Forensic Anthropology**