



Physical Anthropology Section – 2003

H50 Forensic Anthropology for Sale: A Perspective From Law Enforcement

Lauren Rockhold Zephro, MA, Monterey County Sheriff's Department, 1414 Natividad Road, Salinas, CA*

The goal of this presentation is to present the forensic anthropological community with issues concerning specialized training in forensic anthropology for law enforcement personnel and forensic anthropological consultants.

With the introduction short courses, forensic anthropology has entered into the training arsenal of law enforcement. This paper outlines the role of short courses in law enforcement, the types of personnel trained, and current issues in forensic training. In addition, this paper will specifically address what short courses in forensic anthropology should cover.

Civilian or sworn personnel with specialized crime scene training typically process major crime scenes, including homicides. Depending on the department size, resources, and frequency of major crimes, crime scene personnel may be available in-house or through an agreement with another agency or state crime laboratory. Less frequently, crime scene assistance will be requested of experts outside the criminal justice system, in areas such as forensic anthropology, odontology, and entomology. Law enforcement personnel with crime scene training largely originate from two pools: 1) individuals hired and trained as sworn peace officers that rotate into a crime scene investigation unit and 2) individuals hired as civilian support personnel who have education in the sciences, forensic sciences, or evidence technology. In many police departments and crime laboratories, forensic training is provided solely through on-the-job training and specialized training available through short courses.

For law enforcement personnel, short courses provide a valuable educational resource. These courses prepare employees for specific situations, court presentation, and expert testimony. In addition, specific training is often mentioned during qualification as an expert witness in court to establish expertise. Short courses may also help fulfill certification requirements in a specific area, such as the certification tracks provided through the International Association for Identification. There is a legitimate expectation on behalf of the funding agency that the information provided in short courses will be relevant to an individual's daily work assignment and in specific crisis situations. In most law enforcement departments, money is tight and training expenses are considered carefully with regard to cost versus benefit.

Short courses in forensic science are often geared towards different tracks. For example, classes may be geared towards the recognition, documentation and collection of particular types of evidence (for crime scene technicians) and / or positive identification, analysis and interpretation (for specialized experts).

For non-anthropologists, including crime scene technicians and criminalists, forensic anthropological training should be geared towards how to document a crime scene for future analysis by a trained forensic anthropologist. Training for non-anthropologists could include recognition of bone (not the distinction of human versus animal but rather bone from non-bone), photography, videography, exhumation and surface recovery strategies, sketching, evidence collection, storage and preservation of anthropological evidence, court presentation of crime scene recovery, ethics, and how and when you need to find an expert in forensic anthropology.

For graduate level anthropologists with advanced training in osteology and human variation, forensic anthropology short courses potentially offer an excellent opportunity to supplement academic education and could provide training on how to successfully interface with the criminal justice system. Short courses for physical anthropologists should include training on recovery of human remains from a forensic context combined with general techniques of crime scene investigation, forensic photography, videography, trauma analysis, positive identification, determination of interval since death, recognition of non-biological evidence, collection and preservation of evidence, report preparation, and chain-of-custody. Training for consultants should also include discussion on ethics, professional conduct, and court testimony / presentation.

In addition to concerns over appropriate training topics in forensic anthropology, the lack of standards in the field is highly problematic, especially as training becomes more accessible. In many specialized areas of forensic science, scientific working groups have been formed and these groups are producing documents that specifically address definitions, standards, proficiency testing and guidelines for training and practice. These documents are largely in response to growing court challenges that have attacked the validity of forensic science and its practitioners.

The current position of forensic anthropology contrasts with trends in the forensic community. In forensic anthropology, there is no scientific working group or document, no certification program or proficiency testing for crime scene investigation at any level, and no certification program for graduate level trained forensic anthropologists under the PhD level. Of special concern is that many forensic anthropology short course instructors and practicing forensic anthropologists are not eligible for certification or any other type of periodic proficiency testing. In addition, there are no guidelines in forensic anthropology for validation of results while in other forensic sciences; peer review and independent verification are an integral part of a final report. As forensic anthropology expands out of academia, stringent and concise guidelines for the practice and training of forensic anthropology must be established to place it in line with other forensic sciences.



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