



## Physical Anthropology Section – 2005

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### H88 Society of Forensic Anthropologists (SOFA): An Introduction

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After attending this presentation, attendees will be aware of the newly formed Society of Forensic Anthropologists (SOFA), its members' contributions to active medicolegal investigations, and professional concerns the members believe affect the evolving practice of forensic anthropology in the 21st century.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by introducing the Society of Forensic Anthropologists (SOFA) to the larger forensic community and invite their discussion of the group's overall mission and professional concerns affecting the discipline.

In recent years an increasing number of forensically trained anthropologists have found professional employment in the medical examiner system. Often these individuals carry a dual role within the office serving as a medicolegal death investigator and/or autopsy technician in addition to being the forensic anthropologist. Typically, they are the only forensic anthropologists practicing within their office, contrary to the academic setting where you may have several peers. This environment has led to a feeling of isolation and limited means of professional communication. As a result, several forensic anthropologists working in the medical examiner system have formed the Society of Forensic Anthropologists (SOFA). For the most part, SOFA is a web-based discussion forum enabling its members to consult on cases, discuss advances in the field, and raise concerns regarding the evolving practice of forensic anthropology in the 21st century.

SOFA formally came to be in February 2003 and is currently comprised of 20 members who work professionally throughout the United States. Education levels of members include Masters, PhD or PhD, D-ABFA. Most lecture and train other anthropologists through various institutions. A statistical survey of SOFA members conducted in July 2004 revealed that members manage all forensic anthropology cases in areas ranging in size from a single county to a complete state. During 2003, members were assigned 628 anthropology cases and wrote 545 formal reports. Reports were filed with various legal agencies. Many of the members have testified and/or been subpoenaed to testify as expert witnesses in court. In sum, SOFA members make a large professional contribution to current medicolegal casework and thereby, the growth of forensic anthropology.

During the past year, group members have brought two professional concerns to the forefront of discussion. One concern is the lack of policy for certification of forensic anthropologists practicing within the medical examiner system; and a second is the lack of a standardized system to peer review formal reports written by isolated forensic anthropologists. The purpose of this presentation is two fold: first, to introduce SOFA to the larger forensic anthropology community; and second, to define and raise awareness of these concerns.

**Forensic Anthropology, Professional Communication, Society of Forensic Anthropologists (SOFA)**