



Criminalistics Section – 2006

B155 Experience With and the Rationale for a Doctoral Program in Forensic Science

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After attending this presentation, attendees will gain an understanding of the need for advanced degrees in forensic science/criminalistics.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by explaining the rationale for obtaining advanced degree in criminalistics.

The field of criminalistics has undergone rapid growth over the past few decades. The number of personnel employed in the field has increased nearly two orders of magnitude during this time. Maturation as a profession has been slower. Recent encouraging changes such as the impact of laboratory accreditation under the auspices of the Laboratory Accreditation Board (LAB) of the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors (ASCLD) and the certification of scientists by the American Board of Criminalistics (ABC) are clear indicators of a maturing profession. Progress with methods of analysis and broader approaches to the analysis of evidence types has been fostered by the efforts of scientific working groups (SWGs) sponsored by the FBI and by Committee E-30 of the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM).

Slower to develop still has been general agreement concerning the appropriate academic preparation for scientists working as criminalists in forensic science laboratories. Such general agreement is a hallmark of mature professions. Until very recently this agreement has been missing. Personnel in laboratories have been drawn from university programs in forensic science, chemistry, biology, molecular biology, and even medical technology. It is encouraging to note that in recent years educational programs in criminalistics have been playing an increasingly important role. Although, historically these programs have never been major contributors to the staffing needs of forensic science laboratories, the situation is beginning to change. Maturation of the field has led to recognition of the importance of such programs.

Pioneering visionaries in this field, such as Dr. Paul L. Kirk, saw the need for advanced degrees in the field as early as the middle of the 20th Century, but few were established. These visionaries recognized that many problems encountered in criminalistics casework were every bit as complex and challenging as those faced in the highest levels of scientific research. The first doctoral program in criminalistics in the United States was the one established by Dr. Kirk at the University of California at Berkeley in the early 1960s. This was a sub-program of the doctoral program in criminal justice offered by the School of Criminology at the university. This school was later disbanded in the wake of draconian reductions in the levels of state support for the university. The products of this program still continue to positively impact the field in a way that is disproportionate to their number.

The program that the author has headed for the past twenty some years is physically housed at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice but is part of the Ph.D. Program in Criminal Justice offered by the parent university, the City University of New York (CUNY). John Jay is one of the nine senior colleges, which along with several community colleges, make up the multi-unit City University of New York.

The Forensic Science Concentration in the Ph.D. Program in Criminal Justice is effectively a stand-alone science Ph.D. program. It is a very challenging program. Only a fraction of those who have entered the program have completed it. Those who have completed the program and have been awarded the Ph.D. degree have acquitted themselves well in the field. Some are program heads at other universities. Others are respected laboratory administrators and researchers in major laboratories. All are acknowledged leaders in the field of criminalistics.

At this time forensic science education is growing "leaps and bounds" on a worldwide basis. The demand for these programs has allowed some universities to set higher admission standards for entry into forensic science graduate programs than is the case for more traditional science graduate programs. The field can benefit greatly from this.

Forensic Science Education, Doctoral Degree, Criminalistics