



## Jurisprudence Section – 2011

### E33 Forensic Science Academy for Lawyers!

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After attending this presentation, attendees will have a better appreciation for the need to educate lawyers in forensic science disciplines and an understanding as to identifying opportunities and methods to create a forensic science academy.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by recognizing the value of having attorneys who work with forensic science experts being trained specifically in the scientific method and the basic fundamentals of the various forensic science disciplines. The focus will be on lawyers and criminalists working together to provide such a training opportunity.

With the publication of the National Academy of Sciences 2009 Report on Forensic Science: *Strengthening Forensic Science in the United States: A Path Forward*, increased focus has been directed on the training and certification of forensic scientists. But other justice system participants, namely lawyers and judges, have also become increasingly aware of the vacuum in their training regarding forensic science and science in general. The report itself recognizes that the judicial system is encumbered by "judges and lawyers who generally lack the scientific expertise necessary to comprehend and evaluate forensic evidence in an informed manner..." With the publication of the report and, the following year, the legislative mandate to change from *Frye* to a *Daubert* standard, Arizona lawyers and criminalists found themselves faced with a variety of education challenges. A solution to increase attorneys (prosecutors, defense attorneys, and judges) fundamental understanding of the scientific method as well as the scientific principals and processes of a variety of disciplines in forensic science was identified. By creating a Forensic Science Academy, prosecutors and defense attorneys would train on scientific principles and then develop direct and cross-

examination skills by working with criminalists in that discipline. Criminalists from several crime labs could join in the mock courtroom training and, in that fashion, gain competency, and skills regarding courtroom testimony.

This presentation will provide the roadmap that Arizona is using to provide attorneys with fundamental scientific concepts and a familiarization of the different forensic science disciplines. Focusing on topics such as scientific method, basic statistical analysis in scientific research, DNA, drug analysis, forensic biology, firearms and ballistics, fingerprints, digital forensics, arson, and death investigations, attendees will have a chance to become aware of the basic principles in each discipline and an opportunity to develop and practice predicate questions for experts as well as cross-examination skills. Included during the six- month curriculum are tours of various crime labs, the Maricopa County Medical Examiner's Office, and the Arizona Computer Forensic Lab. The information provided to lawyers will also give them an advantage early on in their review of a case to better assess the value of the evidence.

At the Academy, launched in January, 2011, senior criminalists serve as the instructors. The following week, they would serve as the expert witnesses in the mock trial portion; this session would be open to any criminalists interested in a better understanding of the dynamics of courtroom testimony. Cross training and additional dialog will be encouraged.

Such education may develop into a certification program providing additional credentials for practitioners as the Arizona State University is one of the planning partners in the new effort.

#### **Academy, Training, Forensics**