



### D61 The Hiring Preferences of Crime Scene Evidence Technician Applicants: A Survey

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the importance of determining whether crime scene investigation degree programs meet the needs of law enforcement agencies by evaluating their views of forensic science degree programs, and relevant research on the subject. Data from a survey of law enforcement agencies will also be presented.

The presentation will impact the forensic science community by serving as a reference for future research in determining the value of crime scene investigation degree programs for law enforcement agencies and crime scene evidence technician applicants. This research study will also benefit crime scene evidence technician applicants who decide to pursue a degree, and apply for positions within law enforcement agencies.

There appears to be a lack of research about law enforcement agencies' views of crime scene evidence technician applicants with degrees in crime scene investigation. Is education an asset for a future career as a crime scene technician in a law enforcement agency? Previous research has focused on the current issues and status of forensic science education and degrees, the qualifications of educators teaching forensic science courses, and the development of college-level degree programs that prepare students for careers as crime scene evidence technicians. Recent research has also focused on how law enforcement agencies view forensic science and the forensic science knowledge they expect their new recruits to possess. While previous studies can provide an understanding of crime scene investigation degree programs offered in colleges and universities, research has not addressed law enforcement agencies' views of these degree programs.

To measure law enforcement agencies' views of crime scene evidence technician applicants, a survey was designed and administered to 102 various law enforcement agencies in the state of Maryland. The survey was adapted from a similar survey utilized by Lambert in a study titled, *The Forensic Science Needs of Law Enforcement Applicants and Recruits: A Survey of Michigan Law Enforcement Agencies*.<sup>1</sup> The new survey consisted of 17 questions, divided into three parts (general background, work experience and education). The questions were a combination of fill-in-the-blank, short answer, rankings, and multiple choice. After collecting all returned surveys from the respondents, answers for each question and sections were converted to numerical data for entry into a spreadsheet. Afterwards, percentages and means were calculated based on the response rates. The following statistical tests were used:

- A two-proportion z-test was used to determine if law enforcement agencies prefer crime scene investigator applicants with work experience over applicants with education in crime scene investigation.
- To determine whether crime scene investigator applicants' education is weighted less than work experience, a two sample t-test that does not assume equal variances was used.
- A two-sample t-test was used to determine whether forensic science education areas are viewed the same as the qualifications for a crime scene investigator position.

A total of 40 surveys were returned, resulting in a 39.3% response rate. Characteristics of the responding law enforcement agencies are as follows: 17 (44.7%) rural, 15 (39.4%) suburban, and 6 (15.7%) urban. Twenty-four (60%) agencies are either local or municipal, and 13 (32.5%) are county. The mean number of sworn officers was 151.9 (SD 394.2), and the mean number of civilian employees per agency was 37.9 (SD 84.7). Additionally, 75.7% reported that they did not have an officer or a unit specifically dedicated to crime scene evidence collection; 26.3% indicated that they had their own crime/forensic lab; 24.3% hire civilians to assist in the collection of forensic evidence. When comparing work experience to education, 84.6% of the respondents indicated that they prefer work experience, and 80.7% of the respondents indicated that they prefer education. There was not enough statistical evidence to suggest that law enforcement agencies prefer crime scene evidence technician applicants with work experience over those with a degree in forensic science or crime scene investigation ( $p > .05$ ), and there was not sufficient evidence to suggest that the agencies give less weight to education than work experience ( $p > .05$ ).



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Although, the number of crime scene investigation degree programs has grown tremendously in the past ten years, there is no research suggesting that law enforcement agencies prefer crime scene evidence technician applicants with these degrees. On the surface, it appears that forensic science degrees fulfill the requirements of crime scene evidence technician positions within law enforcement agencies.

**Reference:**

- <sup>1</sup> Lambert, E., et al. Differences in forensic science views and needs of law enforcement: A survey of Michigan law enforcement agencies. *Police Practice and Research: An International Journal* 2007; 8(5): 415-430.

**Crime Scene Evidence Technician Applicant, Hiring Preference, Crime Scene Investigation Degree Programs**