



Questioned Documents Section - 2013

J9 U.S. Questioned Document Examiners: A Nationwide Survey of Background, Education, Training, and Experience

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After attending this presentation, attendees will become knowledgeable of the typical background that is characteristic of forensic document examiners currently practicing in the U.S., including educational attainment, training, certification, experience, and other aspects of their professional preparation.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by presenting a snapshot of background training, experience, and qualifications of forensic document examiners that are currently practicing in the U.S. This includes their perception of the strengths and weaknesses in training, based on their response to open-ended questions presented in the survey. This is informative for those still in training and helpful for those who offer continuing education or training courses for document examiners.

This presentation presents the findings from Phase I of a national study of forensic document examiners, sponsored by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ). The purpose of the study is to inform and expand the extant empirical research on forensic document examiner expertise in signature analysis. In Phase I, Forensic Document Examiners (FDE) from across the United States participated in a multi-mode (phone and web) survey to gather background information from the professional examiners and their opinions regarding the strengths and weaknesses of education and training in forensic document examination. This presentation presents a summary of the survey results (e.g., background and education) including a thematic analysis of their views on training programs.

The sampling frame was derived from the contact information on file with various regional and national professional organizations in which participant FDEs are members. Examiners who participated in this study were currently employed in the United States, over the age of 18, and English-speaking. Potential participants received an advanced letter describing the purpose of the study at the mailing address on file with the professional organization. Two weeks after they received an advanced letter, phone interviewers at the Center for Research Design and Analysis at the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR), in collaboration with researchers at Kentucky State University (KSU), contacted potential respondents to participate in the phone survey or web survey if they preferred.

The survey probed examiner background, including their educational attainment, membership in professional organizations, certifications, training, and other professional preparation. The survey also documented the type of lab in which FDEs are employed, as well as other positions that examiners have held (including specializations outside of forensic document examination). The survey also included questions regarding examiner experience in providing expert testimony and engaging in proficiency testing as part of their training. The survey concluded with open-ended questions regarding the perceived strengths and weaknesses of examiner training. Themes from these open-ended responses are summarized and presented in this poster.

The results of this survey will inform Phase II, the experimental portion of the study, which is currently in the ongoing data collection phase at KSU. Phase II involves the examination of various handwriting samples in questioned documents by both forensic document examiners and lay participants. The background information of examiners from the Phase I survey data is informative in and of itself as an indication of the contemporary background, education, and experience of forensic document examiners who are currently practicing in the United States. It will also serve as a fundamental set of statistical controls for differences in examiner backgrounds, as well as a platform for analyzing patterns in individual differences between examiners and their performance in Phase II at KSU.

Questioned Document, QDE Training, QDE Education