



## Physical Anthropology Section - 2014

### H25 Forensic Anthropology Education and Mentoring Opportunities at the University of Tennessee Forensic Anthropology Center

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand some of the parameters of the proposed "Specialist certification level" of the American Board of Forensic Anthropology (ABFA) and the new training initiatives the University of Tennessee Forensic Anthropology Center is doing to prepare students for Specialist certification.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing one model for advanced training of students in academic forensic science disciplines that explicitly utilizes current laboratory accreditation and professional certification standards as guidelines for forensic science mentoring.

The purpose of this presentation is to demonstrate how innovative training and mentoring initiatives of the Forensic Anthropology Center (FAC) at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, are preparing undergraduate and graduate students for careers in forensic anthropology. Importantly, these training efforts are geared to prepare students for the proposed American Board of Forensic Anthropology (ABFA) certification changes.

For over 35 years, ABFA has offered Diplomate certification to post-PhD forensic anthropology professionals. Very soon a new ABFA "Specialist" certification opportunity will be available that targets post-MA students and professionals. Proper preparation for certification will require a shift in the pedagogical framework of academic-based disciplines. While coursework should not be de-emphasized, academic institutions must provide a variety of experiences that provide both students and junior colleagues with the requisite specialized training and casework to achieve certification.

The FAC has recently implemented a number of initiatives that drive the Center toward laboratory accreditation as well as Specialist and Diplomate certification. There are three basic mentoring goals for students: (1) provide professionalization training that builds a minimum skill set to achieve certification-level standards in the field; (2) provide access to cases and formal case reviews with mentors to ensure best practices are employed and to teach technical writing skills necessary for clear and concise case reports; and, (3) provide both academic as well as social networks that enable close mentor-student interactions outside of the classroom. To prepare for Diplomate certification, the FAC has established a formal rotating peer-review system in which one of the six forensic anthropology professionals serves as the case lead while the others peer review the case. Graduate students are also involved in casework on a rotating basis.

The FAC achieves the mentoring goals in a number of ways. Professional training courses are available on a quarterly basis to all Anthropology graduate students. This typically involves day-long trainings on specific subjects, such as standard laboratory procedures, equipment-based training (e.g., total station, GIS, 3D digitizer), proper archaeological excavation techniques, and appropriate usage of computer software and statistics. Each session is explicitly framed by pertinent theoretical, ethical, and professional discussions. Participants receive certificates of course completion and the FAC director documents the training hours for each participant to log for certification preparation.

The key to success of these initiatives is to provide multiple opportunities for students to apply the skill sets established by their coursework and the professional training sessions. For instance, all participants who attended the Body Donation Program training in Spring 2013 are eligible to assist FAC staff with daily tasks at the FAC, including donation intake, biological sampling, laboratory work, and body placement at the Anthropology Research Facility (ARF). Further, all participants are eligible to conduct formal casework with the faculty mentors. Students keep a log of their case-related activities that is signed by a Diplomate.

In addition to participation in formal forensic casework, the 1,100 skeletons of the Bass Donated Skeletal Collection can serve as proxies for case studies. While all UTK students are eligible to study the skeletons, a formal system has been established to encourage casework participation and close mentoring by the FAC faculty. Two donated skeletons are selected bimonthly by the FAC Director for student examination. Provided with a scenario and problem, students conduct an analysis and submit a written report and bench notes to one or more faculty mentors, including a board certified forensic anthropologist. The strengths, weaknesses, and accuracy of the analyses and reports are discussed with each student.



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In conclusion, the FAC uses laboratory accreditation and professional certification as pedagogical roadmaps for forensic science mentoring. One ultimate measure of success of the training initiatives will be determined by the number of successful Diplomate and Specialist certifications obtained by students and faculty.

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### **Mentoring, Forensic Anthropology, Certification**