



## Questioned Documents Section - 2014

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### **J10 Background, Training, and Experience of Questioned Document Examiners: Phase I — Final Report**

*Victoria Springer, MA\*, University of Nevada, Reno, Grant Sawyer Center for Justice S, Mail Stop 313, Reno, NV 89557; Veronica B. Dahir, PhD, University of Nevada, Reno, Center for Research Design & Analysis, 1664 N Virginia Street, Mail Stop 0088, Reno, NV 89557; Mara L. Merlino, PhD, 1066 Tamworth Lane, Frankfort, KY 40601; and Tierra M. Freeman, PhD, Kentucky State University, 229 Hathaway Hall, 400 E Main Street, Frankfort, KY 40601*

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the methodology employed in the first phase of a validation study of forensic document examination that was funded by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ). Attendees will also become knowledgeable of the typical background that is characteristic of Forensic Document Examiners (FDE) who participated in this study (practicing in the United States and Canada), including educational attainment, training, certification, experience, and other aspects of their professional preparation.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by presenting a detailed overview of the background training, experience, and qualifications of FDEs. 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 study presents the full findings from Phase I of a national study of FDEs, sponsored by the NIJ. Selected, partial findings were presented at the American Academy of Forensic Sciences 2013 Annual Scientific Meeting while the study was still in progress. The purpose of the study is to inform and expand the extant empirical research on FDE expertise in signature analysis. In Phase I, FDEs 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. The study survey results (e.g., background and education) included 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 FDE participants 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 advance 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 in collaboration with researchers at Kentucky State University, 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.

The results of this survey informed Phase II, the experimental portion of the study. Phase II involves the examination of various handwriting samples in questioned documents by both FDEs 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 FDEs who are currently practicing in the United States.

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### **Questioned Document Examiners, Forensic Document Examiners, Qualifications**