E93 An Interdisciplinary Approach to Forensic Science Education

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After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand a unique, innovative, and interdisciplinary approach to forensic science education.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by illustrating a novel approach for forensic science educators.

Forensic science programs in higher education in the United States, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, have traditionally been located in departments and colleges of universities offering degrees in the natural and physical sciences, although some programs can be found in social science departments such as criminal justice. Many of these programs are isolated within a specific academic department and this isolation can limit the depth and breadth of knowledge and skills obtained by students. Forensic science is truly an interdisciplinary field of study including specialties in pathology, engineering, odontology, toxicology, entomology, anthropology, psychiatry, psychology, biology, chemistry, computer science, and criminal justice. Isolating forensic science programs within one academic department can limit the options available to students seeking careers in forensic science and weaken the diversity of the pool of job candidates for forensic science laboratories.

This presentation describes an interdisciplinary approach at the University of Central Oklahoma (UCO) Forensic Science Institute (FSI) to educate future forensic science professionals. The FSI maintains that the UCO Forensic Science academic program, in particular with its interdisciplinary dimension, is unmatched in excellence, design, or vision by other forensic science academic programs found in the United States. After approximately 30 years, UCO has ceased to offer a stand-alone Bachelor of Science (BS) degree in forensic science. The forensic science baccalaureate academic program, formerly housed in the Department of Chemistry, now resides in the W. Roger Webb Forensic Science Institute, and has morphed into a unique configuration in which forensic science can only be taken as the companion in a concurrent degree program. All students completing a BS in Forensic Science must complete an additional degree. The BS in Forensic Science may be combined with any UCO undergraduate major with the exception of General Studies. Among the more common degree combinations selected by students are forensic science-biology, forensic science-chemistry, forensic science-computer science, forensic science-psychology, and forensic science-criminal justice. Accordingly, the forensic science degree can be awarded after a student completes the forensic science course requirements and earns either a concurrent degree or a second bachelor's degree. Research is at the core of the UCO FSI. A research-based thesis program was implemented for graduate students, undergraduate students were provided with research opportunities, and cooperative research efforts with the classical academic departments on campus were established with joint appointments held by forensic science faculty. This unique approach has proven successful in generating a diverse pool of job candidates to fulfill the ever-expanding needs of the forensic science work force.

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