



E108 Minimum Education Requirements for Crime Scene Investigators (CSIs): The Missing Link in Forensic Science

Mary Juno, MSc*, SJSU Justice Studies Department, Forensic Science Program, One Washington Square, San Jose, CA 95192

After attending this presentation, attendees will be aware of the low minimum-education hiring requirements for crime scene investigators and the standard on-the-job training a new CSI receives. Further, attendees will understand the potential for error at a crime scene and conceptualize a link between low hiring standards and error.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by proposing that crime labs and police departments attempt to establish error rates for CSIs and potentially re-evaluate their agencies' minimum education requirements for new CSIs. The community is invited to consider the question: Should crime scene investigation, like other forensic disciplines, be professionalized?

The 2009 NAS Report, *Strengthening Forensic Science: A Path Forward*, rightly criticized many of the subdisciplines of forensic science, causing professionals and researchers to “get hot” on the tasks of tracking and minimizing error and strengthening the scientific underpinnings of their fields; however, the NAS Report hardly mentioned crime scene investigation or any potential problems with it, even though CSIs are at the front end of forensic science where the introduction of error is arguably most critical. Errors committed by the CSI at a crime scene can include failure to: locate and recognize evidence, interpret a screening test correctly, prevent contamination, collect sufficient samples and controls, document evidence adequately, preserve evidence using appropriate packaging and handling, and maintain chain of custody, with limitless variation. No amount of forensic wizardry in the lab can make up for these errors.

Few agencies require new CSIs to possess any formal training in the sciences at the time of hiring. Currently, the most common minimum educational standard for obtaining a position as a civilian CSI in the United States is a high school diploma or General Equivalency Diploma (GED). Once hired, a CSI typically attends a short course on photography and fingerprint lifting and completes a period of supervised field training. At that point, a new CSI may know *what* to do but may not completely understand *why* he/she is doing it.

This presentation examines hiring standards and minimum education requirements for CSIs across the United States as part of a larger study that will explore quality assurance mechanisms in crime scene investigation (or the lack thereof) and the relationship between crime scene investigator error rates and education levels. This study argues that the combination of low education minimums and brief on-the-job training are inadequate. A four-year degree is proposed as the new minimum education requirement for CSIs.

Education, Minimum, CSI