



### **E110 A Study of the Forensic Science Education Programs Accreditation Commission (FEPAC) -Accredited Graduate Forensic Science Programs' Curricula**

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After attending this presentation, attendees will be able to define how FEPAC-accredited forensic science graduate programs have implemented FEPAC's Graduate Curriculum Standard.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by identifying the scope of any differences or unique characteristics accredited forensic science graduate programs may exhibit in their curricula, in addition to any inconsistencies. Each graduate program has fulfilled the FEPAC Graduate Curriculum Standard in order to receive accreditation; however, the manner in which they fulfilled these standards may vary among programs. This study sought to understand how each graduate program fulfilled the FEPAC Graduate Curriculum Standard by analyzing the programs' websites and self-study documents.

The National Institute of Justice and the National Academy of Sciences recommended that forensic science training shift from on-the-job training to formal education; however, the reports cited inconsistencies in the curricula of the forensic science degree programs as an impediment to this.<sup>1,2</sup> The FEPAC Standards were created to address this issue; however, no studies have been conducted to determine how the accreditation standards have been implemented by the FEPAC-accredited graduate programs. This study evaluated the self-study responses ( $n=11$ ) and website information ( $n=17$ ) specific to FEPAC's Graduate Curriculum Standard to determine how the accredited graduate programs fulfilled the FEPAC Graduate Curriculum Standard. This study also determined to what extent inconsistencies or consistencies exist among the accredited graduate programs' curricula.

This study found that although FEPAC-accredited graduate forensic science programs exhibited differences (unique characteristics) among their curricula, they did not as a whole exhibit significant inconsistencies (lack of agreement). All the accredited graduate programs covered the natural sciences, particularly the areas related to forensic science, such as forensic chemistry and forensic biology; however, the programs' coverage of the comparative sciences, such as firearms and questioned documents, was limited. Evaluation of the 11 FEPAC self-study reports revealed that, on average, these programs exceeded the required minimum instructional hours of core forensic science topics as specified by the FEPAC guidelines. All programs in this study required students to complete an independent research project as their capstone experience, whether thesis or non-thesis. Additionally, all programs included a requirement for students to attend a graduate seminar where students presented their independent research findings.

The study found the FEPAC-accredited graduate forensic science programs' curricula was consistent with unique characteristics among the graduate programs. The curricula were rigorous, scientific-based, and discipline specific. This study evaluated a snapshot of accredited graduate forensic science programs' curricula. Future research should seek to further flesh out the curricula by gathering documents from the graduate programs, such as course syllabi, conducting interviews with the program director or their designee, and administering surveys.

#### **Reference(s):**

1. National Institute of Justice. *Forensic Sciences: Review of Status and Needs*. Washington, D.C. National Institute of Justice, 1999.
2. National Academy of Sciences. *Strengthening Forensic Science in the United States: A Path Forward*. Washington, DC. The National Academies Press, 2009.

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#### **Higher Education, Accreditation Standards, Curriculum**