



A70 Harris County Forensic Anthropology Training Program

Deborah C. Pinto, PhD, Harris County Institute of Forensic Science, Houston, TX 77054; Michal L. Pierce, MS, Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences, Houston, TX 77054*

Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will have a better understanding of how a well-structured training program can increase the quality of future forensic anthropology practitioners. In addition, attendees will appreciate the need for support from an organization's top management as well as local and federal funding entities of such practical trainings in forensic anthropology, and more widely, forensic sciences.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by addressing how to improve the quality of practice in forensic anthropology through rigorous training and mentorship.

This presentation provides a brief history of the forensic anthropology fellowship and internship program developed by the Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences (HCIFS) as a possible template for other forensic anthropology training programs. The HCIFS serves a population of more than 4.5 million people and annually averages 4,000 autopsies, with approximately 350 forensic anthropology consults. As such, it provides a unique opportunity to facilitate practical training for forensic anthropologists. The Forensic Anthropology Division's (FAD's) training program has progressed through several iterations, with the most drastic changes occurring in 2015 when the FAD became accredited by the American National Standards Institute-American Society of Quality (ANSI-ASQ) National Accreditation Board (ANAB). The program encompasses training of interns, postdoctoral fellows, and newly hired staff.

Every summer, the HCIFS hosts up to a dozen interns who are mentored by professionals throughout the medical examiner office and crime laboratory. The FAD typically hosts one to two interns for approximately 12 weeks. These interns shadow each of the three staff anthropologists, as well as assist with case analyses, attend scenes, learn about laboratory quality assurance, and observe expert testimony; however, they do not co-author reports. During their internship, they receive periodic progress reports and evaluations from their mentors. Additionally, the interns are expected to conduct research or complete a special project and present their findings at a major conference.

Since 2010, the FAD has trained five postdoctoral fellows in casework under the FAD training program. This program was designed to mirror the in-house forensic pathology fellowship program, which is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME). The fellows shadow staff anthropologists and eventually co-author cases during their fellowship year. They receive training in casework, including developing a biological profile, trauma analysis with special attention to pediatric trauma, assessment of pathological conditions, identification procedures, and scene recovery. In addition, they receive training in expert witness testimony and quality assurance. Like the interns, the FAD fellows conduct research or work on a special project and present their results at a major scientific conference.

To comply with ANAB accreditation standards, the FAD has developed a modular training manual, which allows customization of the training program to incoming interns, fellows, and newly hired staff. This type of program offers two tracks, allowing novices to receive more extensive training while seasoned practitioners can demonstrate competency in a more expedited manner. Once trainees successfully complete their training, they are provided with a memo of completion.

Exposing future forensic anthropologists to a diversity of casework within a quality assurance framework better equips them with the tools they need to adapt to any forensic environment. Each of the FAD fellows received training and/or conducted research through grant funding by programs under the National Institute of Justice or the Children's Justice Act. With their support, the FAD has successfully trained fellows who are currently board-certified or board-eligible forensic anthropologists and employed by various governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Due to the ever-increasing scrutiny of forensic practitioners, it serves forensic agencies well to ensure their anthropologists have a solid understanding and appreciation of quality assurance concepts, accreditation standards, and industry-accepted practices. Implementing a rigorous training program that incorporates these components can be labor and resource intensive; therefore, it requires support from top management, as well as federal and local funding entities. Bringing management on board can be facilitated by demonstrating the connection between well-rounded trainees and high-quality work.

Forensic Anthropology, Fellowship Training, Accreditation Program