

## A40 Caseloads in Forensic Anthropology

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**Learning Overview:** After attending this presentation, attendees will have an appreciation for the average amount and types of cases analyzed by forensic anthropologists.

**Impact on the Forensic Science Community:** This presentation will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating the factors that most affect forensic anthropology caseloads as well as the need for increased outreach to better utilize forensic anthropology in medicolegal death investigations.

Forensic anthropology exists largely to provide answers to questioned material in the medicolegal death investigation system. Thus, one could argue that the subsequent presentation of analytical findings via reporting and testimony is the ultimate goal of all forensic anthropology. However, forensic anthropologists work in diverse contexts. Some individuals are employed full time in applied positions. Others are employed full time in academia, assisting with casework on a contractual or volunteer basis. This project attempts to examine the average amount and types of casework performed by forensic anthropologists as well as the factors that have the greatest impact on the number of cases analyzed.

Data are from an online survey hosted by Western Carolina University and approved by the Institutional Review Board of this institution as well as that of the University of Nevada, Reno. The survey had a total of 364 respondents who, via self-reporting, had performed forensic anthropology casework or considered themselves qualified to do so. Not all respondents provided an answer to every question, and this project only used the subset of individuals who had responded to each question.

First, in order to examine factors that had the greatest impact on the average number of forensic anthropology reports written, a Random Forest Model (RFM) was used. This RFM found that the variables with the greatest impact on estimating the average number of forensic anthropology reports per year were (in descending order): number of fieldwork reports per year; primary current employment status; total number of cases analyzed; institution of doctoral degree; number of reports that include both field and laboratory components; and number of fieldwork cases you've participated in (in any capacity).

For current employment status, there were clear divisions between applied and academic jobs. The greatest number of forensic anthropology reports were written by individuals employed at the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) (GS anthropologists=20, median=17.5, Standard Deviation [SD]=18.1; contract anthropologists =32.4, median=30, SD=30.8), followed by forensic anthropologists employed at Coroner/Medical Examiner (C/ME) offices (23.7, median=20, SD=19.7), and finally forensic anthropologists employed in academia (7.9, median=3, SD=13.6).

For reports, on average, forensic anthropologists write two field reports per year (median=2, SD=6.4). When examining number of reports based on human remains (not fieldwork or medicolegal significance), forensic anthropologists averaged 13 reports per year (median=3, SD=20.9). When considering total human remains reports written compared to years of practice, forensic anthropologists averaged 22 reports per year (median=8, SD=63.7). Note, testifying was rare in this sample, with forensic anthropologists averaging three instances of testifying during their career (median=0, SD=8.6). Additionally, when considering report types, the most common types were: medicolegal significance (34.5%); complete skeletal analysis (30.8%); trauma analysis (13.4%); biological profile (10.2%); radiographic comparison (8.4%); and postmortem interval estimation (2.7%). Report type also varied by employment.

For institution of doctoral degree, individuals from the University of Tennessee-Knoxville had the greatest number of cases, followed in descending order by: University of Florida, The Ohio State University, and Michigan State University. While certification by the American Board of Forensic Anthropology (ABFA) was not a factor in the RFM, ABFA-Diplomates had much larger numbers of case reports overall; however, when examined by year, ABFA-Diplomates did not have significantly greater caseloads.

This study provides baseline data on the amount and types of casework analyzed by forensic anthropologists. Overall, forensic anthropologists write relatively few reports per year, particularly those employed in academic positions; additionally, testifying is very rare. However, for both casework and testifying, there is a large amount of variability between practitioners. As forensic anthropology continues to be professionalized, we should consider the relative importance of the types of reports being authored and balance our education, training, and research in these areas appropriately. The relatively low numbers of forensic anthropology reports suggest forensic anthropologists are underutilized; this indicates that forensic anthropologists must be greater advocates for our profession and our contributions to death investigations.

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### Caseload, Employment, Education