

## **International Forensic Science Center: An Innovative Approach to Forensic Science Education for Students and Practitioners<sup>1</sup>**

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The presentation will discuss the development of an International Forensic Science Center that utilizes local resources and a nontraditional curriculum designed to educate international students interested in pursuing forensic science studies. The Chief Medical Examiner in Tarrant County, Texas is developing an innovative, three-month program designed for international forensic science students and practitioners. International students may come from a range of disciplines. Some of those disciplines may include the following: pathology, chemistry, toxicology, histology, and other medico-legal specialties. The International Forensic Science Center will oversee the governance of the program and it will be administered by the administrative hierarchy of the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office. A program coordinator will be assigned the responsibility of directing the program and its activities. The uniqueness of the program is comprised of a combination of mentoring, apprenticeship and individually designed programs for each student. Once an international student is accepted into the program, each student will meet with the coordinator and together, they will develop a specific curriculum based on the international student's forensic science interests and the Medical Examiner's caseload. International students seeking to gain experience in forensic science would have an opportunity to examine numerous case studies at the Center.

For example, the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office had 1,786 ME cases in 2004. Of those cases, 881 were from natural causes, 501 were accidental deaths, 224 were suicides, 127 were homicide, and 184 cases involved human identification. The international students will be assigned to study and observe in each of the sections; however, more time will be scheduled in areas of specific interest to the student. For example, the student will be assigned to observe and interact with the death scene investigators in the field and office, the evidence intake office, and the morgue where they will observe post mortem examinations. Additionally, each student will acquire experience in the following laboratories: forensic toxicology, forensic chemistry, forensic photography, histology, human identification, firearms, and latent prints. Students will gain experience with state-of-the-art laboratory instrumentation such as the scanning electron microscope (SEM), mass spectrometry, gas chromatography, and high-pressure liquid chromatography analysis. They will also become familiar with the automated fingerprint identification system (AFIS) while working in the latent prints laboratory. Each student will work closely with a mentor in each section to ensure a positive transition from one section to the next section. Moreover, each of the mentors will be assigned to instruct the students on the essential details, procedures and protocols in their specific section.

In addition to the laboratories, there will be a breath alcohol testing section and a trace evidence section which analyzes hair, glass, paint, and fibers. Typically, the student will be assigned one day a week in five of the eight sections for a period of three months. As part of the educational process, the student will participate in weekly staff meetings in which cases will be discussed. Students will also participate in the weekly lecture seminars with other medical examiner staff and present at least once during the course of the program. There will be

flexibility in the students' subject matter selection for presentations. Typically, presentations may include such areas as drug abuse, causes of death, child abuse investigation, and other similar medico-legal topics. International students with diverse backgrounds will have the opportunity to exchange ideas with the medical examiner's staff. In addition to the forensic science section assignments, international students will have an opportunity to attend related lectures at area institutions of higher learning. After successfully completing the program, the student will be awarded a certificate of completion by the Tarrant County Chief Medical Examiner.

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