



# Forensic Science in Legal Education

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## OVERVIEW

In recent years, new expert admissibility standards in most states call for judges to assess the reliability of forensic expert evidence. However, little has been reported on the education and training law schools offer to law students regarding forensic evidence. Researchers funded by CSAFE conducted a survey to find out how many schools offer forensic science courses, and they also examine the state of forensics in legal education as a whole.

## GOALS

- Review the curricula of law schools across the United States.
- Discover how many schools offer forensic science courses and what level of training they provide.
- Discuss the survey results and their implications for the legal education system at large.

## THE STUDY

The 2009 National Academy of Sciences Report called for higher quality scientific education in law schools, citing the lack of scientific expertise among lawyers and judges as a longstanding gap. The American Bar Association then adopted a resolution calling for greater forensic sciences training among law students.

In late 2019 and Spring 2020, Garrett et al. searched online listings of courses for 192 law

schools included on the 2019 News and World Report ranking list. They then sent questionnaires to faculties of these schools and requested syllabi to examine the coverage of forensic science courses the schools offered.

With the data in hand, Garrett et al. could examine the type of forensic science-related coverage at law schools in the United States.





## RESULTS

- Only 42 different forensic science courses were identified by the survey, and several schools did not offer any of these courses at all.
- Across the board, the courses offered were all for upper-level students, and many courses were not offered every year, further limiting students' access to forensic science training.



**Only two** of the reported courses mentioned teaching statistics or quantitative methods; the vast majority only covered legal standards for admissibility of expert evidence.

- Compounding this lack of access was a low degree of demand. None of the responding faculty reported having large lecture courses; in fact, many reported class sizes of fewer than twenty students.

## FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

- ⇒ The results of this survey suggest that the 2009 NAS Report's call for higher standards in forensic science education remain highly relevant and that continuing legal education will be particularly useful to addressing these needs.
- ⇒ In addition to specialty courses in forensics, more general courses in quantitative methods, during and after law school, could provide a better understanding of statistics for future and current lawyers and judges.
- ⇒ There is still much work to be done in order to ensure greater scientific literacy in the legal profession. To quote Jim Dwyer, Barry Scheck, and Peter Neufeld, "A fear of science won't cut it in an age when many pleas of guilty are predicated on the reports of scientific experts. Every public defender's office should have at least one lawyer who is not afraid of a test tube."

## LEARN MORE

For further details, the full paper can be found here: [forensicstats.link/ForensicsInEducation](https://forensicstats.link/ForensicsInEducation)

*Additionally, explore relevant publications:*

- **Judges and forensic science education: A national survey** [forensicstats.link/JudgesAndForensicEducationStudy](https://forensicstats.link/JudgesAndForensicEducationStudy)
- **Juror appraisals of forensic evidence: Effects of blind proficiency and cross-examination** [forensicstats.link/JurorAppraisals](https://forensicstats.link/JurorAppraisals)

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