



Forensic Science in Legal Education

Lead Researchers: Brandon L. Garrett, Glinda S. Cooper and Quinn Beckham

Journal: Duke Law School Public Law & Legal Theory Series No. 2021-22

Publication Date: 15 February 2021 | **Link:** forensicstats.link/ForensicsInEducation-DOI

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.




-



- 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."



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

Additionally, explore relevant publications:

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

FUNDING



CSAFE is a publicly funded organization headquartered at Iowa State University. The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) is one of the center's providers, supporting CSAFE as a nationally recognized Center of Excellence in Forensic Sciences, NIST Award #70NANB15H176 and #70NANB20H019.