

Education and Training

1.0 Principle, Spirit and Intent

The profession of forensic anthropology requires education and training that has both breadth in the scope of anthropological inquiry and depth in specific areas of related practice. A holistic understanding of anthropology is fundamental to the practice of forensic anthropology.

2.0 Purpose and Scope

This guideline outlines the education and training that should be achieved to practice forensic anthropology. Contrasted with a set curriculum, these guidelines suggest themes and topics designed to provide students and professionals with the basic knowledge and skills required to both meet qualification guidelines (see SWGANTH Qualifications) and practice forensic anthropology. Aspiring practitioners of forensic anthropology should implement these guidelines to the fullest extent as applicable, practical, and appropriate. In the absence of specific guidance or contradictory guidelines, the principle, spirit and intent should be met.

3.0 General Principles

Education should provide a broad background in anthropological theory, methods, and techniques, as well as specialization at the graduate level to include forensic casework experience and a focused research program. Documentation of education and training should be maintained.

The educational and training process should include mentorship and supervision by a practicing Forensic Anthropologist III (see SWGANTH Qualifications). Appropriate education and training in forensic anthropology prepares an individual to pass a certification examination and serve as a practitioner.

Any one practitioner may not necessarily acquire all skills and knowledge in the various fields used in forensic anthropological casework, but should be conversant in all areas. In addition, some positions may require specialized education and training.

4.0 Best Practices

The following sections outline specific education and training guidelines.

4.1 Education

Undergraduate education should focus on broad, holistic anthropological inquiry, usually attained with an anthropology degree and additional training in the physical and natural sciences. Graduate education should include anthropological theory, with an emphasis on human variation and anatomy, skeletal biology, archaeology, and the other primary areas listed below. Students, particularly graduate students, should begin professional activities, such as active student membership within the American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS), and attend and present at regional and national forensic science meetings. Students are encouraged to gain exposure to other areas of forensic sciences for a broader understanding of the role of forensic anthropology. Students are encouraged to use outside resources to augment their education in forensic anthropology and related sciences (e.g. internships, postgraduate fellowships, short courses).

Students should have university-level coursework in the following primary and secondary areas.

4.1.1 Primary Areas

- Human variation
- Human osteology
- Skeletal pathology
- Evolutionary theory
- Archaeological theory, method, and field work
- Statistics and mathematics
- Research methods and design
- Anthropological theory
- Human growth and development
- Bone biology
- Dental anthropology
- Genetics and molecular biology
- Cultural anthropology
- Human and comparative anatomy and physiology
- General forensic sciences
- Ethics
- Taphonomy

4.1.2 Secondary Areas

- Radiology
- Photography
- Legal procedures
- Evidence handling and security
- Biomechanics
- Bone histology
- Epidemiology

4.2 Training

Training outside the classroom is necessary for the successful practice of forensic anthropology. Training should be documented in a training log that is verified by a trainer. Practitioners should receive mentoring from qualified professionals in the following areas:

- Chain of custody procedures
- Laboratory management and quality assurance
- Photographic techniques
- Radiographic techniques
- Microscopy and slide preparation
- Metric analysis including geometric morphometric techniques
- Biological profile methods and techniques
- Trauma analysis
- Personal identification
- Report writing
- Field search and recovery

4.3 Supplemental Education

Educational opportunities are available in multiple forms and are not limited to formal course curricula. Supplemental education may be accomplished through the following venues:

- Attendance and active participation at meetings and workshops, and/or presentation of research at professional organizations (e.g., American Academy of Forensic Sciences, International Association for Identification, and American Association of Physical Anthropologists)
- Participation in international initiatives in forensic anthropology
- Studying relevant publications in forensic anthropology and related areas
- Short courses
- Professional seminars and workshops
- Guest and invited speakers and lectures
- Courses at any advanced education level
- Internships/apprenticeships/residencies/fellowships/post-docs
- Online seminars through forensic and legal agencies
- Research
- Professional service
- Teaching

4.4 Research

Research and publication of findings allows forensic anthropologists to stay abreast of the field as well as fill gaps and deficiencies in previous knowledge. Research should be published in peer-reviewed venues.

5.0 Unacceptable Practices

The following practices are considered unacceptable and should be avoided:

- Falsely representing training and experience
- Failing to maintain current and accurate records of education, training, or certification.