

DEPARTMENT OF FORENSIC SCIENCE

About

Chair

Sarah Kerrigan, PhD (Sarah.kerrigan@shsu.edu)

Mission

Our mission is to continuously improve and enhance the practice of forensic science through innovative teaching, research and service.

Vision

The Department of Forensic Science at SHSU envisions a future where institutes of higher education and forensic science service providers work in partnership to improve and strengthen forensic science and the criminal justice system as a whole.

Contact Information

Kelsie Bryand, MS. (kelsie@shsu.edu)
(936) 294-4370

Department Website

Department of Forensic Science (<http://forensics.shsu.edu/>)

Highlights

The Master of Science in Forensic Science is accredited by the Forensic Science Education Programs Accreditation Commission (FEPAC (<http://fepac-edu.org/>)). The program itself was established in 2001 and was the very first accredited program in Texas. The program gives students the flexibility to tailor a degree toward their individual interests and professional goals while working in a state-of-the art scientific facility. We have been preparing students for careers in forensic science for over a decade, with proven success.

Sam Houston State University offers a PhD in Forensic Science for those seeking leadership positions or intending to pursue careers in research or education. The doctoral program at SHSU is an interdisciplinary science degree that can be completed in approximately five years of full-time study.

Career Opportunities

The forensic science programs are designed to prepare graduates for successful careers in forensic science and related professions. Students not only develop scientific understanding essential to forensic science, but also acquire the practical skills, knowledge and problem solving abilities that will help them advance into leadership positions. The graduate programs in forensic science offer extensive hands-on and laboratory instruction. Students acquire the practical skills that are sought after by potential employers. Postgraduate success averaged more than 90% over the past ten years.

- PhD in Forensic Science (<http://catalog.shsu.edu/archives/2020-2021/graduate-and-professional/college-departments/criminal-justice/forensic-sciences/forensic-science-phd/>)
- Master of Science in Forensic Science (<http://catalog.shsu.edu/archives/2020-2021/graduate-and-professional/college-departments/criminal-justice/forensic-sciences/forensic-science-ms/>)

Student Organizations and Activities

- Society of Forensic Science
- Graduate Student Organization (Criminal Justice)

Internships

The Department of forensic science partners with numerous accredited crime laboratories and medical examiner's offices for forensic science internships throughout the United States. All students enrolled in one of the graduate programs must successfully complete a forensic science internship. The department does not facilitate internships for students from other colleges or universities.

Scholarships

Scholarship opportunities, assistantships, and financial assistance are available. Student assistantships and scholarships are awarded on a competitive basis based upon academic performance, GRE scores, letters of recommendation and previous laboratory experience.

Financial awards are available, including out-of-state tuition waivers. University policy requires all students to pay in-state tuition.

Information on graduate assistantships is available by contacting Kelsie Bryand (kelsie@shsu.edu) (kelsie@shsu.edu) in the Department of Forensic Science at (936) 294-4370.

Information on specific scholarships available in the College of Criminal Justice are available through Cutty Gilbert (cutty@shsu.edu) at (936) 294-3755.

Please see the College of Criminal Justice (<http://catalog.shsu.edu/archives/2020-2021/graduate-and-professional/college-departments/criminal-justice/>) section for information on college and university level scholarships.

FORS 5114. Firearms and Toolmarks. 1 Hour.

Students are provided a broad overview of firearm and toolmark identification for forensic purposes. Terminology, function testing and ammunition are discussed, together with class and individual characteristics, identification criteria and instrumentation. Determination of caliber/gauge, trajectory and distance determination are also covered. Basic toolmark nomenclature, class and individual characteristics, fracture matching and serial number restoration are also addressed.

FORS 5116. Seminar In Forensic Science. 1 Hour.

This graduate seminar series focuses on current topics and research in forensic science.

FORS 5117. Controlled Substance Analysis. 1 Hour.

Students are introduced to the concepts, theories, and principles used in the forensic analysis of controlled substances. Methods of forensic analysis of drugs, including pill identification, microscopic examination, color tests, microcrystalline tests, thin layer chromatography (TLC), Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR) and gas chromatography-mass spectrometry (GC-MS) will be explored. The source, origin, chemical properties and clandestine manufacture of controlled substances are also discussed. Students gain a fundamental understanding of controlled substance analysis in accordance with the standard of practice in an accredited crime laboratory.

FORS 5118. Questioned Documents. 1 Hour.

This course is designed to provide students with an understanding of techniques and procedures used for forensic document examination. Students explore handwriting comparisons, printed document alterations, and ink analysis.

FORS 5119. Fire Debris. 1 Hour.

Students address evidence collection, analytical techniques, instrumentation and data interpretation related to fire debris. Students learn to interpret analytical results within forensic contexts.

FORS 5226. Law And Forensic Sciences. 2 Hours.

Students are provided an overview of the law-forensic science interface. This includes legal concepts of admissibility of evidence and proof, rules of evidence, structure and hierarchy of criminal courts, and expert testimony. The course also includes direct and cross examination of students in a moot court setting.

FORS 5333. Forensic Anthropology. 3 Hours.

Students address theories, methodologies, and applications of forensic anthropology. The course covers advanced human osteology and includes hands-on training with skeletal remains. Students learn and apply the methods used to construct a human biological profile, which includes the determination of sex, age, and race based on skeletal features. The processes of human decomposition, and the identification of skeletal pathologies and trauma are also introduced. Three-hour laboratory.

FORS 5337. Fundamentals of Criminalistics. 3 Hours.

Students address the fundamentals of physical evidence concepts, pattern evidence, and forensic biology. Students acquire standards and general practices in criminalistics.

FORS 5360. Pattern and Physical Evidence Concepts. 3 Hours.

Students are introduced to the interpretation of pattern evidence and the forensic analysis of physical evidence. Scientific experiments and analysis of pattern in support of crime scene reconstruction are discussed. Pattern recognition of physical evidence, such as bloodstains, gunshot residues, tire prints, shoeprints, fire debris, explosive, glass fracture, body gesture, and wound patterns, are covered. Physical and chemical techniques for the visualization or enhancement of various types of patterns are also introduced. Expert interpretation of observed pattern of physical evidence are discussed. Four-hour laboratory.

FORS 5362. Techniques-Crime Scene Investg. 3 Hours.

Students are provided an advanced comprehensive review of contemporary techniques for the identification, collection, preservation, and evaluation of evidence found at the crime scene. The assistance of different items of physical evidence in the reconstruction of a crime are studied. The course includes the application of CSI theory in various applied scenarios. Concepts of physical evidence, evidence collection, quality assurance, and chain custody procedures in forensic analysis are also covered.

FORS 5435. Trace/Microscopical Analysis. 4 Hours.

Students engage in the review of the classifications and characteristics of trace evidence and are provided hands-on experience in microscopic examination of physical evidence. A wide variety of chromatographic, spectroscopic, and microscopic techniques, such as stereo microscope, polarized light microscope, digital microscope, comparison microscope, scanning electron microscopy-energy dispersive spectroscopy, micro Fourier transform infrared spectrometer, pyrolysis-gas chromatography-mass spectrometry, are used in this course. The forensic examination of fiber, hair, glass, paint, gun shot residue (GSR), ink, and explosives are covered. Four-hour laboratory.

FORS 5440. Forensic Biology. 4 Hours.

Students cover the practical DNA analysis of biological evidence. Different extraction methods are discussed as well as techniques for the quantification of DNA. Students are introduced to emerging forensic DNA methods, such as identifying the tissue of origin and assessing the level of DNA degradation and PCR inhibitors in a biological sample. Strategies for the analysis of PCR products (autosomal and Y chromosome STRs), interpretation of results, biostatistics, and quality assurance procedures will be covered. Basic statistical genetics theory are approached to generate a final DNA report. Four-hour laboratory. Credit 4 .

FORS 5445. Forensic Instrumental Analysis. 4 Hours.

Students are provided a comprehensive overview of the analytical methodology, approaches, and instrumentation used for forensic analysis. Fundamental qualitative and quantitative chemical analysis using advanced instrumentation are reviewed. A wide variety of techniques that are used in a number of forensic disciplines are covered. Well established methods and novel approaches are discussed. Four-hour laboratory.

FORS 6014. Forensic Science Research. 1-3 Hours.

This capstone experience allows students to formally apply their acquired knowledge and skills in forensic science. This course consists of an independent research project which culminates in a formal written report or manuscript. Additionally, students are required to present and defend their scientific research orally in a public forum. Variable Credit (1-3).

FORS 6094. Special Topics in Forensic Sci. 4 Hours.**FORS 6111. Fundamentals of Research Methods. 1 Hour.**

Students are provided a broad overview of theoretical and practical concepts necessary for scientific research. These include an overview of the scientific method, the importance of logical research design, and basic scientific writing skills. Topics covered may include: qualitative and quantitative research approaches, developing and refining research questions and project outlines to adequately test hypotheses, reviewing scientific literature, developing technical writing strategies, and understanding relevant ethical issues.

FORS 6224. Quality Assurance and Ethical Conduct in Forensic Science. 2 Hours.

Students are introduced to the concepts and procedures associated with quality assurance and ethical conduct in forensic science.

FORS 6315. Forens Stats/Populn Genetics. 3 Hours.

This course will focus on the application of statistical methods and theory to forensic genetics. Students must have an introductory knowledge of probability theory and statistics. Fundamental topics like ideal populations, random mating, Hardy-Weinberg equilibrium, linkage disequilibrium, disturbing forces, inbreeding, four-allele descent measurements, product rule, independence testing and genetic distance will also be covered. Students will analyze and interpret the results from microsatellite population databases using population genetics software.

Prerequisite: FORS 5440.

FORS 6317. Forensic Statistics. 3 Hours.

Students address the application of statistical methods to forensic science problems and evidence interpretation. During this course, differences between the frequentist and Bayesian approaches are emphasized. The merits of each approach are explored for a variety of forensic problems, particularly the interpretation of forensic evidence in the courts. Students are exposed to examples pertaining to trace evidence, impression evidence, toxicology, controlled substances, and DNA evidence. Students learn how to construct simple Bayesian networks and utilize statistical software to compute results.

FORS 6333. Behavioral Genetics. 3 Hours.

Students are provided with an understanding of behavior genetics and the influence of genes and the environment of emotion, personality and behavior in humans and animals. Credits 3.

FORS 6335. Advanced Forensic Chemistry. 3 Hours.

Students address novel scientific techniques in crime scene chemistry and crime lab chemistry. Non-destructive optical methods developed for sensing or identifying physical evidence are particularly emphasized in this course. New developments in chromatographic, spectroscopic, and microscopic techniques for the analysis of fibers, hair, gunshot residue, ink, paints, glass, explosives and narcotics are also explored.

Prerequisite: FORS 5335 and FORS 5445.

FORS 6337. Forensic Medicine. 3 Hours.

Students are provided an overview of forensic medicine and forensic pathology pertaining to medicolegal death investigation. Students analyze legal issues associated with the practice of forensic medicine.

FORS 6361. Advanced Forensic DNA. 3 Hours.

Students cover the practical DNA analysis of extremely degraded biological evidence, including hair shafts, nails, teeth and bones. Different extraction methods are discussed and practically applied. Techniques for quantification of minimal amounts of DNA, RNA profiling, alternative strategies for DNA analysis (low copy number, SNPs, X-STRs) and DNA sequencing (mtDNA), interpretation of results, biostatistics, and standard operation procedures are also covered.

Prerequisite: FORS 5440.

FORS 6371. Forensic Science Internship. 3 Hours.

This is a ten week full-time internship in an approved forensic science laboratory. This opportunity allows graduate students to apply their theoretical knowledge, practical skills and abilities in a forensic science setting.

FORS 6446. Forensic Toxicology. 4 Hours.

Students explore the physico-chemical characteristics of drugs and poisons of forensic interest with a focus on human performance and postmortem forensic toxicology applications. Students address pharmacological and analytical challenges associated with biological evidence as well as qualitative and quantitative analysis of compounds from biological and non-biological matrices and are provided with hands-on experience with chromatographic and spectroscopic techniques that are widely used in forensic laboratories. Four-hour laboratory.

FORS 7089. Practicum. 1-3 Hours.

The practicum affords the doctoral student the opportunity to apply research in a practical setting, adapt technologies for maximal use, appreciate the steps necessary for the implementation of new technology within an accredited environment, and observe the technical and non-technical processes involved. During the practicum students must complete the equivalent of a ten-week, full-time placement (400 hours) in an approved forensic science laboratory or facility.

Prerequisite: FORS 6371.

FORS 7094. Adv Topic. 3 Hours.

This special topic course is adaptable to the needs and interests of the individual doctoral students majoring in Forensic Science. Variable credit (1-3).
Prerequisite: Departmental Approval.

FORS 7331. Research Methods. 3 Hours.

Students focus on the scientific method, research methods, and design. Students are provided the opportunity to discover, structure, and formulate research questions. Through this process, students come to understand the many ways in which researchers can acquire knowledge and insights using a wide variety of research methods applicable to forensic science.

Prerequisite: Three credits of statistics.

FORS 7332. Scientific Communications. 3 Hours.

Students develop the oral and written communication skills necessary for forensic science researchers and practitioners. Students must develop mastery of the following: technical report writing with regard to standard operating procedures, scientific publications and grant proposals; oral presentations, depositions and courtroom testimony of scientific evidence.

Prerequisite: FORS 5226.

FORS 7334. Social Science of Forensics. 3 Hours.

This course addresses the nexus between social and behavioral principles and the conduct of forensic science. Topics addressed include the organization of the forensic enterprise including the structure and functioning of forensic crime labs; performance assessment of forensic systems, organizations and practitioners; sociological, social-psychological, and psychological factors affecting the performance of forensic practitioners; and management theory of forensic workplaces and workers.

FORS 7346. Advanced Forensic Toxicology. 3 Hours.

Students focus on advanced principles and practices in forensic toxicology, in particular, advanced analytical, methodological, and interpretive issues. Students apply their knowledge of basic forensic toxicology principles to a variety of analytical and interpretive topics relevant to behavioral and postmortem toxicology, including but not limited to, impaired driving, sexual assault, and death investigation. Credits 3.

Prerequisite: FORS 6446.

FORS 7381. Explosive Analysis & Detection. 3 Hours.

Students survey the broad field of explosive engineering and detection to include the safety and transportation classifications. Chemical and physical properties, explosive reagents and byproducts, and detection techniques are addressed, including military and improvised devices, post-blast evidence and constitutional aspects of interdiction.

Prerequisite: CHEM 4440 or FORS 5445.

FORS 7385. Warfare Agents. 3 Hours.

Students evaluate chemical, biological, and radiological warfare agents. These agents are discussed from a chemical and biochemical standpoint including structure, function, mechanism of action, injury, clinical therapy, and recovery. Three credit hours of biochemistry or toxicology at the undergraduate or graduate level are recommended for students taking this course.

FORS 7390. Forensic Laboratory Management. 3 Hours.

Students address key areas of forensic laboratory management and leadership. Students are prepared for administrative and leadership roles in public or private sector forensic science laboratories. The course focuses on the integration of technical and discipline specific policies and procedures into the administrative framework of the crime laboratory. Issues include the quality management system, organizational efficiency, fiscal, personnel and resource management, regulation, certification and accreditation.

FORS 7394. Doctoral Seminar in For Sci. 3 Hours.

Students broaden their awareness of forensic science practice and critically evaluate forensic research while contributing to their professional development. The seminar focuses on professional practice issues, theoretical and interpretive topics, and current standards within forensic science. Students critically evaluate proposed and existing standards, analyze the process of standard development, discuss and present on topics related to emerging issues, trends, technologies, and foundational science.

FORS 8099. Dissertation. 1-3 Hours.

Director/Chair: Sarah Kerrigan

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