

## **ARIZONA FORENSIC SCIENCE ACADEMY** **COLLABORATIVE TRAINING**

### **History of Academy and AZFSAC:**

The Forensic Science Academy (Academy) is part of the Arizona Forensic Science Advisory Committee (FSAC). FSAC was created in 2007 by the Arizona Attorney General's Office to help coordinate and improve forensic science services in Arizona. The Academy was established by FSAC in 2008. The Academy is self-supporting. A registration fee is charged for each Lecture Series event (average \$25-35/person) and each Academy offering (\$300/person) and these funds are used to cover costs of the events and speakers. To date, because all events are held at government agency venues, there are no venue-related expenditures for events.

FSAC is made up of:

- Voluntarily chaired by Court of Appeals Judge Cattani and Retired Superior Court Judge Ron Reinstein
- Crime lab leadership from all state/local crime labs
- Representative for the prosecuting attorney's association
- Representative(s) of Arizona public defense services
- Representative of Arizona Justice Project
- Victims' rights representative
- Representative(s) from Arizona Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (ACJC)
- Representative from Office of Medical Examiner
- Law enforcement investigator representatives
- Judicial Officer representatives
- Member(s) of the public
- Academic institution representatives (a more recent addition)

The Academy Board is made up of:

- Crime lab representatives
- Attorney representatives
- Judicial officer representative

### **Administration of Academy and AZFSAC:**

From their inception these groups were administratively supported by a person in the Arizona Attorney General's Office. In 2022 when the Arizona Supreme Court established the Center for Forensics and Artificial Intelligence (the Center) as a new unit within the Administrative Office of Courts, the FSAC chairs sought transition of administrative support for FSAC and the Academy to the Center from the Attorney General's Office. The Center's partnership with Arizona colleges and universities with forensic programs was part of the basis for the change in who provided administrative support as it coincided with FSAC and FSAs broadening of their mission and goals. As of Fall 2022 the Director of the Center has acted as administrative support for both FSAC and the Academy.

The administrative support role includes:

- Meeting scheduling for both groups
- Meeting logistic support for both groups including notetaking, aiding in follow-up action items
- All aspects of planning for the Basic and Advanced Academies
  - Announcements
  - Application process
  - Venue (securing site; all venue logistics)
  - Technology
  - Registration fees
  - CLE/CE certification
  - Speaker logistics, including contracts where necessary
  - Managing participant needs (materials; logistics; accommodations)
- All aspects of planning and support for Lecture Series events (same as above for Academy)
- The Forensic Science Academy fund management

### **The Academy:**

There are two types of offerings by the Academy.

The Academy hosts both a basic and advanced forensic science academy that utilizes recognized local and national forensic science experts to jointly educate prosecutors and defense attorneys in forensic science disciplines. The Academy occurs annually with the basic academy occurring in even years and the advanced academy occurring in odd years. Each academy consists of 3.5-hour sessions weekly over a period of 8 weeks. When space allows, other criminal agency personnel such as paralegals and mitigation specialists and law enforcement investigators are admitted to the academy.

Participants are required to apply and the Board reviews and accepts applicants. Applicants must affirm they can attend and complete at least 80% of the Academy Sessions to receive a Certificate of Completion. Participants receive CLE/CE certificates for all hours they attend.

In 2024 the Basic Academy, in an effort to reach more rural attorneys, is piloting a virtual attendance offering for those outside of Maricopa County. This will also allow in-person participants to potentially avoid missing a session because of a need to be in office on a particular day (on-call) or due to another conflict that impedes in person attendance but not attendance virtually.

The 2023 Advance Academy subjects included: firearms; digital evidence (cell and facial recognition); latent prints (expanded conclusions); DNA (mixture analysis and STRM, rapid, familial searching, forensic genetic genealogy); courtroom ethics.

The 2024 Basic Academy Subjects will include: controlled substances; toxicology, death investigations; crime scene response, forensic biology and DNA; digital forensics, latent print analysis, firearms, crime lab tour.

Each Academy averages around 30 participants, but those numbers are likely to expand with the out-of-county virtual participation option.

The Academy is also in the process of creating a Steering Committee with stakeholder partners, including local forensic science program professors to update the curriculum for both academies.

**Lecture Series:**

Lecture series events are primarily aimed at crime lab analysts. These events are usually 3 to 4-hour lectures designed to provide continuing education opportunities to analysts. However, lawyers and judges can be included in the audience as well as law enforcement investigators.

In 2023 and 2024 these were the lecture series offerings:

- Wrongful Convictions and Forensic Science Errors. (3 separate offerings for three groups: lab analysts, lawyers, police investigators)
- Exploring Opportunities for Improvement In The Forensic Sciences, A Center For Statistics And Applications In Forensic Evidence Presentation
- Investigative Genetic Genealogy and Familial DNA Searching