

## A COMPREHENSIVE AND EFFICIENT TRAINING PROGRAM FOR FORENSIC BIOLOGISTS

**Jack Laird, Melinda Matte, and Jonathan Newman**

*Biology Section, Centre of Forensic Sciences, Toronto, ON*



The Centre of Forensic Sciences (CFS) is a large, multidisciplinary laboratory serving a population base of approximately 10 million people in the province of Ontario. In recognition of the potential for forensic biology to be a cost effective component in police investigations, the Government of Ontario provided funding for a new DNA laboratory, and an increase in the number of staff from 36 in 1995 to 72 in 2002.

One of several challenges faced as a result of such a significant expansion was the redesign of the training program for forensic biologists. A program was needed that would:

- Meet the requirements of the CFS quality system and thereby ensure continued compliance with our ASCLD/LAB accreditation.
- Meet the training standards issued by the DNA Advisory Board (DAB) and the training guidelines published by The Scientific Working Group on DNA Analysis Methods.
- Accommodate large numbers of trainees with a wide range of educational backgrounds and experience
- Be comprehensive, yet efficient in light of the pressures that require trainees to become operationally effective as soon as is possible.

In response, a program designed to be completed within 6-9 months has been developed. As part of the program, trainees are afforded the following training opportunities (either within groups or as individuals).

- Health and Safety, Laboratory Orientation, and Policy training
- Miscarriages of Justice training
- Evidence Screening and Body Fluid Identification training
- DNA Analysis and Interpretation training
- Expert Witness training

All are provided within the framework of a one-on-one mentorship with a senior scientist.

Training is accomplished according to a pre-set schedule via the collective efforts of management and senior staff within the section. Instruction techniques include lectures, group literature reviews, practical exercises, and question-and-answer sessions designed to acclimatize trainees to the challenge of conveying information in a court setting.

Assessment of trainees is ongoing throughout the program, allowing managers to specifically address individual needs as they arise. Additionally, feedback opportunities are built-in throughout the program at various levels. Perhaps most notably, trainees are paired with senior scientists for the duration of their training. This mentorship is critical to the overall success of the program, and ensures that not only theoretical knowledge but also practical experience is shared in a learning environment.

The Biology Section has trained 19 forensic biologists in the past three years using this program. We believe the training program to be efficient, effective and comprehensive and it ensures that personnel are well prepared for the various challenges of casework, including court presentation.