

BACKGROUND: The Office of Training and Professional Development worked closely with the Office of Science and Technology's National Laboratory Center, the Association of Firearm and Toolmark Examiners (AFTE) and a private consultant to develop the academic curriculum for the NFEA. The work of the development committee resulted in establishment of eighteen distinct modules of instruction divided into four phases:

MODULE A - Administrative Matters (Laboratory Protocols, Safety and Ethics)

MODULE B – History of Black Powder

MODULE C – Evolution of Early Firearms

MODULE D – Modern Ammunition Evolution and Manufacture

MODULE E – Modern Firearms Development and Operating Systems

MODULE F – Manufacture of Modern Firearms

MODULE G – Firearms Identification, History, Principles, Equipment and Current Developments

MODULE H – Microscopy and Instrumentation

MODULE I – General Preliminary Examinations of Firearms

MODULE J – Test Firing for Known Specimens and Operability

MODULE K – Bullet Examinations and Comparisons – Shotshell Projectiles

MODULE L – Cartridge, Cartridge Case, Shotshell and Fired Shotshell Examinations and Comparisons

MODULE M – Toolmark Examinations, Comparisons and Identifications

MODULE N – Restoration of Obliterated Markings

MODULE O – Terminal Ballistics, Gunshot Residues, Shot Patterns, Distance Determinations, Bullet Path Analysis and Wound Effects

MODULE P – External Tours

MODULE Q – Research Project

MODULE R – Oral Presentations, Daubert and Court Testimony

The first modules (A-G) involve extensive pre-course reading and research in order to establish a solid student knowledge base as well as minimize lecture time in modules with limited opportunity for practical exercises.

Each session of the academy is divided into four distinct phases:

PHASE I – Following student selection and notification students will have a four month period to complete reading and researching pre-course assignments as provided by the academy staff.

PHASE II - An 18-week instructional session at ATF's Forensic Science Laboratory - Washington in Ammendale, Maryland. Instruction and practical exercises in Modules A-R are covered. This phase also includes a trip to an ammunition manufacturer as well as two separate one-week trips to firearm and tool manufacturers in New Hampshire, Connecticut, New York and Massachusetts. This session is very content-intensive and in order for the student to self-develop there is considerable study and research during many evenings and weekends.

PHASE III - A four-month period in which the student returns to their own agency laboratory. During this period the student will complete a research project which has been pre-approved by Academy instructors and the student's supervisor at their agency's laboratory. The student will also complete simulated firearms and toolmark cases prepared by Academy instructors. These will be presented in a courtroom scenario in Phase IV.

PHASE IV - A two-week follow-up school in the Washington, D.C. area guides the student in preparation for the presentation of expert testimony. This will also include pretrial conferences and the preparation of exhibits. Students will also present the research projects that they completed during Phase III (Modules Q and R).

APPLICATION CRITERIA: Student selection is conducted by the NFEA Staff and is dependent on a number of criteria. In order to be considered the applicant must:

1. Have a minimum of a baccalaureate degree in a related area (sciences, criminal justice etc.).
2. Be employed full time in a trainee status to perform the duties of a Firearm and Toolmark examiner.
3. Have a senior examiner assigned to oversee their training.
4. Have agency submit certification on agency letterhead of the satisfactory completion of a background investigation.
5. The student must be a United States Citizen or Permanent Resident Alien.

STUDENT REQUIREMENTS: All students selected for the NFEA will be evaluated throughout the program for continuance in the NFEA. Evaluations, at a minimum, will be based upon completing assignments on time, passing exams with a grade of at least 80% and meeting the criteria in the NFEA Honor Code.

CONTACT INFORMATION: Questions concerning the program can be directed to the NFEA staff listed below.

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