



Cold Case Training

*F*all traditionally means back-to-school time for children and teachers across the country. This fall, another group will observe that tradition when law enforcement investigators begin to sign up for free online cold-case training offered via the Virginia Center for Policing Innovation (VCPI) Web site.

VCPI, using funding from the Office of Justice Programs' National Institute of Justice, offered four classroom sessions of "Unsolved Cases: Cold Case Analysis for Law Enforcement and Prosecutors" in summer and fall 2009, and received approximately 700 applications from 41 states and nearly 300 agencies, nearly double the number of available seats. Fortunately, the applicants who weren't selected as well as other investigators across the nation can take advantage of the self-paced online version, scheduled for launch in October 2009.

According to Teresa Carey, VCPI finance and marketing coordinator, both the classroom and online versions of the training use an enhanced simulation learning tool called the Virtual Case File.

The student plays the role of primary investigator and is responsible for re-examining available evidence. This evidence may include suspects, profiles, case specifics, physical evidence and lab reports. Students practice skills learned from course instruction in a simulated cold case investigation, applying investigative skills, forensic and DNA testing and more. Designed to provide a guided experience to apply tools and skills to cold case scenarios, the simulation is not won or lost as if it were an online game.

"Research demonstrates the effectiveness of practical simulations as a learning enhancement tool moving learners from simple information absorption to skill development," Carey says.

"Every law enforcement department has unsolved cases," says Lynda S. O'Connell, VCPI executive director. "DNA and forensic science advances have become key components to successfully solving them. By providing

training in these advancements and associated investigative techniques, this program will give them the knowledge and skills needed to successfully investigate and resolve cold cases."

According to VCPI materials, the course is designed to:

- Enable nonscientists to grasp the elements of forensic biology and its implications for solving cold cases.
- Provide a practical foundation in DNA evidence identification.
- Teach about the overall knowledge, skills and best practices related to processing previously handled DNA evidence in cold cases.
- Offer guidance on identifying cases for investigation based on statute of limitations considerations and solvability factors.
- Review communication basics including verbal and nonverbal communication and impediments to effective communication.
- Provide practical case examples of successfully solved cold cases from the investigative point of view.
- Give instruction on maximizing successful prosecution of cold cases.
- Offer insight on four key elements necessary for a successful cold case homicide squad.
- Provide strategies for working with and managing the media in high-profile investigations.

"We work to anticipate training needs," Carey says. "With the cold case training, we saw a need for the development of technical knowledge and skills to enhance efforts to successfully investigate and resolve cold cases, and we also saw a need for accessible training."

Comments received with applications for classroom training indicated VCPI's strategy was right on target, based on remarks such as:

- "I have been assigned to our cold case unit for DNA-related sexual assault cases since February of this year and this is the first (and most exciting) training that I have seen."
- "Recently, my investigations unit has undertaken the responsibility of analyzing unsolved homicide cases from years past. These cases have proven to be challenging and difficult. I find myself in a position where I draw my knowledge base from experience and training related to homicide investigation geared toward a recent case. I have no training in investigating a cold case homicide. It is for this reason that your training is necessary for my own development and the investigators I supervise . . . I value the benefit my agency gains from my attendance at this training course."
- "My partner and I . . . are both long-time homicide detectives who have recently been assigned the task of developing a new cold case homicide unit and have been working it the past nine months. We can use all the help we can get!"

For training information, visit <http://www.vcpionline.org> or contact Teresa Carey at VCPI at (804) 644-0899, or e-mail tcarey@vcpionline.org.

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