

**1 TOP STORY:
MORTUARY SCIENCE
STUDENTS AND COVID-19**

5 Planning for Your School Year in Unprecedented Times

7 Funeral Service Needs You!

9 Beyond the Classroom: Better Serve Families Using Remembering A Life

11 Focusing on Maximum Education to Stay Relevant

13 The Mortuary Science Program Landscape: Past, Present and Future

21 One Must Look at the Rolling Data

24 When You Need a Win

25 From the Editor's Desk: Can We Stop Saying "New Normal"?



Mortuary Science Students and COVID-19

By Lauren Budrow

Dear Mortuary Science Student,

Do you realize how fortunate you are to be enrolled in mortuary school during the COVID-19 pandemic? While it might seem strange to refer to this as an opportune period for learning – especially since many traditional courses have been forced online and classroom interaction has diminished – this moment in history spotlights careers in funeral service. It calls attention to things that families, practitioners and license regulators have taken for granted.

The pandemic has also presented many challenges, but those often foster new perspectives on how to best serve families and the need to embrace

service offerings not otherwise considered profitable or necessary.

This article offers a look at the short- and long-term impact of COVID-19 on funeral service and how it's affecting graduates and licensees. There might be many more effects than what I list here, and I admit that some of these are my predictions based on what I see in funeral service, and on former students who are currently practicing.

COVID-19'S SHORT-TERM IMPACT

Fewer funerals, more direct disposition When the pandemic started, the profession immediately faced declining funeral services due to limited attendance in funeral homes and places of worship.

Many families made the only decision they felt they could – to delay or skip the funeral, to hold a graveside service for immediate family only or to seek direct cremation and (maybe) hold a memorial service at a later date.

If you look at any General Price List (GPL), you will see that these service offerings are less expensive than traditional services. I've had students reach out and ask what I thought this meant for funeral service in general. Students pursue this career so they can facilitate services, plan unique celebration ceremonies, and embalm, but if funeral service becomes merely focused on body disposal, it loses its appeal as a career option.

In the short term, I believe this is a temporary situation and one that is region-dependent since not all communities in this country are being impacted in the same way. Families that suffered losses that did not result from COVID-19 and had fully funded prearrangements for a traditional visitation and service were not able to honor their loved ones the way they intended. Similarly, those who would have held services for a loved one who died because of the coronavirus were often not even allowed to perform an ID viewing prior to direct disposition.

Having those things taken away from families might prove the very thing that drives their desire to want those services more in the future. After all, it's human nature to want something more when you're told you can't have it. I predict that families will want back some of those opportunities to say goodbye, particularly when they couldn't be present during a loved one's last moments.

Reduced in-person contact with families Fear and uncertainty surrounding the transmission of COVID-19 forced many funeral homes to re-evaluate the different methods by which funeral directors interact with families in person. One of the first challenges involved how to conduct funeral arrangements, especially since not everyone owns a home computer, printer or scanner to receive and send a funeral contract (or might not know how to use them).

Thus, in the short term, funeral directors figured out how to meet with families virtually by using WebEx, Facebook, Zoom and other videoconferencing platforms. Some resorted to driving contracts to clients' homes for signatures because the

person couldn't use DocuSign or lacked the capability to sign and email the document back to the funeral director.

With much of funeral service education now delivered online during the coronavirus pandemic, students are learning how to interact in this virtual space, as well as how to compose thoughtful and appropriate email communications to (virtually) present themselves in a professional manner. Students are also growing familiar with technologies they might be asked to use at funeral homes after graduation.

With much of funeral service education currently delivered online, students are learning to interact and present themselves professionally in the virtual space.

For families visiting funeral homes, the traditional handshake or condolence hug has been replaced by fist and elbow bumps or no contact at all. This is not normal for us in funeral service, and it is difficult, if not impossible, to comfort someone by simply staring at them over the top of a mask while standing several feet away. Fist and elbow bumps certainly cannot replace the gentle touch of a hand on a shoulder.

In addition, the numbers of attendees inside a funeral home is now limited, chapel occupancies are reduced and chairs are spaced farther apart. Other short-term changes involving contact include the increased availability of hand-sanitizing stations, increased use of disinfectant sprays for commonly touched surfaces and catering box lunches rather than serving buffet style. The environment has become more sterile, too.

Some of these developments are not bad, though. Our facilities are constantly visited by people with colds and other contagious viruses (as are our classrooms), and COVID-19 has made everyone – funeral practitioner and educator alike – aware of how easily disease can spread among staff, visitors and

students. The additional deep cleanings and more access to hand sanitizer will make our facilities healthier places for grieving people, and students, in the future.

Webcasted ceremonies Using the internet to share funeral services with those who cannot attend is not a novel idea but, prior to the pandemic, funeral homes just didn't embrace the use of technology to webcast funerals. Unfortunately, the need has existed for a long time, especially as more people enter assisted living and nursing homes and cannot travel to the funeral home due to personal health risks. Moreover, family members often cannot attend a service because they can't afford to travel or they face family and job obligations. This forced families to figure out their own workarounds by using Facebook or YouTube.

If funeral service becomes merely focused on body disposal, it loses its appeal as a career option.

The COVID-19 pandemic made it quite clear to funeral practitioners, however, that virtual funerals can be incorporated into their traditional funeral service models. In addition, families might be willing to pay for this service.

Fortunately, many education programs have already partnered with webcasting providers in the classroom in order to train future licensees on how to use these services. This skill is an asset a new graduate can offer to a potential employer.

Lower revenues The COVID-19 pandemic deeply affected revenues for some funeral homes, many of which were already seeing profitability declines due to the rising cremation rate. With less revenue, there's less money for new hires, raises, new equipment or facilities. This means either an increased demand for non-licensed work, such as removals, or requiring licensees to work longer hours with less help.

Hoping staff will be patient with funeral home managers during this time, I predict this is a short-

term problem, as funeral services expand and firms offer new services, such as webcasting, to help increase revenue. Funeral homes could even potentially start offering virtual service packages that cost more than traditional ones. Pricing will need to better reflect consumer demands, however, given the supplies and labor available.

Supply and labor shortages I hope every student has paid attention to the supply chain disruptions and labor shortages during the pandemic. Similar to a mass fatality incident, COVID-19 illnesses first overwhelmed hospital systems. Doctors ran themselves ragged trying to figure out how to save patients, doctors and nurses were in short supply because they were quarantining after exposure and some were ill themselves due to the virus. In addition, refrigerated semi-trucks were used for temporary morgue storage because there weren't enough removal personnel to pick up cases fast enough.

Meanwhile, some funeral homes ran out of room for body storage because the next of kin was also sick or unable to make funeral arrangements. Plus, due to quarantining or illness, there was a shortage of licensed personnel available to meet with families, embalm or perform cremations fast enough to keep up with the volume.

None of those issues addresses the shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE). It's highly probable that most firms didn't stockpile supplies just in case a pandemic occurred. And who would have imagined the scarcity of PPE due to increased demand by healthcare professionals? (Likewise, who could have foreseen something as basic and essential as toilet paper disappearing from store shelves!)

Now, even with supplies again available, the reduced number of flights and increased layovers have impacted ship-ins and ship-outs. The effects of the coronavirus pandemic make it clear that a funeral home's operations depend on many outside factors.

COVID-19'S LONG-TERM IMPACT

Embracing more technology Now that funeral home personnel and families have grown more comfortable with virtual funerals, I suspect this service will become more readily available to families. Surely more funeral homes will consider it a viable service offering to include on their GPL.

The acceptance of virtual funerals would also

open the door to other personalization possibilities, such as offering a larger variety of virtual backgrounds or allowing people to speak from their home computers or other devices. What if funeral homes become studios complete with green screens, sound production equipment and live broadcasts? The future might even include developing personalized funeral channels.

The profession has been reluctant to embrace technology, partly because it changes rapidly, and it can prove expensive to stay up to date. But as those costs decline and equipment becomes more affordable and portable, so much more is possible.

More funerals and fewer direct dispositions I predict there will be an increase in families holding services (once we move beyond the pandemic) because so many could not be with their loved ones either in the hospital or at the funeral home. I've already encountered many people suffering emotionally because they couldn't share memories about their loved one with their friends.

Many people simply didn't realize just how much those community connections meant until they were gone. Hopefully, post-coronavirus, people will feel a renewed appreciation for their support networks, friendships and family members.

Mass fatality planning Large-scale death does not occur solely due to airplane crashes or earthquakes. As we have all seen, disease is a very real situation that should have its own mass fatality plan. Cities and local officials need to look at their preparedness plans for events such as a pandemic.

Moreover, how we define "first responder" when facing a pandemic might be different than when confronted with a transportation accident. Contagion is a serious concern, and we must evaluate our level of preparation as a profession in order to handle a national mass fatality, not just a local one.

Assess the amount of education devoted to mass fatality and infectious disease There is already debate on the relevance of microbiology and pathology courses to mortuary science licensure, and after this COVID-19 pandemic, I hope that debate is silenced. Clearly, the virility, transmission and pathological impact of disease is crucial to protecting the safety of the public and our own practitioners.

Additionally, we need to incorporate training concerning how to handle disruptions to supply chains, even international ones, in order to develop contingency plans for future situations similar to this pandemic. We simply cannot take a short-term, reactionary approach since this type of event will likely happen again.

Evaluate the split-license concept and training

Almost half of U.S. states offer some form of a split funeral directing and embalming license. During non-pandemic times, I see how this model might work well for firms and particular regions of the country. Post COVID-19, however, I think regulators need to re-evaluate this model. Are all funeral director-only practitioners trained to handle infectious disease cases? Are all licensees required to seek continuing education in mass fatality or pandemic events in the same way they are required to undergo annual OSHA training?

If we, as a nation, experience a crisis and need more people skilled in body preparation, will we have enough licensed embalmers? If crematories end up with large backlogs of cases, will we face a situation in which people need to be embalmed prior to cremation due to an extended delay?

Yes, these are all hypothetical situations, but I believe they are now more plausible scenarios.

In closing, if you're wondering about your decision to enter funeral service, I want to reassure you that this is a wonderful and incredibly rewarding profession, and you should continue to pursue it. Because of this pandemic, this profession has received some much overdue media attention. We are *essential* workers. The work you will perform will have a lasting effect on the families you serve.

I also ask that you look at the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and determine how you can better prepare yourself and the community in which you will serve. How will you stay ahead of the next curve so you can absorb financial and community losses that might arise due to the next pandemic? Start planning now!

Lauren Budrow, CFSP, is an assistant professor at Wayne State University in Detroit and has been a licensed funeral director since 2003.



Planning for Your School Year in Unprecedented Times

By Michael LuBrant, Ph.D.

Having just celebrated the Fourth of July holiday with your family and loved ones, I suspect that, for many of you, the thought of heading back to campus for the start of classes is probably the last thing on your mind. After all, we have at least two more months of summer to enjoy before we need to think about returning to school, right?

During these challenging times, know that we who work as program directors, faculty and staff all hope you find the time right now to rest and relax. None of us could have anticipated a spring semester like the one we just had, and we are thankful to all our students for demonstrating patience, flexibility and understanding as we strove to provide them with the best possible educational experience in light of the sudden changes brought on by COVID-19.

Also please know that your instructors, program directors and school administrators are all working hard over the summer months to ensure an excellent funeral service education experience when you return to classes this autumn.

At the time of this writing, you probably already

know that we are experiencing an increase in the number of COVID-19 cases nationwide, especially among younger people who, as a demographic, make up a significant portion of students currently studying mortuary science.

Although many schools have already announced how they plan to resume instruction this fall (e.g., on campus, virtual learning and/or a combination of different approaches), if we see a surge in COVID-19 infections during the next several weeks, it is possible that some schools may modify their plans for fall instruction.

With the understanding that much still remains unknown about how the coronavirus might potentially impact college operations in the near future, the following suggestions are intended to help you as you plan for the fall semester.

First and foremost is your safety as a student.

If you have any questions about how your program is working to ensure your safety, do not hesitate to reach out to the program director and ask.

At some institutions, like the one where I teach, we require at least six feet of physical distance between all persons in our classrooms and lab spaces. We are now working to determine seating and lab arrangement plans to ensure that this amount of physical-distancing space is available for everyone.

Likewise, our students will have to wear masks during their classes; failure to do so could mean a student might not be allowed in the same classroom space with other students. Be aware of the distancing and safety policies in place at your school and prepare to meet these requirements.

To attend classes virtually, you may need to have either a laptop or desktop computer (or other computing device, such as a tablet) with a functioning camera and microphone, if required by your program. If you do not have access to this equipment, please let your program director know and ask what resources might be available to you.

During this past spring semester, some of my students shared with me that their computer equipment did not work correctly and that they were having difficulty participating in classes remotely. I'm grateful they made me aware of these problems, and I was able to secure fully functioning computers for them to use. Many colleges have resources available to help students who need computer

hardware, software and internet support. Never hesitate to reach out to your program director to discuss your needs.

If you plan to live either on or near campus, be sure to read carefully, and understand completely, all terms and conditions relating to your rental or lease agreement. Should it happen that your campus is required to close suddenly during the academic year, make sure you can return home and not have to worry about paying rent for a space in which you cannot live. Moreover, have a plan ready in case you need to return home suddenly during the academic term. Now is the time to determine where you will go, how you will get there and how long you will be able to stay at that location.

If you're taking lab classes, find out what kind of clothing and personal protective gear you will need, and look into getting these items sooner rather than later.

Now is a good time to purchase any kind of lab clothing, such as scrubs, personal protective equipment (PPE), etc., in preparation for the start of fall courses. There has been a high demand for PPE since March, when we began to see a spike in coronavirus infection rates. Because I assist with ordering PPE for my program, I've found that some commonly used items are currently backordered, without a clear "to be stocked by" date available. If you're taking lab classes, find out what kind of clothing and/or protective gear you'll need and look into getting these things sooner rather than later.

If you need professional attire for clinical or practicum learning, now is also the time to do so. Purchasing your professional clothing now will allow time for returns, alterations, etc. Consider shopping early to ensure that you will have all your items ready when you begin classes.

Also, if your program has specific grooming requirements related to visible piercings, such as ear

gauges, and you have one (or more), you will need time to either find a suitable plug to cover the piercing site or allow the piercing site to close, if that is your choice.

This same counsel holds true for concealing visible tattoos. Make sure you have time to find the right cosmetic products to cover them effectively if doing so is required by your school and/or the clinical site.

Remember to pay yourself first, as the old saying goes. Many students, of course, work while going to school. If at all possible, try to set aside each week at least 5% to 10% of your take-home pay for an emergency.

There are several excellent savings plans available that will automatically transfer money from your checking account to an interest-bearing savings account on a regularly scheduled basis. For information, consider reaching out to a customer service representative at your bank or research automatic savings plan options online. Know that there is a plan that will work for you!

Even if you can only set aside 3% to 5%, start doing so now! You'll be amazed at how quickly this "reserve" fund will grow, and you'll thank yourself at a future date if you should suddenly find yourself in need of money for an unexpected expense or emergency.

Try to keep in mind that these times are unlike any we have ever experienced and that it's only natural to feel stress and anxiety about the impact COVID-19 is having on your life.

To help reduce feelings of stress and anxiety relating to your college studies, consider proactively planning for your mortuary science education this fall. Take control of your experience, ask plenty of questions and put into place action items that will ensure your success as a student.

Finally, please know that all of us – program directors, faculty and support staff – look forward to seeing you in September and are here for you now to help answer any questions or address any concerns you might have. Be safe, plan ahead and enjoy the rest of your summer!

Michael LuBrant, Ph.D., is program director of the University of Minnesota Mortuary Science Program.

WE CAN DO THIS.

Funeral Service Needs You!

By Matt Bailey

“May you live in interesting times” purports an ancient Chinese curse. Well, a really strong argument can certainly be made that we now find ourselves living in some interesting times. But even if today’s students don’t consider the current era of COVID-19 cursed, it’s understandable that they may still harbor a variety of feelings and concerns about the future and perhaps even question their career decision.

I’ve had the privilege of speaking with students many times over the years. I first did this as an instructor charged with teaching students. (Here, I must make a confession. Before I know it, I will hit 20 years in funeral service. My colleagues all call me Matt, so when someone says, “Hi, Mr. Bailey,” I cringe because he or she probably had me in class. I hope they can overlook any deficiencies I brought to the experience!)

Anyway, more recently, I’ve been honored to be invited to talk to students as they prepare to conclude their studies. We go over résumé design, interview tactics, professional dress and some best practices to help them take the first steps as they transition from the academic environment to the practical training of their apprenticeship or internship. At one of these presentations, I was struck by a student who thanked me for coming by saying, “You’re the first funeral director I’ve spoken to who has actually been supportive and encouraging about pursuing this field of work.”

That broke my heart. I truly believe funeral ser-

vice provides an amazing opportunity for us to make a living by making a difference.

So, in the interest of likewise supporting and encouraging you so that you, too, can someday experience this amazing opportunity, I offer the following in case you’re second-guessing yourself right now, during these “interesting times.”

DO NOT DESPAIR, PERSEVERE!

Perhaps you chose to attend a program with classroom-based learning because you don’t like online learning platforms, yet here we are anyway. Maybe you have been reading the news with its reports of providers unable to keep up with demand.

Understandably, you might find yourself worrying and filled with questions about your own health and how it might be impacted by working with the remains of pandemic victims. Or you might wonder how much help you can really offer families during a time of numerous restrictions and delayed services.

If you are second-guessing your decision to enter funeral service and wondering if the universe is trying to send you a message, let me be clear: You are needed now more than ever.

Your community needs you. The struggles and challenges we have faced these past several months demonstrate just how much we need professionals who are able to perform the most essential functions of what we do.

If you’ve not yet heard the jokes, you soon will. You might tell a friend you are on call, for instance,

and he or she will think they just thought up the funniest joke of all time when they retort, “Who cares when you get there – they’re dead!”

But the real-world experience of those who suffer the death of a loved one shows just how oblivious this jest is. A nation watched in horror as bodies lingered in New York City. It proved how much we need skilled professionals with the training necessary to respond during such situations. You are preparing to be one of those last responders we so desperately need during times like this.

Second-guessing your decision to enter funeral service and wondering if the universe is sending you a message? Let me be clear: You’re needed now more than ever.

Grieving families need you. Losing someone is always hard, always complicated. Even in the most ideal work environment, it is challenging work to walk with people devastated by the death of the most important person in their world. Complicate that experience by adding a global pandemic, and the circumstances are almost unimaginable.

For example, I listened to a friend describe how she arrived at her grandmother’s house shortly after her death and how hard it was because she couldn’t hug other family members. Another friend grew angry as she recalled the funeral for a relative in which clergy refused to officiate unless everyone remained in their cars for the duration of the rites.

We have seen some real heroes in our profession during these long, challenging days, but we must be honest and look in the mirror so we can acknowledge that some fell short. In their eagerness to tell the bereaved what they could not do, they failed to creatively embrace that which they could.

Unfortunately, this highlighted the fact that there are some providers who do just enough to get by. When their minimal service standards became impossible because of current guidelines and restric-

tions, they did not know what to do. Thus, we need thoughtful, energetic, creative professionals to join us in our work to ensure that we are meeting the needs of the families who call on us.

One of the last things I did before the pandemic impacted our world was travel to Atlanta to serve as one of the mentors for NFDA’s Meet the Mentors program. (It seemed like only a few years had passed since I attended the program myself as a mentee, and my participation really made my 40th birthday earlier this year hit home.) I was happy to take time to share my thoughts about the future of funeral service with those in attendance.

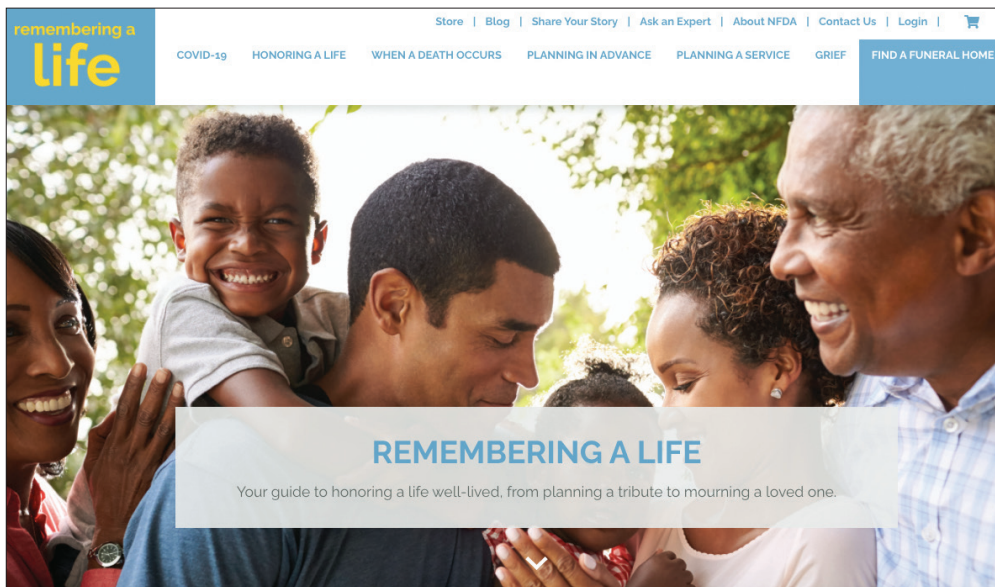
The highlight of this program for me, though, is the roundtable period, where I sat with small groups of attendees so they could ask questions of the mentors. Truth be told, I learned so much from them! I saw the excitement and passion they have for funeral service. I was impressed by their dedication and commitment. I know that many of them have faced challenges navigating their place within funeral service. Sometimes they are viewed as too young and their insight and perspective has not been appreciated; other times, they have been stereotyped because of their generation.

First and foremost, what I saw among these caring individuals, each relatively new to funeral service, was a dedication we desperately need. We urgently need them in this profession.

We really need you, too. Whatever doubts, worries, struggles or fears you might have about continuing toward a career in funeral service, I encourage you to persevere. It has been the honor and privilege of my life to walk with people during the most sacred time surrounding the death of someone they love. It gives meaning to my existence because I know I make a difference.

No, it’s not always easy, but it is always something remarkably special. I hope you stick with it, that you double down on your studies to ensure that, as you enter the field, you are skilled and prepared for today’s challenges, as well as the unforeseen ones of tomorrow. Many are counting on you. We need you to help us navigate these “interesting times.”

Matt Bailey is a fourth-generation funeral director and owner/operator of B.C. Bailey Funeral Home in Wallingford, Connecticut.



Left: A wealth of resources on RememberingALife.com. Above: A series of consumer brochures are available on a variety of topics.

Beyond the Classroom Better Serve Families Using Remembering A Life

By Gail Marquardt

There's much to learn in a mortuary science education – from embalming to holding an arrangement conference to day-to-day funeral home management. Of course, when it comes to getting to know the families you'll be serving, you shouldn't expect all of your knowledge to come from the classroom.

NFDA, through its Remembering A Life consumer initiative, provides families with a community in which they can learn about planning a funeral, access grief resources and be inspired to pay tribute to their loved ones in meaningful ways.

You can take advantage of this community as well to supplement your education with insights and information to better prepare yourself for your career.

FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF WITH REMEMBERING A LIFE RESOURCES

When you begin working as a funeral director, it's likely you won't have a lot of time to create resources that educate families about the value of a funeral. Fortunately, Remembering A Life features a suite of free materials that NFDA-member firms can use to help educate families about their options so they

can make thoughtful decisions while working with you to create a meaningful tribute. Here are some of these resources:

Website RememberingALife.com is the central resource for consumers and features information about what to do when a death occurs, planning/preplanning a service, grief, honoring the life of a loved one and navigating the challenges of planning and attending a funeral during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, the site's "Find a Funeral Home" functionality helps families find an NFDA-member funeral director who can assist them in creating a meaningful tribute.

Public service announcements A suite of PSAs explores the value of a funeral, the value of a funeral director and how funeral professionals help communities heal. NFDA-member firms can post these PSAs on their website and social media account(s). nfda.org/psas

Legacy films This series of beautifully produced short films pays tribute to the extraordinary lives

of ordinary people and illustrates the importance of honoring a life. NFDA-member firms can post these films on their website and social media account(s). RememberingALife.com/filmcontest

Social media tools NFDA makes it easy to share links to Remembering A Life resources on social media via downloadable social media posts that member firms can use on Facebook and Instagram.

Consumer brochures This series provides consumer information about planning a funeral, grieving a loss, embalming and many other topics.

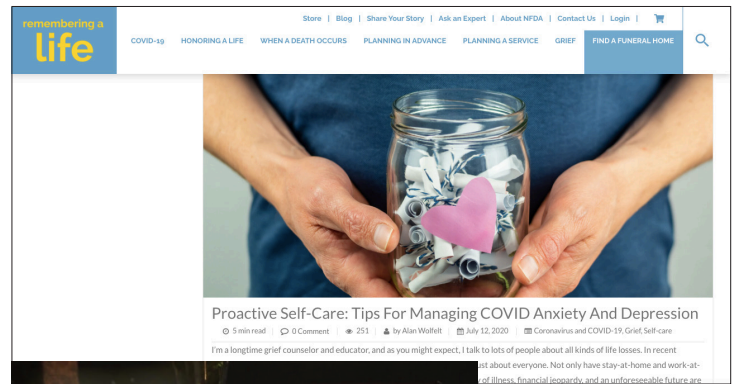
Have the Talk of a Lifetime Founded by FAMIC, “Have the Talk of a Lifetime” encourages consumers to talk to family members and friends about what matters most so that, when the time comes, they can plan a beautiful funeral that reflects the life of their loved one. NFDA’s Have the Talk of a Lifetime Conversation Cards are one of many tools families can use to start those conversations.

Youth & Funerals The Funeral Service Foundation’s Youth & Funerals initiative encourages families to consider the value of children not only attending a funeral but also participating in honoring and remembering their loved ones. Resources include a booklet, e-book and video. funeralservicefoundation.org

Merchandise Remembering A Life offers items that can help families as they begin their grief journey. The Remembering A Life Self-Care Box includes a grief journal, essential oil, memory jar, candle, dragonfly keychain, rose quartz stone heart and water bottle. The box and/or individual items make thoughtful gifts for anyone who is grieving.

LEARN FROM LEADERS IN THE END-OF-LIFE PROFESSIONS VIA THE REMEMBERING A LIFE BLOG

Contributing writers, each respected within their respective professions, share their knowledge, insights and unique perspectives on various topics, including grief, self-care, honoring a life, the COVID-19 pandemic and more. RememberingALife.com/blog



Remembering A Life offers (top to bottom) pandemic-focused information and self-help tips, a suite of PSAs to post and the Self-Care Box, a loving gift for anyone grieving a loss.



JOIN THE VIRTUAL CONVERSATION

Following Remembering A Life on Facebook, Instagram and/or Twitter gives you the opportunity to engage with people who have an interest in learning how they can remember their loved ones in meaningful and beautiful ways. Start a conversation with them to learn more about how you can better serve families in the future.

As a mortuary science student, it’s never too soon for you to explore Remembering A Life and all it has to offer. Plus, what you learn might provide a competitive edge as you look for your first job in funeral service. Most importantly, you’ll establish a foundation of knowledge that will enhance your ability to serve families with excellence, empathy and compassion.

Gail Marquardt is NFDA vice president of consumer engagement.



Focusing on Maximum Education to Stay Relevant

By Daniel M. Isard

If you're 20-something and love this profession, ask yourself this question: What education will you need to be valuable when you're in your 50s? I don't mean basic mortuary school education but education that makes you valuable in a more holistic sense.

Instead of focusing exclusively on the minimum CEU requirements to keep your license up to date, you must also focus on the maximum education you'll need to keep your funeral director self-relevant. Education doesn't stop at graduation. Would you want to be treated by a doctor who says, "I graduated 20 years ago and haven't done any continuing education except the minimum required"? I think not. If funeral directors want to be called professionals, then they must adopt the common

proactive measures of other professionals.

Here are the three components of maximum education you should pursue.

PEOPLE SKILLS

People think funeral directors primarily deal with the dead, and that is obviously part of their daily routine. For those who specialize in embalming and restorative arts, the dead make up a larger portion of their work. But actually, the average licensed funeral director spends about 90% of his or her time dealing with the living. This includes planning preneed and at-need funeral arrangements and general representation within the community, both of which require strong people skills to be valuable.

Nothing in the mortuary school curriculum really prepares you for this, however. Occasionally, your state convention will present a speaker talking on the subject of "people skills," but this doesn't train you, it informs you.

So where can you get these people skills? You can certainly read books on the subject, and there are many. You can attend classes dealing with psychology, sociology and human behavior at a local college or online. You can attend workshops given by leading funeral minds, such as Dr. Alan Wolfelt, to learn more about how to empathize and understand what families are going through.

The average licensed funeral director spends about 90% of his or her time dealing with the living.

But don't just *think* about doing something to gain these skills – *do something!* What's the worst that can happen? Perhaps you spend some time and money but don't perceive any benefit. How many

fishing lures will you buy and lose? How many golf balls will you hit into the woods? As Nike always reminds us, “Just do it!”

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Think about the following methods of communication we employ. Are your skills perfect?

- **Speaking** How comfortable are you speaking one-on-one to small and large groups? Is your vocabulary strong? If not, take classes to improve your skills. Learn about various groups, such as Toastmasters International, that might be located in your area, too.
- **Writing** Can you write a strong, concise paragraph? Can you formulate a good letter? Unfortunately, email, which started as an informal means of communication, has surpassed writing letters on paper, but writing flaws are just as obvious.
- **Body language** How you dress, stand and smile while talking says as much as your words do (and sometimes more). Go to a high-end clothing store and look at what business-appropriate clothing looks like. Dress for the person with whom you are meeting at the office, not for those with whom you will socialize after work.

Remember, communication is saying what you mean and what the recipient of your message needs to hear. If your body language is bad, the receiver of your message will be distracted. If your writing is improper, you will lose credibility. If you are not adept at speaking, all else will be lost from that point forward.

If you are not adept at speaking, all else will be lost from that point forward.

Therefore, look for resources in your community to help you. Take a community college class in business writing. You are now more than just a kid trying to pass a class.

BALANCE

If our society has learned anything from millennials, it's about balance. This profession has missed



out on that for a long time. Any career field in which you are known by your profession rather than your surname has this problem. The doctor who is called “Doc” everywhere he goes has the same issue as a funeral director.

For a long time, funeral directors never retired. Instead, they died at their desk, working long past normal retirement age. This is because they had no passions outside of professional service. This was wrong, but fortunately, I see clearly that the next generation of funeral directors will get this right.

So, start now! Find your personal passion to balance your professional passion. Someday, someone might introduce you to a group, saying, “This is [Your Name], a great ___ and our town funeral director.” That will demonstrate the proper life/profession balance.

Daniel M. Isard, MSFS, is president of The Foresight Companies in Phoenix, Arizona, a management consulting firm specializing in mergers and acquisitions, valuations, accounting, financing and consumer surveys. Contact him at danisard@theforesightcompanies.com or 800-426-0165.



Past, Present and Future

The Mortuary Science Program Landscape

By Deana Gillespie and Edward J. Defort

New enrollment in mortuary science programs in 2019 posted the highest number since 2016, while the number of graduates showed an increase over 2018’s five-year low, according to statistics compiled by the American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE).

Total current-year enrollment (new, pre-graduate

and graduate students) in the 58 mortuary science programs in 2019 was 5,634 – 3.9% higher than the prior year’s enrollment of 5,420.

ABFSE noted that 56 accredited programs completed annual reports. Two programs closed in 2019; one of those submitted an annual report and one did not (two graduates). Data from three programs seeking candidacy are not included in the annual report statistics since programs are not accredited until the candidacy process is complete.

Robb Smith, ABFSE executive director, said that, this year, he is watching the growth in distance education. “COVID-19 forced every college in the United States to shift to distance delivery. No approval

STUDENT ENROLLMENT/GRADUATION

| Year | New Students | Graduates |
|------|--------------|-----------|
| 1975 | 2,475 | 1,852 |
| 1980 | 2,155 | 1,397 |
| 1985 | 2,222 | 1,509 |
| 1990 | 2,213 | 1,622 |
| 1995 | 3,022 | 2,221 |
| 2000 | 2,368 | 1,745 |
| 2005 | 2,691 | 1,483 |
| 2007 | 2,514 | 1,340 |
| 2008 | 2,361 | 1,342 |
| 2009 | 2,857 | 1,278 |
| 2010 | 2,824 | 1,374 |
| 2011 | 2,917 | 1,494 |
| 2012 | 2,885 | 1,589 |
| 2013 | 2,755 | 1,548 |
| 2014 | 2,567 | 1,449 |
| 2015 | 2,639 | 1,713 |
| 2016 | 2,511 | 1,638 |
| 2017 | 2,411 | 1,646 |
| 2018 | 2,359 | 1,501 |
| 2019 | 2,588 | 1,597 |

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

ATTRITION Program Year 2019

| Reason for Withdrawal | Number | Percentage |
|---|------------|-------------|
| Remained in mortuary science-related major but transferred to another institution | 13 | 1.81 |
| Changed major but remained in higher education | 60 | 8.34 |
| Left for academic reasons | 294 | 40.89 |
| Left for financial reasons | 54 | 7.51 |
| Left for personal reasons | 214 | 29.76 |
| Left for other reasons | 84 | 11.68 |
| TOTALS | 719 | 100% |

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

NEW ENROLLEES BY AGE Program Year 2019

| Age | # of Students | Percentage |
|---------------|---------------|-------------|
| 20 or under | 422 | 16.31 |
| 21-25 | 824 | 31.84 |
| 26-30 | 498 | 19.24 |
| 31-35 | 314 | 12.13 |
| 36-40 | 203 | 7.84 |
| 41-45 | 129 | 4.98 |
| 46-50 | 94 | 3.63 |
| 51-55 | 43 | 1.66 |
| 56-60 | 44 | 1.70 |
| 61-65 | 12 | 0.46 |
| 66-70 | 4 | 0.15 |
| 71 and over | 1 | 0.04 |
| Unknown | 0 | 0.00 |
| TOTALS | 2,588 | 100% |

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

NEW ENROLLEES BY PRIOR EDUCATION Program Year 2019

| Level Completed | # of Students | Percentage |
|---------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| GED | 144 | 5.56 |
| High school graduate | 2,376 | 91.81 |
| Other | 68 | 2.63 |
| TOTALS | 2,588 | 100% |
| High school or equivalent | 737 | 28.48 |
| 1 year of college | 471 | 18.20 |
| 2 years of college | 653 | 25.23 |
| 3 years of college | 242 | 9.35 |
| Bachelor's degree | 357 | 13.79 |
| Master's degree | 76 | 2.94 |
| Other | 52 | 2.01 |
| TOTALS | 2,588 | 100% |

Previously attended a funeral service program 88

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

was required for this emergency situation. However, the U.S. Department of Education requires accreditors to evaluate and approve distance-education programs. Five existing ABFSE programs were approved to offer distance education in 2018-19 [before the pandemic],” he said.

Smith added that ABFSE must prepare to deal with an increased number of requests for permanent approval of distance education once this emergency situation passes.

According to the numbers, in 2019, 32% of mortuary science graduates were reported to have completed 50% or more of their funeral service educa-

tion via distance education. In 2018, it was 21.3%.

As Smith noted, in 2018-19, five new distance-education programs were approved. At the end of 2019, 21 ABFSE programs now offer 50% or more of their coursework via the distance modality. “Two offer 50% of coursework via distance education but not the entire program,” Smith said. “Three of the newly approved distance-education programs will have their first graduates in 2020.”

Smith noted that 29 programs offer some funeral courses via distance education. Of those, 21 offer

NEW ENROLLEES BY ETHNIC ORIGIN AND GENDER Program Year 2019

| Ethnic Origin | Male | | Female | | Total | |
|------------------------|------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage |
| Caucasian | 522 | 67.44 | 1,150 | 63.40 | 1,672 | 64.61 |
| African American | 150 | 19.38 | 325 | 17.92 | 475 | 18.35 |
| Hispanic American | 74 | 9.56 | 244 | 13.45 | 318 | 12.29 |
| Native American | 6 | 0.78 | 24 | 1.32 | 30 | 1.16 |
| Asian-Pacific Islander | 11 | 1.42 | 21 | 1.16 | 32 | 1.24 |
| Other | 11 | 1.42 | 50 | 2.76 | 61 | 2.36 |
| TOTALS | 774 | 100% | 1,814 | 100% | 2,588 | 100% |

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

NEW ENROLLEES BY PRIOR EMPLOYMENT Program Year 2019

| Employed | # of Students | Percentage of Total Students New Enrollees (2,588) |
|--------------------|---------------|--|
| Less than 6 months | 401 | 15.49 |
| 6 months to 1 year | 186 | 7.19 |
| More than 1 year | 483 | 18.66 |
| TOTALS | 1,070 | 41.34% |

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

NEW ENROLLEES BY FAMILY IN FUNERAL SERVICE Program Year 2019

| | # of Students | Percentage of Total Students New Enrollees (2,588) |
|---------------|---------------|--|
| Parent | 150 | 5.80 |
| Spouse | 18 | 0.70 |
| Sibling | 19 | 0.73 |
| In-law | 10 | 0.39 |
| Other | 134 | 5.18 |
| TOTALS | 331 | 12.8% |

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

50% or more of instruction via distance, and 19 additional institutions offer general education courses via the distance modality.

THE LABOR SHORTAGE QUESTION

As Smith acknowledged, a labor shortage is an often discussed concern in funeral service circles. “My experience is that most funeral service students attend the college that is most convenient for them geographically,” he said. “We get calls in the ABFSE office from students who cannot understand why there is no funeral service program in their local community college. Traveling even 50 miles is too far.”

Smith added that two different colleges recently contacted the ABFSE office about starting a new funeral service program. “When they learned how

One of my concerns is that available funeral service jobs lack sufficient incentive to warrant relocation.

many students from their state had enrolled in the existing schools in the past five years, they realized that investment in a new program was not warranted,” he explained.

“One of my concerns is that the available jobs in funeral service lack sufficient incentive to warrant relocation on the part of job seekers,” Smith added. “I am always surprised when potential students as-

GRADUATES BY ETHNIC ORIGIN AND GENDER Program Year 2019

| Ethnic Origin | Male | | Female | | Total | |
|------------------------|------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage |
| Caucasian | 415 | 74.77 | 689 | 66.12 | 1,104 | 69.13 |
| African American | 93 | 16.76 | 198 | 19.00 | 291 | 18.22 |
| Hispanic American | 30 | 5.41 | 124 | 11.90 | 154 | 9.64 |
| Native American | 4 | 0.72 | 11 | 1.06 | 15 | 0.94 |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 5 | 0.90 | 8 | 0.77 | 13 | 0.81 |
| Other/Did Not Indicate | 8 | 1.44 | 12 | 1.15 | 20 | 1.25 |
| TOTALS | 555 | 100% | 1,042 | 100% | 1,597 | 100% |

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

GRADUATES BY AGE Program Year 2019

| Age | # of Students | Percentage |
|---------------|---------------|-------------|
| 20 or under | 98 | 6.14 |
| 21-25 | 524 | 32.81 |
| 26-30 | 391 | 24.48 |
| 31-35 | 205 | 12.84 |
| 36-40 | 136 | 8.52 |
| 41-45 | 95 | 5.95 |
| 46-50 | 65 | 4.07 |
| 51-55 | 45 | 2.82 |
| 56-60 | 26 | 1.63 |
| 61-65 | 11 | 0.69 |
| 66-70 | 1 | 0.06 |
| 71 and over | 0 | 0.00 |
| Unknown | 0 | 0.00 |
| TOTALS | 1,597 | 100% |

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

GRADUATES BY PRIOR EDUCATION Program Year 2019

| Level Completed | # of Students | Percentage |
|---------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| GED | 88 | 5.51 |
| High school grad | 1,478 | 92.55 |
| Other | 31 | 1.94 |
| TOTALS | 1,597 | 100% |
| High school or equivalent | 316 | 19.79 |
| 1 year of college | 337 | 21.10 |
| 2 years of college | 473 | 29.62 |
| 3 years of college | 142 | 8.89 |
| Bachelor's degree | 259 | 16.22 |
| Master's degree | 38 | 2.38 |
| Other | 32 | 2.00 |
| TOTALS | 1,597 | 100% |

Previously attended a funeral service program 67

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

sume that because there is a funeral home in their town, they will find a job there.”

INSIDE THE NUMBERS

Looking at 2019 mortuary science program total enrollment, the 2,588 new students is up 9.7% from the 2,359 new students in 2018, and 7.3% ahead of the 2,411 students in 2017.

This year's enrollment is 19.4% fewer students than the record 3,213 students enrolled in 1996.

However, the 1996 figure is considered an aberration since that was the year the associate degree was implemented as the minimum ABFSE standard. Many students flocked to ABFSE certificate and diploma programs to complete their funeral service education before the requirement took effect.

Before this year's uptick, between 2011 and 2018, new enrollment showed a gradual decline – from 2,917 students in 2011 to 2,359 in 2018, a 19.1% drop overall.

GRADUATES WHO WORKED WHILE IN SCHOOL Program Year 2019

| Employment | Number | Percentage of Total Number Grads (1,597) |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|--|
| In funeral-related services | 1,084 | 67.88 |
| Other non-funeral service employment | 347 | 21.73 |
| TOTALS | 1,431 | 89.61% |

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

GRADUATES BY FAMILY IN FUNERAL SERVICE Program Year 2019

| Employment | Number | Percentage of Total Number Grads (1,597) |
|---------------|------------|--|
| Parent | 130 | 8.14 |
| Spouse | 14 | 0.88 |
| Sibling | 15 | 0.94 |
| In-law | 7 | 0.44 |
| Other | 72 | 4.51 |
| TOTALS | 238 | 14.91% |

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

The 1,597 graduates in 2019 is 6.4% more than the 1,501 graduates in 2018, but 3% fewer than the 1,646 graduates in 2017.

In 2019, 719 students left accredited mortuary science education programs, which is 4.5% more than the 688 students who exited in 2018. The reasons cited include academic (40.89%), personal (29.76%), “other” (11.68%), changed major but remained in higher education (8.34%), and financial (7.51%).

The shortage of qualified professionals is a two-pronged problem. While it's true that the schools do see attrition, it's the post-graduate exodus that most concerns funeral directors.

There has been much chatter in funeral service about the decline in enrollment in mortuary science schools possibly creating an environment in which there is a shortage of qualified professionals. This is a two-pronged problem, however. It's true that the schools do see attrition, but it is the post-graduate exodus that most concerns funeral directors.

NEW ENROLLEE PROFILES

Based on ABFSE statistics, the most likely person enrolling in a mortuary science program in 2019 was a Caucasian female, 21-25 years of age, and a high-school graduate with at least one or two years of college.

The data also reveal that students entering mortuary science programs have more prior education than previous enrollees. From 1971-2004, the number of students having one or more years of college under their belts ranged between 51% and 62%. In 2009, that figure jumped to 69%. In 2019, it landed at 71.52%, up slightly from 70.73% in 2018, and 70.02% in 2017.

Furthermore, in 2019, the number of enrollees with bachelor's or graduate degrees was 16.73%,

down from 17.33% in 2018, but up from 16.63% in 2017.

Continuing a 21st century trend, significantly more women than men are enrolling in mortuary science programs. The tipping point came in 2000, when female enrollees surpassed the number of males enrolling (51% to 49%).

In 2019, out of 2,588 newly enrolled students, 1,814 (70.1%) were female and 774 (29.91%) were male. This compares with 2018 when, of the 2,359 new students enrolled, 1,572 (66.64%) were female and 787 were male, and with 2017, when 1,599 of the total 2,411 new students enrolled were female (66.39%).

Broken down by ethnicity, in 2019, 64.61% of all new students were Caucasian, compared with 66.86% in 2018, and 65.41% in 2017. The percentage of African-American enrollees in 2019 was 18.35%, down slightly from 19.42% in 2018, and 20.57% in 2017. Hispanics accounted for 12.29% of new students in 2019, up from 10.55% in 2018, and 9.66% in 2017.

From a much smaller base, the number of new Asian/Pacific Islander enrollees was 1.24%, up from 0.68% in 2018, and 1.12% in 2017. The number of new Native American students in 2019 was 1.16%, up from 0.97% in 2018, and 0.87% in 2017. The number of new students of “other” ethnic backgrounds in 2019 was 2.36%, up from 2.03% in 2018 and in 2017.

According to ABFSE statistics, 67.44% of male new enrollees in 2019, and 63.40% of female new enrollees, were Caucasian, which compares with 72.81% of male new enrollees and 63.87% of female new enrollees in 2018, and 71.31% of male enrollees and 62.41% of female enrollees in 2017.

The number of new African-American enrollees in 2019 dipped a bit from recent years. Last year, 19.38% of male new enrollees, and 17.92% of female new enrollees, were African-American compared with 19.7% of male new enrollees and 19.27% of female new enrollees in 2018, and 19.12% of male enrollees and 21.26% of female enrollees in 2017.

In 2019, 9.56% of male enrollees and 13.45% of female enrollees were Hispanic, an increase over 2018 when 5.46% of male enrollees and 12.34% of female enrollees were Hispanic, and 5.67% of male enrollees and 11.69% of female enrollees in 2017.

Asian/Pacific Islanders accounted for 1.42% of

NEW ENROLLEES/GRADUATES BY STATE (Program Year 2019)

| <i>State</i> | <i>New Enrollees</i> | <i>Percentage</i> | <i>Graduates</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Alabama</i> | 47 | 1.82 | 28 | 1.75 |
| <i>Alaska</i> | 0 | 0.00 | 1 | 0.06 |
| <i>Arizona</i> | 4 | 0.15 | 23 | 1.44 |
| <i>Arkansas</i> | 71 | 2.74 | 13 | 0.81 |
| <i>California</i> | 90 | 3.48 | 52 | 3.26 |
| <i>Colorado</i> | 26 | 1.00 | 19 | 1.19 |
| <i>Connecticut</i> | 36 | 1.39 | 33 | 2.07 |
| <i>Delaware</i> | 6 | 0.23 | 4 | 0.25 |
| <i>District of Columbia</i> | 10 | 0.39 | 1 | 0.06 |
| <i>Florida</i> | 97 | 3.75 | 84 | 5.26 |
| <i>Georgia</i> | 98 | 3.79 | 84 | 5.26 |
| <i>Hawaii</i> | 0 | 0.00 | 0 | 0.00 |
| <i>Idaho</i> | 9 | 0.35 | 5 | 0.31 |
| <i>Illinois</i> | 149 | 5.76 | 94 | 5.89 |
| <i>Indiana</i> | 115 | 4.44 | 63 | 3.94 |
| <i>Iowa</i> | 39 | 1.51 | 31 | 1.94 |
| <i>Kansas</i> | 25 | 0.97 | 17 | 1.06 |
| <i>Kentucky</i> | 86 | 3.32 | 45 | 2.82 |
| <i>Louisiana</i> | 62 | 2.40 | 28 | 1.75 |
| <i>Maine</i> | 12 | 0.46 | 7 | 0.44 |
| <i>Maryland</i> | 42 | 1.62 | 28 | 1.75 |
| <i>Massachusetts</i> | 64 | 2.47 | 42 | 2.63 |
| <i>Michigan</i> | 61 | 2.36 | 40 | 2.50 |
| <i>Minnesota</i> | 34 | 1.31 | 27 | 1.69 |
| <i>Mississippi</i> | 46 | 1.78 | 19 | 1.19 |
| <i>Missouri</i> | 33 | 1.28 | 26 | 1.63 |
| <i>Montana</i> | 12 | 0.46 | 6 | 0.38 |
| <i>Nebraska</i> | 10 | 0.39 | 9 | 0.56 |
| <i>Nevada</i> | 3 | 0.12 | 1 | 0.06 |
| <i>New Hampshire</i> | 12 | 0.46 | 7 | 0.44 |
| <i>New Jersey</i> | 116 | 4.48 | 54 | 3.38 |
| <i>New Mexico</i> | 9 | 0.35 | 5 | 0.31 |
| <i>New York</i> | 201 | 7.77 | 129 | 8.08 |
| <i>North Carolina</i> | 36 | 1.39 | 45 | 2.82 |
| <i>North Dakota</i> | 2 | 0.08 | 4 | 0.25 |
| <i>Ohio</i> | 78 | 3.01 | 41 | 2.57 |
| <i>Oklahoma</i> | 76 | 2.94 | 28 | 1.75 |
| <i>Oregon</i> | 20 | 0.77 | 14 | 0.88 |
| <i>Pennsylvania</i> | 125 | 4.83 | 86 | 5.39 |
| <i>Rhode Island</i> | 12 | 0.46 | 7 | 0.44 |
| <i>South Carolina</i> | 43 | 1.66 | 17 | 1.06 |
| <i>South Dakota</i> | 9 | 0.35 | 8 | 0.50 |
| <i>Tennessee</i> | 68 | 2.63 | 29 | 1.82 |
| <i>Texas</i> | 298 | 11.51 | 187 | 11.71 |
| <i>Utah</i> | 25 | 0.97 | 13 | 0.81 |
| <i>Vermont</i> | 4 | 0.15 | 1 | 0.06 |
| <i>Virginia</i> | 71 | 2.74 | 34 | 2.13 |
| <i>Washington</i> | 37 | 1.43 | 7 | 0.44 |
| <i>West Virginia</i> | 13 | 0.50 | 11 | 0.69 |
| <i>Wisconsin</i> | 41 | 1.58 | 29 | 1.82 |
| <i>Wyoming</i> | 3 | 0.12 | 4 | 0.25 |
| <i>Unknown</i> | 0 | 0.00 | 0 | 0.00 |
| <i>Foreign</i> | 2 | 0.08 | 7 | 0.44 |
| TOTAL | 2,588 | 100% | 1,597 | 100% |

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

new male enrollees and 1.16% of new female enrollees in 2019, compared with 0.51% of new male enrollees and 0.76% of new female enrollees in 2018, and 0.99% of new male enrollees and 1.19% of new female enrollees in 2017.

Last year, Native Americans accounted for 0.78% of new male enrollees and 1.32% of new female enrollees, compared with 2018, when Native Americans accounted for 0.51% of new male enrollees and 1.21% of new female enrollees, and 0.99% of male enrollees and 0.81% of female enrollees in 2017.

In 2019, ABFSE reported 1.42% of all new male enrollees and 2.76% of all new female enrollees as “other,” compared with 1.02% of all new male enrollees and 2.54% of all new female enrollees in 2018, and 1.85% of all male new enrollees and 2.63% of all new female enrollees in 2017.

In 2019, 12.8% of all new enrollees were found to be carrying on, or getting into, the family business, down slightly from 13% in 2018, and the nearly 18% of new enrollees in 2017.

Of all new enrollees in 2019, 5.80% had a parent in the business, 0.70% had a spouse, 0.73% a sibling, 0.39% an in-law, and 5.18% said “other” relative.

GRADUATE PROFILES

There were 1,597 graduates from accredited programs in 2019, up from 1,501 graduates in 2018, and down slightly from 1,646 graduates in 2017.

These graduates represent 49 of the 50 states, and there were seven international graduates. The only state without a graduate was Hawaii. Texas led all states with 187 grads, followed by New York with 129, Illinois with 94, Pennsylvania with 86, and Florida and Georgia, both with 84.

As noted earlier, 2000 was the year in which the scales tipped toward women on the enrollment side, but it wasn't until 2005 that there were more women than men graduating from mortuary science programs. That year, of 1,483 graduates, 52.2% were women. Overall, 65.25% of the 1,597 graduates in 2019 were women, up slightly from 2018 and 2017, when 64.82% of the 1,501 graduates in 2018, and 64.82% of the 1,646 graduates in 2017, were female.

According to ABFSE, 69.13% of all graduates in 2019 were Caucasian, compared with 70.89% in 2018, and 68.96% in 2017.

Last year, the percentage of African-American mortuary science graduates was 18.22%, up from

16.46% in 2018, but down from 18.41% in 2017.

The percentage of Hispanic graduates in 2019 was 9.64%, up slightly from 9.13% in 2018, and 9.54% in 2017.

The percentage of Asian/Pacific Islander graduates was 0.81% in 2019, down from 1.53% in 2018, and 1.03% in 2017.

The percentage of Native American graduates last year was 0.94%, up from 0.27% in 2018, but down a tick from 0.97% in 2017.

“Other/did not indicate” ethnic backgrounds were 1.25% in 2019, down from 1.73% in 2018, and 1.09% in 2017.

By gender, 74.77% of male graduates and 66.12% of female graduates in 2019 were Caucasian, both down from 76.70% of male graduates and 67.73% of female graduates in 2018, and 73.92% of male graduates and 66.26% of females in 2017.

Last year, 16.76% of male graduates and 19% of female graduates were African-American, up from 15.53% of male graduates and 16.96% of female graduates in 2018, but down from 17.96% male and 18.65% female grads in 2017.

Among Hispanic graduates in 2019, 5.41% were male and 11.90% were female, up slightly from 5.11% male and 11.31% female in 2018, but down from 5.70% of male graduates and 11.62% of female graduates in 2017.

2019 saw mortuary science graduates representing 49 of the 50 states, and there were seven international graduates.

Native Americans accounted for 0.72% of male graduates and 1.06% of female graduates in 2019, up from 0.19% of male graduates and 0.31% of female graduates in 2018, and 0.35% of male graduates and 1.31% of female graduates in 2017.

In 2019, 0.90% of all male graduates and 0.77% of all female graduates were Asian/Pacific Islander, compared with 1.14% of all male graduates and 1.75% of all female graduates in 2018, and 1.55%

of all male graduates and 0.75% of all female graduates in 2017.

ABFSE reported that 1.44% of all male graduates and 1.15% of all female graduates classified themselves as “other/did not indicate” in 2019, compared with 1.33% of all male graduates and 1.95% of all female graduates in 2018, and 0.52% of all male graduates and 1.41% of all female graduates in 2017.

In 2019, 14.91% of graduates had a relative in funeral service, which is down 16.59% versus 2018, and 17.86% in 2017. A total of 130 graduates (8.14%) had a parent in the business in 2019, 0.88% had a spouse, 0.94% had a sibling, 0.44% had an in-law, and 4.51% responded “other” relative.

THE NEXT STEPS

According to two recent NFDA studies, funeral home managers and incoming graduates have different perspectives and expectations at the start of a new career. Smith said that funeral service educators often report employers calling and asking for a list of graduates as potential job applicants. “Many of those potential employers are amazed to learn that 65% of the graduates are female and that 30%-40% have some level of commitment to a funeral home when they started their education,” he said.

Two recent NFDA studies show that firm managers and incoming graduates have different perspectives and expectations at the start of a new career.

“That is also related to the question about generational differences in managerial style,” Smith continued. “Today’s workforce has different expectations about the workplace regarding wages, hours, time off, etc. That can be particularly difficult to reconcile in a field such as ours, which is dominated by small businesses and where 24/7 coverage is necessary. In addition, too often we hear the management mantra, ‘That’s the way we did it when I was an intern,’ which assumes that policies and procedures of the past should still be applied.”

Looking ahead to next year, Smith believes that the COVID-19 pandemic will have an impact on the 2020 or 2021 numbers. “Interestingly enough, an article in the November edition of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reported a 1.7% decline in overall college enrollment for 2019,” he said.

“The same article suggests that colleges should expect continued declines for the next 10 to 12 years. Enrollment in ABFSE programs increased by 3.9% in 2019 over 2018. So, for at least one year, funeral service is bucking the trend.”

In a June 17 *Chronicle* article, a small survey found mixed responses from schools regarding fall enrollment. According to Smith, 11 schools of various sizes responded. “In the limited survey, fall enrollment confirmations ranged from -10% to +11%,” he said.

“We do not track funeral service statistics until the year’s end,” Smith continued. “In any given year, more than 50% of ABFSE programs report 10% or more changes in enrollment. Typically, those changes are 50/50 [half report a decline in enrollment and half report growth]. There should be no surprises if there is an overall funeral service enrollment decline in 2020 in concert with the national trends.”

On a potential positive note, Smith said that during the pandemic, he was pleased to see local media provide some positive coverage of funeral service activity. “We saw almost weekly portrayals of how funeral service was responding to COVID-19 conditions and the efforts made to help families cope with the unprecedented situation,” Smith said. “My hope is that similar coverage occurred in other media markets. That could be the impetus necessary for some to consider a career in funeral service.”

As far as the pandemic’s impact on curriculum, Smith said the immediate impact has been the need to shift the accredited program to distance-based delivery. “For students already enrolled in a distance education program, the impact is minimal,” he said. “However... for many/most of the traditional students, [no] direct interaction with classmates and instructors is proving very stressful.”

“Overall curriculum content did not change due to COVID-19, but effective faculty are finding tremendous opportunities for ‘teachable moments’ from this unprecedented environment,” said Smith.

Deana Gillespie is NFDA research manager.

Ed Defort is editor of NFDA Publications.

One Must Look at the Rolling Data

By Jzyk Ennis, Ph.D.

The American Board of Funeral Service Education stands ready to educate any and all who apply and are accepted into our programs.

Last year at this time, there was great concern that a drop in new enrollees was reported for 2018.

Year-over-year data is important, but, as I cautioned last year (*Memorial Business Journal*, May 23, 2019), to recognize trends, we must look at rolling data. As we anticipated, the number of new enrollees in ABFSE programs for 2019 increased by 229 students and 96 graduates over 2018.

The area of most interest, to me and to others, is the demographic trend of new enrollees and graduates.

What does this mean strictly from a “numbers perspective”? Going back to 2005, ABFSE graduates in 2019 made up the fourth-largest graduating class during that 14-year period. What is most recognizable is who those graduates are today compared to the past.

As far as new enrollees, 2019 reversed the downward trend of people enrolling in ABFSE funeral service education programs going back to 2015. Last year was the first in four years where we saw the number of enrollees increase. This is a very important piece of data.

The area of most interest, to me and to others, is the demographic trend of new enrollees and graduates. For many years now, we have been preparing employers for that fact that the look of tomorrow’s



workforce will be different. For me, the 2019 numbers are not a “whoa” moment; rather, they are more of a “yep” moment. Like the Earth, the rotation is steady and constant – no surprises, just acknowledgment that it does rotate. The same can be said for the most recent ABFSE data, which show what we have already been seeing for some time now: the future workforce for funeral service is going to be overwhelmingly female. For employers still stuck in employment models from the 1950s, this will be a real shock (if you haven’t already realized it).

And if you think your family members are going to fill your shoes, you might have a surprise in store. In 2018, only about 16.5% of graduates were related to someone already in funeral service, and new enrollees related to someone in funeral service was only 13%. Likewise, in 2019, 12.8% of new enrollees and 14.9% of graduates were related to someone already in funeral service. Therefore, only about 15%, on average, of those who have a family member in funeral service are choosing funeral service as a licensed career from ABFSE-accredited programs.

So, who will fill the workforce void now and in the future? Overwhelmingly, the future of funeral service is a first-generation employee who is most likely going to be female. The days of calling your local funeral service program and asking them to send you “a guy” are nearly over (never mind that the practice is illegal).

Progressive owners and managers open to diversity and a changing workforce will thrive with the current new enrollee and graduation reality. A

real question the profession must honestly ask itself is whether its own employment biases, trends and policies are possibly directly related to their cries about the inability to find employees in their area. Could there be a correlation? Not necessarily, but most possibly it could be true.

Editor's note: With our request for comment, we sent Ennis some specific questions to address.

Is there any number, or group of numbers, you are paying particular attention to?

As I said earlier, probably the continued demographic shift of new enrollees and graduates, along with the lower numbers of family members entering the profession. Of course, we always monitor trends related to enrollment and graduation numbers. COVID-19 going forward will certainly be important to watch related to these numbers.

Do you feel the needs of the profession are being met with the quantity of new grads?

I suggest that everyone go back and read my comments from last year's report in the *Memorial Business Journal* (May 23, 2019). I think education and practice go hand in hand. They are two halves of the same apple. ABFSE would love to see higher numbers, as would employers.

Based on a review of previous data, ABFSE graduation numbers are well within the normal ebb and flow of previous years since data have been collected. In other words, ABFSE is enrolling and graduating what has historically been the "norm" and within normal standard deviations. I think what has changed might be the profession's perceptions of what it wants and needs in regard to licensed employees.

I also strongly believe that employers cannot reasonably expect to continue to hire people for \$30,000-\$35,000. This is especially true when they also don't offer retirement, guaranteed time off and benefits. Furthermore, you cannot expect employees to work 50 to 60 hours without days off.

This model is no longer feasible for the new workforce. If this is your employment model, you must hope that you have a local talent pool that wants to "stay near home" and will sacrifice to do so. I just wonder how long they will last before they realize they can sell insurance, etc., for the same

money and more time off with their families? This, I believe, might be one of the problems with finding help in certain areas of the country.

Are fewer graduates considering these geographic opportunities?

Today's workforce wants work/life balance as much as salary. I perform a non-scientific survey in my classes, and every year, my students report that they would take less pay for more time off to be with their families (not like \$20,000, but reasonable).

This is why corporate funeral service and modern private employers can attract employees. Today's employees want time off. Rural areas of the country might have a hard time competing when employees are not local and are willing to move for better opportunities.

Every year in a non-scientific survey I perform in my classes, my students report that they would take less pay for more time off to be with their families (not like \$20,000, but reasonable).

Are new generations as willing to put the time and effort into their career, especially at the start, as were previous generations?

In the same May 23 *Memorial Business Journal* article, I think we discussed this, and I think it is still true today. Some people might not understand, so I offer this analogy. My great-grandmother washed her clothes in a creek. Today, I don't have to, and I'm not going to because of modern washing machines and the availability of modern appliances. Likewise, the employment model of the 1950s is like washing your clothes in the creek. Graduates today can find employers who value them and employ modern business policies.

Employees who can and are willing to move to the opportunities will gravitate to the more modern-practicing firms. Employees today will not con-

tinue, for long, to work 50 to 60 hours a week with no time off for \$35,000. It is just not a sustainable employment proposition in today's market. This is even more true when the employer does not give annual raises or says that their raise is the increase in healthcare premium costs the employer pays.

Let me be clear: I'm not telling business owners charged with making a profit how to run their business, but I am telling them that I think I have a finger on the pulse of today's workforce. That old model won't fly. That is one of the reasons we see such high employee turnover.

What do you think the pandemic's impact will be on the 2020 or 2021 numbers?

At this point, we really don't know. It's too early to tell what COVID-19 will do to new enrollment this fall and into the future. But we are monitoring it going forward.

ABFSE annually reviews curriculum, which will include any pandemic-related events and procedures, and practitioners are directly involved in those reviews.

How has the pandemic impacted curriculum?

The ABFSE curriculum is not the same curriculum from the 1950s. ABFSE annually reviews curriculum, which will include any pandemic-related events and procedures. We have a rotation designed to review each subject area every five to six years.

It is important to note that practitioners are directly involved in curriculum review and change. Representatives from the major national funeral associations participate in ABFSE committees and in the curriculum-review process. Just as funeral service has changed through the years as a direct



result of practitioner influence, so has the ABFSE curriculum.

The ABFSE curriculum has 20 subject areas, including cremation, embalming, small-business management, etc. Of these 20 areas, 70% are non-technical and do not directly relate to the practice of embalming, restorative art, etc. Individual funeral service education programs might structure their programs in a manner that appears to be technical driven, but the curriculum itself is not designed to that end.

Additionally, the ABFSE Committee on Accreditation updated accreditation standards for member schools to refocus on the learning outcomes for our programs. The changes in real-world practice were also heavily considered in those changes.

I appreciate, on behalf of ABFSE, the opportunity to speak to our most recent reporting data. I am open for anyone to email or call with any questions or concerns. My information, along with other officers and the executive director, can be found at abfse.org.

Jzyk Ennis, Ph.D., is an author and funeral service educator at Jefferson State Community College in Birmingham, Alabama. He currently serves as president of the American Board of Funeral Service Education.



When You Need a Win

By Kelly Manion

The Funeral Service Foundation has funds available for scholarships, and students, more often than not, need funds for their education.

5 REASONS TO APPLY FOR A FUNERAL SERVICE FOUNDATION ACADEMIC SCHOLARSHIP

Hey! Free Money!

Now more than ever, we know bills are piling up: tuition, books, rent, loans. And you're doing your best to do it all. (You're doing great, by the way!) We're here to help. This fall, we're on track to award a record number of academic scholarships, ranging from \$2,500-\$5,000.

Sent directly to the schools, the funds help offset the costs associated with books and tuition. We were honored to award scholarships to full- and part-time students in good standing in ABFSE-accredited mortuary science programs or accredited Canadian institutions.

The online application process is easy – the last thing we want to do is add more to your plate. Simply answer four brief questions and submit a video no longer than two minutes. That's it. We'll accept

submissions September 15-November 1. Get full details at <https://www.funeralservicefoundation.org/academicscholarships/>.

You'll Impress Your Professors

Pro tip: Ask your professors for insight on your video – your dedication to your education is sure to impress. Professors may seem a bit tough, but they've been in your shoes, know all that you're juggling, and they want you to succeed.

And if you've done the work and have already applied for, but have not received, a Foundation academic scholarship, why not try again? Your professors will be doubly impressed by your perseverance and commitment.

Total. Résumé. Booster.

Hiring managers look at what sets a potential employee apart from other candidates. Noting on your résumé that you're a national academic scholarship recipient should help send you to the top of the pile. Your scholarship will show potential employers that you value education and that you're not afraid of a little extra work to get the job done.

See Your Name in Print

We understand that exposure is necessary to building a successful career. That's why we showcase our scholarship winners on our website and in trade publications across the profession. You'll also be invited to create a brief "thank you" video for us to share on our social media channels, which lets our donors know how their dollars are strengthening the profession. (And those donors are the same funeral directors looking to hire great talent.)

You Can Tell Your Story

You're dedicating your (second? third?) career to helping families and communities understand that funerals matter, and we want to hear what calls you to this work. When you apply, tell us what makes you, well, you. We want to see your sparkling personality, your professionalism and your compassion. We want to hear your ideas and experiences. Your story inspires our work and drives our mission. Your story matters.

Kelly Manion is the Funeral Service Foundation's director of communication.

From the Editor's Desk

Can We Stop Saying "New Normal"?

One of the most heartrending aspects of these deaths is that the virus has stolen from us our rituals, our funerals, our wakes, our house meetings with family after the burial. Our ability to stand by our loved ones, to touch them, to kiss them as they pass, to look into their eyes and let them physically know we love them. This is the cruelty of this disease. To say our last goodbyes to our loved ones by phone and then return home alone to an empty house. It is a heartbreaking and lonely death for those afflicted and for those left behind to pick up the pieces.

Bruce Springsteen, June 17, 2020
"From My Home to Yours" on SiriusXM

Since the life-altering restrictions were put in place months ago, we've pondered the question, "What's next?" The term "new normal" has been used (way overused, actually) to describe something we haven't seen yet and perhaps something we won't see for quite some time.

Thinking about our "old normal," do we miss its sense of routine, of complacency, even ordinariness? This pandemic has forced us from that bubble into a state of trial and error, innovation, experimentation. Nothing normal about that.

As we wait for the medical community to get a grasp on a vaccine, everything we're doing is "on the fly." Oh, there might be parts of what we're doing that will be components of whatever the future normal looks like, but we're still fairly early in the rebuilding mode.

So, what are we looking at, both in the short term and long term?

During a recent NFDA webinar, funeral directors John Horan (Horan & McConaty Funeral Service, Denver, Colorado) and Matt Bailey (B.C. Bailey Funeral Home, Wallingford, Connecticut) pondered the question of how to re-engage with the public. "There are things we need to do differently, but incorporating ceremony in every step of the process has always been a hallmark of how we try to operate," said Bailey, "and it became even more important during a time like this."

Today, directors are also asking families to meet with them via Zoom, by phone or within state restrictions put in place for in-person meetings. "My hope is that while some families have been conditioned to interact with us virtually, it won't become a tradition or custom," said Horan.

It's hoped that the aspects of funeral service that directors and families have been forced to embrace, such as Zoom-based arrangements and livestreamed services, will combine with a family's newfound appreciation of coming together and celebrating the life of a loved one under one roof.

Said Bailey: "Hopefully, as a profession, we can do a postmortem review of what it looked like in various parts of the country, what worked well, what did not and how to do it the next time something like this happens."

Unless innovation and continued reinvention are part of what you foresee in the next normal, perhaps we need to consider a different term.

 Edward J. Defort
Editor

The Director.edu

A publication of the
National Funeral Directors Association

13625 Bishop's Dr.
Brookfield, WI 53005-6607
800-228-6332
or 609-815-8145
www.nfda.org

Editor

Edward J. Defort
(edefort@nfda.org)

Managing Editor

Dawn M. Behr
(dbehr@nfda.org)

Contributing Editor

Chris Raymond
(cjrayment@nfda.org)

Graphics

Brooke Krishok
(bkrishok@nfda.org)

The Director.edu is a quarterly publication of the National Funeral Directors Association. Its mission is to provide objective, comprehensive news and analysis to mortuary science students.

Subscription Rates:

The Director.edu is free of charge for all students of accredited mortuary science programs. Non-student rates are \$40 for one year (4 issues).

Unauthorized redistribution of this copyrighted material is unlawful.

No part of this publication may be reproduced by any means without prior written permission of the publisher.

Contents © 2020
NFDA Services Inc.