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The Essential Next Step: Apprenticeship

By W. Ashley Cozine

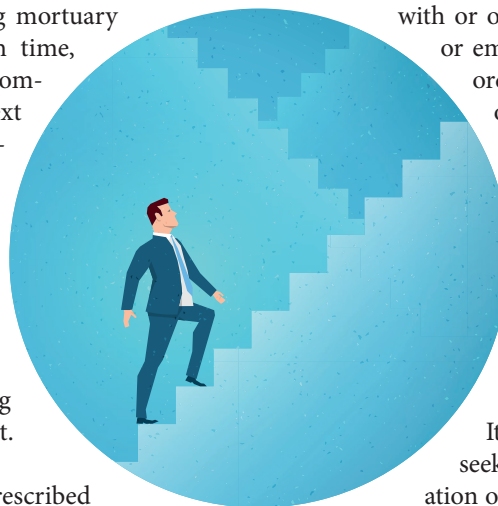
If you're in the process of completing mortuary school, no doubt you've spent much time, energy and money to reach this accomplishment. It's now time to take the next essential step of your career as you consider the apprenticeship program. If you haven't given much thought to this, I cannot stress how important it is to do so! The next year or two will have as much of an impact on your career as just about anything else you do. It can be the difference between a successful, lifelong dedication to serving others or, potentially, complete burnout.

While most states have some type of prescribed requirements for funeral service apprenticeship programs, I would venture to guess that the majority are truly dependent on the skills, attitude and commitment of the actual supervisor. In other words, if a state does not require an apprentice to sit down and make arrangements with a family,



A successful apprenticeship program starts with the right supervisor, and the burden falls on the apprentice to find the right fit.

then the likelihood or opportunity for this to actually happen becomes the sole responsibility of the trainer. Furthermore, requiring only a "minimum" number of tasks (e.g., meeting



with or observing a set number of arrangements or embalming a certain number of bodies in order to qualify for a license) hardly makes one a professional. Let's face it, the human tendency is to take the easy road and only do what's necessary to get along or get the basic job completed. When it comes to finding the right supervisor to oversee your apprenticeship, you don't want to settle for someone who is not committed to training and developing you to your fullest potential.

It's important to look for a program that seeks to develop and produce the next generation of highly qualified and skilled funeral service professionals. An apprenticeship is defined as "the method in which trainees learn a craft or trade by hands-on experience while working with a skilled worker." A successful apprenticeship program starts with the right supervisor, and it's important to know that not all of them are the same. Therefore, the burden falls on the apprentice to find the right fit.

If at all possible, I'd recommend finding the person and/or firm you want to train under before or at least early on during your time in mortuary school. The reason is simple – it's all about relationships! If you can develop a relationship with a funeral director at the outset, you'll be well ahead of the curve. You will likely receive encouragement, additional experience, insight into possible scholarship funds and much more along

your educational journey. Most importantly, you will likely land a job at a firm where you can both serve your apprenticeship and begin your career after you become licensed.

How should you begin looking for the right fit? I recommend being proactive, asking the right questions and knowing what it is you want and expect to gain from your apprenticeship experience. From a funeral home owner/potential apprentice supervisor's standpoint, there can be nothing more frustrating than having a student interview for a potential position and not be fully engaged in the process. I've interviewed individuals who asked few or no questions about me or our firm. They don't seem to know what is involved or expected of them. The impression they give is that they expect the supervisor to do everything and they'll simply just show up. Needless to say, I haven't ever hired one of these people. I have a personal rule set in stone: I will not supervise or mentor an apprentice unless I am willing to hire him or her on a long-term basis. I have found this to be beneficial to both parties. It's a big commitment to undertake the responsibility of training and being accountable for another person's career development, so if the apprentice is not fully devoted and committed to the process, it becomes a waste of the supervisor's time and effort. So, in a nutshell, own your apprenticeship!

Do you consider yourself a team player? If so, great! If not, why not? When a funeral home hires someone who doesn't fit into the company's culture or seems to consistently go against the grain, it only upsets the boat. The result is that the person will either lose the job or likely will get the short end of the stick. If the supervisor has reservations or hesitations about you, he or she becomes more likely to only spend the "required" amount of time to get you through the program and licensed. This doesn't benefit you in the long run at all. Our policy is to only hire people (apprentices included) we believe will be good team players and who will bring the necessary skills we need to continue to be successful.



If a supervisor has reservations about you, he or she becomes more likely to spend only the "required" amount of time to get you through the program.

It is important to have an honest discussion with a potential supervisor. We all hear stories of young men and women hired as apprentices only to do the "grunt work" around the funeral home. These individuals aren't allowed to sit in and observe arrangements, interact with families or even learn worthwhile skills that will help them develop in their career. While I'm certainly not suggesting that an apprentice shouldn't ever wash cars, mow the lawn, pick up trash in the parking lot, etc., I am suggesting that these types of jobs shouldn't be the only things you are expected or allowed to do. These necessary tasks obviously must be done on a regular basis at any funeral home, and teamwork means that

everyone should be willing to pitch in and do what it takes to get the job done.

One way to avoid being hired as "cheap labor" is to ask what will be expected of you during the apprenticeship. You should have a candid discussion about the job description, expectations, requirements, etc. Ask what you can expect to learn during your training and how much of it will be hands-on opportunities. I know of firms that hire trainees and expect them to perform as though they are experienced directors. Find out if it is common for the supervisor or firm to put apprentices into situations for which they have little or no experience or training. In other words, is "trial by fire" the main source of teaching? If so, you might want to rethink before accepting the position. Inquire about the number of apprentices who have been trained at the firm and ask if all of them have become licensed. Better yet, find out how many are still actually in funeral service five years after completing their apprenticeship. Ask how many have continued on staff and if the firm would be willing to let you talk with them about their experience.



One way to avoid being hired as "cheap labor" is to ask what will be expected of you during your apprenticeship.

You should strive for an apprenticeship that will develop and teach you how to handle all types of situations. The objective should be to teach you the skills necessary to become a good, caring and professional funeral director and/or a highly skilled and experienced embalmer. Find out about opportunities that might exist for observing and learning from other staff members as well. You should strive for a program that affords regular and consistent communication with constructive feedback and where the supervisor and/or funeral home considers everything a teaching opportunity.

You need to be aware that investing in the development of a young funeral service professional can be one of the most challenging and time-consuming things one can undertake. It can be very tedious to have to stop, think and explain to someone what you are, by instinct, naturally doing. I have found that many times, there is a tendency to just do the job or task myself, but I always have to remember to look for and take advantage of teaching moments. A true appreciation for the dedication and efforts of your supervisor will go a long way.

I would challenge you to make the most of your apprenticeship opportunity. Strive for excellence. Don't cut corners. Continue to ask questions. Above all, make a commitment to become a lifelong learner. It's hoped that at some point in the future, you will be one of those who can honestly say, "I learned from the best" and then pass on what you have learned to the next generation. Live your life to make a positive impact on others. After all, this is the very essence of funeral service.

W. Ashley Cozine is NFDA president.



Mass Fatalities Give Way to Resilience

By Lacy Robinson

When a mass fatality occurs in a community, it shakes residents and families to the core. The level of emotional intensity in the following days impacts everyone from family members to first responders. The range of emotions and cognitive and physical reactions, as well as interpersonal effects, can extend for months and even years.

One noted response consistent among those impacted is resilience. Research from the National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder states, “A disaster may also bring a community closer together or re-orient an individual to new priorities, goals or values. This concept has been referred to as post-traumatic growth by some authors and is similar to the ‘benefited response’ reported in combat trauma literature.”

While resilience may be the unexpected meaningful outcome following a mass fatality event, the challenge in getting to that feeling can be complicated and exhausting. Serving as the funeral director for a family whose loved one died either in a local mass fatality or perhaps out state or out of the country immediately places that funeral director in an irreplaceable role.

Knowledge is a key component to preparing for such an event. Understanding the processes and policies following a mass fatality will help to enhance a funeral director's communication skills with families they may be assisting directly in making funeral arrangements.

A mass fatality can be defined as an incident or accident where more deaths occur than can be handled by local resources. A mass fatality can be caused by natural or man-made hazards. The four types of mass fatalities categorized in the United States are industrial accident, transport accident, natural disaster and miscellaneous accident (to include fire, explosion, collapse, chemical threat, biological weapons and mass violence).

Important Statistics

- The deadliest natural disaster in U.S. history was a tropical cyclone that hit Galveston, Texas, September 8, 1900, killing at least 6,000 people.
- Public massacres account for 1 in 6 mass killings.
- The deadliest mass shooting in recent history took place June 12, 2016, in Orlando, Florida, killing 49 people.
- The deadliest industrial disaster in U.S. history occurred April 16, 1947, in Texas City, Texas, when a cargo ship exploded, killing 581 people.
- The crash of American Airlines Flight 191 killed 273 people, making it the deadliest transportation accident in U.S. history.

When a mass fatality event occurs, Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Teams, also known as DMORTs, are activated. DMORT teams include forensic pathologists, forensic dentists, forensic anthropologists, fingerprint specialists, med-

Community Outreach Ideas

Plan a candlelight vigil

Create a support banner and invite signatures

Provide grief materials to school counselors

Organize a clothing, food or bottled water drive

Partner with a caterer and sponsor a community support meal

Provide meals to first responders and volunteers

Help organize cleanup efforts

Offer meeting space for groups

Create a grief center specifically for children

Accept online condolences on the funeral home's website

Make available a guest book at the funeral home

Create a Hearts of Hope chapter:
ourheartsofhope.org



Recommended Resources

NFDA State Mass Fatality Plans

nfda.org/resources/operations-management/disaster-planning/state-mass-fatality-plans

Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team: dmort.org

World Health Organization: who.int

Ready Campaign: ready.gov

International Disease Database: emdate.be

Books

Mass Fatalities: Managing the Community Response by Peter R. Teahen

Mass Fatality Management: Concise Field Guide by Mary H. Dudley, M.D.

ico-legal investigators, funeral directors, embalmers, medical records technicians, X-ray technicians, photographers, dental assistants, mental health specialists, and security and administrative personnel. Rescuing survivors is top priority. Next is the transfer of bodies in order to begin victim identification. To effectively identify victims, fingerprints, dental records, DNA records and/or photo identification are used. The process of notification is completed through a Notification Team established by the medical examiner's office. There are guidelines, recommended procedures and suggested dialogue to ensure that the notification of death is professional, respectful and sensitive to the family's situation. During these notification meetings, family members are asked to select a funeral home. Once the firm is selected, the Notification Team representative will proceed with the completion of required documents. Knowing this process, specifically the order of procedures relevant to one's state, will help a director manage the family's expectations.

Prior to the arrangement conference, prepare for questions or concerns relevant to the family's situation. This extra preparation to anticipate their questions and emotional needs is time well spent. Relevant questions ranging from appearance of the deceased to privacy issues may include:

- You may be wondering when you will be able to see your son.
- It may be helpful to discuss what you can expect when viewing your son.
- The most effective way to respond to the media may have crossed your mind.
- You may be concerned about your family's privacy during this time.
- As we discuss the different choices for honoring your son's life, you may have questions about whether it should be a private or public ceremony.

In addition to giving careful consideration to the specific questions or concerns family members may have, be aware of the wide range of emotions they may be experiencing. Those who experience the death of a loved one in a mass fatality situation suffer many of the same grief responses as other loss circumstances, says Jason Troyer, Ph.D., founder of Mt. Hope Grief Services. "However, the responses of

those bereaved due to a mass fatality may be more extreme and last longer."

Family and friends of the deceased aren't the only ones who may be experiencing grief symptoms. First responders and other witnesses often experience many of the same reactions. "Given the public nature of mass fatalities, survivors are often retraumatized as they view media coverage and are sometimes asked to share their views and grief with the public," says Troyer.

Common Reactions to Grief

The range of emotions will impact the family's communication style as well as their decision-making abilities. Finding the right words to say when an unimaginable tragedy has occurred can be a challenge. Sharing a brief and meaningful commitment statement to start the arrangement conference will serve as an appropriate transition. These carefully chosen words with caring and compassionate tone will provide additional peace of mind.

Example: "Mrs. Smith, what has happened in our community is incomprehensible. I want you to know that your family has my commitment to honor Kyle's life in a very special way. Together, we'll be discussing every detail – from his obituary to his service. Every step of the way, I'm here for you. If you have questions or need to share something important, please do so at any time. We'll take as much time as your family needs in order to plan a service that reflects the remarkable life your son lived."

In addition, spend time preparing for a discussion regarding identification and viewing considerations. Vernie Fountain, renowned master embalmer and post-mortem reconstructive specialist, strongly recommends that viewing by next of kin (and/or other family members) be scheduled after identification has been confirmed by officials. The embalmer should complete a detailed condition report to be reviewed with the funeral director prior to the arrangement conference. In addition to reviewing the report, the funeral director should arrange a time to view the deceased prior to meeting with the family. At that point, any potential considerations that may delay viewing by the family should be discussed with the embalmer in order to

manage the family's expectations further.

When the deceased is unrecognizable, make every effort to make available a portion of the loved one for viewing. Even if the only recognizable portion is the deceased's fingers, the emotional impact can be tremendous for families that desire a physical connection with their loved one. Take time to build the credibility of the funeral home's care team when explaining embalming and reconstructive surgery to provide additional peace of mind. When it's time for the family to view their loved one, prepare the family emotionally by managing their expectations. Share with them what they will be seeing (clothing, hair, jewelry, complexion). Fountain recommends using supportive language to manage realistic expectations. For example, using the word "acceptable" in place of the word "perfect."

If only the next of kin is scheduled to privately view the loved one, suggest they bring a close family member or friend with them for additional support. For additional peace of mind, share with the family that after the private viewing takes place, it will be their decision to make if they prefer their loved one to be viewed during the public

visitation. Regardless of their final decision, always emphasize the comfort they will feel from spending private time with their loved one. Your ability to communicate value is of utmost importance during this time of uncertainty for the family.

Your firm may be asked or expected to help organize community outreach programs under a very limited time frame. In advance, determine with funeral home employees what community outreach ideas and resources can be put into action immediately. Ideas, supplies, equipment and local partners can all be organized, identified and secured in advance.

Every person employed by the funeral home plays an important part in helping the bereaved emotionally heal following a mass fatality. Spend time reviewing important information with co-workers, organizing resources and discussing implementation of community outreach and the use of restorative art materials (and tools) during such circumstances. Families need you to be prepared for the unexpected.

Lacy Robinson is NFDA director of member development.

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Time Management Takes Time

A Conversation With Deborah Tolboom

A big challenge for mortuary students is time management. A typical schedule is a delicate balance of studying, lab work, internship or apprenticeship and, oh yeah, family time.

For some tips on the topic, Deborah Tolboom, professor emerita at Mercer County Community College and American Board of Funeral Service Education executive assistant, offers advice based on her years of experience.

When the topic of time management comes up, what pops into your head?

If you've read Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, you may recall the opening chapter. Alice is sitting on the riverbank making daisy chains. A white rabbit runs by wearing only a waistcoat. He pulls a watch and chain from his pocket, looks at the watch and exclaims, "Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be too late!" He then dashes down a hole, and Alice follows.

This scene often comes to mind when students express concern regarding their perceived lack of time to complete projects, do assigned readings and study for tests and exams. Time management is a common challenge for college students.

Thinking about high school, a student's time is usually structured by the teachers.

Exactly. In college, students do not have as much in-class

time for assignments and are given more work to do outside of class. This provides the student with more flexibility; however, this freedom can also be overwhelming for some. Successful students are those who are able to utilize their time effectively.

Learning to manage time effectively can energize and motivate and also reduce anxiety and stress. Research suggests that the way we use time (or waste it) is largely dependent on our habits. Therefore, it is possible to learn habits that will help us manage time more effectively. In other words, there is hope for the white rabbit!

Even though sometimes one might feel hopeless in trying to re-organize...

In order to manage time successfully, it is important to prioritize commitments. Start by developing a calendar of important dates for classes. This would include assignments, tests, exams, school holidays and other important academic events. Next, add important dates for family and social life.

It's important to determine how time is spent in a typical 24-hour day. This involves recording the amount of time spent doing various tasks such as studying, sleeping, exercising, working, socializing, relaxing, personal grooming and any other activity that's part of a typical day. This will help prioritize commitments and provide insight into the amount of time available for specific obligations.

Develop a schedule for the coming week that includes all of the important academic, family and social events. Begin by listing the activities that come at fixed hours and cannot be changed. Next, determine how much time is to be allocated for each activity. It is recommended that a student allow two hours of studying for each hour spent in the classroom. It's also helpful to schedule certain hours every day to be used for studying in a habitual, systematic way. Regular study hours will make it easier to follow the schedule and maintain a proactive approach to academics.

Rest periods are also important when studying. It is recommended that after studying for 50 to 90 minutes, a rest period of 10 to 15 minutes should be taken. The rest period will help to energize and make the study time more effective. Studying difficult subjects first is also helpful in maximizing study time, along with being aware of the best time of day to study.

I have found that there are periods of the day in which time is not wasted, but it's also not productive time.

The time between classes can be a student's most valuable study time yet is most frequently misused. This time can be used to review the material and edit notes from the preceding class, as well as study material for the next class.

It is critical to leave some unscheduled time for flexibility. Lack of flexibility is one of the main reasons a schedule fails.

Students tend to overschedule themselves and then throw up their arms in complete frustration. The result is that they will abandon the schedule completely rather than revise it! If something happens that requires the student to deviate from the schedule, it is important to "trade" time rather than "steal" it. For example, if study time was used for an activity, that study time is rescheduled for later that day.

The level of distraction these days is far worse than when I was in school.

Exponentially! The place chosen for study is as important as the amount of time allotted. Choose a place that minimizes visual and auditory distractions. This includes avoiding the



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temptation to answer a cellphone, instant message or respond to any other distraction. It may be necessary to tell family and friends that they are not to disturb you during scheduled study times. By removing yourself from distracting areas, you are communicating to others the importance of having this time to study.

For most students, planning a weekly schedule is adequate for ensuring that their goals are met. However, a daily schedule may be necessary for those who feel that daily demands require more careful planning. Regardless of your situation, the time spent in developing a schedule is worth the effort.

The funeral service profession requires its practitioners to be excellent managers of their time.

Funeral directors must organize their work to meet numerous time commitments. If a family is coming to the funeral home to make funeral arrangements, it is imperative the funeral director is there to greet them. If the family has requested that arrangements be made in their home, it is important for the funeral director to arrive on time.

When finalizing funeral arrangements, the funeral director must order merchandise and arrange for tasks to be completed by third parties in a timely fashion. An example of this would be arranging disposition with a cemetery. The cemetery and vault company need to be aware of the date and time of the graveside service. It is critical that the funeral procession arrive on time for the service. If circumstances prohibit this, it is imperative for the funeral director to notify the cemetery and give an approximate time of arrival. Of course, this type of situation should be rare! Funeral directors who habitually arrive at the cemetery late will not be respected by cemetery personnel. In addition, the funeral director will appear incompetent to family and friends in attendance.

Funeral service students are embarking on a career that demands excellent time management skills, and school is a great opportunity to hone those skills. It is possible to develop habits to manage time more effectively while reducing stress.

Funeral directors work with clergy who conduct funeral services in their respective places of worship. It is critical that the director organize the procession so that family and friends arrive on time for the service. The relationship between the funeral director and clergy is easily strained when practitioners are habitually late for services.

Funeral service students are embarking on a career that demands excellent time management skills. The time spent in school can be a great opportunity to hone these skills. It is possible to develop habits that will help to manage time more effectively while reducing unnecessary stress.

On a related topic, test taking is a common concern for students. For some, just the thought of taking a test can result in feelings of anxiety or even panic.

In my teaching experience, I've seen many students who have not developed test-taking skills. Typically, these are students who are attending class, doing the readings and participating in class discussions; however, when they take a test or examination, their score does not appear to reflect their knowledge. As a result of this observation, I began to look at how they were approaching the test and offer suggestions for improvement. The following suggestions are the result of my experience in helping students develop effective test-taking skills.

First, let's address the various types of tests a college student may have to take and then offer some ways to approach them. These suggestions are not meant to circumvent the need for

studying! There is no shortcut to proper preparation for a test or examination. However, I have had many students who have benefited from learning how to analyze a question before attempting to answer it.

Multiple choice tests are probably the most common format used in colleges, and the National Board Examination uses this format as well. It is critical that the student read the question very carefully first.

These questions can often have more than one correct option. Watch for negative words in the instructions or the main question. I encourage students to circle or underline these words if they can. Try to answer the easy questions first. Read each question and try to answer it without looking at the options given. I have told students to cover the options with their hand while they read the question.

Once the question is read, immediately eliminate the options you know are incorrect. If possible, I encourage students to cross out the incorrect options with a pencil. Sometimes the answer will be a combination of several options. An example of this would be:

The following are examples of minor restorations:

1. Hypodermic tissue building
2. Removal of a scab
3. Care of a deep laceration
4. Care of third-degree burns.

- a.) 1 and 4
- b.) 2 and 3
- c.) 1, 2, and 4
- d.) 1 and 2.

The student looking at this question knows that a third-degree burn requires a major restoration. Therefore, any answers that contain "4" should be immediately eliminated. This will leave the student with a choice of two answers to ponder.

Be sure to question options that are totally unfamiliar or that contain negative and/or absolute words. If two or three options seem to be correct, then "all of the above" may be the correct response. If two answers appear to be similar, then probably one of them is correct. Compare them for differences and then refer back to the question for the best answer. It is critical that once a question is answered, it is not changed unless the student is absolutely certain! Many times, I have had students who would change answers at the last minute only to find that they had the correct answer originally.

I've done that a number of times myself. What about handling sentence completion or fill-in-the-blank questions?

I believe that the best way to approach this type of question is to read the sentence completely and then insert a word that makes the content and grammar correct. If you cannot think of the exact word or words, then give a descriptive answer

and you may get partial credit. It is also important to note the number of blanks that are being used in the question to ensure that you give the appropriate number of answers.

Tests comprising true and false answers are also challenging for some students. I think the idea that there are only two options available for the answer intimidates them. It's important to remember that every part of the sentence must be true. If the sentence contains "extreme modifiers," it is more likely to be false. Extreme modifiers are words such as "all," "always," "only," "none," "never," "absolutely," "certainly," etc. Sentences that contain "qualifiers" are usually true. Qualifiers are words such as "usually," "some," "probably," "might," "may," "frequently," "seldom," etc. Be careful to watch for any negative words because they will change the meaning of the sentence. The use of double negatives in a sentence will cancel each other out. An example of this would be "not uncommon," which means "common."

Matching questions are those in which two lists are provided. The student must match the items in one list with those in the other. First, it is important to look at both lists to see the types of items and their relationship. Start with an item in one list, then go through the second list to find a match. Move through the entire second list before making a match. Cross off the items in the second list as they are selected. Be sure to make all of the "absolute" matches before guessing.

Generally, my students became concerned when they were told a test will contain questions that require a short essay. But I have found that students often do much better with this type of question.

Why is that?

I believe it's because it gives them an opportunity to express themselves in their own words. They do not have to select a response from a list they may find confusing. In preparing for this type of question, it is important to make "summary sheets" of the course material. Try to categorize the material according to subject/interest areas that make sense to you. It is much easier, the, to study from these notes. During the test, write the answers in simple, straight-forward sentences. If the question is confusing or you think you could answer it in several ways, speak to the instructor. Never leave an answer blank!

Essay questions are also very useful in ascertaining student knowledge.

Absolutely. Generally, an instructor will tell students how many questions will be provided and the amount of time they will be given to complete the test. It is important to set up a timetable for this type of test. For example, if there are six questions to be answered in 60 minutes, then students should allow themselves seven minutes for each question.

First, read through all of the questions once and note whether you are given any choice in answering them. For example,

the instructions may read, "Answer three of the following five questions." Paraphrase (put in your own words) the original question and organize your thoughts before you begin to write. Answers will usually come to mind immediately for some of the questions. Write or print clearly, using a dark-colored erasable pen or pencil (if allowed). Form a clear thesis statement in the first sentence. The first paragraph should provide an overview of the essay. The rest of the essay can then be used to discuss these points in detail. It is also important to provide a brief summary at the conclusion of the essay. Be sure to allow time to review the answers to the questions. If you should short on time, outline your answers to any of the remaining questions.

Generally, my students became concerned when they were told a test would contain essay questions. But I have found that students often do much better with this type of question because it gives them an opportunity to express themselves in their own words.

One of the toughest kinds of tests I recall from college were oral reports in front of the class.

Oral tests are not as common as the previously mentioned tests. Due to the nature of this type of test, preparation is critical. Before the test, write out the questions you expect to be asked. This will give you an opportunity to formulate your responses.

Verify the date, time and location of the test. Dress appropriately for the test because first impressions can have a tremendous impact on the examiner's perception. Arrive at the location early and be sure to turn off your cellphone and/or pager. Remember, the test begins the minute you walk into the room. Introduce yourself and give the instructor your full attention. During the test, maintain good posture and eye contact. Stay focused and do not ramble. If you don't know the answer, state that you do not know and then outline how you would find the answer. Maintain self-confidence and composure throughout the test. Be sure to answer the questions with more than a simple "yes" or "no," unless instructed to do otherwise. Watch for signs that the test is over. At the end of the test, thank the instructor for his or her time.

Remember that it is important to not only study for a test but also to prepare for the types of questions that will be provided. I encourage you to take time to analyze the format of the question before attempting to answer it. This will help you to focus your efforts in a positive manner and will most likely give you a better result on the test.



Enrollment in Mortuary Science Programs Hits 15-Year Low

Based on statistics compiled by the American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE), the majority of funeral service students fit this profile: Caucasian female, age 21-25 and a high school graduate with at least one or two years of college.

Overall, new enrollments in mortuary science programs hit a 15-year low in 2016, while the number of graduates was the third highest since 2000, according to the statistics.

Total current-year enrollment (new, pre-graduate and graduate) in the 59 mortuary science programs in 2016 was 6,031, 3.68% higher than the 2015 total enrollment of 5,837 and 4.34% higher than the 5,778 students enrolled in 2014.

Looking at 2016 mortuary science program total enrollment, the 2,511 new students is down 4.85% from the 2,639 new

students in 2015 and down 2.18% from the 2,567 new students in 2014.

This year's figure of 702 students is 21.84% fewer students than the record 3,213 students enrolled in 1996. It must be remembered, however, that the 1996 figure is considered an aberration because that was the year the associate degree was implemented as the minimum ABFSE standard, and many students flocked to ABFSE certificate and diploma programs to complete their funeral service education before the requirement took effect.

Between 2007 and 2016, the number of new enrollments showed a gradual decline but bounced back in 2009 to post steady increases through 2011 before beginning a four-year downturn.

Student Enrollment/Graduation

Year	New Students	Graduates
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

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

Attrition PROGRAM YEAR 2016

Reason for Withdrawal	Number	Percentage
Remained in mortuary science-related major but transferred to another institution	9	1.13
Changed major but remained in higher education	31	3.91
Left for academic reasons	339	42.75
Left for financial reasons	56	7.06
Left for personal reasons	206	25.98
Left for other reasons	152	19.17
TOTALS	793	100%

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

New Enrollees By Age PROGRAM YEAR 2016

Age	No. of Students	Percentage
20 or under	366	14.58
21-25	824	32.82
26-30	465	18.52
31-35	319	12.70
36-40	213	8.48
41-45	123	4.90
46-50	89	3.54
51-55	54	2.15
56-60	35	1.39
61-65	10	0.40
66-70	6	0.24
71 and over	2	0.08
Unknown	5	0.20
TOTALS	2,511	100%

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

New Enrollees By Prior Education PROGRAM YEAR 2016

Level Completed	No. of Students	Percentage
GED	138	5.50
High school grad	2,335	92.99
Other	38	1.51
TOTALS	2,511	100%
High school or equivalent	726	28.91
1 year of college	440	17.52
2 years of college	639	25.45
3 years of college	180	7.17
Bachelor's degree	465	18.52
Master's degree	37	1.47
Other	24	0.96
TOTALS	2,511	100%

Previously attended a funeral service program 93

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

The 1,638 graduates in 2016 was 4.38% lower than the 1,713 graduates in 2015 but still 13.04% higher than the 1,449 graduates in 2014.

The data also reveal that students entering mortuary science programs have more prior education than previous enrollees. From 1971-2004, the number of students with one or more years of college ranged between 51% and 62%. In 2009, that figure jumped to 69%; in 2016, it landed at 71.09%, which is slightly lower than the 72.98% in 2015 but still an increase of 3 percentage points from the 69.7% in 2014. Furthermore, in 2016, the number of new enrollees with a bachelor's or graduate degree was put at 19.99%, about 3.4

percentage points higher than the 16.56% in 2015.

Continuing a 21st century trend, significantly more women than men are enrolling in mortuary science programs. The tipping point came in 2000, when the number of women enrolling in mortuary science programs surpassed the number of men – 51% vs. 49%. In 2016, out of 2,511 new students enrolled, 1,622 (64.59%) were female. This compares with 2015, when out of 2,639 new students enrolled, 1,670 (63.28%) were female.

Broken down by ethnicity, 63.4% of all new students in 2016 were Caucasian, compared with 62.33% of all new students in

New Enrollees By Ethnic Origin and Gender PROGRAM YEAR 2016

Ethnic Origin	Male		Female		Total	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Caucasian	600	67.49	992	61.16	1,592	63.40
African American	215	24.18	351	21.64	566	22.54
Hispanic American	48	5.40	192	11.84	240	9.56
Asian-Pacific Islander	11	1.24	23	1.42	34	1.35
Native American	2	0.22	10	0.62	12	0.48
Other	13	1.46	54	3.33	67	2.67
TOTALS	889	100%	1,622	100%	2,511	100%

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

New Enrollees By Prior Employment PROGRAM YEAR 2016

Employed	No. of Students	Percentage of Total Students New Enrollees (2,511)
Less than 6 months	308	12.27
6 months to 1 year	184	7.33
More than 1 year	454	18.08
TOTALS	946	37.67%

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

New Enrollees By Family in Funeral Service PROGRAM YEAR 2016

	No. of Students	Percentage of Total Students New Enrollees (2,511)
Parent	227	9.04
Spouse	30	1.19
Sibling	16	0.64
In-law	20	0.80
Other	66	2.63
TOTALS	359	14.30%

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

2015 and 64.1% in 2014. The percentage of African-American enrollees in 2016 was 22.54%, down from 24.29% in 2015 and 23.1% in 2014. Hispanics accounted for 9.56% of new students in 2016, which was on par with 9.36% in 2015 and up from 8.6% in 2014. Asian-Pacific Islanders accounted for 1.35% of new students, up slightly from 1.25% in 2015 (albeit from a smaller base) and from 0.8% in 2014. The number of new Native American students in 2016 was 0.48%, down slightly from 0.76% in 2015 and from 0.9% in 2014. The number of new students of “other” ethnic backgrounds in 2016 was put at 2.67%, up from 2.01% in 2015 and 2.4% in 2014.

According to ABFSE statistics, 67.49% of male enrollees and 61.16% of female enrollees in 2016 were Caucasian. This compares with 67.39% of males and 59.40% of females in 2015. In 2014, 70.2% of male enrollees and 60.6% of female enrollees were Caucasian. Last year, 24.18% of male and 21.64% of female enrollees were African American. This compares with 22.91% and 25.09%, respectively, in 2015, and 20.9% of all

male new students and 24.4% of females in 2014. In 2016, 5.40% of males and 11.84% of females were Hispanic. This compares with 6.3% of males and 11.14% of females in 2015 and 6.2% of males and 10% of all female new students in 2014.

Asian-Pacific Islanders accounted for 1.24% of new male enrollees and 1.42% of new female enrollees in 2016. This compares with 2015’s 1.34% of new male enrollees and 1.2% of new female students, and 0.5% of all male new students and 1% of all female new enrollees in 2014.

Native Americans accounted for 0.22% of new male enrollees and 0.62% of new female enrollees in 2016. In 2015, 0.72% of all new male enrollees and 0.78% of female enrollees were Native American, and in 2014, 0.3% of all male new enrollees and 1.3% of all female new students were Native American.

ABFSE reported that 1.46% of all male new enrollees and 3.33% of all female new enrollees were “other/did not indi-

Graduates by Ethnic Origin and Gender PROGRAM YEAR 2016

Ethnic Origin	Male		Female		Total	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Caucasian	463	76.78	703	67.92	1,166	71.18
African American	84	13.93	184	17.78	268	16.36
Hispanic American	40	6.63	113	10.92	153	9.34
Asian/Pacific Islander	6	1.00	11	1.06	17	1.04
Native American	2	0.33	6	0.58	8	0.49
Other/Did Not Indicate	8	1.33	18	1.74	26	1.59
TOTALS	603	100%	1,035	100%	1,638	100%

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

Graduates By Age PROGRAM YEAR 2016

Age	No. of Students	Percentage
20 or under	93	5.68
21-25	612	37.36
26-30	364	22.22
31-35	212	12.94
36-40	123	7.51
41-45	86	5.25
46-50	67	4.09
51-55	40	2.44
56-60	23	1.40
61-65	5	0.31
66-70	6	0.37
71 and over	0	0.00
Unknown	7	0.43
TOTALS	1,638	100%

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

Graduates By Prior Education PROGRAM YEAR 2016

Level Completed	No. of Students	Percentage
GED	59	3.60
High school grad	1,566	95.60
Other	13	0.79
TOTALS	1,638	100%
High school or equivalent	338	20.63
1 year of college	289	17.64
2 years of college	467	28.51
3 years of college	140	8.55
Bachelor's degree	354	21.61
Master's degree	27	1.65
Other	23	1.40
TOTALS	1,638	100%

Previously attended a funeral service program 59

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

cate,” which compares with 1.34% of all male new enrollees and 2.40% of all new female enrollees as “other” ethnicity in 2015, and 1.7% of all male new enrollees and 2.8% of all female new enrollees in 2014.

Slightly more than 1 in 10 new enrollees in 2016 seemed to be carrying on or getting into the family business. ABFSE reported that just 14.30% of all new enrollees had a relative (or other) in funeral service, which compares with 13.16% in 2015. A total of 227 new enrollees in 2016 (9.04%) had a parent in the business, 1.19% had a spouse, 0.64% a sibling, 0.80% an in-law and 2.63% said “other” relative.

Graduate Profiles

In 2016, there were 1,638 graduates from accredited programs; in 2015, the number was 1,713 graduates. These graduates represent 49 of the 50 states and the District of Columbia, and four graduates hailed from foreign countries. The only state that did not have a graduate was Alaska. Texas led all states with 154 grads, with Illinois and New York the only other states to post triple-digit graduates, 112 and 110, respectively.

Overall, 63.18% (1,035) of the 1,638 students who graduated from mortuary science programs were women. This is up from

Graduates Who Work While in School PROGRAM YEAR 2016

Employment	Number	Percentage of Total Number Grads (1,638)
In funeral-related services	896	54.70
Other non-funeral service employment	457	27.90
TOTALS	1,353	82.60%

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

Graduates By Family in Funeral Service PROGRAM YEAR 2016

Employment	Number	Percentage of Total Number Grads (1,638)
Parent	156	9.52
Spouse	15	0.92
Sibling	9	0.55
In-law	19	1.16
Other	67	4.09
TOTALS	266	16.24%

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

62.40% (1,069) or 1,713 female graduates in 2015 and 56.4% (817) or 1,449 students in 2014. As noted earlier, 2000 was the year when 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 1,661 graduates, 52.2% (867) were women.

According to ABFSE, 71.18% of all graduates in 2016 were Caucasian, which compares with 71.86% in 2015 and 75.3% in 2014.

The percentage of African-American graduates in 2016 was put at 16.36%, which is down from 18.1% in 2015 but up from 16.0% in 2014.

In 2016, there were 1,638 graduates from accredited programs; in 2015, the number was 1,713 graduates. These graduates represent 49 of the 50 states and the District of Columbia, and four graduates hailed from foreign countries.

The number of Hispanic graduates saw a significant increase in 2016, advancing to 9.34%, which is up from 6.65% in 2015 and 5.7% in 2014.

The percentage of Asian-Pacific Islander graduates was put at 1.04% in 2016, down from 1.11% recorded in both 2014 and 2015.

In 2016, the percentage of Native American grads was put at 0.49%, up from 0.35% in 2015 but still off from the 0.6% in 2014. "Other/did not indicate" ethnic backgrounds dropped slightly to 1.59% in 2016 from 1.93% in 2015, but the number was up from the 1.30% in 2014.

Broken down by gender, 76.78% of male and 67.92% of female graduates were Caucasian in 2016. Last year, 78.42% of male and 67.91% of female graduates were Caucasian, and in 2014, the numbers were 80.2% of males and 71.5% of females.

In 2016, 13.93% of male graduates and 17.78% of female grads were African American, which compares with 15.68% of male graduates and 19.55% of female grads in 2015, and 13.6% of male and 17.9% of female grads in 2014.

Furthermore, in 2016, 6.63% of male graduates and 10.92% of female graduates were Hispanic, a significant gain over the 3.11% of male graduates and 8.79% of female graduates in 2015 and 3.2% of male graduates and 7.6% of female graduates in 2014.

Native Americans accounted for 0.33% of male graduates and 0.58% of female graduates in 2016, up from the 0.16% of male graduates and 0.47% of female graduates in 2015. The year before, 0.6% of all male graduates and 0.2% of all female graduates were Native American.

In 2016, 1.0% of all male graduates and 1.06% of all female graduates were Asian-Pacific Islander. This is on par with 2015, when 1.09% of all male graduates and 1.12% of all female graduates were Asian-Pacific Islander, and with 2014, with 1.1% of male grads and 1.8% of female graduates being Asian-Pacific Islander.

ABFSE reported that 1.33% of all male graduates and 1.74% of all female grads in 2016 were classified as "other/did not indicate," which compares with 1.55% of male graduates and 2.15% of female graduates in 2015, and 1.3% of male graduates and 1.0% of female graduates in 2014.

Only 16.24% of graduates had a relative in funeral service in 2016, which is on par with 2015. A total of 9.52% of graduates had a parent in the business, 0.92% had a spouse, 0.55 had a sibling, 1.16 had an in-law and 4.09% responded "other" relative.



Going Viral

Have you ever seen or read something that brings to mind something you hadn't thought about in a while? Recently, I watched as a woman took a picture of her husband/boyfriend standing casually under a no-loitering sign. If they're going for viral, they're going to come up short, I thought to myself.

But it reminded me of another stunt that earned the actors far more attention than they ever wanted. It was nearly five years ago that a 30-year-old woman was fired for allowing her picture to be taken in front of a sign at Arlington National Cemetery that read "Silence and Respect," posing as if she were yelling at someone and making an obscene gesture. No surprise, the photo found its way to Facebook and other social media ports. Which means, of course, that it will never go away.

At one time or another, we've all said or done something we thought was going to be a laugh riot, only to have it fall flat. I understand that humor is subjective, and I suppose the actor here may have been going for a modern-day interpretation of the image of the guy leaning against a pole under a sign that reads, "No Loitering."

But woman photographed at Arlington lost her job because of the complete disconnect between being funny and showing shocking disrespect. Of course, we can't be sure of her motives. Did she have illusions of the photo "going viral" and maybe securing a mention on one of those cable TV shows that spotlight foolish behavior found on the internet? Who knows?

The woman did issue an apology, saying it was a "spur-of-the-moment total lapse of judgment" and that she "wasn't reacting to the place, she was reacting to the sign." Reacting to the sign? Again, for the record, the sign said, "Silence and Respect" and "Arlington National Cemetery." While I will accept the "total lapse of judgment" comment, I can't see how she missed the cemetery's name on the very sign she was mocking. Did she forget where she was?

One thing is certain – she was not the first, nor will she be the last to be terminated for such behavior. The internet is unforgiving, and if you have second thoughts about something you said or did online, well, you're rolling the dice that no one took a screen shot.

While the general issue of a company's influence over an employee's behavior in the employee's off hours has been debated in many circles, this woman made this decision pretty easy for her employer since she was on a company-sponsored trip to the cemetery. The woman's photographer co-worker was also dismissed.

These days, it seems much more difficult to raise the bar while there are so many outlets intent on lowering it. But that doesn't mean we should ever stop trying, especially considering that the consequences can be permanent.

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