

SCAFO Certification Programs

In this issue of *The Print*, the association has posted the requirements for two certification programs: the Fingerprint Examiner Certification for 10 print examiners and the Evidence Print Examiner Certification for latent print examiners.

The idea of SCAFO developing a certification program for its members resulted from a telephone conversation between SCAFO President Elect Ed Palma and Bill Leo concerning members who were being challenged in court because they were not certified. Asking for and challenging fingerprint examiners who do not hold a certification during the Voir Dire process has become more common since the airing of a *Sixty Minutes* program which stated that “there is not even a requirement that fingerprint examiners be certified”.

Currently, the only certification program for fingerprint examiners is offered through the International Association for Identification. The earliest in a fingerprint examiner’s career that he or she would be eligible for certification through the I.A.I. Program would be three years and then only if the examiner had a bachelor’s degree. The Board felt that our membership needed a program that would provide a certification for examiners who have completed training and are now assigned to testify as comparison experts in court. We felt that waiting, sometimes for years, to become eligible to be certified while being required to testify as an expert was not an acceptable alternative.

The Board has approved certification programs for latent print examiners and for ten print examiners who have completed training and are now assigned to do journey level work. Applicants must show proof of training and, through written and comparison testing, show a level of proficiency expected of a fully trained examiner. Additional tenure and educational requirements have by design been left out of the SCAFO’s Certification Programs. Our goal is to provide our members with the ability to provide the courts and other interested parties a means to verify that an examiner’s experience and training has been reviewed and verified by a professional organization of his or her peers and, through testing, that the examiner has demonstrated technical competence.

After reviewing the requirement for certification, we also encourage your comments and suggestions that may improve the program. Please forward any comments or suggestions to Bill Leo at leo@scafo.org. Your comments and suggestions will be shared at the Association’s Board meeting in January. It is hoped that any final adjustments will be made at that time and testing will begin in January or February.

The board encourages the active membership of the Association to take advantage of these programs.

Recommended Study Areas for the Written Test SCAFO Certification Programs

The following SWGFAST Guidelines:

Guidelines for Professional Conduct
Standards for Conclusions
Friction Ridge Examination Methodology for
Latent Print Examiners

Knowledge of the definitions of and the ability to recognize the eight basic fingerprint patterns as defined in the FBI *Science of Fingerprints*.

Knowledge of the structure of friction skin.

Knowledge of the scientific research that supports the basic premise of the permanence and uniqueness of all areas of friction skin.

Examples for a narrative question, which requires the preparation of a stipulation suitable to be read into court record. The following are two examples:

I am prepared to testify to the following:

On October 3, 2003, at Department G, Orange County Superior Court, I compared the recorded prints on the following documents:

Sheriff’s Booking Slip #1234465 dated 12-12-03, bearing the name Smith, John and a ten print fingerprint exemplar card bearing the name, Smith, John, dated 1-12-03.

The prints appearing on the two documents were made by the same person.

or

Based on the comparison of the fingerprints appearing on the above two documents, I am prepared to testify that the prints were made by one and the same person.

The points that are reviewed and scored include: Did the examiner accurately describe the exhibits compared? Did the examiner clearly express his or her conclusions? Is the written narrative legible? Would it make sense if read to a jury as a stipulation?

For Evidence Print Examiner Certification Only:

Knowledge of various latent print development processes including what types of surfaces they are used on and what they react to.

Powder development
Ninhydrin
Cyanoacrylate
Small particle reagent
Physical developer
Forensic light source using dye staining
Iodine fuming
Silver nitrate

SCAFO Certification Program for Fingerprint Examiners

Purpose of the Certification Program

The Certification Program's sole purpose is to provide the courts and other interested parties a means to verify that a fingerprint examiner's experience and training has been reviewed and verified by a professional organization of his or her peers through testing where the examiner has demonstrated technical competence. Certification by SCAFO is not an endorsement or recommendation of any fingerprint examiner over another.

This program differs from the Evidence Print Examiner Certification Program in that the Fingerprint Examiner Program deals with the comparison and identification of recorded fingerprints for the purpose of personal identification rather than dealing with the identification of evidence prints found at crime scenes.

Eligibility Requirements

Must be an active member of the Southern California Association of Fingerprint Officers. Applicants for certification must agree to abide by the Guidelines for Professional Conduct as recommended by SWGFAST.

Experience Requirements

One year of experience as a fingerprint examiner. Experience must be full-time, paid experience, with the identification of recorded fingerprints being the primary job duty.

The examiner must be off of training and currently employed in the searching, comparing, and identifying of fingerprints, and providing conclusions and reports as to his or her findings.

Written documentation of work experience must be submitted with application for certification.

The SCAFO Board will determine what documentation is acceptable, and all experience must be verifiable.

Training Requirements

Applicant must have completed at least 80 hours of formal training in the searching, comparison, and identification of recorded fingerprints. This requirement may be met through a combination of training courses offered by professional or private organizations, colleges, or structured in-house training and internships. For training courses, course certificates of completion and the names of instructors must be submitted.

Proof of in-house training programs and internships shall consist of submitting a copy of the training outline

or syllabus plus a letter on department letterhead stating that the applicant successfully completed the program or internship and shall include the names and qualifications of the instructors. This letter must be signed by a supervisor overseeing the training.

Instructors for all training must meet the instructor qualifications as defined by SWGFAST as described below:

Instructor Qualifications

Essential Qualifications:

An instructor must possess the knowledge, skills, and abilities for the courses being instructed. An instructor for the Friction Ridge Examination segment of training must have been accepted in court as an expert in friction ridge identification.

Desirable Qualifications:

An instructor should have completed training on how to be an instructor.

An instructor should have attained accreditation/certification from recognized institutions, agencies, or professional organizations.

An instructor should have completed a structured training and internship program covering the same subject matter.

Written Test requirements

Pass a written test on the following subject areas (passing is defined as receiving a score of 75% or better):

Subject areas:

- Basic premise of friction skin identification ACE/V
- The three levels of clarity
- Scientific basis that establishes the uniqueness of all areas of friction skin
- Acceptable conclusions of fingerprint examinations
- Fingerprint pattern interpretation
- Structure of friction skin
- Professional responsibilities and conduct

At the conclusion of the written test, the applicant will be given copies of two prints to compare and will be required to prepare a report suitable to be used as a stipulation in a court of law.

The report will be evaluated based on the following elements:

Be hand-printed and legible as to be read in court.

Include a statement(s) that the examiner is prepared to testify to the following:

When and where analyzed
A description of the exhibits compared
Conclusions

Printed name, title, and signature.

This exercise is intended to demonstrate the applicant's ability to communicate in writing his or her conclusions to a court of law. This section is valued as 25% of the written examination.

Comparison Test Requirements

Successfully complete a series of comparisons of recorded fingerprints to include:

Digitally stored fingerprint images used to make identifications using an automated fingerprint identification system

Exemplar to exemplar comparisons

Driver's licenses

Pawn slips

Court documents

Each questioned print must be evaluated as to its quality and, if suitable for comparison, whether it is an identification or an elimination. Not all comparisons will result in an identification. Not all prints are suitable for comparison. Questioned prints have been selected to represent typical case work expected of fingerprint examiners who have completed a training program and are doing journeyman level work. A 100% score will be required for passing.

Certification by "The Southern California Association of Fingerprint Officers" may be revoked for any of the following reasons:

1. Falsification of information on the application for certification.
2. Conviction of a crime or termination for misconduct from a law enforcement agency.
3. Incompetent analysis or testimony.
4. Conduct in conflict with the goals and purposes of the Southern California Association of Fingerprint Officers.
5. Failure to abide by the SWFGAST Guidelines for Professional Conduct.

Complaints or allegations of misconduct should be directed to the President of the Association.

The requirements for certification will be posted on the SCAFO web site along with an application for certification that will be capable of being downloaded. A listing of certified examiners will also be posted at this site for all to see.

Recertification

Examiners must be recertified every 5 years. Re-certification requires the examiner to be active in fingerprint identification, submit a new and updated application, and complete the testing process. The applicant must have completed an additional forty (40) hours of continuing education training.

Cost

A \$50.00 fee payable at time of application is required for both initial certification and recertification. Fees are collected to offset the cost of testing materials, certificates, and the cost of administering the program.

SCAFO Certification Program for Evidence Print Examiners

Purpose of the Certification Program

The Certification Program's sole purpose is to provide the courts and other interested parties a means to verify that an evidence print examiner's experience and training has been reviewed and verified by a professional organization of his or her peers through testing where the examiner has demonstrated technical competence. Certification by SCAFO is not an endorsement or recommendation of any evidence print examiner over another.

This certification differs from SCAFO's Fingerprint Examiner Certification Program in that the Evidence Print Examiner deals with all types and areas of friction ridge evidence, including the development and individualization of fragmentary latent prints found at crime scenes for the purpose of crime solution, rather than the identification of individuals through their recorded fingerprints.

Eligibility Requirements

Must be an active member of the Southern California Association of Fingerprint Officers. Applicants for certification must agree to abide by the Guidelines for Professional Conduct as recommended by SWGFAST.

Experience Requirements

One year of experience as an evidence print examiner. Experience must be full-time, paid experience, with latent print development and examination being the primary job duties. Primary duty is defined as over fifty percent of the time is spent doing latent print development and examination.

or

Two years of experience where latent print development and examination is an additional duty, such as a burglary detective trained in latent print identification.

The examiner, must be off of training and doing evidence print examinations, providing conclusions and reports as to his or her findings.

Written documentation of work experience must be submitted with application for certification.

The SCAFO Board will determine what documentation is acceptable, and all experience must be verifiable.

Training Requirements

Applicant must have completed at least 160 hours of formal training in latent print identification.

This requirement may be met through a combination of training courses offered by professional or private organizations, colleges, or structured in-house training and internships. For training courses, course certificates of completion and the names of instructors must be submitted.

Proof of in-house training programs and internships shall consist of submitting a copy of the training outline or syllabus plus a letter on department letterhead stating that the applicant successfully completed the program or internship and shall include the names and qualifications of the instructors. This letter must be signed by a supervisor overseeing the training.

Instructors for all training must meet the instructor qualifications as defined by SWGFAST as described below:

Instructor Qualifications

Essential Qualifications:

An instructor must possess the knowledge, skills, and abilities for the courses being instructed. An instructor for the Friction Ridge Examination segment of training must have been accepted in court as an expert in friction ridge identification.

Desirable Qualifications:

An instructor should have completed training on how to be an instructor.

An instructor should have attained accreditation/certification from recognized institutions, agencies, or professional organizations.

An instructor should have completed a structured training and internship program covering the same subject matter.

Written Test requirements

Pass a written test on the following subject areas (passing is defined as receiving a score of 75% or better):

Subject areas:

- Basic premise of friction skin identification ACE/V
- The three levels of clarity
- Scientific basis that establishes the uniqueness of all areas of friction skin
- Latent print development with powders and chemicals
- Acceptable conclusions of latent print examinations
- Fingerprint pattern interpretation
- Structure of friction skin
- Professional responsibilities and conduct

At the conclusion of the written test, the applicant will be given copies of two prints to compare and will be required to prepare a report suitable to be used as a stipulation in a court of law.

The report will be evaluated based on the following elements:

Be hand-printed and legible as to be read in court.

Include a statement(s) that the examiner is prepared to testify to the following:

When and where analyzed
A description of the exhibits compared
Conclusions

Printed name, title, and signature.

This exercise is intended to demonstrate the applicant's ability to communicate in writing his or her conclusions to a court of law. This section is valued as 25% of the written examination.

Successfully complete a series of comparisons to include:

Partial latent prints developed with various powders and chemicals with known finger and palm exemplar.

Exemplar to exemplar comparisons

Driver's licenses

Pawn slips

Court documents

Each evidence print must be evaluated as to its quality and, if suitable for comparison, whether it is an identification or an elimination. Not all comparisons will result in an identification. Not all evidence prints are suitable for comparison. Evidence prints have been selected to represent typical case work expected of latent print examiners who have completed a training program and are doing journeyman level work. A 100% score will be required for passing.

Certification by "The Southern California Association of Fingerprint Officers" may be revoked for any of the following reasons:

1. Falsification of information on the application for certification.
2. Conviction of a crime or termination for misconduct from a law enforcement agency.
3. Incompetent analysis or testimony.
4. Conduct in conflict with the goals and purposes of the Southern California Association of Fingerprint Officers.
5. Failure to abide by the SWFGAST Guidelines for Professional Conduct.

Complaints or allegations of misconduct should be directed to the President of the Association.

The requirements for certification will be posted on the SCAFO web site along with an application for certification that will be capable of being downloaded. A listing of certified examiners will also be posted at this site for all to see.

Recertification

Examiners must be recertified every 5 years. Re-certification requires the examiner to be active in evidence print identification, submit a new and updated application, and complete the testing process. The applicant must have completed an additional sixty (60) hours of continuing education training.

Costs

A \$50.00 fee payable at time of application is required for both initial certification and recertification. Fees are collected to offset the cost of testing materials, certificates, and the cost of administering the program.