Teaching Forensic Science – Putting It In Perspective
Forensic science is a fascinating discipline that draws on many pure sciences to produce methods and processes to aid criminal inquiry and investigation that are constantly evolving.

The processes are scientific. The subject matter, by its very nature, often relates to crimes where conventional societal behaviors are challenged to the extreme, and the results of sexual and or violent acts become the subject matter of forensic science investigation.
» The content that you will be teaching in your classes may well challenge the perception that some stakeholders have of our world, as well as how they interpret that information.

» Each student will come to the classroom with a frame of reference based upon a number of factors, such as her or his upbringing, community, culture, religion, and socioeconomic status.
In this session we will review the importance of objectivity as you prepare to teach Forensic Science.

We will look at communication and instructional strategies. Our topics will include:

- the identification of stakeholders,
- the development of a communication plan,
- the use of objectivity,
- pitfalls and problem-solving strategies.
At the end of this session, you will be equipped with ideas to employ appropriate communication and instructional strategies along with a planning process to develop the course you will be teaching.
As a teacher, you are familiar with effective instructional strategies and appropriate methods of communication between yourself, students, parents, and administrators. However, there are elements of a sensitive nature in the Forensic Science course material that might require a heightened level of awareness during instruction and in your communication.
As you develop a plan to teach this course, ask yourself these questions:

- **Who will I engage for assistance with course development?**
- **How will I gain approval for my course choices?**
- **Will I consider notifying parents about the course content?**
Although you always carefully handle your communications with students and parents, teaching forensic science requires extreme thoughtfulness and sensitivity. Therefore, your approach to this course should include a communication strategy that identifies stakeholders, determines whether they are internal stakeholders or external stakeholders, and creates a clear plan for communication. Your strategy will equip you with a proactive approach that will help you anticipate concerns and prepare you for quick but careful responses.

Developing a Plan
When developing a communication strategy, it is essential to consider each stakeholder who will have a role in or be affected by the course. In the next section, you will identify the various stakeholders who are primary players in the communication process for the course. You will also categorize them based on whether they are internal or external stakeholders.
Stakeholders are those individuals or groups of individuals who will somehow be affected by a course of action. Effective and open communication with stakeholders is an important aspect of proper preparation for teaching this course. The first step towards opening communication channels with your stakeholders is by identifying exactly who these individuals or groups may be.

Stakeholders must be divided into two groups: internal and external.
The charts above illustrate the largest groups of internal and external stakeholders that may have an interest in the course you teach. As you can see, these stakeholders represent a diverse group of individuals who may each need to be treated differently. In the next section, we will consider suggested methods of communication for these different groups.
Communication with stakeholders prior to teaching Forensic Science is an effective method for addressing concerns before they are raised. Once you have identified your core internal and external stakeholders, you must develop a key message about the course. Then you and your district support team must control the message. This means that you and your district support team must maintain control over what message is conveyed about the content and purpose of the course.
➢ Set class norms/ground rules.
➢ Conduct a frame of reference exercise to best understand student background, level of understanding, and expectations.
➢ State clearly and often your availability to meet privately.
- Request meetings with the curriculum director and principal to gain approval of the course curriculum and syllabus.
- Develop a “communication protocol” in case parent concerns are raised. Who speaks with the parent first? Who would be involved in a parent meeting?
- Engage teachers of other courses by distributing the course syllabus. They can alert you if they hear any student discussion related to your course.
- Email the principal, curriculum director, or any other relevant staff if a difficult discussion occurs in class. This is a proactive method for alerting everyone that a student or parent concern might arise.

Communication Methods – District Faculty and Staff
Distribute the course syllabus/curriculum prior to the beginning of the course.
Draft and send a parent letter home with students on the first day of class. Require a signature to confirm receipt of the letter.

Conduct an open house one or two evenings during the first few weeks of the class. Invite parents to attend and discuss their expectations of the course.

State clearly and often your availability to meet with parents.
If your district has a communication director, provide him or her with a synopsis of the course along with a copy of syllabus.

A course synopsis and the syllabus may be sent to associations as a general notification of the new course, or they may be prepared and ready in case an education association contacts your district with questions regarding the course.
- Prepare a course synopsis and copy of syllabus for media distribution.
- Meet with the principal to determine if media should be proactively contacted about the course via a press release.
- If the district decides against a press release, be sure the course synopsis and syllabus are with the appropriate district-level contact person in case there is media interest.
- Coordinate with your principal to establish the appropriate primary contact for media inquiries regarding Forensic Science.
Although you may create a communication plan independently, be sure to gain feedback from the curriculum specialist, principal, and other members of your support team.

The next slide shows a template that you can use for your plan.
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<th>Stakeholder (individual or group)</th>
<th>Message Distribution (email, meeting, etc.)</th>
<th>Person Responsible</th>
<th>Frequency/Deadline</th>
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Communication Plan Template
And finally, we have attached a sample letter for you to tailor to your own needs to send to parents or guardians of prospective Forensic Science students. This sample letter can be found in the additional materials section of “Putting It In Perspective”.

We hope you enjoy reviewing the course contents as part of your professional development.

Good luck.