

Majoring in

Forensic Science

Description of the Forensic Science Major

What is forensic science?

Forensic science is the application of science to support the law.

What forensic science majors study?

Forensic science majors learn the theory and practice of forensic science, including the nature and scope of the discipline; the application of forensic to crime, police investigation and the adjudication process; and the legal, ethical, natural science, mathematical and laboratory skills required for forensic work.

What skills are important for a forensic science major?

Forensic science majors should be able to:

- Conduct thorough scientific analyses;
- Express themselves well orally and in writing;
- Think analytically using scientific reasoning skills;
- Enjoy and be proficient in conducting laboratory work.

What else do forensic science majors study?

Forensic Science is considered an interdisciplinary liberal arts major. This means that students take a wide variety of courses in other disciplines/sciences in addition to those in the major. These courses help develop knowledge and skills that are applied throughout one's lifetime.

Liberal arts courses provide a background to strengthen critical thinking; problem solving; written, oral, and interpersonal communication; and quantitative, analytical, and reasoning skills. These skills are considered very important for future success in the workplace. A strong liberal arts background also provides the foundation of an educated person.

Course Requirements

General education: About 60 credit hours of general education courses are required. These courses provide students with a broad range of knowledge in foreign languages, science, math, writing, arts, ethics, civilization, literature, human behavior, and urban environment.

Major courses: A total of 47 credit hours of forensic science and general science courses are required including several laboratory courses. Forensic science majors take courses such as:

- Biotechniques Laboratory
- Organic Chemistry I & II with laboratory
- Biochemistry I & II
- General Physics I & II with laboratory
- Crime Scene Search and Recovery
- Forensic Laboratory Principles and Practice
- Forensic Evidence, Law & Criminal Procedure
- Professional Practices in Forensics
- Forensic Microscopy
- Forensic Molecular Biology
- Genetics

Tracks: An additional 13-14 credits in one of two tracks supplement the major courses. These tracks are forensic biology and forensic chemistry.

Electives: Generally, forensic majors take fewer elective credits because their general education, major, and track courses give them enough hours to graduate.

Minor: The student completing the forensic science undergraduate degree (either biology or chemistry track) will be eligible for a minor in chemistry. There is no minor in forensic science.

Careers in Forensic Science

Students with a B.S. in Forensic Science can pursue a number of employment opportunities, including:

- Governmental employment at the local, state, and federal level in forensic science laboratories
- Law enforcement positions at the local, state and federal level
- Private sector laboratory employment
- Firearms analyst
- Fingerprint analyst
- Entomologist
- Toxicologist
- Microbiologist
- Pathologist
- Crime Scene Investigator
- Forensic Investigator
- Criminalist
- Forensic Biologist

Many forensic science majors go on to graduate programs, such as forensic science, criminal justice, psychology, biology and chemistry. Other students enter law school, or medical, dental or other health science programs. The following are examples of careers that require an advanced degree.

- Medical examiner
- Forensic pathologist
- Forensic science professor
- Psychiatrist
- Toxicologist

Next Steps

If you are interested in learning more about becoming a forensic science major at VCU, consider doing each of the following things. Check them off as you complete each step.

- Check out the VCU forensic science webpage.
- Take an introductory biology or chemistry course for majors.
- Read about the forensic science major in the *Undergraduate Bulletin*.
- Review the forensic major graduation worksheet with an academic advisor.
- Talk to one or more upper-level forensic science students about their major.
- Attend a Forensic Science Student Club meeting.
- Discuss the major with one or more forensic science professors.
- Go to the Career Center to read about careers in forensic science.
- Go to the VCU bookstore and browse through the forensic science textbook section.
- Explore internship possibilities through the Career Center and the forensic science department.

☐ Check out the American Academy of Forensic Science website at www.aafs.org for information on topics related to the study of forensic science.

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