Think You Want to Be a CSI?

Do you think of naming your children Gil, Horatio or Warrick? Are songs by The Who frequently playing in your head? Chances are you are a huge fan of CSI, the TV phenomenon that has spurred three hit series and has a hot syndication following. Thanks to the popularity of the hit series, there's a growing curiosity in careers in forensics and criminology.

Lest you think that is the only contributor to the growing interest in a career in crime scene investigation, other factors include population demographics, increased awareness of forensic science by law enforcement, increased numbers of law enforcement officers, database automation in several categories of physical evidence, jury expectations, legal requirements, accreditation and certification requirements of laboratories and personnel, and the impending retirement of a large number of currently practicing forensic scientists.

Criminalistics and forensics, which is projected to grow as fast as the average industry growth by the BLS, is the science and profession dealing with the recognition, collection, identification, individualization, and interpretation of physical evidence and the application of the natural sciences to law-science matters, according to Education and Training in Forensic Science: A Guide for Forensic Science Laboratories published by the U.S. Department of Justice.

Forensics includes analytical chemical methods to analyze controlled substances, fibers, glass, soil, paint and other materials, as well as fingerprint analysis, toolmark and firearms identification and document examination.

Qualifications/Characteristics of a Good Candidate

Most forensic scientists are employed in crime labs associated with law enforcement or other government agencies. Education should include a bachelor's degree (at minimum) in the natural sciences, plus completion of written and practical tests. Other factors considered may include drug tests, criminal history, medical or physical exam, past work performance and polygraph test.

More than 20 colleges or universities in the U.S. offer a bachelor's degree program in forensic science; more than 10 additional schools offer a bachelor's of science in chemistry, biochemistry or genetic engineering with an emphasis on forensic science; a few additional schools offer a bachelor's of science degree with an emphasis in a specialty area, such as criminalistics, pathology, jurisprudence, odontology, toxicology, or forensic accounting.

Other skills essential to this work include critical thinking, decision-making, good lab practices, observation and attention to detail, computer proficiency, interpersonal skills and time management. Plus, knowledge and understanding of legal procedures can be helpful.

Types of CSI Jobs include:

**Forensic Anthropologist**
These experts are physical anthropologists who generate biological profiles for unidentified human skeletal remains, identify unknown individuals and evaluate skeletal trauma. They are often university-based and consult for medical examiner offices.
Forensic Computer Scientist/Digital Evidence Examiner
Think Warrick Brown on CSI. These investigators are computer and information scientists/technicians who may be involved in the recovery and examination of probative information from digital evidence. This evidence includes desktop computers, laptops, network servers, and other digital equipment including cameras, personal digital assistants, pagers, software programs, databases and e-mail.

Forensic Engineer
The forensic work in this area mostly relates to civil litigation and sometimes criminal casework. But for people like the character Calleigh Duquesne on CSI: Miami, the range of forensic activity includes accident reconstruction, product failure investigations, structural failure analysis and related investigations.

Forensic Entomologist
Although he is the head of his unit, this is Gil Grissom's specialty on CSI. These investigators are often university-based and consult for medical examiners, coroners, law enforcement agencies and attorneys. They use insect evidence to help reconstruct the circumstances surrounding human death, including time of death and movement of the body.

Forensic Nurse
These specialized nurses perform functions such as serving as sexual assault nurse examiners and case reviewers for medical malpractice attorneys.

Forensic Odontology
Forensic Odontologists are dentists and oral pathologists who most often consult for medical examiner offices. They identify people from dental structures and analysis/comparisons of bite-marks.

Forensic Pathologist
Like Dr. Sheldon Hawkes on CSI: New York, forensic pathologists are medical doctors who serve as medical examiners and sometimes as coroners. They determine the cause and manner of death through autopsies and death investigation.

Forensic Psychiatrist
They are the medical doctors who serve as researchers and clinical practitioners where psychiatry is applied to legal issues. They might conduct psychiatric examinations to determine civil and criminal competence, psychological trauma and criminal responsibility.

Forensic Psychologist
This person applies psychology to questions relating to the law and the legal system. This work includes psychological evaluation and expert testimony including trial competency, forensic behavioral analysis, civil commitment and guardianship.

Forensic Toxicologist
Forensic Toxicologists, like Eric Delko on CSI: Miami, provide services in postmortem cases (support death investigations), human performance cases (driving under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs) and workplace testing (mandatory job-related alcohol/drug testing). The work encompasses the determination and interpretation of drugs and their metabolites in biological fluids.

Kate Lorenz is the article and advice editor for CareerBuilder.com. She researches and writes about job search strategy, career management, hiring trends and workplace issues.