

DNA ON TRIAL: A PROGRAM FOR LAWYERS AND JUDGES
TEXAS STATE CAPITOL AUDITORIUM
AUGUST 12-14, 2026

DAY ONE, AUGUST 12, 2026—12:30PM-5:00PM (3.75 hrs. CLE)

Preparing for a Trial that Has DNA Evidence: What You Need to Know

12:00 p.m. Registration and Logistics: Capitol Auditorium Foyer

12:30 p.m. Welcome & Program Roadmap
Lynn Garcia (Texas Forensic Science Commission, General Counsel)

12:45 p.m. Introduction to Forensic Biology & Case Assessment
Brady Mills (TXDPS Deputy Asst. Director), Jarrah Kennedy (Texas Forensic Science Commission, Scientific Program Coordinator)

Faculty will introduce the types of testing a laboratory may use in a forensic biology case against the backdrop of typical questions asked during an investigation. DNA analysts must understand incoming requests for analysis and background case information sufficiently to formulate efficient testing plans given limited resources, while minimizing access to task-irrelevant information where possible. DNA analysts must be able to effectively communicate what the DNA reporting results may or may not mean within the entirety of the case. Attendees will be introduced to key limitations of biological/DNA interpretations and the rationale behind current case acceptance policies at DPS and beyond. Finally, faculty will emphasize how effective communication between investigators, legal practitioners, and laboratories positively impacts the speed and utility of the testing performed.

1:30 p.m. Forensic Biology Screening
Stacy McDonald (Southwestern Institute of Forensic Sciences, Deputy Chief of Physical Evidence), Gary McDonald (Dallas Co. DAO)

In this session, attendees will learn about common test methods used to characterize biological material to help answer questions like “is there blood on this swab?” or “is there semen on the underwear?” Faculty will review examples of laboratory notes and reporting statements to explain what they mean—including their limitations. Faculty will provide a current snapshot of what biological screening methods Texas accredited labs are performing and how often. The attendees should take away an improved understanding of the value of these tests to help them decide whether the tests would be helpful in their practice.

2:15 p.m. Break

2:30 p.m. DNA Laboratory Processing
Samantha Wandzek (Signature Science), Chase Baumgartner (Innocence Project of Texas)

Faculty will briefly explain what occurs at each of the steps that ultimately lead to generation of a DNA profile: extraction, quantitation, amplification, and detection. Supporting documentation should be routinely requested for trial preparation. Attendees will learn to review this laboratory documentation for important information related to who performed the tests, what quality controls were used, and if any issues were documented during the processing of the items like contamination, sample switches, failed controls, etc.

3:15 p.m. Introduction to DNA Interpretation, Reporting, and CODIS
Tiffany Larsen (Brazos Co DA), Charity Hubbard (Texas DPS)

This session will give a high-level overview of DNA interpretation to delve into the key takeaways for attendees related to profile interpretation, assignment of number of contributors, mixture interpretation and the statistics used to give weight to DNA comparisons. Examples of DNA reports from Texas accredited laboratories will be used to illustrate similarities/differences and how to locate the information needed during trial preparation. The national DNA database (CODIS) will be discussed as it relates to eligibility requirements and what follow-ups are necessary once a “hit” occurs. The session will include discussion about potential red flags such as higher-order mixtures, the impact of related individuals, and the DNA language—words or numbers—means in a report.

4:00 p.m. Break

4:15 p.m. Question and Answer Session: Full Panel of Instructors

4:30 p.m. Key Takeaways & Preview for Tomorrow
Lynn Garcia & Jarrah Kennedy (TFSC)

Faculty will highlight key takeaways and emphasize the importance of getting full (and timely) discovery. Just as important as discovery is pre-trial preparation with the DNA scientist(s) in the case so that common issues can be addressed and understood by all parties. Finally, the attendees will hear a preview of the remainder of the program where the issues introduced today will be illustrated through real case facts.

5:00 p.m. Adjourn

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DAY TWO: AUGUST 13, 2026, 9:00am-4:30pm

The Power and Limitations of Forensic DNA Evidence (5.5 hrs. CLE)

9:00 a.m. Welcome: Preview of the Day and Roadmap of Materials

9:15 a.m. Introduce Travis Cobb Case
Matt Howard (Bexar Co. DA), Dayna Jones (Defense), and exoneree Travis Cobb

During this session, faculty will understand the critical lessons that emerged from Mr. Cobb's wrongful conviction and the work done by the Bexar County DA's Office, law enforcement and his attorney in pursuit of his exoneration.

10:15 a.m. Break

10:30 a.m. What Questions Do DNA Reports Help Answer?
Dawn Boswell (UNT CHI), Jarrah Kennedy (TFSC)

Faculty will remind the audience of the limitations of DNA interpretations that help to address the "who" questions in a case. To explore what the DNA results mean in the wider context of the case, additional information needs to be considered. There are various scientific issues to consider, such as the type of biological material present, the recovery of DNA under different circumstances (DNA-TPPR), and the other case facts that help the trier of fact properly understand the meaning of the DNA profiling results.

11:00 a.m. DNA Transfer: Counter-Arguments in Travis Cobb's Exoneration
Matt Howard (Bexar Co. DA)

Faculty will discuss the DNA transfer explanation(s) offered by the real perpetrator in the Travis Cobb case and why the prosecutors ultimately rejected the explanations in the context of all case facts. Key takeaway—the factfinder and legal professionals should investigate what the DNA findings mean when considered along with other case information (e.g., other forensic evidence, lay witnesses, etc.).

11:30am PBS Video "You've Been Lied to About DNA Evidence"
Lynn Garcia (TFSC)

After a short introduction discussing the continued value of DNA evidence and the importance of understanding it in context, audience will view the following video: [You've Been Lied to About DNA Evidence](#)

12:00 p.m. Lunch (on your own)

1:00 p.m. DNA Can Transfer in Unexpected Ways (Real Case Examples)
J.D. Schmid (Minnesota Board of Public Defense)

During this session, faculty will discuss real case examples where DNA transferred in unexpected ways and provide insights from a defense attorney about how this has impacted his practice and how he approaches DNA testimony when transfer is a consideration.

2:00 p.m.

FSC Reporting and Testimony Task Group Update

Lynn Garcia (FSC), Jarrah Kennedy (TFSC)

During this session, faculty will provide an update about the Texas DNA Technical Leader task group's progress regarding DNA reporting and testimony guidance as well as other task group work products on the horizon.

2:30 p.m.

Break

2:45pm

Other Challenging Issues that May Impact Case Outcomes in a Complex DNA Mixture

Colin Bellair (Travis County DA), Jarrah Kennedy (TFSC)

This session will use a recent Travis County case to discuss the technical challenges of a higher order number of contributors, related persons (victim/eliminations to each other), and conditioning and how it impacted the outcome/legal disposition. Robust validation and clear standard operating procedures are critical for higher order mixtures, *especially* where there are related people.

Takeaways:

Importance of pre-trialing so lawyers can understand the strengths and weaknesses of what they are presenting or preparing to cross-examine; understanding when expert assistance is necessary; and the ability to identify issues.

3:45pm

Forensic Genetic Genealogy (FGG) Update: Texas Cases

Dawn Boswell (UNT CHI), Leighton D'Antoni (Dallas Co DA)

This session will briefly discuss some scientific and legal considerations with Forensic Genetic Genealogy (FGG). Attendees will better understand the limitations and applicability of FGG through the presentation of Texas cases.

4:15pm

Wrap Up and Preview for Tomorrow

4:30pm

Adjourn

DAY THREE: AUGUST 14, 2026 (9:00am-1:00pm) (3.25 hours CLE; 1.0 ethics)

Capstone: Professional Responsibilities and Case Breakout Sessions/Applying What We've Learned

9:00 a.m. **Roadmap**
Lynn Garcia (TFSC)

9:15 a.m. **Other Technologies You Might See in a Case: YSTRs/mtDNA/SNP (MPS)**
Ashley Korsakas (DNA Labs International)

This session will provide an overview of additional DNA-related technologies that are not specifically addressed in this program. Attendees should take away an improved understanding of the utility of the methods aided by real casework scenarios.

9:45 a.m. **The Journey Toward Useful and Timely Disclosure of Forensic Case Records in Texas Criminal Cases**
Lynn Garcia (TFSC), Kevin Callahan (TX DPS) (1.0 Ethics CLE)

Attendees will learn about statutory disclosure obligations of lawyers, pertinent case law and related ethical obligations in the specific context of forensic records. They will also learn about the historical challenges lawyers and labs have faced in meeting disclosure obligations given technology limitations. Faculty will discuss the implementation of a new legislatively created statewide crime laboratory portal for purposes of better effectuating legal and ethical disclosure obligations in the specific context of forensic laboratory records. Key case records to be aware of, and a recent FSC Report discussing legal disclosure and professional responsibility issues with respect to pending quality incidents will be presented.

10:45 a.m. **Break**

11:00 a.m. **Present Case Facts and Issue Spotting Small Group Breakout Sessions**
Facilitators: Tiffany Larsen/Bill Wirskye (prosecutors); Nicolas Hughes/Chase Baumgartner(defense); Judge-elect Garza/Judge TBD

Case facts will be provided to discuss in small groups. Faculty will serve as facilitators and help guide discussion as well as provide questions to the groups to consider. Attendees will be given the opportunity to apply what they have learned about issue spotting with DNA evidence when preparing for trial.

12:15 p.m. **Full Group Discussion / Q&A**

Attendees will be given the opportunity to discuss issues covered during their small group sessions. Attendees will also have an opportunity to ask the faculty questions that have been submitted throughout the program.

12:45 p.m. **Closing Remarks/Takeaways**

1:00 p.m. **Adjourn**