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We dedicate this issue of the Journal to Dr. Gordon Bigelow,

Leader  
Mentor  
Spokesman  
Friend

in recognition of his contributions, as Executive Director,  
to the  
American Board of Funeral Service Education.





#### Dr. Gordon Bigelow Announces Retirement

At the March 28, 1998 meeting of the American Board of Funeral Service Education Dr. Gordon Bigelow announced that he would be stepping down as ABFSE Executive Director with the close of the 1999 Annual Convention in Milwaukee, WI. In announcing his retirement, Dr. Bigelow stated "There comes a time in every position when you come to realize that you have contributed all you can, when you have brought to the table all the ideas for change and improvement that you possess, and, therefore, when the time has come for new leadership to come in and move the organization to new heights and new horizons."

Dr. Bigelow has served as Executive Director of the American Board of Funeral Service Education since 1985. Prior to joining the ABFSE he served as Dean and Vice-President at the University of Southern Maine where, at his departure he was named Dean Emeritus. Gordon earned his bachelor's degree at Brown University, a master's degree at the University of Maine and a second master's at Brigham Young where he remained to earn his Ph.D. in educational psychology followed by a post-doctoral year at the University of California, Berkeley. Prior to his appointment at Southern Maine, Dr. Bigelow held the position of Assistant VP at Kent State University where, for better or worse, his campus suffered the tragic 1970 confrontation with the National Guard.

During his 14 years of leadership the American Board has witnessed significant accomplishments: the formulation of a new accreditation manual, the development of a process for the recurring review of the funeral service curriculum and the publication of up to date teaching outlines. Under Dr. Bigelow's leadership the ABFSE scholarship fund has tripled and new policies and procedures have been designed to insure that their award be equitable and objective. Graduate scholarships are now available to faculty on a competitive basis and a

National Board Exam Liaison Committee has been established to facilitate the flow of information between the American Board and the International Conference of Funeral Service Examining Boards (ICFSEB).

While Executive Director, Dr. Bigelow has authored numerous professional articles and has been invited to address many funeral service organizations as well as colleges and universities. He has also served on the Board of Directors for the Loewen Group, several NFDA committees, and managed (for five years) the Academy of Professional Funeral Service Practice.

Gordon's wife of 38 years, Beverly, holds a master's degree in science from the University of Maine and the Bigelows have two sons: Bruce, an Ohio University graduate working as a park ranger in the Chugach Mountains outside of Anchorage, Alaska, and Gordon, who recently earned his doctorate in English literature and is currently an Assistant professor at Rhodes College, Memphis, Tennessee.

Gordon will be departing amidst a flurry of complements and good wishes.

"He has provided excellent leadership which has taken our organization to heights we never expected to obtain. Truly, Gordon has not only been an excellent administrator, giving more than 100% of his time, talent, and tireless energy to funeral service and to the profession at large but also a man whose personal friendship we each value and cherish". (Dan Buchanan)

"Dr. Bigelow has had an incredible impact upon funeral service education. His endeavors in this field and his contributions to the profession as a whole will long be remembered." (Board of Directors, ICFSEB)

"When I was appointed Chair of the Mortuary Science Department, I had little knowledge of what was expected of me. Dr. Bigelow was a mentor, guide and true friend from the beginning. He always went out of his way to help in whatever way he could." (Elaine Reinhard)

On a personal note, having served as Chairperson of the ABFSE Curriculum Committee, I've found Dr. Bigelow's help invaluable in making accommodations for the Annual Curriculum Workshops.

Following the Milwaukee Convention, Gordon will assist the new Executive Director in affecting a smooth transition of the office, a task which he hopes will be completed by late summer. Retirement plans include enjoying life, their home and a newly acquired boat on which they will explore Maine's many coastal islands and coves.

Gordon, it has been a distinct honor to have worked with you. Each and every member of the American Board wishes you and your wife the long and pleasant retirement that you have earned and deserve.

God bless you.

James Augustine

Conflict Between Competency and  
Mandatory Professional Continuing Education

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Running head: CONFLICT BETWEEN COMPETENCY AND MANDATORY

PROFESSIONAL CONTINUING EDUCATION

## Abstract

There is a distance between the worlds of learning and of practice and the compelling logic may be, the path and outcomes of continuing professional education are not automatically compatible. The purpose of this paper is the initial investigation of mandatory professional continuing education. As such, a literature review was undertaken to learn of the terminology, the background, and the participants who are affected by mandatory professional continuing education. The goal is to become knowledgeable of the various aspects that each plays as an important part of a professional life. Pertinent concepts researched were the topics of professionalism, competence of a professional, statutes mandating continuous education, deterrents to and motivators for participation in continuous learning programs, and finally the stated opinions of those that oppose, and those that are proponents for, mandatory professional continuing education. Ascertained from the review literature is that although all parties agree that continual learning is essential to competent practice, there is no clear support for, and no clear rejection of, mandatory professional continuing education. The reviewed literature indicated favorable and unfavorable positions exist and that the findings of research are inconclusive.

## Conflict Between Competency and

## Mandatory Professional Continuing Education

There is a distance between the worlds of learning and of practice and the compelling logic may be the path and outcomes of continuing professional education (CPE) are not automatically compatible (Townley & Hollinger, 1981). The goal of this paper is to describe certain characteristics which relate to professionals' participation in continuous education programs. The literature review of CPE reveals the adult learner has many different attitudes and ideas regarding continuing education. Foremost is the conflict between professional competence and mandatory professional continuing education (MPCE).

Although universally controversial, professionals recognize the need to continue to learn throughout their careers (Queeney & English, 1994). As any professional knows it's absurd to believe that learning ends after college. With the idea that one studies existing knowledge and skills in earning a degree, then it's reasonable to assume that these arts will not fully serve the professional throughout his/her practicing years (Garganta, 1989). The concept of a preparatory education for a lifetime is not applicable in today's world (Hwang, 1996). Each graduate will experience the functional obsolescence of abilities by newer theories or techniques being taught in the classrooms of today. For postpreparatory students it is now no longer practical to expect that all the knowledge and skills acquired will be effective for any long-term duration upon graduation; it must be understood that only through consistent continuous education will they maintain competence in their fields (Queeney & English, 1994).

To prevent this obsolescence will require some form of continuing professional education that demonstrates competency (Tucker & Huerta, 1984). Two ways for professions, consumers,

legislative bodies, and regulators to address either incompetence or erosion of skills is by improving professional competence and achieving greater professional accountability (Hale, 1986).

In the essence of clarity, two definitions by (Parochka et al., 1981) are presented:

- “1. Continuing Education: Any systematic effort developed to appropriately update and expand knowledge and skills. Continuing education encompasses a vast scope of training and education formats. It should be to maintain, develop or increase knowledge, reasoning and performance to serve the public’s best interests.
2. Competence: Initial competence is determined by successful completion of an approved training program. Continuing competence is lifelong study to maintain judgement to know what to do and not do.”

They further add an assumption that links these two definitions together in a very concise manner, i.e., “continuing education has been promoted as a response to a need for continued professional competence” (p. 4).

Once, prior to consumerism, continuing education (CE) was left up to the discretion of the professional. They decided which educational materials to use and how to remain current in changing trends (Queeney, 1992). In 1986, Toombs & Landsay suggested their premise that a strong intellectual affinity, potential and actual, has existed between the professional and consumer. They further imply that practitioners bring a certain legitimized power, granted as a public trust, to real-world practicing procedures. As an offset to this power, Freman put forth in 1985, that continuous self-policing of association members has been and must be done by using a code of ethics of some kind and a method of hearing criticism and charges against its members by

the public.

With the arrival of consumerism in the 1960's, the public became overtly conscious of the incompetent practitioner and demanded an accounting from the professionals (Tucker & Huerta, 1984). Consumers became ever more critical in demanding, through their legal and legislative advocates, high quality professional services (Queeney & English, 1994). Legislators, acting as spokespersons for the public, and representatives of professional associations argued for the implementation of mandatory continuing education (MCE) as a guarantee of competent professional service (Garganta, 1989). The assumption by these agencies was that educational activities could remedy obsolescence and incompetency from the profession.

During that decade, and since, many attempts at finding an accessible and reasonable methodology to measure competency and currentness have been attempted with what seems to be less than satisfactory results (Tucker & Huerta, 1984). Continuing education was eventually seen as the best alternative to any other method to prove competency by practitioners (Queeney & English, 1994). Though professionalism by its very nature is somewhat analogous to competence, the inability of professionals to reach a consensus of how to police their own associations of incompetents led to statute enactments that mandated professional education to assure and ease the public’s concern (Hwang, 1996).

In an attempt to address these concerns of the public, there was a need to establish and distinguish between certification, accreditation, and licensing. Professional certification, unlike licensing or other externally imposed requirements, is a voluntary process regulated by the profession itself (Queeney & English, 1994). They continue that certification provides a framework to identify critical competencies, validate them, and place them in performance terms;

however, it should not be confused with licensing which is a mandatory legal process required by a governmental agency in order to protect the public from incompetent practitioners. Accreditation is a voluntary process whereby an agency grants recognition to an educational program or institution (Tucker & Huerta, 1984). Therefore, states license professionals in order to protect the public from physical and financial harm at the hands of incompetent or unethical practitioners. The theory behind this practice is that professional services are considered too specialized for lay consumers to be expected to be able to distinguish between good and bad practitioners unassisted (Townley & Hollinger, 1981).

Being a professional, one assumes that she/he is obligated to serve their clientele with the best they have to offer. If true, then the professional should be motivated to seek learning experience that would help them keep abreast of current, acceptable, and cost-efficient practice techniques (Toombs & Lindsay, 1986). An idea, which is strikingly terse, is the belief that when one enters a profession he/she obliges themselves to follow the rules of the organization or the laws of the state in which they intend to practice. Kerka (1994) relates this very succinctly in her work with the issue that being a professional means a commitment to participation in professional continuing education (PCE) and if it is mandatory, then the practitioner should expect to attend mandatory professional continuing education programs as a matter of professional ethics.

Professional associations are the dynamic representatives of skilled professionals and both must constantly change in response to societal changes. Consumers have come to rely on these highly trained specialists, practicing their occupation with an assumed skill and degree of competence (Pennington, 1981). A common phenomenon affecting professionals in contemporary societies is the accelerating rate of technological and social change. Continuing professional education is,

according to Azzaretto (1992), the primary method through which professionals are updated in their specialized knowledge base, which is expanding and changing as a result of the technology and information explosion. Even though each profession has many characteristics that make it unique (Queeney, 1992), the issue for every professional is how to keep current and therefore competent.

With few exceptions, learning is a satisfying endeavor. Once learned though, will it be retained perfectly, forever? Garganta (1989) proposes that in certain professions the time it takes for something learned in school to become obsolete is described as its half-life (i.e. the time at which half of what one originally learned is either forgotten or is no longer valid due to more recent developments in the profession). For example, in the funeral industry for those who graduated in the late 1970's, AIDS was not a problem. This wasn't a known threat to the families or staff so it wasn't studied. Today, one must practice universal sanitation procedures on the deceased each time in the fear of possible contamination. Therefore, by participating in sequenced continuing education, provided by knowledgeable instructors in a formal education environment, one would learn of the proper protection procedures. It is doubtful that any objections would arise in cases such as these.

Some professions are just beginning to recognize how CE can contribute to the maintenance and improvement of professional practice (Parochka et al., (1981). Others view education as continuous with preparatory education at one end and continuing professional education at the other (Pennington, 1992). One may look at continuing education, during one's mid-career, and consider its function is to maintain knowledge, skills, and abilities at levels comparable to those students recently graduated (Queeney & English, 1994). Again, education does not end with a



diploma because at some point in time, a professional will need to enrich or acquire new work-related knowledge (Hunt, 1992). Hunt adds that additional educational training will be crucial for career development. The question of how to educate, with focus, is really the decisive point.

If our reliance upon professionals is acknowledged, as stated by Azzaretto (1992), then their qualifications and competence are of great concern. Hwang (1996) proposes that professional development depends on the learning activity of the individual and therefore professional development and career development are almost synonymous. Townley and Hollinger (1981) maintain that any learning experience that could improve job performance or advancement is considered as continuing education. Continuing professional education (CPE), as defined by Hunt in 1992, may be considered as encompassing all forms of learning that are organized to enhance the professional's capacity. Or, as defined by Scanlan & Darkenwald (1984), "continuing education is any organized learning activity for adults designed to update, maintain, or expand knowledge or skills through such vehicles as short courses, workshops, symposia, or colloquia" (p. 157).

It must be remembered, in this era of tremendous growth in information and technology, that in each professional field technological and social change alter the body of knowledge and skills that defines competent professional practice and thus threaten the individual practitioner with obsolescence. Queeney (1992) addresses the changes in professional practice caused by life cycles, i.e., early, mid-life, near retirement. She suggests that professionals reflect on the status of their practice during these stages and critique their skills which are or have become obsolete; and further, assess those skills which one has become comfortable with and decide if improvement of these skills could be made by attending a CPE program. This suggestion supports growth of the

individual both within their own capabilities but also for career opportunities.

As noted by Queeney (1992), an educational activity must relate to one's profession and improve it. She suggests that it build upon previous education; address the scope of practice; and offer improved and updated knowledge. Garganta (1989) wrote that the concern really is not one of reeducation, for the professional is educated; the issue is on the learning outcome. Tucker & Huerta (1984) also imply this currentness could be considered one that does indeed alter behavior by learning of treatments that would decrease the cost of service to the consumer while increasing the protection of the practitioner. Yet, not all professionals remain current and competent.

The main question is, which component of continuous learning will best serve the professional most effectively in relearning forgotten or rusting skills from the past or acquiring new techniques for the treatment of their clients? Added along with this question is which method of education, voluntary or mandated, is considered best and will enhance the practitioners knowledge, skills, and abilities with measurable outcomes?

According to Hwang, Hagen, and Farmer (1996) perhaps one of the strongest arguments for continuing education by a professional is that simply being with colleagues and discussing current trends, problems, issues will result in new knowledge. Yet, one strong argument against CPE, mandatory or voluntary, is the inability to document quality control or a positive relationship between practitioner participation and true behavior changes that can be used in servicing the consumer (Stern & Queeney, 1992). Mandatory continuing professional education is a concept stimulated by the belief that all professionals are not equally conscientious in keeping up with their fields (Toombs & Lindsay, 1986). Moreover, they suggest that may consider CPE as having a demeaning connotation of being some sort of remedial education.

Knox (1981) rightly stated that continuing professional education helps to provide three types of education outcomes to practicing professionals: a) assistance in maintaining their professional knowledge and skills; b) preparation for assuming new responsibilities or changing career paths; and c) a broadening of the practitioner's range of knowledge and skills in order to cope with new developments in the field and the need to achieve flexibility in complex work environments. This is reinforced by the work of Azzaretto (1992) when he states "career maintenance relates both to preventing professional obsolescence and insuring continued competence, matters of primary interest to both the professionals and the public" (p. 59). Stern and Queeney (1992) propose that CPE is a program that extends preparatory professional learning into a lifelong strategy to expand and enhance professional practice. But as Queeney (1992) points out, CPE which is episodic by design, in which isolated, unrelated educational programs which have no structure are selected, there will be no well-rounded systematic learning occurrence which would aid in any type of real improvement for the professional.

As mentioned earlier, being a professional implies commitment to continuing one's education and the ability to pursue practice-enhancing learning (Kerka, 1994). Although professionals universally recognize a need to continue learning throughout their careers and the importance of CPE to maintain competence, growth and professional advancement within their fields, there are those who feel any type of compulsory professional education may actually limit learning (Langsner, 1994). Yet, there are many self-motivated professionals who continue who seek out and pursue the post-graduate education they need regardless of whether it is mandated or not (Queeney & English, 1994).

The issue of MCE is the attempt to enable all professionals to remain current and competent

throughout their careers (Queeney & English, 1994). Though applaudable in theory, Queeney & English consider MPE as an emotional issue because it forces the practitioner to meet specific mandates if she/he wishes to remain licensed. As stated by numerous scholars, when researching MCE on both sides of the debate (voluntary vs mandatory), though highly contested, there may really be no suitable alternative to MCE in the public's view to ensure competence of the professional. Queeney & English (1994) reinforced this when they discovered that professionals tend to resent being tested or challenged during their career if it relates to their level of knowledge, skill, or ability. Yet, as history has shown since the 1960's consumerism movement, legislative bodies and professional associations know they must show the consumer that they are monitoring and gauging the competence of the practitioner by strategic use of mandatory professional education (MPCE) to ensure accountability of the incompetents and prevent obsolescents in the fields. However, critics contend also that by concentrating on educational and examination criteria as the measures of competence rather than on consumer satisfaction and performance, licensing fails in its primary mission, the delivery of high quality services (Jahns, Urbano, & Urbano, 19).

One of the founding principles in the establishment of mandated education was to have a format in which to remove practitioners who, by their abuses, violated the standards of legal or associational agencies (Parochka, et al., 1981). Mandatory continuing education came to be recognized as any learning which assisted the professional in maintaining the legal right to practice or earn special certification within a profession (Queeney, Smutz, & Shurman, 1990). As noted by Langsner (1994), MCPE is a means to control the quality of a profession by controlling the knowledge of the members. Dowling (1984) adds that MCE is being treated more frequently as a

type of quality assurance mechanism. Although MCE is used by practitioners to update and remain current, many are not truly enamored with its requirement to be relicensed (Dowling, 1984). Further, as Queeney & English (1994) report, legislative and professional bodies increasingly have no other option than mandated continuing education for accountability on the public's behalf.

Here the issue of MCE is controversial because it strikes at the very heart of adult education (Kerka, 1994). As Queeney & English (1994) maintain, MCE is in direct conflict with the fundamental tenets of adult learning. However, whether one supports or opposes MPCE, it must be acknowledged as a reality and professionals must learn to make the most of it (Langsner, 1994). This includes, per Queeney and English (1994), that there seems to exist an inability to define exactly what is competence; whether or not MPCE affects competence; there is no standard monitoring system which delineates between competence and incompetence; and even though professionals are compelled to attend programs of continual learning they are further hindered by having to financially incur the burden themselves.

Not only must the professional shoulder the cost of attendance, which by extensive research has proven to be the most formidable deterrent, they must also overcome other prominent obstacles. These barriers are considered reasons for nonparticipation and encompass both external and internal influences upon the professional (Scanlan & Darkenwald, 1984). Johnstone and Rivera (1965) distinguish between situational deterrents (influences outside the control of the participant) and dispositional deterrents (personal attitudes toward continuing learning). Cross (1981) added a third barrier termed institutional which relates to red tape, lack of relevant offerings of education programs, and scheduling time-off to attend.

Extensive research has shown that among professionals who must attend continuous education programs for purposes of obtaining credits proving attendance, that the major impediments to participation include, but are not limited to, hindrances on family time, lack of paid release-time, travel time and expense, doubts of relevance to one's practice, inconvenient scheduling, lack of interest, lack of confidence, lack of information, indifference to education, lack of time (Scanlan & Darkenwald, 1984; Langsner, 1994; Jahns, Urbano, & Urbano, 1986; Toombs & Lindsay, 1986).

Scanlan and Darkenwald (1984) found some professionals have dispositions ascribed as inertia, boredom, or even apathy toward continuous learning. In other words, paraphrasing Langsner, a person may choose continuous education for a number of reasons, but one may be simply in attendance in any program just to qualify for recertification or relicensure with no real sense of dedication. The professional attends because they are persuaded by legislative action and do acquire new knowledge, but as Dowling (1984) argues, no significant behavioral change occurs that alters an incompetent practitioner into a competent one. Closely aligned with haphazard and sporadic continuous learning programs is the premise that not all professionals have the ability to objectively scrutinize their careers and plan for their educational needs (Queeney & English, 1994).

#### Conclusion

People who do not keep up with the mainstream will eventually experience a decrease in knowledge and skills. With this decrease will come an increase in obsolete practice procedures. Without mandatory professional continuous education, compelling attendance for relicensure purposes, there cannot be an accountability to protect the public. A well thought out relearning program, in conjunction with legislative and associational groups, by the professional would ensure

continuous and current updates pertinent to their professional disciplines. This knowledge has social and practical importance to the field of adult education as it correlates to MCE. The debate over continuous learning, whether mandated or not, will continue. The issue that needs further study is appropriate education that has relevance to the professionals' needs taught from an adult learner's perspective.

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The Dynamic Integration of Computer Technology with Mortuary Management: A  
Suggested Didactic Module

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Introduction

The emergence of computerized technology has been recognized as an important educational modality for some time. Computers, application programs and Internet involvement inclusive of distance education are increasingly becoming integral parts of educational programs nationwide. Their role in funeral service management is becoming more prominent. In this communication, we would like to describe modifications made to our traditional mortuary management course that incorporates aspects of new computer technology as applied to funeral service management and administration. In our approach, an integrated perspective unifying computers and mortuary management was launched under the title "Funeral Directing and The New Technology". The overall goal of this combined course offering was to advance the incoming level of computer literacy of our students to one of proficiency in computer application technology appropriate to this profession. The merging of a separate formalized computer course offering with that of mortuary management was launched in the fall semester of 1996 with subsequent course enhancements made annually. Our efforts received meritorious comments from an external accreditation team on their review of the didactic aspects of our mortuary program.

Student Computer Background Profiles

While one computer science course is a prerequisite to entering the program, all students are asked to complete a brief questionnaire during the first formal class session of mortuary management. Question types range from one's prior familiarity with computer hardware, application programs, accessible computer systems, software operating environments, and applications most often used or most familiar to the student. A representative computer background survey is shown in the Appendix. With better than a 90% return rate of questionnaires distributed over the years 1996-98, the following points are indicated from results:

- Entering students feel their familiarity with computer hardware and software applications range from beginning to intermediate. Less than 10% considered themselves advanced.
- Over the years surveyed, the numbers of entering students using 286, 386 and 486 based PC's and Macintosh systems decreased proportionally while those using Pentium based systems increased as expected.
- Students using DOS and Windows 3.x environments decreased uniformly as expected while those using *Windows '95* increased markedly. Only 2% of our entering students surveyed in 1998 use *Windows '98*.
- Software programs used most often include word processors, spreadsheets, and integrated application suites. However, less than 10% of the students surveyed used any type of mortuary management software.

A summary of tabulated results over the period 1996 – 1998 are presented in the Appendix.

Course Objectives and Structure

Underscoring our original intention in merging computers and mortuary management was to develop in our students a greater appreciation of the importance of modern computer technology integrated with administrative and management responsibilities of the professional funeral director. This unified effort generates a greater continuity of topics in terms of understanding computer technology on the one hand and using this technology to solve real life problems encountered by funeral directors. By attaching new technology enhancements to our former mortuary management course structure, lecture topics such as computer specifications and hardware, selection and utilization of vertical and horizontal software, introduction to the use of intranets as administrative tools and protective firewalls, and factors surrounding effective implementation of computer security are emphasized. With the abundant availability of second hand computers, a discussion of factors to be considered surrounding the purchase of used systems rounds out the lecture series. Collectively these topics develop in students the necessary skills to effectively select quality computer and software systems for personal or business applications. Introductory lectures on intranets are unique and introduce students to customization associated with networking features within funeral homes. At the same time, these intranet systems can serve as internal firewalls to protect the primary computer network system of the funeral facility. With an ever-increasing focus on encryption, lectures on

computer security inclusive of description of "cyber" infections develops a greater appreciation by students as to the necessity to protect all established computer system(s) against physical and electronic damages. With the advent of the new millennium, a discussion of the Y2K problem and its consequences to funeral service professionals alert students and their apprenticeship employers to the potential managerial problems resulting from the likelihood of "system failure" associated with computer hardware not being Y2K compliant. Discussion of the Y2K problem generated concern among our students and resulted in many funeral home audits of computer systems as to their Y2K status. Indirectly, this lecture served as a means of continuing education by increasing in the professional funeral directors employing our students a real awareness of remedial actions needed to be taken prior to January 1, 2000. As academicians, we found this bi-directional communication between students and their employers gratifying.

*Mortuary Software Applications.* Actual hands-on experience with skill building exercises is presented to students in terms of using in-house computers with task-oriented applications. A pertinent example involves the development of a comprehensive funeral service module based on a case narrative supplied to our students on an individual basis. The importance of challenging the student with coursework that mirrors the actual daily practices required of a funeral service professional is an essential part of a complete education. In order to create the right effect, each student is presented with his or her own individual

case study. We had earlier assigned the same case study to several students, but discovered the few who were computer competent ended up doing the assignment for their classmates. By assigning each their own case, we attempt to assure that all would be equally tasked.

These individual case studies follow six different scenarios: Hospital Death-Male; Hospital Death-Female; Nursing Home Death-Male; Nursing Home Death-Female; Hospice/Home Death-Male and Hospice/Home Death-Female. Students are required to use the *Funeral Data Manager* software available to all our students to create the following items:

- Utilizing a General Price List provided to all the students and the description of the items "selected" by the family they are serving in the case study, they must generate a Statement of Goods and Services for their case.
- Using the information provided in the case study, the students must prepare a Michigan Death Certificate ready for the physician's completion.
- Complete a Michigan Burial Transit Permit.
- Generate one sample memorial folder using the formats provided in the software.

An example of one of these case studies is presented in the Appendix.

From this narrative case assignment, students develop all aspects of an entire funeral service using a contemporary mortuary management software program. This assignment challenges student understanding of crucial information including first call perspectives, the medical cause of death,

completing the death certificate and burial transit permit, FTC regulation, the final disposition of remains as well as developing a contract for goods and services. In addition, it reinforces classroom perspectives presented in other courses in our curriculum.

From our survey results, less than 10% of students entering our program actually use any type funeral management software prior to admission. This came as a surprise since greater than 10% of our yearly entering student population are family members of funeral home owners. To help normalize this disparity and train students in the computer use of mortuary orientated case applications, an on-site copy of a fully operational mortuary management software program was mandatory. In response to our need, a professional version of *Funeral Data Manager* was graciously supplied to our department with upgrades by Michael F. Feeney<sup>1</sup>. By so doing, our educational program becomes a testing laboratory for his software and upgrades.

*Additional Professional Skills Development.* The writing of an effective professional resume is crucial to one's effort in obtaining a professional position. In particular, this assignment serves as a dynamic means of increasing non-funeral home related students who will need job hunting skills faced with many opportunities from the private as well as conglomerate/corporate sectors. While some feel this exercise is unimportant, it allows our student to gain experience in

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<sup>1</sup> *Funeral Data Manager*, 625 North Fourth Street, Reading, PA 19601; (888) 478-9775.

presenting to prospective employers in the mortuary profession examples of skills and experience developed in our program. Students create both a cover letter and resume from a commercially available template software program<sup>2</sup> as well as producing one manually using available resources. While students enjoy the time saving advantage of commercially template resume programs, they appreciate more fully the ability to customize more specifically a resume and cover letter in a cost-effective manner by using word processor options.

#### Future Modalities

It is our goal to expand task driven skills development in the future to include topics that further enhance the application of computers in the mortuary profession. With the new millennium, greater emphasis on task driven exercises will ensue. One projected exercise will involve the utilization of relational data base creation for funeral records and merchandising from spreadsheets. Another project will involve the creation of a departmental student oriented *Mortuary Management NewsGroup* on the Internet. This would allow students in our mortuary science facility to discuss challenging topics unique to funeral service management with students located at other sites globally. A new technology only touched on during our present lecture cycle will involve an assignment

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<sup>2</sup> *Tom Jackson Presents The Perfect Resume*, Davidson & Associates, Inc, P.O. Box 2961, Torrance, CA 90509, (800) 556-6141.

investigating the benefits and merits associated with the *extranet* utilization as an experimental module applied to a futuristic funeral home design and its management. The electronic filing of information relative to vital statistics will be more fully realized as a national pilot program for the electronic filing of death certificates now being studied by New York, Minnesota, and New Hampshire is evaluated. This effort is backed by CDC for year 2002 implementation. In this protocol, intranets integrated as firewall security devices to insure encryption and information integrity and security.

Conclusion

The workplace of the future will require comprehensive computer literacy. While entering students feel they possess adequate levels of understanding of computer technology and their application, reality checks indicate a lesser degree of sophistication than expressed on admission. With rapidly changing advances in the computer technology market, our objectives in course design and modification remain progressively dynamic. Our approach allows for the further integration of futuristic computer based applications and technology generating in students a sophistication to serve them in the twenty-first century. To achieve our goal, we encourage software producers of funeral management programs to investigate the potential educational advantages of incorporating their software products as part of our program and other mortuary programs.

**APPENDIX**

COMPUTER BACKGROUND PROFILE

MS 3800: *MORTUARY MANAGEMENT I*  
Fall, 1996-98

Name (Print) \_\_\_\_\_

Please answer the following question concerning your background in computers (hardware) and application program familiarity.

1. Your level of familiarity with computer hardware:  
None \_\_\_\_\_ Intermediate \_\_\_\_\_  
Beginner \_\_\_\_\_ Advanced \_\_\_\_\_
2. Your level of familiarity with application programs:  
None \_\_\_\_\_ Intermediate \_\_\_\_\_  
Beginner \_\_\_\_\_ Advanced \_\_\_\_\_
3. Computer system(s) you are currently using or have access to:  
None \_\_\_\_\_ 486 \_\_\_\_\_  
286 \_\_\_\_\_ Pentium \_\_\_\_\_  
386 \_\_\_\_\_ MacIntosh \_\_\_\_\_
4. Software environment you are currently using:  
DOS only \_\_\_\_\_ Windows 3.xx \_\_\_\_\_ Windows 9x \_\_\_\_\_ Windows NT \_\_\_\_\_  
UNIX \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_
5. Current application programs you use routinely \_\_\_\_\_



**Summary of Computer Background Profile Results**

**Questions 1-2: Student Hardware/Software Familiarity Level**

Level	Class of 1996	Class of 1997	Class of 1998
None	0-6%	1-10%	0-7%
Beginner	27%	50-58%	30%
Intermediate	61-67%	34%	58-67%
Advanced	6%	5%	2%

**Question 3: Computer System Used by Students**

Computer	Class of 1996	Class of 1997	Class of 1998
None	27%	29%	23%
286	3%	0%	0%
386	12%	8%	7%
486	21%	18%	12%
Pentium	15%	40%	42%
MacIntosh	21%	16%	7%

**Question 4: Operating Systems Used by Students Routinely**

Environment	Class of 1996	Class of 1997	Class of 1998
DOS	12%	1%	1%
Windows 3.x	36%	24%	14%
Windows 95	42%	53%	72%
Windows NT	0%	0%	0%
Windows 98	0%	0%	2%

**Question 5: Applications Used Routinely by Students**

Application	Class of 1996	Class of 1997	Class of 1998
Word Processors	27%	29%	35%
Spreadsheets	12%	8%	16%
Database	6%	0%	5%
Presentation	0%	3%	2%
Application Suites	18%	30%	21%
DOS Applications	6%	0%	2%
Financial	0%	3%	12%
Desktop Publishing	0%	5%	5%
Mortuary Programs	3%	3%	7%
Internet / e-mail	3%	0%	5%
No Response	42%	60%	37%

**MS 3800 - Computer Software Exercise Fall 1998**

Assigned To: \_\_\_\_\_ Due \_\_\_\_\_

**CASE NUMBER - 98-313-3**

It is 6:55 a.m. on November 21, 1998. The funeral home you work for, the FRADE-WILLIAMS FUNERAL HOME, 627 Alexandrine, Detroit, Michigan 48201, receives a call from Esther June Wickersham, 1913 Fort Street, Detroit, Michigan 48209 (Wayne County). She was calling to request your firm to handle the arrangements for her husband, Charles Calvin Wickersham, who died at Harper Hospital, Detroit, Michigan (Wayne County) at 5:25 a.m. that day. After receiving permission to embalm, you confirm with the caller the time of the arrangement conference as 10:30 a.m. today. You also review the clothing required and the necessary personal information needed, you close the call by reassuring the family you will do everything possible to assist the family through their loss.

When confirming release from the facility, the hospital staff gave the doctor of record as Peter Atchoo, M.D. The doctor's address is 25609 Michigan Avenue, Dearborn, Michigan 48124. The doctor's license number is PA 90625. The staff at the hospital confirmed the time of death that you were given. Mr. Wickersham's institutional status was described as that of an inpatient. The doctor will sign the death certificate at the hospital.

At the arrangement conference, you discover that Mr. Wickersham was born October 13, 1933, in Birmingham, England. His father's name was Samuel Cage Wickersham and his mother's name was Mary Alice Murphy. The family described his ancestry as British/Irish and race as white. Charles had 2 years of college education and was retired from a job as a quality control inspector for Great Lakes Steel. His Social Security number was 313-13-1234. He lived quietly with his wife of 26 years, Esther June (whose maiden name was Andrews), at their home in Detroit. He had served in the U.S. Army during Korea.

The family selected a traditional funeral with one day of viewing. The funeral will be at the funeral home with procession to the cemetery using your hearse. Using your General Price List (GPL) and other FTC Forms, the family chose a Hanover Poplar casket made by Batesville that you list at \$2150.00. Because the cemetery they are using requires a vault, they select a Monticello® vault made by Wilbert® that you list at \$805.00. The family chooses to use the Register Book and memorial folders you list on your GPL (be sure to figure in the tax on the merchandise items). The accommodation items you arrange for them include the following: 10 Death Certificates at \$66.00, Cemetery O/C for \$950.00 and Newspaper charges of \$155.00.

Services are set for 10:30 a.m., November 24, 1998, with services conducted by Reverend Andrew Taylor. Burial will be the same day at Roseland Park Cemetery, Berkley, Michigan in Oakland County.

Some Thought On Teaching Funeral Ethics  
by  
John Kroshus, Ph.D.

Good funeral directors don't just appear from nowhere. They develop as a result of formal and informal processes that include completing an accredited course of study in a program or college of funeral service education. Under the authority of the American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE), all accredited funeral service programs must teach an ethics content area. While the ABFSE mandate is clear, bringing the concept of personal and professional ethics to life in the minds of funeral service students, and teaching the basic principles of personal and professional ethics is a matter that requires considerable attention.

A basic element in the teaching-learning process is the inclination of those involved to think or feel in a certain way. In other words, the **bias** of those involved. While it is true that the teaching-learning process is affected by a variety of forces, it is also true that the respective biases of the students, faculty, and those in charge of curriculum development are critical to the process.

In the teaching of funeral service ethics, bias should be addressed from the perspective that post-death activities: (1) are needed, (2) have value, (3) are therefore important.

Students cannot necessarily be expected to believe in, or be forced to accept a bias that is held by another person. It's essential that funeral service education offer students the opportunity to examine their beliefs, biases, and motivations in an informed way so that they can develop their own unique points of view. Once that is done, teachers and students can find a common ground upon which to proceed.

Students coming into colleges and program of funeral service education tend to fall into

Students coming into colleges and program of funeral service education tend to fall into one of three broad categories. First, there are students who have no preconceived notions about being a funeral director. These people tend to come to the school looking for information. Once they have attained information, they will pursue education and build careers according to what they learn and how they choose to apply what they learn. In terms of the three points described previously, the students with no preconceived notions want to know: (1) What are the factors that create the need for post-death activities? (2) What benefits can be attributed to participating in post-death activities? (3) Why are post-death activities important?

Second, there are students who come to school with the preconceived notion that funeral directing is a business. They seek to have the basic business principles in which they believe validated, and want to gain greater insight into how business works. For them the three points laid out previously might be interpreted as: (1) There is a market for post-death activities because consumers want or need them. (2) Consumers place a value on post-death activities. (3) Therefore, post-death activities are important because they generate profit.

Third, there are students who come to school with the preconceived notion that funeral directing is a vocation to which they have been called. They have a counseling bias, and are not as interested in business as they are in helping people. They would interpret the approach the three points described previously as meaning: (1) Post-death activities are critically important to the emotional and psychological well being of individuals, (2) Post-death activities have a significant impact on societal and cultural well being, (3) Therefore, post-death activities are important individual, societal, and cultural events.

The educational dilemma is to find ways to stimulate an open, informed examination of

individual biases for the purpose of validation, change, or replacement. The teaching-learning environment needs to take into account the biases that can exist within the teacher and among students. If the teacher holds rigidly to a narrow point of view about what constitutes proper or acceptable post-death activities, the educational process will not be served. Students who find themselves disagreeing with the teacher may resent, resist, or reject both the lesson, and the way the lesson is being taught. Students need the opportunity to examine varied points of view and, in doing so, may gain valuable insights from everyone involved.

In the three points offered, common ground can be found in the word *important*. Post-death activities are important. Students either want to know why post-death activities are important, or already have their own idea of why they are important. The teacher can build on this common ground because, regardless of bias, everyone can agree on the concept of importance. From that point, the teacher can examine the notion that certain things have to happen in order to properly meet the expectations that accompany something which has importance. If post-death activities are conducted in such a way that consumers are dissatisfied, opportunities for profit will be lost. If post-death activities are conducted in such a way that families are not well served, an opportunity for service will be lost. The words, *opportunity* and *lost* thus become common ground words. Certain things have to happen in order to assure that opportunities are not lost. Having established common ground, the teacher can then guide the teaching-learning process to general concepts that can fit a variety of biases.

As professionals who have the potential to do good, or to potentially do harm, funeral directors must fully realize the value of what they offer, and must develop a strong sense for the important role they play in society. Funeral directors must never underestimate the

responsibilities with which they have been entrusted. Funeral directing demands the best that individuals have to offer and, from a grieving family's point of view, nothing less is acceptable.

The implication, of course, is that the performance of funeral directors will be consistently high. The expectation is that every funeral is the most important funeral, ever. In order to satisfy expectations, funeral directors must conduct themselves in a manner that is personally and professionally ethical. Regardless of whether the motivation is profit, or service, the same types of things have to happen in order to achieve the desired outcome.

## The Y2K Problem - A Warning to Educators in Mortuary Science Curricula

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### Introduction

With the advent of a new millennium, realization of short term and long term potential problems associated with computer based technologies of the twentieth century are emerging. The major problem of catastrophic concern is the year 2000 computer problem (Y2K), a problem impacting every aspect of modern day life utilizing computer based applications [1]. The Y2K problem is real and its consequences should not be underestimated on the onset. This problem surrounds the inability of certain computers to recognize the date transition from 1999 to 2000, a fault generated by lack of four digit date recognition. This fault will cause certain computers to interpret 2000 as 1900! A pre-year 2000 problem may be noted on September 9, 1999 when the repeating nine's of the date may confuse programmer's 9999 file end flag [2].

Without exception, members of the mortuary science educational community need to judiciously assess their present computer and software

status in this transitory period prior to the year 2000. As an active member of the "Y2K Task Force" at Wayne State University, it has been my responsibility to adapt and implement an intense evaluation program of computers, operating systems and software in our mortuary science department under standardized university guidelines. It is the purpose of this communication to alert mortuary science educators as to the importance of the Y2K problem, suggest an appropriate inventory protocol, and possible options to lessen the impact of potential complications of this problem.

#### Who's Taking Care of What?

An evaluation program as to the numbers and types of computer based systems and software programs present in any given department needs to be initiated expeditiously. The primary directive of this effort is to establish a comprehensive inventory or database of time/date sensitive hardware and software potentially affected by the Y2K glitch. To meet this objective, an internal task force should be established. Membership can range from a single faculty/staff member to a multi-dimensional unit consisting of faculty, staff and students in mortuary science each assigned the critical responsibility of creating an inventory of computers, office equipment, and software in current use. Depending on the size of the mortuary science facility, this effort could be quite formidable requiring considerable dedication of time.

Creating the actual inventory is only the first step but the most important. If the mortuary entity is a departmental or divisional unit within a college or

university, it would be prudent to know in advance the delineated areas of responsibility. In the case of university based departments, the smaller departmental or divisional units are generally responsible only for "internal items". These include computers, software programs, office equipment, and peripherals located internally and connected "to the wall". The university or college is responsible for the maintainance of external hardwiring or electrical requirements "up to the building". Knowing these boundaries helps to limit the stress associated with inventory data procurement and management within the educational unit.

#### Creating the Inventory

The establishment of an inventory is the critical first step in assessing the reliability of pieces of equipment in the new century. A summary of a suggested protocol is given in Table I. Information contained in the inventory database is of paramount importance especially for possible budgetary allotments directed towards replacement of computers and software programs found not to be Y2K compliant. Equipment requiring assessment are those with embedded time and date sensitive hardware devices. Included in this group are (1) all PC's except MacIntosh® and Apple® computers are Y2K compliant and need not be tested only listed (2) certain office printers and copiers and (3) telecommunication office equipment. Other critical areas of information needed to be included in the database are manufacturer/vendor's name, serial numbers, date of manufacture, model numbers, processor type and speed. Additional valuable information



includes the computer's classification - a workstation, a standalone unit or server. In addition to equipment documentation, data surrounding software is important. Key items include the computer's operating system and version number, name and version of individual proprietary software and software packages as well as any custom designed in-house software programs. For mortuary programs using computers as part of research, it is important to note the software platform used by integrated laboratory equipment associated with these computers, since Y2K software problems can occur within the instrumentation itself. Documentation of computer software versions cannot be stressed enough. This is of particular importance since this information will be referenced when contacting vendors as to the availability of potential software patches by the manufacturer. In our experience, considerable problems have been observed with members of the task force team or their appointees in recording the accurate version number of software loaded on computers and obtaining accurate listing of in-house software sub-programs created by individual faculty member that are time and date sensitive.

If there is uncertainty as to the Y2K reliability of any office equipment especially copiers and telecommunication equipment, individual manufacturers should be contacted to request its year 2000 status. If the equipment is not Y2K compliant, investigate options including any available updates or replacement. If compliant, request written certification of its Y2K compliance.

#### Assessment of Computer Hardware and Software for Y2K Compliance

To evaluate performance of the date sensitive BIOS, it is necessary to challenge them with software specifically designed to assess hardware compliance. Commercially available Y2K software programs challenge BIOS systems, find, and fix Y2K hardware problems on PC's and networks. Some Y2K programs have the additional feature of evaluating loaded software for compliancy. Overall, these software programs present a final report and supply useful suggestions how hardware/software performance will be affected in year 2000 and beyond. In certain cases, computer systems can be made compliant by simple software patches. In other cases, it will be necessary to purchase BIOS upgrade hardware if available. As an alternative, hardware and software Y2K updates and compliance information are available from the manufacturer at their web sites via the Internet. It is important to note that while major computer companies such as Hewlett-Packard, Compaq, IBM, and Dell guarantee system compliance for systems produced no later than October 1997 [ 3 ], it is quite possible that two systems produced at nearly the same time will not exhibit the same degree of Y2K compliance. It is mandatory to check all computer systems within the education unit with appropriate Y2K compliance check software programs. Systems failing to recognize the year 2000 may not recognize date and time sensitive commands in a reproducible and reliable manner. As noted recently, further failures associated with real - time clocks built into PC circuitry present greater problems than previously suspected [ 4 ]. While the degree of failure is variable, in the worst case scenario, some systems may fail completely.

To gain a greater in-depth appreciation of how to assess Y2K risks, the readership is referred to an excellent overview recently published [5]. A summary of useful Internet web sites is presented in Table 2.

#### A Further Note on Patches

Patches are commercially available fixes for computer hardware (especially BIOS) and software that is not Y2K compliant. Patches are applicable if preliminary testing of systems indicate that software patches can remedy the Y2K problems of the system tested. Essentially there are four options available to fix the Y2K problem: (1) use the flash BIOS technique for flash BIOS compatible systems (2) use a software patch for systems non-amenable to BIOS flashing technique (3) perform a hardware upgrade or (4) total system replacement [3]. Hardware updates may be possible only if the computer manufacture has one available. In regard to software, certain software manufacturers have patches available to fix commercially available products prior to Y2K. All new software purchased in the time frame in transition to the year 2000 must have *Year 2000 Compliant* stated on the software carton to insure this compliance.

#### A Final Warning to Mortuary Educators

Computers inventoried and found correctable by software patches in the form of specially designed Y2K "fix" programs are effective only if implemented prior to the year 2000. If loaded after the new millennium, their effectiveness will

be jeopardized. If a computer is found to be non-correctable by appropriate software patches or hardware updates, there is no way of predicting how these units will function if at all after the year 2000.

**Table 1**  
***Educational Y2K Protocol***

- Establish a mortuary science school / departmental Y2K task force
- Create an inventory of computers, software, office equipment, and other date/time sensitive pieces of equipment.
- Test all PC's with appropriate commercially available Y2K software checking programs
- Identify all computers, workstations, servers and other equipment that are not Y2K compliant.
- Check with computer, equipment manufacturers, and software vendors, as to the availability of "hardware" and "software" patches
- Delegate and reassign computers found to be Y2K noncompliant for tasks that are not date and time sensitive.
- Establish a backup system for non-functional computer systems

**Table 2\***  
**Internet Listing of Some Useful Y2K Information Resources**

- [www.nstl.com/html/nstl\\_ymark2000.html](http://www.nstl.com/html/nstl_ymark2000.html) [Ymark2000 - free hardware test]
- [www.righttime.com](http://www.righttime.com) [Test2000.Exe - free hardware test]
- [www.compaq.com/year2000](http://www.compaq.com/year2000) [Compaq Computers]
- [www.dell.com/year2000/exec/y2kprob.htm](http://www.dell.com/year2000/exec/y2kprob.htm) [Dell Computers]
- [www.gateway.com/frameset.asp?s=corp](http://www.gateway.com/frameset.asp?s=corp) [Gateway Computers]
- [www.hp.com/year2000/index.html](http://www.hp.com/year2000/index.html) [Hewlett-Packard Computers]
- [www.ibm.com/IBM/year2000](http://www.ibm.com/IBM/year2000) [IBM Computers]
- [www.microsoft.com/magazine/mi/y2k.htm](http://www.microsoft.com/magazine/mi/y2k.htm) [Microsoft Y2K Resource Guide]
- [www.corel.com/2000.htm](http://www.corel.com/2000.htm) [Corel + Word Perfect Software]
- [www.novell.com/year2000](http://www.novell.com/year2000) [Novell Software]
- [www.cnet.com/Content/Features/Dlife/Millbug](http://www.cnet.com/Content/Features/Dlife/Millbug) [The Millennium Bug]
- [www.survive-2000.com/faq.htm](http://www.survive-2000.com/faq.htm) [Y2K Related Sites]
- [www.zdy2k.com](http://www.zdy2k.com) [The ZD Y2K Supersite]

\*Adapted after Langa [5]

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## NOTES

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