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Book Review

By

Marilyn T. Miller, EdD[1]

Girard, James E. (2011) *Criminalistics: Forensic Science, Crime, and Terrorism.* Sudbury, MA; Jones & Bartlett Learning, 515 pp.

As a forensic science-criminal justice educator for over sixteen years, I remember that it was not all that long ago that we had limited choices, if any, for textbooks for our courses. In the past ten years there has been a surge of texts for selection into our curricula. So when given the chance to review and select a text for a variety of courses I look for material that is engaging and at the same time challenging for the students in my forensic science and criminal justice undergraduate and graduate courses. Secondarily, I go straight to those sections of the new text that for me are most relevant.

This text is a second edition of the author's first production of a forensic science text. This edition mimics the first edition but with a notable inclusion of a much needed computer forensics/cyber crime chapter. As with most textbooks, the publisher has a slew of well-done ancillary resources available for both the instructor and the students. For the instructors, these materials range from lecture PowerPoints or lecture outlines to test banks with review problem solutions. For the student user, there are numerous online, interactive activities that make use of many teaching and engaged learning technologies. They are for the most part an excellent source for supplemental, independent learning options. Also available are two online laboratory manuals (not reviewed here).

As with most texts in the market, the author has clearly stated chapter learning objectives and review questions. Within the body of the chapters in a highly distinctive format, the author has placed "Feature" boxes showing applications for the chapter topic. In each chapter are "You are the Forensic Scientist", "Back at the Crime Lab", "On the Crime Scene", and "See You In Court" boxes. These are a great way for the student to apply the specific information presented in the chapter. "You are the Forensic Scientist" highlights real case studies and suggests critical thinking, discussion questions in hopes of making the students think like forensic scientists. "Back at the Crime Lab" reinforces the relevant scientific principles and procedures. Using the

[1] Marilyn T. Miller, EdD, is an associate professor in the Department of Forensic Science in the College of Humanities and Sciences at Virginia Commonwealth University. Prior to teaching, Dr. Miller was a forensic scientist going to crime scenes and analyzing the evidence in forensic laboratories in PA, FL and NC. She has testified hundreds of times in federal and state courts in over a dozen states.

"On the Crime Scene" feature box is another way for reinforcement of theories by use of high-profile cases or issues. The "See You in Court" box because it adds a facet of realism by featuring actual trial application to the topic in the chapter.

The organization of the chapters and material in this text is pretty much what can be found out there in the forensic science textbook market. The organization starts with the time tested criminalistics or crime scene investigation section, followed by trace evidence, pattern evidence, chemical evidence, biological evidence, and lastly, terrorism. This final section of the text borders on being a marketing ploy because most forensic laboratories do not have "terrorism" sections. The section contains a chapter on explosives, computer forensics, and detecting weapons of mass destruction. Historically, chapters relating to explosives detection and examination are found in the chemical evidence section. As an instructor I would take this chapter out of order. The remaining chapters are mostly appropriate in placement in the terrorism section. Most forensic scientists will not be directly involved in computer/cybercrime or weapons of mass destruction investigations, as these areas of examination are highly specialized and not found in the typical forensic laboratory. The topics are, however, needed for most forensic science survey courses and absolutely for a criminal justice course. The chapters are nicely presented with relevant and appropriate materials.

A final question as to material placement is found in the trace evidence section of the text. A single chapter is dedicated to soil evidence and another entire chapter for glass evidence. These single chapter placements are especially questionable because hair, fiber, and paint are combined together into one chapter. While soil and glass are indeed trace evidence of important value, most forensic laboratories will be more occupied with the analysis of fibers and paint than soil or glass.

Lastly, as a well-experienced crime scene investigator and teacher of this topic, I always evaluate these chapters with a harsh eye. The author has very succinctly put together crime scene investigation. There is no fluff here. The chapter looks at the fundamental steps to crime scene investigation. I would like to see a little more detail if wanting to put together an entire course. However, for a survey of forensic science course, this abbreviated chapter is appropriate. It was wise of the author to have omitted any crime scene reconstruction activities or to discuss the multitudes of visualization and enhancement methodologies and technologies. These topics are more often found in traditional crime scene investigation textbooks.

On a whole, this text is very well suited for a criminal justice curriculum that offers courses relating to the analysis or application of forensic science to the testing of physical evidence. The text provides a sufficient amount of science for the criminal justice reader be able to apply the science to analyze the evidence correctly. The text is not appropriate for a science-based forensic science curriculum.