Special Agent Lauren Ware
With contributions by Sergeant Joanne Archambault (Ret.)

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Course Description

This module provides guidance on crime scene processing, a systematic, meticulous, and scientific process that law enforcement investigators should employ in every major criminal investigation. This process is used to document and preserve a location where criminal activity is known or suspected to have occurred; it facilitates the location and recovery of physical evidence to help prove the elements of an offense; it generates information that helps outline individual investigative steps and an overall investigative plan; and it facilitates the identification of participants, such as witnesses and suspects. It is essentially the foundation on which the entire investigation is built. By applying the scientific method, investigators can explore competing hypotheses. This helps to prevent bias, by combating a natural inclination to form conclusions too early in the investigation. It also helps to address possible defenses introduced during the investigation or at trial.

Estimated time for completion: 13 hours

OVW Grant Funding

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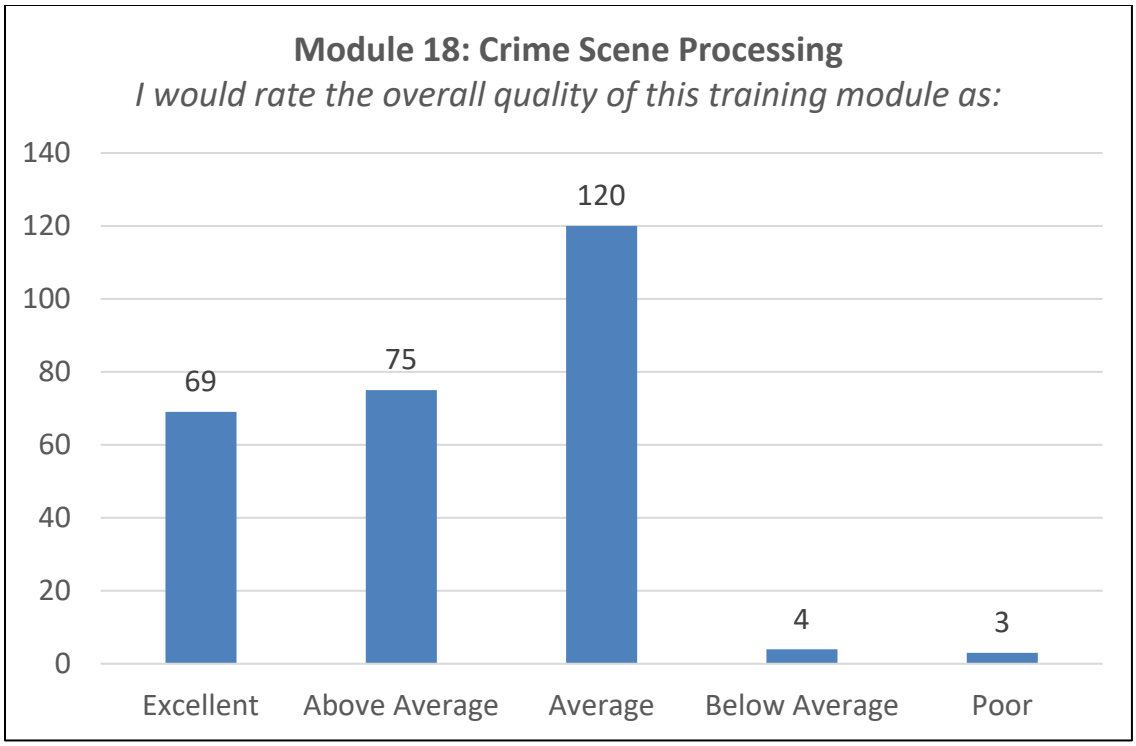
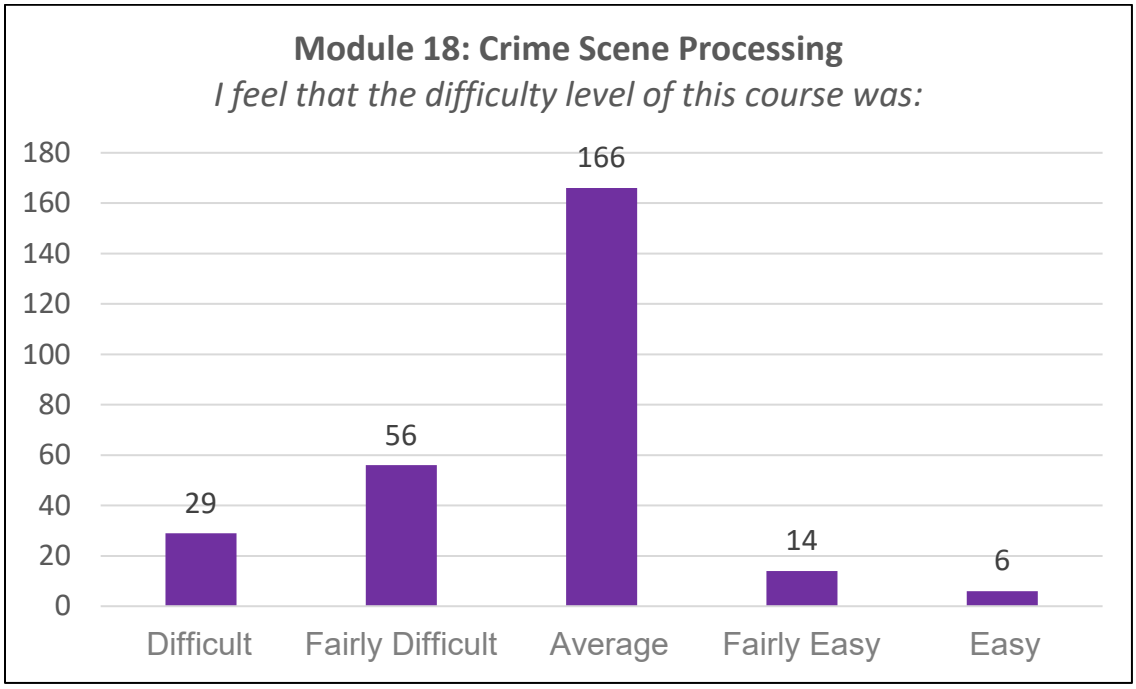
Expert Contributions

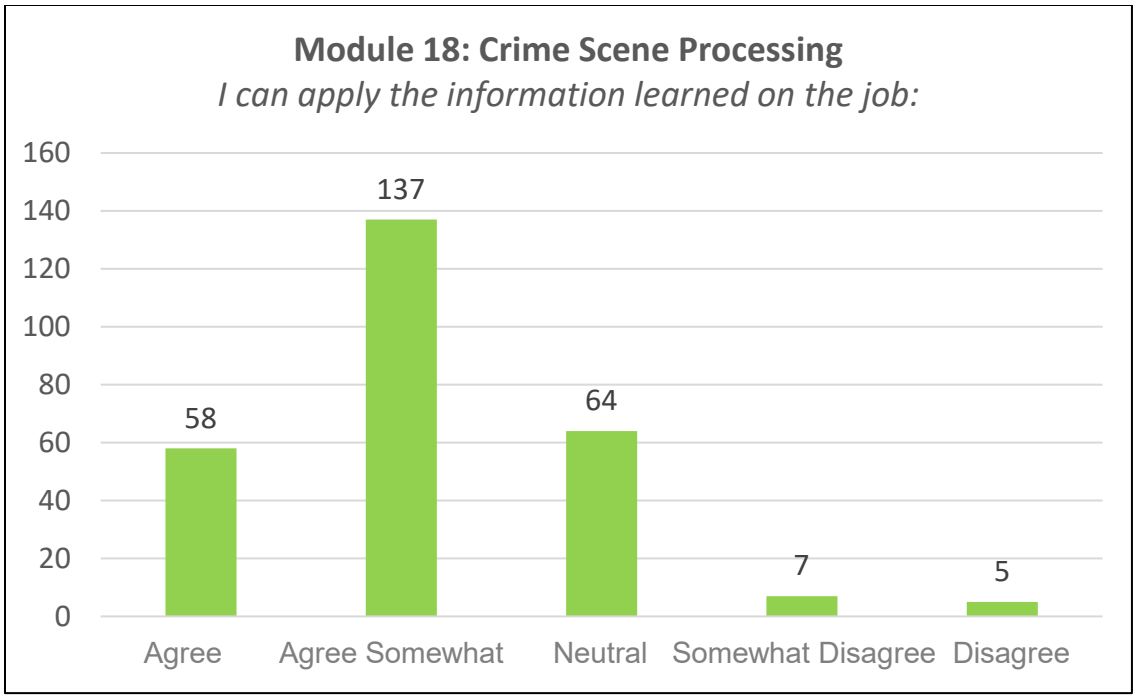
OLTI training content is created and updated with input from professionals in a variety of disciplines, including law enforcement, prosecution, health care, victim advocacy, and related fields. Please see the acknowledgements page of each module, for a list of the individuals who served as contributing authors or expert reviewers.

Course Evaluations

At the end of each module participants are asked a number of questions, including the overall quality of the module, as well as its difficulty. They are also asked to indicate how likely they are to apply the information they learned on the job. Their responses are summarized in the following charts.


Module 18: Crime Scene Processing
I would rate the overall quality of this training module as:
140
120
100
80
60
40
20
0
69
75
120
4
3
Excellent
Above Average
Average
Below Average
Poor


Module 18: Crime Scene Processing
I feel that the difficulty level of this course was:
180
160
140
120
100
80
60
40
20
0
29
56
166
14
6
Difficult
Fairly Difficult
Average
Fairly Easy
Easy



71% "agree" and "somewhat agree" that they can apply what they learned on the job.

Course Objectives

At the end of this training module, the learner will be better able to:

1. Apply the scientific method and competing hypotheses to sexual assault crime scene processing.
2. Understand the characteristics and value of physical evidence.
3. Identify and describe the various roles and associated duties needed to successfully process the sexual assault crime scene.
4. Employ standard crime scene processing procedures, to include:
    a. Documentation through notes, sketches, and photographs
    b. Application of methodical and thorough scene search techniques
    c. Identification and prioritization of physical evidence
    d. Proper handling, seizure, and packaging of physical evidence
5. Identify the major categories of evidence potentially found at sexual assault crime scenes; perform proper development, preservation, and packaging; and evaluate the evidentiary value of each of the following:
    a. Footwear impression evidence
    b. Friction ridge (fingerprint) evidence
    c. Trace evidence (hairs, fibers, soil, paint, glass, tool marks)
    d. Biological evidence
    e. Documents as evidence
    f. Digital evidence
    g. Drug evidence

6. Consider the uniquely challenging characteristics of the sexual assault crime scene and identify potential strategies to overcome those challenges.
7. Recognize the importance of scientific crime scene processing to prevent gender bias in sexual assault investigation and prosecution.

Course Outline

I. The Scientific Method in Crime Scene Processing
   a. The use of competing hypothesis
   b. Application of the scientific method to prevent gender bias
   c. Competing hypotheses and possible defenses
   d. Crime scene processing vs. evidence recovery
   e. Characteristics and value of physical evidence
   f. Locard's exchange principle
   g. Class vs. individual characteristics
   h. Supporting elements of the offense

II. Preliminary Crime Scene Steps and Team Roles
   a. Arrival at the crime scene
   b. Roles and responsibilities

III. Standard Processing Procedures
   a. Written notes
   b. Crime scene sketch and diagram
   c. Crime scene photography

IV. Crime Scene Searches
   a. Determining whether an Item is evidence
   b. Prioritizing evidence collection
   c. Cross-contamination
   d. Evidence chain of custody

V. Documentation, Processing, and Packaging of Evidence
   a. Footwear impressions
   b. Friction ridge (fingerprint) evidence
   c. Trace evidence
   d. Biological evidence
   e. Documents as evidence
   f. Digital evidence
   g. Drug evidence

VI. Unique Crime Scene Challenges and Considerations

VII. Potential Evidence Quick Reference Chart

VIII. Concluding Thoughts