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The Center for Justice Research: Intersection of Forensic Science and the Criminal Justice System



The Texas Southern University [Forensic Science Learning Laboratory in the Barbara Jordan Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs](#) and the [Thurgood Marshall School of Law](#) held a special Cross-over Lecture at the Intersection of Forensic Science and the Criminal Justice System. The lecture series was organized jointly by Dr. Jasmine Drake, who is a [Center for Justice Research](#) faculty research fellow and Assistant Professor, and Ericka Kelsaw, J.D., who is an Associate Professor of Law and Director of Legal Writing/Lawyering Process in the Thurgood Marshall School of Law (TMSLAW).

Dr. Drake received her B.Sc. in Chemistry from Southern University and her Ph.D. in Chemistry from Louisiana State University. During this lecture series, which was one of the first of its kind in bridging the gap between the Forensic Science Program and Law Programs at TSU, Dr. Drake



presented to approximately 200 first- year law students and forensic science students important strategies for defending drug evidence cases. Dr. Drake provided the audience with a basic tool kit, which could be utilized in understanding the implications and considerations necessary for cases involving forensic drug evidence.

Dr. Drake's academic achievements and forensic practitioner experience have positioned her to uniquely bridge the gap between forensic science evidence analysis and criminal justice research. Her research focuses on the development of reliable and objective methods for the collection and analysis of evidentiary materials in an effort to mitigate the effects of cognitive bias and the unreliable use of forensic feature-comparative methods, such as DNA, latent print analysis, ballistic test interpretations, bite-mark comparisons, and hair fiber testing, which are contributing factors to the large, number of

wrongful convictions that have disproportionately plagued fragile communities. The goal of Dr. Drake's "Cross-over Lecture" was to help law students understand the considerations when handling cases involving forensic work. "It is really important to have a good grasp of how forensic evidence and expert testimony may influence your case," noted Dr. Drake, who declared the importance of litigators attorneys ensuring the quality of forensic data and expert testimony in the handling of cases involving forensic evidence.

Dr. Drake's research within the Center for Justice Research focuses on the evaluation and error management of forensic methods and the resulting expert witness testimonies in wrongful conviction cases, with the goal of identifying root-cause analyses in order to recommend best practices and the implementation of policies. Dr. Drake had students recollect their thoughts on the OJ Simpson and Nicole Brown Simpson case and to exchange open dialogue about investigative and forensic issues in case, such as scene contamination, poor chain of custody and record keeping, cognitive bias, and of flawed expert testimony. She also highlighted forms of contamination, which may have resulted directly from error management of forensic methods.

Throughout the lecture, Dr. Drake stressed the importance of lawyers truly understanding and critically evaluating forensic data and the certainty associated with findings, which were collected by forensic practitioners. Students were also encouraged to actively participate in a Q&A session, where Dr. Drake



discussed her insights, professional experiences and answered questions about forensic evidence collection, testing and analysis.

Prior to her tenure at Texas Southern University, Dr. Drake held a position as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Forensic Science at Sam Houston State University. She is also a certified educator in the State of Texas (Chemistry 8-

12) and taught Chemistry and Forensic Science following her tenure as a forensic chemist for the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). Dr. Drake is very passionate about increasing STEM awareness and engagement in vulnerable communities to increase diversity in the field and as a pathway for economic mobility. She is also passionate and actively engaged in research at the interface of forensic science and criminal justice reform measures.

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