



BUREAU OF ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, FIREARMS & EXPLOSIVES NATIONAL FIREARMS EXAMINER ACADEMY



BACKGROUND: The National Firearms Examiner Academy (NFEA) was a collaboration among the Office of Science and Technology's National Laboratory Center, the Association of Firearm and Toolmark Examiners (AFTE) and a private consultant to develop the academic curriculum for the NFEA. The work of the development committee resulted in establishment of eighteen distinct modules of instruction divided into four phases:

MODULE A - Administrative Matters (Laboratory Protocols and Safety/Health)

MODULE B – History of Black Powder

MODULE C – Evolution of Early Firearms

MODULE D – Modern Ammunition Evolution and Manufacture

MODULE E – Modern Firearms Development and Operating Systems

MODULE F – Manufacture of Modern Firearms

MODULE G – Firearms Identification, History, Principles, Equipment and Current Developments

MODULE H – Microscopy and Instrumentation

MODULE I – General Preliminary Examinations of Firearms

MODULE J – Test Firing for Known Specimens and Operability

MODULE K – Bullet Examinations and Comparisons – Shotshell Projectiles

MODULE L – Cartridge, Cartridge Case, Shotshell and Fired Shotshell Examinations and Comparisons

MODULE M – Toolmark Examinations, Comparisons and Identifications

MODULE N – Restoration of Obliterated Markings

MODULE O – Terminal Ballistics, Gunshot Residues, Shot Patterns, Distance Determinations, Bullet Path Analysis and Wound Effects

MODULE P – Quality Assurance

MODULE Q – Research Project

MODULE R – Oral Presentations, Court Testimony, and Admissibility

Several modules involve extensive pre-course reading and research to establish a solid knowledge base.



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Each session of the academy is divided into four distinct phases:

PHASE I – Following student selection and notification students will have a three month period to complete reading and researching pre-course assignments as provided by the academy staff.

PHASE II - A 17-week instructional session at ATF's Forensic Science Laboratory - Washington in Ammendale, Maryland. Instruction and practical exercises in Modules A-R are covered. This phase also includes a trip to ammunition manufacturers and a 10-day trip to firearm and tool manufacturers in New England area. This session is very content-intensive and in-order for the student to self- develop there is considerable studying, assignments, and research during many evenings and weekends.

PHASE III - A four-month period in which the student returns to their own agency laboratory. During this period the student will complete a research project which has been pre-approved by Academy instructors and the student's supervisor at their agency's laboratory. The student will also complete simulated firearms and toolmark cases prepared by Academy instructors. These will be presented in a courtroom scenario in Phase IV.

PHASE IV - A two-week follow-up school in the Washington, D.C. area which guides the student in preparation for the presentation of expert testimony. This will also include pretrial conferences, the preparation of exhibits and mock case testimonies. Students will also present their completed research projects.

APPLICATION CRITERIA: Student selection is conducted by the NFEA Staff and is dependent on several criteria. In-order to be considered the applicant must be a U.S. citizen and:

- Have a minimum of a baccalaureate degree in a related area (sciences, criminal justice etc.).
- Be employed full time in a trainee status to perform the duties of a Firearm and Toolmark examiner.
- Have a senior Firearm and Toolmark examiner assigned to oversee their training.
- Have agency submit certification on agency letterhead of the satisfactory completion of a background investigation.

In addition to the applicant qualifications student selection is dependent on laboratory need and the ratio of trainees to qualified examiners in their home laboratory.

STUDENT REQUIREMENTS: All student trainees selected for the NFEA will be evaluated throughout the program for continuance in the academy. Evaluations, at a minimum, will be based upon completing assignments on time, passing exams and practical exercises with a grade of at least 80% and meeting the criteria in the NFEA Honor Code.



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APPLICATION SUBMISSIONS: Application deadline for the 2025-2026 NFEA class is **August 1, 2025**. Completed applications are emailed to NFEATRaining@atf.gov and an email receipt will be sent within three days.

CLASS DATES: Tentative class dates - October 1, 2025 through September 11, 2026

CONTACT INFORMATION: Questions concerning the program can be directed to the NFEA staff listed below.

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