

Certification Requirements
by
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When my wife and I joined Big Muddy Ghost Hunters, we were required, like everyone else in the group, to take (and pay for) a certification course offered by a well-known ghost hunting organization. This certification was accomplished by reading the manual (written by the principals in the organization), and then answering a long series of simple questions about what has been read. It is a very unsophisticated form of unsupervised programmed learning that has been adapted for many types of applications from gun safety to driver's license to property administration. For gaining general knowledge of procedures and procedural requirements, it can be effective. For complex, theory-based learning, it is just a time waster; it does not require critical thinking or complex reasoning.

To the poorly educated, ghost hunting is a simplistic activity governed by protocols--systematically using instruments and equipment to find anomalies, or abnormal results. Once these anomalies are found, then general and usually inconsistent theories--commonly based in Christian assumptions about the nature of the universe--are used to speculate on the sources and meanings of the anomalies. These theories are often adopted as truth without having been developed or tested by anyone or by any means. It seems to me that movies, television, and science fiction are the principal sources of theories-in-use. Once the baseless conclusions are reached, then it's on to the next investigation.

To the educated mind, paranormal study is a highly complex problem of knowledge. What makes it complex is that there is nothing really to know. Ontological standing of paranormal phenomena cannot be established with instruments, recorders, or cameras, or by any positive method. It can only be established through Hegelian dialectic--we know that something is paranormal because it is not normal. We know a ghost is a ghost because it is not a birthday cake, or a ski lift, or a pair of glasses, or a planet, etc. That means that those who study the paranormal must know and understand all the knowledge and human development that make up *normal*--including Hegel's dialectic, and his meaning of *geist*. They must understand, for example, that the Christian idea of the soul was borrowed from Plato and Plotinus.

If a ghost represents the soul of a dead person, then we had better have a good idea what we mean by a soul so we can answer questions like the following: Is the soul eternal? Does it retain the person's identity? Does it retain knowledge? Does it have hopes, ideals, and goals? Does it have wants and needs? Does it have material, spatial, or temporal properties? Can it manifest itself in physical form? Does it exhibit a personality? If it does exhibit a personality, just what is a personality anyway? Psychologists have not answered that question to everyone's satisfaction, but the uneducated person assumes that we all know what a personality is.

The above questions are but the tiniest fraction of the complexities associated with paranormal study. If you did not understand the above two paragraphs, then you will have no chance with the problem. Unless a certification course covers these sorts of questions, then it is worthless for anything more than giving underachievers a sense of accomplishment where none exists. Those serious about studying the paranormal should be interested in studying everything, because

everything embraced by conventional knowledge is what one must know in order to understand the paranormal. If you did not like studying in school, then you are a pretender. Have fun ghost hunting, but don't think you are accomplishing anything other than self-amusement and gaming.

For those interested in something more than running around snapping pictures and sweeping K2 meters, Big Muddy Ghost Hunters Association has developed a certification course as an alternative to those on the market. All of our investigators must be certified or working toward certification to be allowed to investigate. We do not for a moment believe that our course will produce scholars, but at least it weeds out the pretenders. Our certification is only the beginning. It means that you are acquainted at a minimal level with the important intellectual and procedural issues associated with paranormal investigation. The remainder of your education is gained through experience, and as W. Edwards Deming once said, experience is useless without theory.

Having a degree or a certification is not the same as being educated. Having extensive knowledge of trivia is not the same as being educated. Knowing the date the Panama Canal was completed is one thing; being able to explain the geo-political ramifications of the Panama Canal's completion is something else. Education is developed through curiosity, and those who are educated walk around with their eyes and minds wide open, seeking out the snippets of information and insights that integrate the wide world into a conceptual whole. These are the people who benefit from experience. Of course, there are always people who help facilitate one's education--I can name five specific individuals who helped me--but basically education is taken through personal effort, and not merely received from someone else.

Our course is self-study, with assistance available. It is not easy or even possible for unmotivated learners. It consists of five parts: philosophical issues, theological issues, psychological issues, investigative protocol, and the use of equipment and technology. Most who have begun the study have not found the gumption to finish; it can take one to six months to complete depending on how well the learner has been prepared. Those interested in ghost hunting are normally not academically inclined. To be fair, all but a handful of educational institutions fail to produce educated graduates as a rule. Those who wish to be educated must pursue it on their own.

Courses of study I have found useful for understanding the paranormal are the following: clinical, behavioral, and developmental psychology; brain physiology; philosophy of psychology; philosophy of religion; social psychology; social anthropology; sociology; economics (as in the study of applied value); history of ideas; ecology (the study of complex ecosystems, not recycling plastic); evolutionary biology; mechanics of solids; electricity; thermodynamics; physics of sound; chemistry; literature; ancient civilizations; ancient and modern history; mythology; and folklore. These are theories I have found useful to know: chaos theory; theory of relativity; theory of constraints; theory of evolution; and theory of conservation of mass and energy. These are skills I have found useful to have: conscious differentiation of sounds (something I began in Sonar A School), use of electronics (something I began learning in Electronics School); behavior of materials under various conditions (learned in a factory); mechanical skills in fixing things; measurement; environmental awareness (something I picked

up in combat--has nothing to do with global warming, trash, or CO₂ levels); psychological mapping; and critical thinking.

Most certification courses I have seen are flagrant frauds--products developed and sold to make money--and nothing more. Certification is not needed by those who play at ghost hunting in the same way that they play at video games. If you are over twenty and have not sought out serious intellectual development by now, then there is not much that will make you into an effective paranormal investigator. Have fun, but don't take yourself seriously, and don't waste your money on certification programs. You can do much better by going to the library.

The problem with requiring any standard certification is the same problem we have with intelligence tests--the most intelligent people in the world do not waste their time making up intelligence tests. They know it is not possible because there is no widely accepted definition of intelligence. Since there are no widely accepted theories of the paranormal, a standardized certification process would have more to do with politics than with knowledge. We train our investigators to our satisfaction, and do not issue certificates for merely trying hard.