

## SAM SPADE MEETS SOCRATES

### ***A New College Program In Private Investigation May Set An Enduring Example***

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The Spring 1998 publication of *P.I. Magazine* was dedicated to featuring the industry's leaders. It discussed the distinctive qualities that leaders in any profession embody and it went on to discuss the specific contributions of today's investigative leaders. "Leaders are doing significant things that have an impact on the profession.", the article said, " "They're taking risks. They're setting the pace. Sometimes they're setting the standards to which others must raise their own level of operation. But what they do has an impact, in their city, in their state, and across the country."

Brandon Perron, featured in that article as one of the nation's "top ten" leaders in the industry, is introducing yet another innovation that exemplifies those attributes essential to leadership. An academic program developed by Perron at the State of Florida's Criminal Justice Institute at Indian River Community College in St. Lucie County, leads to Professional Certification in Private Investigation or to an Associates Degree in Criminal Justice with a specialization in Private Investigation. It is a unique, cutting-edge course of practical study and intellectual training that addresses an important rapidly emerging need in the investigative profession.

Already an accomplished educator and trainer, Perron conceived and currently instructs the training program for the investigative staff of the 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Public Defenders Office for the State of Florida. He also trains investigative staff from other such agencies throughout the State. In addition, he speaks to and instructs private investigators nationally as well as publishing widely in numerous professional journals. His compelling book, *UNCOVERING REASONABLE DOUBT*, is a landmark work, which presents, for the first time in the profession, a comprehensive philosophy and methodology for conducting criminal defense investigations. This methodology, called the *Component Method*, is also the basis for Perron's practical as well as intellectually challenging college curriculum that trains both new and veteran investigators to be critical thinkers of the highest caliber. And it is this emphasis that makes the program a truly innovative one —one that indeed, as *PI* magazine's Leadership article stated: "sets the standards to which others must raise their own level of operation."

A genuine philosopher of the profession, Perron believes that Private Investigation must begin to raise its own self-image in order to attain the status that it deserves in the professional community at large. He attributes his own financial success and elite professional reputation primarily to his intellectual acuity and fervent quest for truth rather than to any slick new business marketing gimmick. In one recent article he wrote, "The charlatans of the investigative industry have replaced mentoring and guidance with an 'info-mercial type' sales pitch designed to convince us that the latest trend will revolutionize the investigative industry. But the fact of the matter is that the private investigators' role has been and always will be that of a critical thinker, problem-solver, and advocate of Truth." In this way both Perron's *Component Method* and comprehensive degree program in private investigation seek to authentically revolutionize the profession by —paradoxically—reviving an age-old spirit of learning and inquiry. Indeed, one of Perron's foremost investigative role-models is none other than the ancient Greek

philosopher Socrates, whose process of analytic inquiry Perron regards as the exemplary investigative method.

Perron is well read in various academic disciplines and appreciates the relevance of historical research, philosophical epistemology, and critical theory to practical investigative procedure. In fact, his ability to interview criminal defendants as well as lecture on *Plato's REPUBLIC* has elevated Perron's own investigative techniques to a level that have earned renowned attorney F. Lee Bailey's praise. And his 15 years of experience as an investigator in both the public and private sectors have taught him that the investigative profession must begin to see itself as a primarily intellectual institution – like its peers in other professions – if it is to enhance its professional status in today's "information age". "I am tired of Private Investigation being regarded as merely the bastard-child of lawyers and law-enforcement", he said during a seminar at Florida Atlantic University. And Perron himself has certainly never settled for any lesser role than as an authority among his counter-parts in the professional world.

He is therefore troubled by the all-to-popular image of private investigators as uneducated, untrained, and somehow inferior to other professionals with whom investigators often work. A pretentious attempt recently among some national investigative associations to become more professionally legitimate by actually excluding investigators from speaking at their own conferences – allowing only doctors, attorneys, and engineers to address the audience – is a glaring example of just how poor the investigative field's self-image has become. How, Perron wonders, can private investigators expect the same status and financial rewards as other professionals if they do not envision themselves as professional equals? -- while also holding themselves to the same intellectual standards.

It is this industry need for increased professional standardization, further education and training, and an improved image in the professional community, which the Indian River Academy program addresses. Unlike many private study-programs, the course of study at Indian River Community College is academically grounded. As part of the State University system, any course or degree completed there is transferable to any other two or four-year program. And unlike the few other academically based private investigation programs that currently exist in the country, the course of study at Indian River Academy is grounded in practical investigation as well as critical-thinking skills – while also offering certification from a State Law Enforcement Academy and Criminal Justice Institute. Students can also take specific courses as individual training\retraining modules, which meet their particular professional needs. A number of State and private investigation agencies have sent investigators to Perron's courses for training.

**The program of study includes the following courses:**

**INTRODUCTION TO PRIVATE INVESTIGATION** – trains the student in the application of the basic *Component Method* of investigation focusing on the specialized discipline of criminal defense. Lectures supported by a mock investigation provide students with the opportunity to apply the skills presented during the course.

**FUNDAMENTALS OF SURVEILLANCE** – a hands-on surveillance and related issues course. The program provides scenario based learning to enhance the learning experience.

**INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEWS** – Advanced techniques and legal aspects are examined in a scenario-based environment.

**DEATH & INJURY INVESTIGATIONS** – Skills and techniques utilized to investigate civil cases involving wrongful death and accidents resulting in injuries are examined.

**INTRODUCTION TO ETHICS** – This course addresses the most significant tool of the investigative trade – critical and creative thinking – and examines the nature of professional ethics in an open forum.

**FUNDAMENTALS OF LAW** – This course provides a basic introduction to law and the legal system.

**PRIVATE INVESTIGATIVE PRACTICUM** -- A supervised internship with the Office of the Public Defender.

In addition to these core requirements, there are numerous elective courses in such topics as background investigations, forensic applications, process-serving, and other civil/criminal investigative techniques offered in conjunction with the Criminal Justice Degree program.

It is now universally understood that the world is entering an "information age" economy in which knowledge is "capital" and intellectual acuity is any industry's most significant resource. Companies invest billions of dollars in education and training for this reason, and professions whose legitimacy rests upon a proven tradition of expert knowledge and intellectual expertise are flourishing in the contemporary milieu. The private investigation industry cannot afford to ignore this emerging trend. Nor can it afford to under-appreciate its own status as a professional field of the highest order.

As an industry leader, Brandon Perron has formulated a program of higher learning to meet this challenge. This program may well serve our industry as a model for future standardized training and education. In the Winter 1998 issue of PI Magazine John Grogan wrote, "Doctors, Lawyers, Mechanics, and other professionals all must continually up-date their industry education or find themselves ineffective to their clients. Today's P.I.'s are in exactly the same situation." This is particularly true at a time when the Private Investigative Industry must elevate its self-image as well as its stature in the professional community at large. The intellectual and professional standards established by the Investigative program at the Florida State University system's Academy at Indian River Community College can play an essential role in this process.