

UC Fire Science Program Ignites Chiefs' Careers

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The UC Fire Science program graduates top-flight professionals as exemplified by its successful alumni—now serving as fire chiefs around the country.

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■ The University of Cincinnati College of Engineering and Applied Science (CEAS) [Fire Science Technology Program](#) is known for outfitting students—both those just starting out and veterans in the fire service—with a diverse skill set to enhance their

- Promotional opportunities, while enhancing
- Lateral transfer potential, and
- Post-career opportunities with new careers in the fields of fire insurance, arson investigation, fire protection engineering or industrial safety.

Exemplifying the successful careers of the program's graduates are:

District Fire Chief Michael A. Washington— Cincinnati Fire Department



District Fire Chief Michael
A. Washington

Michael A. Washington, CEAS Fire Science '08 alumnus, was promoted to district fire chief in March 2013 and now directs, manages, supervises, evaluates, and organizes all firefighting, emergency medical service, and other related emergency operations within Cincinnati city limits. Chief Washington credits the UC Fire Science program with playing a major role in his promotion stating, "My experience in the program allowed me to expand my professional development and my career from a uniquely scientific and executive administration view point."

As a Queen City native, Washington has always dreamed of becoming a fire chief. Without hesitation, he entered the fire service in 1991 at a young age after graduating from Hughes High School. After a few years working as a part-time firefighter-emergency medical technician for Green and Colerain townships' departments, Washington received an appointment to the Cincinnati Fire Department (CFD).

Washington first attained paramedic certification from D. Russell Lee Career Center and was quickly promoted to rescue unit paramedic. He was then promoted to the rank of fire apparatus operator and next, fire lieutenant. Washington worked with Engine Company 23 and Rescue 2 as

a fire lieutenant prior to becoming fire captain. As a fire captain, he served as company commander of Engine 3 (downtown) and Ladder 2 (Hartwell).

Hungry to give back even more to his hometown, Washington moved into a position as fire captain in the Training Bureau. In this role, he oversaw several in-service training sessions, a fire recruit class, and taught numerous specialized courses. Thousands of hours of firefighter education and training were delivered to members of the CFD as well as many other local agencies under the guidance of Chief Washington.

While at the Training Bureau, Washington also assumed the rigorous duty of public information officer (PIO) for the department. As PIO, he regularly communicated with the local media, presenting fire department, and fire safety information to the general public. Through this position and these interactions with the public, Washington worked tirelessly to shed the best possible light on the City of Cincinnati and the CFD, as well as spotlighting the importance of fire safety for all citizens.

When Washington was assigned to the City of Cincinnati's Emergency Communication Center (ECC), he served as liaison officer to ECC senior staff and handled matters pertaining to fire station deployment, dispatch issues, response data analysis, 800 MHz radio system management, cellular telephone network, and mobile data computer (MDC) networks.

Washington chose to enroll in the UC Fire Science program after receiving several recommendations on its high quality and earned his bachelor's degree in fire service engineering technology in 2008. The chief now utilizes his expertise in fire apparatus specifications, human resource management, fire department strategic planning, and emergency medical billing to give back to UC working as an adjunct professor in the Fire Science program. Washington has also been hired as a consultant by various fire departments around the nation.

Washington adds, "The words of advice that I would give any student aspiring to become a chief officer would be to never stop educating yourself, always find ways to expand your horizon, step out of your comfort zone, be willing to do what the other person is NOT willing to do! Put others first, and never forget where you came from. Last but not least, enjoy the ride of your career."

Additionally, Washington graduated from the Carl Holmes Executive Development Institute, a national fire service organization devoted to providing cutting edge management training to fire service leaders. He is currently a third-year student of National Fire Academy's "Executive Fire Officer Program" (EFOP) in Emmitsburg, Md. The EFOP is a four-year program representing the "best of the best" in fire service leaders.

The chief has also served as an evaluator on several assessment centers for fire captain and lieutenant promotional examinations. He has assessed the tactical scenario (major incident), oral interview (including resume), oral presentation, personnel issue, in-basket exercise, and teaching demonstrations. Washington's experience rating exams includes local fire departments for the City of Cincinnati, Norwood and Dublin, Ohio, and spans nationally for the cities of Birmingham, Ala.; San Francisco, Calif.; Lexington, Ky.; and West Palm Beach County, Fla.

Washington's current professional affiliations include: International Association of Fire Chiefs, International Association of Black Professional Firefighters Black Chief Officer's Committee, International Association of Firefighters Local 48, Hamilton County Fire Chief, Fire Instructors Committee and the Ohio Fire Chiefs' Association. Presently, the Chief and his wife, Pia, have five children and reside in Colerain Township.

Washington says of his recent promotion to district chief, "This promotion, for me, is a dream come true! I was maybe 10 or 11 when a Cincinnati district fire chief caught my attention, amazement is all that I can say. This district chief commanded his troops at a fire scene without hesitation or reservation. His demeanor was calm and poised. My immediate goal was to master the knowledge, skills and abilities of a district fire chief. My future endeavors may involve interviewing for the next level of command (assistant fire chief)."

Chief Michael Benson— Copley Fire Department



Chief Michael Benson

CEAS Fire Science '06 alumnus, **Michael Benson**, is currently the chief of the Copley Fire Department in Copley, Ohio, and is responsible for a 62-person, \$3.4 million all-hazard response agency. Chief Benson, a seasoned professional with 24+ years in fire service, says, "My UC education greatly prepared me for my role as fire chief. It shaped my perspective and forced me to look at the 'big picture.'"

As Copley fire chief, Benson oversees the operations, planning and budget for the department. He also maintains relationships with neighboring agencies, such as the police department and other departments in and around his county. Benson is a member of the Summit County Domestic Preparedness Steering Committee, Fire Chiefs Association, Radio System

Administrative Committee, and he's also on the Special Operations Response Team's Executive Board.

For Benson, writing grants and providing project management for regional projects has become a regular responsibility in his new role as chief. He is currently working to achieve a regional radio system upgrade and to combine three dispatch centers into large one through grants and loan programs, all to improve the response system in his area.

Benson affirms, "Grant writing is one very significant area that was affected by my education. Lieutenant Rob Pursley invited me to work with him on alternative funding of programs, apparatus and equipment for the Barberton Fire Department—we were successful in obtaining more than \$2 million in grants for SCBA's, health and wellness, diesel exhaust, a fire engine, and other projects. UC's coursework required an analytical mind and an ability to write, equipping me with skills needed to succeed as a grant writer and planner in my career. Lieutenant Pursley followed me to UC and also graduated with a BS FSET."

The Uniontown, Ohio, native graduated from Lake High School in Stark County. With four

years of volunteer fire service under his belt, Benson decided to pursue a career as a firefighter/paramedic and was hired by the City of Barberton in 1993. He completed his associate's degree at the Ohio State University and the University of Akron. After several more years, Benson was promoted to lieutenant while he was finishing his bachelor's degree at UC.

“When I decided to go back to school, CEAS accepted a large portion of my credits from the University of Akron and the Ohio State University. I was originally an electrical engineering major so many of my classes translated well into the College of Applied Science (which combined with the College of Engineering to create the present CEAS).

I chose to go to UC because its Open Learning Fire Service Program (OLFSP) was designed for professional firefighters like me. We work 24 hour shifts, so attending regular classes is difficult. The OLFSP makes it possible to earn a fire science degree via distance learning. The coursework was directly relatable and applicable to my career,” reflects Benson.

Benson advises his fellow professionals and new students, “The depth of understanding provided by the UC Fire Science program is essential if you want to fully embrace this profession. With that said, take each course as an opportunity to grow your ability to do more than ‘put the wet stuff on the red stuff.’”

Benson graduated from the Fire Science program in 2006, receiving his bachelor's in fire and safety engineering. In 2007, a fire chief position opened at a neighboring department and he applied. After an exhaustive process of tests, he was hired in August 2007 as the sixth fire chief in the history of the Copley Fire Department.

The chief adds, “The most important and rewarding thing I do is take care of the personnel working for Copley Fire. They are my ‘customers’ and it is my job to provide them with everything they need in order to provide the highest level of service possible to the citizens, businesses and visitors of Copley Township and surrounding communities.”

Chief Mark Ober— Anderson Township Fire & Rescue Department



Chief Mark Ober

Mark Ober, CEAS Fire Science '07 alumnus, currently serves as fire chief of the Anderson Township Fire & Rescue Department in Hamilton County, Ohio. Chief Ober has been instrumental in leading change for department—transitioning a combination fire department into a professional career fire department for the southeastern Hamilton County, Ohio, community.

“The UC Fire Science program provided me with a better understanding of the development and procedures the fire service carries out in a multitude of processes. The courses fulfilled a background to the modern day fire service. Two courses that made a major impact on my future as chief were the Personnel Management and the Political & Legal classes. They take the firefighter out of the normal role and broaden the management

horizons,” says Ober.

Selected as 10th career fire chief of Anderson Township in May 2002, Ober manages 65 career personnel from four fire stations, an assistant chief and three battalion chiefs. He’s currently serving as president of the Southwest Ohio Fire Chiefs Association while staying involved with several fire service and professional organizations such as the Ohio Fire Chiefs Association, the International Fire Chiefs Association, Greater Cincinnati Hazardous Materials Team, and the Hamilton County Fire Chiefs Association. Ober is also presently the co-chair of the Southwest Ohio Incident Management Team (IMAT), in which he helps update and instruct officers regarding incident management.

Ober began his career with the Anderson Township Fire & Rescue Department in 1976 as a volunteer firefighter and was then appointed to a career position in 1977. Beginning as a firefighter/EMT, he acquired his paramedic certification in 1978. Ober became a state certified inspector in 1979. He was an apparatus driver and a paramedic for four years and then in 1982, he was promoted to a lieutenant. In the same year, he attained his State of Ohio Fire Instructor Certification, which was the start of his training career.

In 1994, Ober became an assistant chief and was responsible for fire and rescue training. From 1995 to 1997, he served as the assistant chief of emergency and support services, responsible for EMS, operations, support services and training. In 1997, Ober was reassigned to the Training Division, which included EMS, support and all EMS and fire training.

After becoming enrolled in the Ohio Fire Executive program (which lasts five separate weeks extending over two years), the life-long Anderson Township resident decided to give the UC Fire Science program a shot.

“I chose UC specifically because of the Fire Science program. I had known about it for years but was just too busy to investigate the options. After completing over 35 projects and papers in the class, I decided to go for the degree. I was amazed at how successfully the courses further developed me as a professional,” reflects Ober.

In 2007, Ober received his bachelor’s degree in fire and safety engineering technology and in 2011, he earned master’s degree in public administration from Northern Kentucky University. He is an active member in Anderson Township, coaching youth sports for 12 years and acting as the local high school booster president for two years. Ober enjoys playing baseball in a 35 and older league and frequently travels to play in a baseball tournament in Florida. His latest favorite recreation is spending time with his grandchildren.

Ober advises future fire science students and his colleagues, “This profession is much more than just putting water on a fire and the vocation has changed drastically in the past 36 years. Technology is just one of the modern advancements that students will need to master. The shift in methods of how we detect heat—from feel to the current use of a thermal imaging camera—is just one example of major advancements occurring in modern day firefighting techniques.

Those aspiring to be fire chief should continue their education and training for the journey to

become chief. When the day arrives, continue to stay engaged in change as this will be part of the road map to success.”

Chief Charles Scott— City of Waynesboro Fire Department



Chief Charles F. Scott

CEAS Fire Science '91 alumnus, **Charles F. Scott**, is currently chief of the City of Waynesboro Fire Department in Waynesboro, Va. He leads a full service combination fire department in a community of about 21,000 residents. According to Chief Scott, “My time in the UC Fire Science program was a springboard to where I am now.

The excellent instruction, the networking that still remains, and the knowledge base shared during that time has been a focal point of my career since graduating. Bill Kramer and many of the staff inspired me to learn not only fire related information, but to use the experience as well as life to constantly learn. Collaborating with individuals from around the world was truly an inspiring and meaningful enterprise.”

Scott began his career as a volunteer firefighter at the young age of 16 in his local hometown of Weyers Cave, Va. He was hired by the City of Waynesboro in 1977, a year after graduating from Fort Defiance High School. Scott has been with the City of Waynesboro Fire Department for his entire career, serving as a firefighter, engineer, captain, and now as chief of the department for the past 17+ years.

While he was acting as a captain of the City of Waynesboro Fire Department, Scott decided to enroll in the UC Open Learning Fire Service Program (OLFSP). He says, “I had completed two associates’ degrees and wanted to further my education within the fire discipline. I chose UC’s program due to its reputation, the accelerated residency week in the summers, and also because it was a respected engineering degree.”

Chief Scott’s advice to fellow professionals and future fire science students would be: “I consider my experiences with the staff and students at UC to be highlights of my career. Never stop learning, and always follow your dreams. Being a Fire Chief is the best job in the world.”

The UC Open Learning Fire Service Program (OLFSP, which offers distance learning courses and one-week residencies each July) appeals to many fire science professionals looking to advance their careers as it adds a high degree of flexibility and convenience by allowing them to schedule academic and professional development around duty assignments.

With over 30 experienced educators teaching a solid well-orchestrated curriculum, world-class research and advanced technology unite to provide students with the knowledge required to confront and master 21st century challenges in their ever-changing discipline. Respected faculty and mentors range from emergency medical service directors and coordinators to paramedics and firefighters to fire chiefs and district chiefs.

OLFSP is offered in conjunction with the National Fire Academy's FESHE Program (Fire & Emergency Services Higher Education). Students may receive advanced standing credit for EMT, paramedic, fire inspector and other certifications. UC is accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges & Secondary Schools.

The UC Fire Science program graduates top-flight professionals and is proud of its successful alumni—now serving as Fire Chiefs.

- Apply to UC's [Fire Science Program](#).