**Computer Forensics Key Terms**

Bit – short for binary digit; takes the form of either a one or a zero; the smallest unit of information on a machine (Saferstein, 2009)

Byte – a group of eight bits (Saferstein, 2009)

Central Processing Unit (CPU) – the central component of a computer where all of the data is processed

Cluster – a group of sectors in multiples of two, typically the minimum space allocated in a file (Saferstein, 2009)

Computer Case/Chassis – the box that typically rests besides the computer monitor and houses the internal components of the computer

File Slack – the area that begins at the end of the last sector that contains logical data and terminates at the end of the cluster (Saferstein, 2009)

Hard Disk Drive (HDD) – the location in a computer where data is stored and retrieved

Hardware – the physical material that comprises a computer

Input Devices – used to get data into the computer

Internet – (a.k.a. information superhighway) a computer network that provides information globally

Latent Data – areas of files and disks that are typically not apparent to the computer user (and often not to the operating system), but contain data nonetheless (Saferstein, 2009)

Message Digest 5 (MD5) Secure Hash Algorithm – a software algorithm used to “fingerprint” a file or the contents of a disk; used to verify the integrity of data (Saferstein, 2009)

Motherboard – the primary board that contains the main circuitry for the computer

Operating System (OS) – essentially, the software that directs basic functions and operations within a computer

Output Devices – used to get data from the computer

Partition – the process of dividing a hard disc drive into different independent sections

Power Supply – converts the power from the wall outlet to a usable form for the computer and its components

RAM Slack – the area beginning at the end of the logical file and terminating at the end of that sector; in some older operating systems this area is padded with information in RAM (Saferstein, 2009)

Random Access Memory (RAM) – the location in a computer where the operating system that is in use can be stored and retrieved for quick reference by the CPU

Read Only Memory (ROM) – chips that store programs called firmware and are used to start the boot process and configure a computer’s components

Sector – the smallest unit of data addressable by a hard disk drive, generally consisting of 512 bytes (Saferstein, 2009)

Software – programs and operations that are used by a computer

System Bus – a vast complex network of wires that carries data from one hardware device to another and is located on the motherboard

Swap File – a file or defined space on the HDD to which data is written or swapped to free RAM for applications that are in use (Saferstein, 2009)

Temporary Files – files temporarily written by an application to perform a function (Saferstein, 2009)

Unallocated Space – the space on a hard drive that contains available space; the space may also contain temporary and deleted files

Visible Data – data from a computer that is openly visible and available to users