

Workshop Report, ASMS Conference, Baltimore, MD

Roundtable Discussion on Research Challenges in Forensics and Homeland Security

Organized by the Forensics and Homeland Security Interest Group

Glen Jackson and Guido Verbeck and

Monday, 5:45 – 7:00 pm, Room 349-350

Peak attendance 115, total attendance ~150

After brief welcoming remarks, Glen kicked off the business portion of the interest group meeting by promoting the 2015 Sanibel Conference on Security and Forensic Applications of Mass Spectrometry to be held in Clearwater Beach, FL, Jan 22-25, 2015. Glen and Jose Almirall are co-organizing the meeting and more than 20 world-renowned researchers have already agreed to provide oral presentations. Sir Peter Fahy, Chief Constable of the Greater Manchester Police in the UK, will give the keynote, and Dr. Vahid Majidi, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear Matters in the US, will give the Plenary. There are plenty of opportunities for contributed abstracts and students travel awards and some of the submitted abstracts will be promoted to short oral presentations.

We solicited nominations for chair-elect for the interest group for 2015 and Adam Hall of Northeastern University was identified as the top choice. We also solicited recommendations for oral and poster sessions for 2015, and for ideas for the workshop. Attendees identified environmental forensics and food forensics as possible topics for sessions, in addition to the broader “forensic applications” session.

We then proceeded to the Roundtable discussion.

Glen provided apologies on behalf of Dr. Max Houck, Director of Forensic Sciences at the Consolidated Crime Laboratory in Washington, DC, who had agreed to serve on the panel, but had to cancel at short notice. Glen then introduced the following panelists:

Dr. Brian Eckenrode, Forensic Scientist at the FBI Labs in Quantico, VA; Dr. Stephen Stein of NIST; Dr. Guido Verbeck, Professor of Chemistry at the University of North Texas, Denton, TX; and Dr. Kelsey Cook, an NSF Program Officer, former Senior Policy Analyst in the Executive Office of the President and former professor of chemistry at UT, Knoxville.

Dr. Stein began with an update on the national policies and federal oversight in development by congress, NIST, NSF and NIJ. Steve presented a clear summary of the recent bills proposed by Senators Leahy and Rockefeller, the oversight structure in development at NIST and some details about NIST's role in forensic science research. His talk stimulated many questions from the floor and enthusiastic discussion from the panelists and workshop attendees. The Organization for the Scientific Area Committees (OSAC) at NIST was discussed at length, as was as the now-closed window to apply for participation in the Forensic Science Committees. Unfortunately, the dialogue was so engaging at this point that we neglected to take very good notes.

Dr. Cook then provided some background and an update about NSF's involvement with funding in the area of forensic science, such as the Dear Colleague letter released in 2013. He also provided details and answered questions about the I/UCRC program at NSF and their willingness to help establish forensic science centers of excellence. He encouraged attendees to think about the broader impacts of forensic science research and education, and how our community could take advantage of the CSI effects (there are many effects of CSI!) to attract students to STEM careers.

We also discussed topics such as the status of graduate education in forensic science in the US and publishing before the closing remarks at 7:00 p.m. Many attendees stayed behind to talk with the panel members and to provide very positive feedback about the structure of the workshop. Many attendees were appreciative to see a format so different from the oral technical sessions.

We offer sincere gratitude to the Panel members for their participation, and for the many attendees who spoke up to ask and answer questions and help provide a stimulating, enjoyable and informative discussion. We look forward to more participation next year and are always open to suggestions from interest group members, so please feel free to volunteer your ideas any time.

Respectfully,

Glen Jackson (Chair 2014) and Guido Verbeck (Chair 2015).