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## Regional Cooperation and Regional Centers Among Forensic Science Programs in the United States

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**ABSTRACT:** Various types of cooperative arrangements between the forensic science programs of colleges and universities are discussed as possible means of increasing student exposure to faculty expertise in specialized subject areas and of using more effectively the comparatively scarce resources of individual programs.

**KEYWORDS:** forensic science, symposium, education, regional cooperation

The number of college and university-based programs in forensic sciences grew during the 1960s and early 1970s, probably reaching a high watermark of about 25 around 1978. Although the number of forensic science laboratories has increased modestly in the past decade or so, the number of academic programs has been declining. At present, there are about 15.

Generally speaking, all the programs have modest enrollments as a result of the limited labor market. Since there is typically a correlation between enrollment in a program and a parent college or university's support for it in terms of resources, few if any of the programs can cost-effectively support a full-time faculty and staff appropriately representative of the many subspecialties that make up forensic sciences today (one version of which appears in Table 1). Besides a limited full-time faculty, there tends to be limited support for space, equipment, and supplies as well. Finally, opportunities for external grants and contracts to which many parent institutions expect programs to look for additional support of both programmatic and research activities are very limited.

One creative strategy for increasing the spectrum of specialized offerings for students, and of utilizing the comparatively sparse capital and faculty resources available, is mutual cooperation among a number of programs within a geographical region. Cooperation is possible in a variety of ways and on a number of different levels.

The specialized forensic science courses comprise the central core of most programs, distinguishing them from other, more traditional scientific programs. Reduced to its lowest terms, the offering of courses requires only that we have students, a qualified faculty member, and appropriate facilities. Cooperation between and among institutions may then be envisaged in term of these three requirements.

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TABLE 1—*Some specialty areas in forensic science.*

• Imprints/impressions	• Fire scene investigation
• Latent fingerprints	• Analysis of arson debris
• Firearms/toolmarks	• Reconstructions
• Questioned documents	• Trace evidence analysis
• Drug identification and quantitation	• Instrumental analysis
• Microscopy	• Serology
• Crime scene investigation	• Photography

Interested institutions could consider exchanges of faculty, of students, or of both for purposes of offering various specialized courses. Faculty exchanges are probably the simplest logistically. Such exchanges could be valuable and mutually beneficial to both cooperating institutions to the degree that they take advantage of special faculty expertise in a subject area or of specialized facilities available at one institution but not the other.

Cooperative arrangements of this kind would afford more students the opportunity for coursework with faculty having specialized expertise and skill in a subject area as well as affording the faculty member greater opportunities for contact with interested students. Any such cooperative arrangements, if they are to work out on an extended basis, should be mutually beneficial to the students and faculty of the cooperating programs.

There are certain administrative matters that would have to be worked out between institutions wishing to cooperate with one another. These include student registration and tuition charges, faculty compensation, scheduling, the use of facilities, and the logistics of any exchange arrangements. These issues could be worked out informally between program directors and coordinators, or more formal agreements involving the approval of college and university administrators could be negotiated.

Some of the problems associated with exchanges of faculty between cooperative institutions could be solved quite easily by the innovative scheduling of specialized courses. Courses typically involve around 35 to 45 h of instruction, depending upon whether the institution operates a quarter, trimester, or semester academic calendar. Laboratory oriented courses involve a larger number of hours. Whatever the required number of hours, however, there is no a priori reason that instruction must be spread out over 12 to 15 weeks. For purposes of cooperative specialized courses involving exchanges of faculty (or of students), instructional hours could be concentrated into shorter periods such as a calendar week or 3 successive weekends.

Another strategy for facilitating cooperation between programs and institutions is team teaching by faculty from both. For example, the "guest" faculty member could provide lecture or laboratory instruction in a concentrated time period while the "host" faculty member followed through with the students over a longer period of time. Many other types of arrangements are also conceivable.

Cooperation of the kind briefly described in this paper has many advantages to students and to faculty of cooperating institutions. Students would be exposed to greater coverage of specialized areas by full-time faculty experts, faculty would have greater opportunities to share their expertise with interested students, and more effective use would be made of comparatively scarce laboratory and specialized equipment resources.

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