

PRESIDENT'S EDITORIAL

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The Forensic Sciences: International Perspectives, Global Vision

Our theme this year—Global Research: The Forensic Science Edge—emphasizes the important role that international research plays in the goals of our organization and the direction of our disciplines. The theme acknowledges that a substantial amount of research in the forensic sciences is international in scope, increasingly involving multidisciplinary, international teams focusing on specific issues of global concern. The resulting project strategies and new forensic methodologies are of worldwide interest and deserve thoughtful consideration.

The selection of this theme reflects my personal experience in the world of forensic science. My first research project, following completion of a Ph.D. in 1973, took me to the rural southern coast of Ecuador on an archeological excavation focusing on pre-European contact human burials within large ceramic containers. This complex excavation in an isolated area challenged me to work effectively within a different cultural context while communicating in Spanish. My success with that project led to many others in Ecuador and to an ongoing collaboration with international scientists working in that region. Although the cultural and linguistic differences presented challenges, the rewards of international collaboration were invaluable.

In 1978, I was invited to participate in a small international conference in Sárospatak, Hungary, focusing on the then-emerging field of paleodemography. Organized by the late Hungarian demographer János Nemeskéri, the conference included key researchers from many countries. This conference opened my eyes to the value of international perspective on research topics. All attendees shared concern with the central issues, but each brought a special approach shaped by their local academic environment and research direction. The participants learned a great deal from each other and developed collegial relationships that carried over into innovative research and future collaboration.

Since the Sárospatak conference, I have continuously been involved in workshops, training courses, professional conferences, and collaborative research projects in numerous countries, primarily in Latin America and Europe. In many of the associated gatherings, I have been the only representative from North America. These experiences have been uniformly positive and have cemented my impression that the forensic sciences are truly international in scope, and they thrive on global collaboration and interaction.

Our theme this year celebrates the multifaceted nature of international work in the forensic sciences and builds on momentum developed in previous years. As recently as 2008, President Bruce Goldberger chose the theme “The Forensic Sciences—An International Treasure.” Previously, in 2007, President James Young



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focused Academy attention on “Forensic Science in a Global Community: Issues and Advances.” In 2001, President John McDowell’s theme, “War Crimes and Other Acts Against Humanity,” was clearly international in scope. These initiatives and others before them recognize the international context of our work in the forensic sciences, showing how the issues that we face are of shared global concern.

In fact, international perspective can be traced to the very origins of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS). Our roots extend back to the First American Medicolegal Congress held in St. Louis, Missouri in 1948. According to Kenneth Field (1, p. 18), the concept leading to this foundational meeting developed from discussions between our first President, Rutherford B. Hayes Gradwohl, MD of St. Louis, and his friend and colleague Israel Castellanos, MD of Cuba. In particular, Field (p. 18) cites a meeting between Gradwohl and Castellanos in the latter’s office in Havana in 1947. Planning for the future meeting centered on it being multidisciplinary (all of the forensic sciences) and representative of countries of the Western Hemisphere. Field relates that the original title considered for the conference was the “First Pan American Medicolegal Congress.” Although the word “Pan” was eliminated, documents examined by Field suggest that the intention remained to include an entire Western Hemisphere perspective. Dr. Castellanos was an official Co-Chairman of the original meeting;

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TABLE 1—Number and percentage of abstracts originating from international colleagues.

Meeting Year	Abstract Count	International	Percent International (%)
2002	521	80	15.4
2003	585	108	18.5
2004	677	120	17.7
2005	693	151	21.8
2006	677	112	16.5
2007	764	133	17.4
2008	783	133	17.0
2009	696	141	20.3
2010	846	158	18.7
2011	798	202	25.3

however, neither he nor other key representatives of Latin American countries were able to attend. The reasons cited were related to political unrest and national monetary difficulties in Latin America at the time.

Although Dr. Castellanos and colleagues from Latin America were not able to attend the original meeting in 1948, representatives from many countries have attended AAFS meetings in subsequent years. At our recent 2011 annual meeting in Chicago, a record 512 international colleagues from countries other than the United States, Canada, and Mexico were in attendance. This figure represents approximately 13% of all registrants at the Chicago meeting, a 37% increase from the 375 international registrants at the 2009 Denver meeting who represented 11% of all registrants.

Records indicate that international colleagues are not only attending our annual meetings in growing numbers but presenting papers as well. The earliest record in AAFS files for a meeting presentation by a colleague from a country other than the United States, Canada, or Mexico was in the General Section at the 1952 meeting in Atlanta, Georgia. H.S. Mehta from Bombay, India, presented "The Computation of Age in Medico-Legal Practice in India."

At our 2011 meeting in Chicago, 202 accepted abstracts originated from international colleagues from countries other than the United States, Canada, and Mexico, representing approximately 3% of the total number of accepted abstracts at that meeting. As shown in Table 1, the 2011 numbers represent a significant increase over the past 10 years. The 202 abstracts accepted from international colleagues in 2011 represent an increase of 122 (153%) over those presented in 2002. Clearly, colleagues from other countries are attending our meetings in increasing numbers while actively sharing their important research and forensic experiences as well.

Perhaps, the strongest indicator of the international nature of our organization rests with the global composition of our membership. In 2010 (numbers are not yet available for 2011), 267 AAFS members were from countries other than the United States, Canada, and Mexico. This number represents about 4.4% of the total membership of 6065. Although these international members were present in all sections, the largest numbers (98) were in the Pathology/Biology section, followed by Criminalistics (55). In 2010, 60 countries other than the United States, Canada, and Mexico were represented in membership with the United Kingdom, followed by Italy, recording the greatest numbers.

Table 2 presents the numbers and percentages of membership with country origin other than the United States, Canada, and Mexico for each year between 1966 and 2010. This table reveals that, although the numbers have increased over the last 44 years (32 in 1966 vs. 267 in 2010), the percentages of total membership have fluctuated but not changed dramatically during this period. In fact, the highest percentage (5.7%) was recorded back in 1971. These

TABLE 2—Number and percentage of international members by year, 1966–2010.

Year	Total Members	Total International	Percent International (%)
1966	711	32	4.5
1967	Not Recorded	0	0.0
1968	804	44	5.5
1969	871	47	5.4
1970	907	48	5.3
1971	1060	60	5.7
1972	1152	65	5.6
1973	1262	70	5.5
1974	1342	71	5.3
1975	1535	8	0.5
1976	1708	82	4.8
1977	1825	77	4.2
1978	1842	82	4.5
1979	1918	79	4.1
1980	2048	83	4.1
1981	Not Recorded	0	0.0
1982	2323	89	3.8
1983	2362	51	2.2
1984	2463	45	1.8
1985	2616	52	2.0
1986	2677	45	1.7
1987	2843	55	1.9
1988	Not Recorded	0	0.0
1989	3270	76	2.3
1990	3273	69	2.1
1991	3426	72	2.1
1992	3596	107	3.0
1993	3688	122	3.3
1994	3825	126	3.3
1995	4131	150	3.6
1996	4450	156	3.5
1997	4658	176	3.8
1998	4918	210	4.3
1999	5012	213	4.2
2000	5029	231	4.6
2001	5180	236	4.6
2002	5325	236	4.4
2003	5520	235	4.3
2004	5709	226	4.0
2005	5152	219	4.3
2006	5349	224	4.2
2007	5632	244	4.3
2008	5819	256	4.4
2009	6020	273	4.5
2010	6065	267	4.4

data reveal that our organization has enjoyed strong international perspective for decades.

With such substantial international representation in our membership, meeting attendance, and accepted meeting abstracts, it should come as no surprise that international colleagues strive to be represented in the pages of our journal, the *Journal of Forensic Sciences*. In 2010, 60% of the 682 manuscripts received were from countries other than the United States and Canada. In 2009, this percentage was slightly lower, 58% of 699 manuscripts received. In 2004, 56% of 554 manuscripts were submitted by authors outside the United States.

Not only are colleagues from many countries submitting manuscripts for publication in the *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, but forensic scientists from the United States, Canada, and Mexico are also publishing their results in international journals other than the *Journal of Forensic Sciences*. Table 3 presents data on manuscripts published in the journal, *Forensic Science International* with corresponding authors from Canada, Mexico, and the United States. The table reveals that the numbers and percentages of these authors

TABLE 3—Percentage of manuscripts submitted to *Forensic Science International* by corresponding authors from Canada, Mexico, and the United States.

Year	Canada	Mexico	United States	Total
2006	1.7	0	6.3	8
2007	1.1	0	7.2	8.3
2008	2.7	0	6.8	9.5
2009	3.7	0	10.2	13.9
2010	2.7	0.3	13.4	16.4

have increased steadily in the last 5 years. In 2010, 16.4% of all corresponding authors publishing in the journal originated from Canada, Mexico, or the United States.

These data reflect the international nature and quality of the *Journal of Forensic Sciences* and *Forensic Science International*, as well as the global nature of research in the forensic sciences. Journals dedicated to publishing high-quality research results in the forensic sciences must be international in scope.

Considerable discussion in the last few years has focused on defining the path forward for the forensic sciences. Deliberations continue on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC and elsewhere that hopefully will produce positive results to strengthen our field.

While these efforts focus on accreditation, certification, objectivity, and many other principal concerns, focused research represents a central component. Discussion continues to illuminate key issues in all of our forensic sciences that would benefit from enhanced research. Such research has always stimulated advancement in the forensic sciences and remains embedded in our historical record. It is hoped that current discussions will lead to enhanced funding for research to address many of these issues. As discussed in this editorial, that research will likely be global in scope and will indeed represent “the forensic science edge.”

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Reference

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