



Criminalistics Section – 2007

B121 Research Findings on the Ethical Standards in Forensic Science

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the results of a study concerning the ethical considerations in forensic science conducted at the 2006 American Academy of Forensic Sciences annual meeting. Attendees will learn more about the training requirements, standards, and needs of the forensic science community regarding the subject of ethics. This topic involves the entire forensic science community and is not discipline specific.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by making the forensic community aware of the need for standardized training in ethics for forensic professionals.

The goal of this presentation is to present the forensic community with the ethical challenges faced by those within the profession.

This presentation will communicate the research conducted on ethical considerations that forensic scientists face. Through investigation into the ethics of science, health, business, and research West Virginia University's Forensic Science Initiative has identified which ethical issues are most prevalent in the forensic science community. Important skills gained by studying ethics include improved ethical awareness, knowledge of relevant standards (AAFS, IAI, ASCLD, etc.), skill in ethical decision making, and appropriate ethical actions. Such skills are crucial to maintaining the integrity of the forensic sciences.

The data were collected at the 2006 American Academy of Forensic Sciences meeting in Seattle, WA. A survey was employed to tap into the thoughts and opinions of the forensic science community. The survey presented some common occurrences and asked participants to provide their perspective. The overall response to the survey was excellent, having over 600 surveys completed. The results had a fairly even distribution among disciplines, age groups, and experience levels. The research will be correlated based on the trends shown among age groups. Do the answers provided by young professionals vary greatly from their older mentors? The results provide the answers to such correlative questions as well as give attendees an intriguing look at how colleagues view various situations. In addition, the results identified the profession's position on ethical merit and determined what steps should be taken for future improvement.

The major areas of concern within forensic science include falsification, fabrication, and misuse of resources. Another common concern among many fields, including forensic science, is the misrepresentation of credentials. The issue of misrepresented credentials is prevalent in the presentation of expert testimony. It is shown that people often over look seemingly smaller ethical issues, such as padding resumes and travel expenses. These issues are closely observed to determine the potential impact on the forensic science community.

This research is an excerpt from an online course offered at West Virginia University. Through a grant provided by the National Institute of Justice, the course applies to all forensic professionals. The course covers topics such as the history of ethics, science and research, forensic ethics, unethical behavior, and the future of ethics in criminal investigations. The course is specialized and focuses on forensic science in response to the stated need for formal ethics training.

The data show that many individuals may not realize when a situation contains ethical issues or could be misinterpreted as unethical. This presentation will assist in making some of the grey areas slightly more black or white. The culture of forensic science needs to give more attention to this subject by placing stricter requirements on the training of professionals in ethics and by understanding the consequences for wrongdoing.

Ethics, Standards, Training