



### A184 Opinions of Forensic Professionals on Key Issues Facing Friction Ridge Analysis

Samantha H. Neal, BS\*, West Virginia University Forensic Science Initiative, 208 Oglebay Hall, PO Box 6217, Morgantown, WV 26506-6217

After attending this presentation, attendees will have an increased understanding of the views, perspectives, and opinions of forensic practitioners on key issues facing friction ridge analysis.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by highlighting current opinions of forensic professionals in light of recent government publications. This data will create a deeper appreciation for the gap between perception and the reality of friction ridge analysis in forensic laboratories.

Since the National Academy of Sciences Report, *Strengthening Forensic Science in the United States: A Path Forward*, was released in February 2009, many forensic disciplines have been under increased scrutiny, including friction ridge analysis. As part of an award-winning series of on-line continuing professional development courses, 150 forensic practitioners were surveyed between 2007 and 2009 with the following eight questions:

- 1) Do you believe that fingerprint identification is a science?
- 2) Do you feel that fingerprint identification should be admitted into courtrooms as expert testimony?
- 3) What type of research, if any, should be done to correct the misidentifications that occur?
- 4) Should there be a minimum number of points for identification? Why?
- 5) Do you feel that other misidentifications have occurred that have never been caught?
- 6) Do you believe that innocent people are in jail or on death row because of fingerprint errors?
- 7) What additional quality assurance steps should be taken for fingerprint examiners?
- 8) Do the *Daubert* factors apply to fingerprint identifications? The practitioners' represented local, state,

and federal agencies in the United States and ranged from 0 to 20 years or more experience.

The responses to the questions varied more than might be expected for certain questions but less than expected for others. For example, in response to the question as to whether a minimum number of points for identification should be used, two participants responded:

"No. The ACE-V process is based on an overall examination of the latent print presented, and that includes the level 1 examination of pattern

type, ridge flow and creases along with the level 2 points, and level three ridge edges and pores."

"My personal preference is for a number of points of comparisons which would likely give fingerprint evidence more legal standing and public acceptance."

Consensus in the field of forensic science can be difficult given the variance in jurisdictional requirements. While, the majority of practitioners surveyed believed that fingerprint identification is a science, this survey demonstrates that a clear, coherent message as to what constitutes that science is yet to be achieved.

#### Friction Ridge, Fingerprint Identification, NAS Report