B183 Forensic Science Education: Future-Proof or Flawed Paradigm?

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Learning Overview: The goal of this presentation is to discuss and highlight the changes in forensic science and the need for education providers to reflect that change in their programs.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing attendees with: (1) a review of forensic science programs currently offered internationally, (2) an overview of the necessary skills required for future forensic scientists, and (3) a discussion on the challenges facing forensic science as an academic discipline.

A review of forensic science degree programs around the world and industry feedback have shown that in education, forensic science traditionally comes second after core scientific disciplines (such as chemistry or biology); it is not considered as a core discipline on its own. Education providers have designed tertiary courses to produce discipline specific graduates (chemists, biologists, etc.) who are able to give an application of this discipline to forensic science. This has led to the current silos and prevents the development of a unified culture of 'Forensic Science.'

With the advent of the 'smart society' leading to the extraordinary developments of digital forensic science and the changes in operational laboratory practices, there is growing indication that this model presents serious issues and no longer reflects the current state of forensic science. There is a real risk to generate graduates who will not be equipped to face tomorrow's challenges. Part of the problem is that these programs tend to focus on tools rather than problems and rarely consider the complex interpretation, problem solving, critical thinking, and evaluative skills required to be an effective forensic scientist. While the development of laboratory-based skills is important, it is often at the expense of the bigger forensic picture–the value of the trace in court proceedings, in investigative and intelligence processes. This is becoming more of an issue as technological advances are rapidly changing and impact on forensic science workflows. If we focus on the tools, education cannot keep up in this dynamic dimension; the focus needs to be on building better Forensic Scientists.

The presentation will outline the current state and future challenges forensic science education providers face and the need for continued improvement and renewal to ensure the needs of industry, graduates and the discipline of forensic science are met.

Higher Education, Curriculum, Graduate Outcomes