Welcome to the Fall 2021 issue of the Future of Forensic Science Initiative newsletter! Our Future of Forensic Science Initiative has been slowly building for several years, and 2021 will be the big year for the initiative’s development yet! Here is a bit of history of how things have unfolded so far.

In 2011 – just two years after the watershed 2009 National Academy of Sciences report on the state of forensic science, ASU’s School of Mathematical and Natural Sciences in New College added a Forensics concentration to the Bachelor’s degree in Life Sciences. In 2013, the School then launched a full Bachelor of Science program in Forensic Science. These efforts were led in part by Todd Sandrin, who now serves as Dean of New College.

In the 2017-2018 academic year, an interdisciplinary team of seven scholars went through an ASU-facilitated intensive Team Leadership Academy process to develop the underpinnings of FFSI. These efforts included engaging internal and external stakeholders in various input and feedback processes. With funding from the ASU Provost and New College’s School of Social and Behavioral Sciences and School of Mathematical and Natural Sciences, we hosted a ‘Visioning’ event focused on the intellectual space surrounding forensic science that ASU could occupy. The event included 20 faculty from across various ASU schools, as well as several national leaders in the field from other universities (Iowa State, UC Irvine, West Virginia University, and Baylor College of Medicine).

These efforts led to the approval for several new faculty lines, and we were able to hire 5 new Forensic Science tenure-track faculty in New College in 2018-2019. In 2019, we participated in a PLuS Alliance symposium at ASU – together with colleagues at UNSW in Sydney Australia and Kings College London. In 2020, we launched a Professional Science Master’s degree program in Forensic Science, began publishing a regular newsletter, held a held a second “Visioning” event with many faculty across ASU schools as well as external faculty from UNSW and Iowa State University, and held a day-long working group at ASU Skysong with ASU and UNSW faculty in forensic science. Near the end of 2020, New College appointed a Director of the FFSI to help coordinate and grow the activities of the initiative. Look for updates coming soon for how our new Director will help build on the history of this initiative in 2021!

- Dr. Tess Neal and edited by Dr. Bethany Growns
( Editor Spring 2020 - 2021)
RESEARCH

Dr. Shirly Montero is presenting a poster at the American Academy of Forensic Sciences Scientific Meeting 2021 entitled Revisiting the Recovery of Defense Sprays From Fabrics.

Dr. Gwyneth Gordon presented at the American Geophysical Union in December 2020 with a talk entitled The fidelity of elemental concentrations and mass-dependent and radiogenic isotopic compositions (Sr/Sr, Pb isotope) in human hair in seawater and fresh water and implications for forensics, anthropology, and environmental exposure monitoring.

PUBLICATIONS

Dr. Lauren Weidner has a new publication in the open-access journal Forensic Science International: Synergy entitled Technical Note: A technique to mount Sarcophagidae and Calliphoridae (Diptera) larvae for forensic identification using geometric morphometrics, and a book chapter in Geriatric Forensic Medicine and Pathology discussing Forensic Entomology.

Dr. Valena Beety and colleagues have released a new book entitled Sixth Edition of Scientific Evidence Treatise.

Dr. Michael Saks and colleagues have released a new book entitled Closing Death’s Door: Legal Innovations to End the Epidemic of Healthcare Harm.


TECHNOLOGY

Dr. Shirly Montero's new laser ablation unit has been installed and is in operation in the METAL core facility on the Tempe campus! For the first time, this will allow ASU researchers to use laser ablation ICP-MS and MC-ICP-MS to measure elemental composition and isotopic composition in a wide variety of materials including glass and paint with minimum sample destruction. The initial project to conduct an interlaboratory study of new glass standards for forensic purposes is ongoing.

TECHNOLOGY

A piece of glass in the laser ablation chamber for analysis

Aaron Flores (left), Dr. Montero and Tyler Goepfert (right) hard at work

- Courtesy of the Metals, Environment and Terrestrial Analytical Lab

UPCOMING EVENTS

FUTURE OF FORENSIC WORKING GROUP 2021

Wednesday, 24th February from 9AM - 4PM

We will be holding the second annual Future of Forensic Science Working Group virtually in February 2021.

After the success of our first working group in 2020, we look forward to virtually hosting local and international scholars to discuss the latest burning issues in forensic and behavioral science. We will be discussing new and relevant ideas at the intersection of forensic science, law, and behavioral science, with an aim to create interdisciplinary projects and papers. Please RSVP below!

FFSI in the COVID-19 Pandemic

Dr. Tess Neal and her lab have been working remotely but were able to meet in-person twice in Fall 2020 (masked and socially distanced) - once for a writing session and once for a Christmas shindig on Fletcher lawn.

Thankfully core essential facility at the Metals, Environmental and Terrestrial Analytical Laboratory was never officially closed, but they were shuttered for almost four months to anything other than very high priority analyses. They are now in the closing phases of a major construction renovation to accommodate new instrumentation which has also been disruptive to operations. However, the good news is that they will be opening bigger and better this year!