Criminal Investigations and Network Analysis
A DHS CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

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THOUGHTS FROM THE DIRECTOR



Brook Hefright

To everyone who had an opportunity to take a break over the summer, welcome back! CINA stayed busy supporting research, workforce development, and outreach in support of DHS's mission to Counter Transnational Organized Crime.

The highlight of CINA's summer was hosting three teams under DHS's Summer Research Team Program for Minority Serving Institutions. We hosted two virtual projects:

- "Gas optimization in Move Smart contracts on the Sui Blockchain," by Dr. Nahid Majd and students Fernando Landeros and Calvary Fisher from California State University San Marcos, mentored by George Mason faculty member Dr. Foteini Baldimtsi
- "Development of accurate blood simulant for forensic applications: Biologically Equivalent Simulant for Forensic Tracedrop (BEST)," by Dr. Jingbo Liu and student Maria M. Sandoval from Texas A&M University Kingsville, mentored by Dr. Emily D. Rancourt.

We also hosted one project on campus:

- "The effects of soil contamination, with petroleum products, on microbial presence and the rate of human decomposition," by Dr. Mieko M. Thompson and students Brittney Sylvester and Latavia Williams from Southern University at New Orleans, mentored by Dr. Georgia A. Williams.

Dr. Thompson's team took advantage of George Mason's Forensic Science Research and Training Laboratory (also known as the Body Farm) to observe the decomposition of two pig cadavers and collect DNA samples of microbes at each stage of the process. It was a treat to share Brittney and Latavia's excitement about developing their fieldwork skills and to learn about their plans to train as

forensic medical examiners. Their experience would not have been possible without the generous support of Dr. Mary Ellen O'Toole, Dr. Emily D. Rancourt, and all their colleagues in George Mason's Forensic Science Program.

Read more



2023 CINA Annual Report

CINA is pleased to release the 2023 Annual Report, a comprehensive document that details the Center of Excellence's accomplishments this past year.

Read the Report



Project Spotlight: Enhancing Victim Cooperation and Intelligence Gathering in Human Trafficking Cases

The project titled *Overcoming Reluctance and Increasing Intelligence Gathering from Victims of Trafficking* addresses the critical challenges of obtaining cooperation and actionable intelligence from human trafficking victims. Led by researchers Jodi Quas (University of California, Irvine) and Allison Redlich (George Mason University), the study spans four phases, focusing on victim disclosure, law enforcement challenges, and prosecution trends in trafficking cases. The project aims to improve the identification of victims, enhance cooperation, and strengthen prosecution outcomes by analyzing trial data, conducting law enforcement surveys, and studying federal prosecution trends.

Key findings highlight significant barriers, such as victims' reluctance to disclose information and their general uncooperativeness during investigations, which hinder prosecutorial success. The study also underscores the importance of specialized training for law enforcement and prosecutors to improve interviews and secure stronger intelligence.

A recent webinar presented these findings, drawing a substantial audience and sparking discussions on the need for a multidisciplinary approach. Participants emphasized the importance of collaboration across sectors to improve victim cooperation and achieve more effective prosecution results. For a comprehensive breakdown of our findings, watch the full briefing below:

For more information about the project, please contact cina@gmu.edu.





CINA Distinguished Speaker Series with Donna Turner - Wednesday, October 9: "The Global Squeezing of the Fraud Balloon"



Join us on Wednesday, October 9 for the upcoming virtual CINA Distinguished Speaker Series event featuring Donna Turner, former Bank of America C-Suite Executive as she discusses "The Global Squeezing of the Fraud Balloon."

This event will take place virtually via MS Teams. The information to attend virtually will be sent to participants upon registration. Faculty, students, industry, and government attendees are welcome.

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