



NEWSLETTER 09-2020

INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR FORENSIC GENETICS

<http://www.isfg.org>

WELCOME

In this edition of our ISFG newsletter, we provide information about recent developments regarding our journal *FSI Genetics*, the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on various activities in our field, about new publications, and an important update on the ISFG 2021 Congress.

ISFG CONGRESS 2021 DELAYED TO 2022



In discussions with Christian Westring (ISFG 2021 Congress President) and the local organizing committee, **we have decided to delay the 29th International Congress for one year** due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. International travel will likely be uncertain well into next year and large indoor gatherings are currently prohibited in the United States. This difficult decision has been made as we have considered the health and wellbeing of our membership as well as the viability of holding a large scientific gathering during these uncertain times. While we hope that conditions improve before August 2021, we must go forward with the meeting planning. We do not feel that replacing the ISFG 2021 meeting with a virtual conference would be a viable option given that ISFG membership spans time zones worldwide.

However, we are considering the possibility of **virtually conducting a series of educational workshops next summer**. These could be pre-recorded and thus be conveniently accessible to our membership. Presenters for 16 pre-Congress workshops have been recruited for ISFG 2021 prior to our recent decision to move the meeting to 2022, and we will discuss with these presenters

the possibility of contributing to some 2021 educational workshops.

The 29th International Congress will still take place in Washington, D.C., in the **Marriott Marquis Hotel** located only a few blocks from the city center. The local organizing committee is working with the hotel to finalize new dates. **We expect the ISFG 2022 meeting to occur August 29 to September 2, 2022.** As always, the congress will cover the latest research and discuss legal and ethical concerns in forensic genetics. Abstract submission and early registration will open December 2021, please monitor the website <http://www.isfg2021.org> for information.

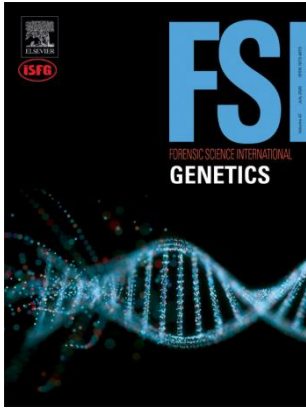
An impressive list of invited speakers has been recruited as follows:

- Genomics/Ancestry:
Chris Phillips (Scientific Prize Winner)
- Biostatistics:
Thore Egeland (Scientific Prize Winner)
- Population Genetics:
Noah Rosenberg (Stanford)
- Legal Issues:
David Kaye (Penn State law professor)
- Interpretation:
Tacha Hicks (University of Lausanne)
- Genetic Genealogy
Debbie Kennett (University College London)

In addition, a **discussion panel** to review the "lessons learned" from the high profile **O.J. Simpson case** in 1994-1995 has been organized with the following participants, who all played major roles during the criminal proceedings:

- **Robin Cotton** (forensic DNA expert),
Bruce Weir (statistics expert),
Rockne Harmon (prosecutor),
Barry Scheck (defense counsel)

NO IMPACT FACTOR FOR FSI GENETICS IN 2019



A letter from *Clarivate*, the publisher of the Journal Citation Report (JCR), which arrived at the end of June 2020 has resulted in frustration and anger among the editors of *Forensic Science International: Genetics* (FSIGEN) and our publishing company

Elsevier. The message from *Clarivate* was as follows:

Please note that Forensic Science International-Genetics will not be included in the upcoming release of the Web of Science Journal Citation Reports (JCR) from Clarivate due to atypically high levels of journal self-citation. This would have resulted in an increased Journal Impact Factor (JIF) that would not give an accurate representation of the journal's standing with respect to the surrounding scholarly literature.

Our analysis was performed using the 2019 citation data for this journal. We found:

- *45.0% of all 2019 outgoing citations from the journal to 2018 or 2017 scholarly literature were journal self-citations.*
- *These citations account for 44.5% of the JIF numerator.*

Each of these values exceed the normal ranges for journals in the Genetics & Heredity and the Medicine, Legal categories.

In 2020, we have updated our methodology and parameters for identifying journal self-citation. The improved methodology makes comparisons within each journal's category, rather than the entire JCR edition, to better account for discipline norms. (...) Clarivate does not assume or investigate motive on behalf of any party when making the decision to suppress a journal.

We realize this will be disappointing news for you. Suppression from JCR does not result in automatic removal from Web of Science but may result in an editorial re-evaluation. Assuming continued coverage in Web of Science, Forensic Science International-Genetics will be re-considered for inclusion in the 2021 JCR report, based on 2020 data.

The current editors of our journal, together with the ISFG Executive Board Members have immediately started a discussion to agree on a strategy to appeal this decision. Our president, John Butler, has already sent an email message in July to all ISFG members informing about the situation, and circulating the text of an Editorial that was published recently in FSIGEN: "[On the suppression of Forensic Science International: Genetics from the 2019 Journal Citations Report](#)", published in July 28, 2020.

Furthermore, the editors have sent a letter to *Clarivate* already on July 3rd, 2020, appealing this decision as follows:

The editors and our editorial board were shocked and dismayed by the notice of suppression of the impact factor for the journal Forensic Science International: Genetics (FSI:G) from this year's Journal Citation Report (JCR) for 2019. The letter received allowed no warning nor any time for us to react to ensure that our impact factor is maintained. This letter provides, we very much trust, information that will reverse suppression notification and restore the impact factor that FSI:G strove so hard to attain and is, we believe, rightly deserved.

In previous years, Clarivate had published information on journals exhibiting anomalous citation patterns.¹ Here, our journal was never mentioned. Given the already high self-citation rates in previous years (which have actually been coming down since 2016; see table), it would have been appropriate to include FSI:G in these warning messages, so that there would have been a chance to mitigate the risk of a suppression in time.

To aid with the reversal we provide the following helpful information. Forensic genetics is carried out by a small scientific community where research is needed to constantly adapt and integrate new processes into the criminal justice system. In the absence of a suitable avenue to publish, and hence disseminate to the forensic genetics field, there would be stagnation in the processes of DNA profiling methods key to forensic human identification. These innovations require funding by grant money for research projects executed by dedicated scientists from renowned academic institutions. Therefore, recognition of scientific

¹ <http://help.incites.clarivate.com/incitesLiveJCR/JCRGroup/8275-TRS.html>
<https://clarivate.com/webofsciencegroup/essays/jcr-editorial-expression-of-concern/>



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excellence is, among other criteria, also assessed based on the JCR Impact Factor.

Year	IF	Self cites	Total cites	% Self
2014	4.604	552	999	55.3%
2015	4.988	779	1272	61.2%
2016	3.911	616	1232	50.0%
2017	5.637	781	1629	47.9%
2018	4.884	654	1348	48.5%
2019	n/a	n/a	n/a	45.0%

The growth in this highly specialised area led to the launch of FSI:G in 2007 as a sister journal of Forensic Science International to respond to the rapidly growing interest in the field of forensic genetics. Prior to the establishment of FSI:G, articles covering this field were scattered throughout journals covering general forensic sciences and medicine. The idea for a specialized journal was brought up and supported by the International Society for Forensic Genetics (ISFG, the largest scientific society with more than 1400 members world-wide).

Since the inception of FSI:G, it has been the only journal exclusively specialising in forensic genetics. No other journal accepts papers only from the area of forensic genetics – specifically relating to the criminal justice system.

The success of FSI:G as a journal for describing crucial advances in forensic DNA typing has, not surprisingly, attracted so many of the most important papers in the field. The effect therefore was an increasing trend in citations and an increasing impact factor: this was 2.421 in 2009 leading to a high of 5.637 in 2017 and 4.884 at the last impact factor release for 2018. The increase in impact factor was not in any way artificially engineered, rather a direct consequence of the success of this journal. It is therefore highly concerning that the loss of an impact factor is a consequence of the dedication of members of the forensic DNA community aiming to publish in FSI:G.

There is therefore no evidence, and absolutely no contrived activities by the editors, to deliberately increase this impact factor. The steady rise shows clearly the esteem and prominence in which FSI:G is viewed by the forensic genetics community. It should be noted that there are specific subjects in our field that are hard to publish in more general journals, such as e.g. the highly relevant problem of addressing the various mechanisms of direct and indirect transfer DNA traces found at crime scenes.

Although the possibility of a reinstatement of the Impact Factor after one year was offered by Clarivate if the situation of the journal regarding self-citations changes, this is not an encouraging perspective for us, first for the immediate consequences in the field and second since a sustainable solution is not feasible. Just as we never acted to deliberately increase the impact factor, we also cannot limit or omit references that the authors deem relevant, to decrease self-citation.

In the last few years, we have opened our journal to publications from other related fields such as forensic molecular pathology to become more multidisciplinary. In addition, we have also promoted an independent forensic genetic section in the journal Forensic Science International, and have worked with our publisher Elsevier to launch another journal (FSI:Reports) also accepting papers on forensic genetics. However, these measures require time to become visible, and are only slowly starting to have some impact.

The suppression of an Impact Factor for the only journal that specialises in forensic genetics is a loss to the forensic science community as a whole and the advancement of forensic genetics in particular. This is a backward step that will have deleterious consequences on the forensic community. Additionally, there will be a negative impact on career progression and capability of attracting grant funding for the forensic sciences.

The editorial team appreciates that there is a need to prevent those that artificially alter the process by which an impact factor is determined, but we are adamant that this is not the case with our journal. We collectively request that Clarivate reconsider the suppression of the impact factor for FSI:G. We would also be ready to enter into a direct dialogue with you discussing possibilities to find a sustainable solution for this problem.

The Editors of Forensic Science International: Genetics

Angel Carracedo, Leonor Gusmão, Adrian Linacre, Walther Parson, Peter M. Schneider, Peter Vallone

Recently we have received an official reply from Clarivate rejecting our appeal, and we are in the process of writing a rebuttal. In addition, members of numerous ISFG Working Parties have started their own initiatives to send letters to Clarivate appealing the suppression of the IF.



Most notably, the **GHEP-ISFG** has organized a world-wide petition objecting to *Clarivate's* move. Between August 18 and August 26, nearly 500 forensic scientists from 49 countries have signed the petition that was published in Retraction Watch which is [available for download here](#).

Retraction Watch

Tracking retractions as a window into the scientific process

Major indexing service rejects appeals by two suppressed journals

Journals hoping that Clarivate Analytics — the company behind the Impact Factor — would reverse their decision to suppress their titles from the closely watched metric are batting .500.

In July, as we reported, Clarivate [suppressed 33 journals](#) from its Journal Citation Reports (JCR), which means they will not have a 2019 Impact Factor, because of what Clarivate said was excessive self-citation. As affected journals have noted, suppression from the list can have a major impact on journals and researchers, many of whom are judged based on where they publish, using Impact Factor as a key metric.

Two journals — *Zootaxa* and the *International Journal of Systematic and Evolutionary Microbiology* — [successfully appealed the decision](#), and have been reinstated in the 2019 JCR. But appeals by two others — *Body Image* and *Forensic Science International: Genetics* (FSIGEN) — have been denied, Retraction Watch has learned.



All these activities including the letters sent by the ISFG Working Parties are also documented on a [special section of the ISFG Homepage](#). We will of course continue to inform our members about any new developments.

DNA-TRAC - KEEPING TRACK OF DNA TRANSFER

We have received a request from our colleagues **Annica Gosch** and **Cornelius Courts** from the Institute of Forensic Medicine in Kiel, Germany, asking for support of the DNA-TrAC database:

In 2018 we launched "DNA-TrAC", a searchable open access database that aims to represent all relevant publications (original articles and reviews) on "DNA transfer" and that is endorsed by the ISFG (<https://www.isfg.org/Links>). It had been devised to provide an extensive overview of the current state of research and knowledge on DNA transfer, intended to facilitate the identification of relevant studies adding knowledge to a specific question and thus help forensic experts (e.g. when in court) to base their opinion on a broader, more complete and more reproducible selection of studies but also to support the planning and reviewing of research on DNA transfer. Since then, DNA-TrAC can be accessed here: <https://bit.ly/2R4bFqL>

An extensive description of the problem of "DNA transfer" and the DNA-TrAC project was published last year: Gosch, A., & Courts, C. (2019). On DNA transfer: the lack and difficulty of systematic research and how to do it better. Forensic Science International: Genetics, 40, 24-36.

In December 2019 we uploaded the last release of DNA-TrAC that was fully and actively curated by us. From 2020 on, we are no longer actively breaking down and entering new studies into DNA-TrAC ourselves but instead would like to ask the forensic genetic community for participation. So, if you want to help, please read the "You want to contribute? Yes, please!"-File in the folder linked to above. To break down and prepare your own or a colleague's DNA transfer study for DNA-TrAC, please use a provided "Add-an-entry"-file (in Excel or Access format, also in the folder), fill it in and send it by e-mail to

forensische.genetik@gmail.com

We will then update DNA-TrAC with the new information. To help you identify DNA transfer studies not yet included in DNA-TrAC, we added a list of studies to be entered („DNA-TrAC_Not-yet-included“) to the folder linked to above. Please give us a short notice if you are in the process of preparing a particular study, we will then immediately delete it from the list to avoid redundancy.

Also, please feel free to forward this petition to any colleague who may be interested in DNA-TrAC but does not receive this newsletter, every contribution is welcome.

Annica Gosch & Cornelius Courts, Kiel

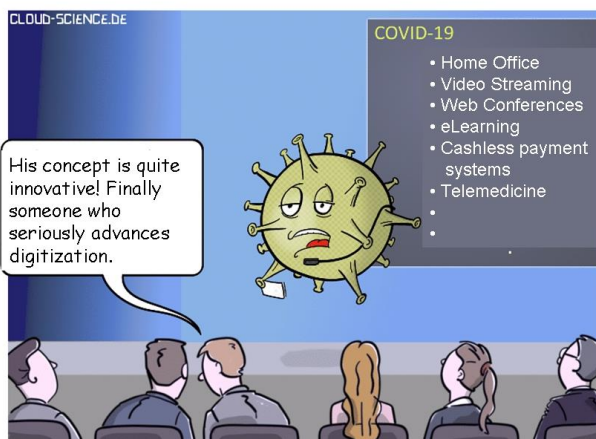
ISFG DNA COMMISSION PAPERS

Two papers have been published this year by ISFG DNA Commissions:

Gill P, Hicks T, Butler JM, Connolly E, Gusmão L, Kokshoorn B, Morling N, van Oorschot RAH, Parson W, Prinz M, Schneider PM, Sijen T, Taylor D. *DNA commission of the International Society for Forensic Genetics: Assessing the value of forensic biological evidence - Guidelines highlighting the importance of propositions. Part II: Evaluation of biological traces considering activity level propositions.* [Forensic Sci Int Genet. 2020, 44: 102186. 10.1016/j.fsigen.2019.102186.](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fsigen.2019.102186)

Roewer L, Andersen MM, Ballantyne J, Butler JM, Caliebe A, Corach D, D'Amato ME, Gusmão L, Hou Y, de Knijff P, Parson W, Prinz M, Schneider PM, Taylor D, Vennemann M, Willuweit S. *DNA commission of the International Society of Forensic Genetics (ISFG): Recommendations on the interpretation of Y-STR results in forensic analysis.* [Forensic Sci Int Genet. 2020, 48: 102308. 10.1016/j.fsigen.2020.102308.](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fsigen.2020.102308)

MEETING POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS



We all are missing the personal exchanges and interactions at scientific workshops, meetings, and conferences that have abruptly ceased to take place since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, we have learned that web meetings and conferences can be used as time and money saving alternatives, and we will have to live with this situation for the time being.

We have listed below names and dates of meetings that have been canceled or postponed:



Haploid Markers 2020 is currently postponed to June 09-12, 2021; see <http://www.hm2020.hu/>



The 11th **International Conference on Forensic Inference and Statistics (ICFIS 2020)**, originally planned for June 15-18, 2020, at the Faculty of Law, Lund University, Sweden, has been postponed to 2021. A new date has not yet been announced, see <http://www.law.lu.se/#!ICFIS2020registration>.



The 22nd **Triennial Meeting of the International Association of Forensic Science (IAFS)** in conjunction with the 25th **Symposium of the Australian and New Zealand Forensic Science Society (ANZFSS)** originally due to be held in September 2020 has been postponed to November 20-24, 2023, see <https://iafs2020.com.au/>.

PAYMENT OF ISFG MEMBERSHIP FEES



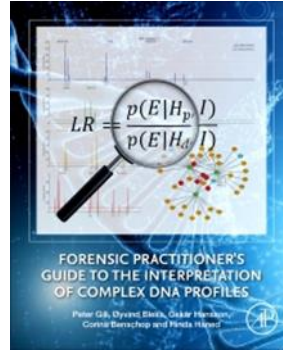
This is a reminder to all members to check their payment status. Currently, **over 500 members have not yet paid** their 2020 membership fees resulting in a total of **over 30.000 € of missing fees**. If this money is not available, it will be difficult to fund some of our society's activities in the future, such as short term fellowships, workshops or travel grants to our conferences.

Please note that members who haven't paid their membership fees in 2020 will no longer receive a printed version of our journal *Forensic Science International: Genetics* next year.

You can easily pay by entering your profile on our website: Sign in with your email address and password on www.isfg.org, and click on your name in the upper right corner of the page. This brings you to your personal profile, where you can see your payment status and make a secure payment by credit card immediately. Alternatively, you can make a payment by bank transfer, details are also given on your personal profile page. Please note that payment by **cheque is no longer possible** due to changed regulations of our bank. Also, automatic **payment via debit authorization is no longer possible**.



FORENSIC PRACTITIONER'S GUIDE TO THE INTERPRETATION OF COMPLEX DNA PROFILES



A new textbook written by Peter Gill and his colleagues Øyvind Bleka, Oskar Hansson, Corina Benschop and Hinda Haned has been published by Academic Press in June 2020. The book begins with an introduction to basic forensic genetics. The

laws of statistics are described, along with the likelihood ratio based on Hardy-Weinberg equilibrium and alternative models considering sub-structuring and relatedness. The historical development of low template mixture analysis, theory and practice, is also described, so the reader has a full understanding of rationale and progression. Evaluation of evidence and statement writing is described in detail, along with common pitfalls and their avoidance.

Peter Gill has generously offered that all royalties from the book sales will be passed on the ISFG to fund educational events and fellowships for the members of our society - thank you, Peter! You find all further details about the book and how to purchase it on the [Publisher's website](#).

In addition, the authors have created an accompanying website that contains examples described in the book, profile data, Excel worksheets, links for downloading relevant R scripts, and corrections/errata:

<https://sites.google.com/view/dnabook/home>



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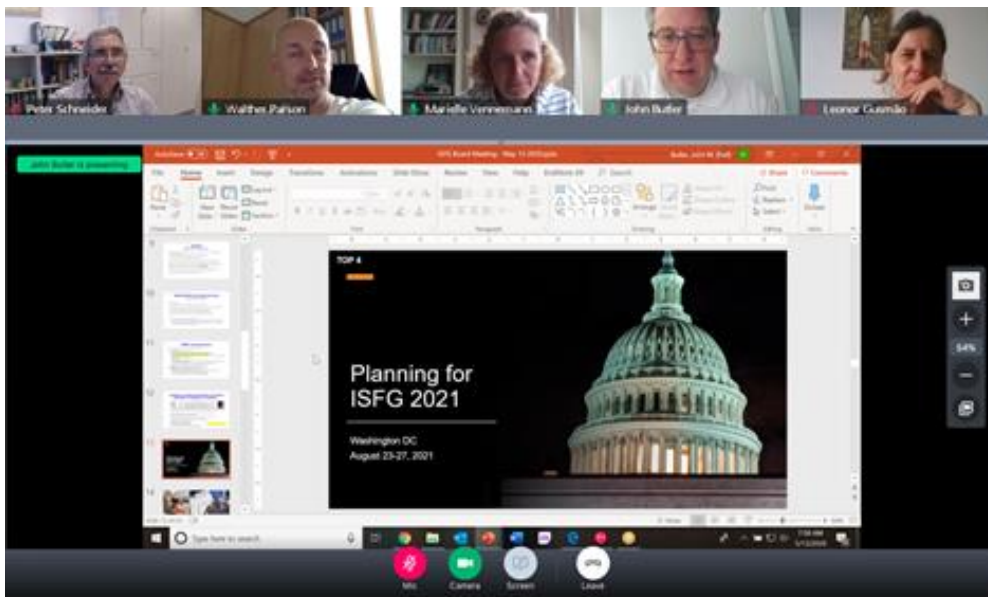
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ISFG BOARD MEETINGS

Despite the COVID-19 situation, the ISFG Executive Board meets regularly online to discuss the issues of our society and, most importantly, to plan activities for a better time after the pandemic.

In particular, we are in permanent contact with the organizers of the next ISFG Congress, and will ensure that all necessary decisions will be made and communicated swiftly.



The ISFG Executive Board: *J.M. Butler, W. Parson, M. Vennemann, L. Gusmão, P.M. Schneider (September 2020)*