

Colloquia presentations and why you should go to them

Let me introduce myself: I am Steffan Jonkers, have a background in chemistry and graduated from the MSc Forensic Science in July 2016 with a chemometrics research project on fire debris data. During the master I was a member of the Programme Committee. I will try to explain to you why I found it important to attend the presentations that fellow students gave when finishing their literature theses and their research projects, the so-called colloquia presentations. Attendance at a number of these is required, and for good reasons.

Why it is important to go to them

The MSc Forensic Science is an interdisciplinary programme and students have a wide variety of academic backgrounds. Consequently, the research that they carry out covers a large part of the forensic spectrum. Attending a number of colloquia presentations allows for a good and up to date overview of innovative forensic research, which can provide the students with inspiration for their own literature theses and research projects. Furthermore, attending the presentations provides students with opportunities to develop a critical mind, to learn which kind of statements are safe to make, what experimental setups are considered sound and robust, and it aids the students in finding out what they like or dislike in terms of lay-out and presenting style.

Why it is important to give them

A fundamental element in scientific research is reproducibility – that is, studies should have the ability to be duplicated. Proper communication of underlying theory, methods, techniques and results is key in that regard. For that reason, exit qualifications of the MSc Forensic Science, found in the [Teaching and Exam Regulations, part B](#), include the following:

“Graduates will be able to communicate findings and conclusions with solid argumentation both orally and with written reports to expert and non-expert audiences in the legal context”.

Giving colloquia presentations helps moving towards this goal, since such a presentation is one of the few possibilities for our students to get feedback from people other than their supervisors on the research they have carried out on their own, and as such one of the few moments in which the understanding of a non-expert audience can be tested. In the discussion, flaws in the research or things that were not clear to audience will surface. Questions from such a non-expert audience can lead to better understanding of how to explain the material because answers will have to be formulated in relatively simple terms. Furthermore, they can lead to ideas for future research. Finally, whether the student will end up in research or in industry, he is likely to have to present at congresses or at other occasions, which is always good to practise.

Tips

Some tips to (future) students of the MSc Forensic Science:

- You will have a lot of opportunities to go to colloquia presentations so you do not have to go to each and every one of them - but do make sure you go to enough of them, since you will not be able to graduate unless having attended a sufficient number of them
- Make a scan or a copy of your colloquia signature card every once in a while – it might get lost, and this way you will always have a backup with your signatures
- The dates of colloquia presentations are made available as soon as they are set. Try to pick out one or a few colloquia presentations to go to shortly in advance of your own colloquia presentation so that you can get a feeling what aspects of your own presentation need some more attention

- Ask questions if you do not understand something as an attendant – the speaker should be able to explain the matter at hand. Do not be afraid to ask critical questions; you can train yourself in attending presentations and picking up one or two interesting things that have not been adequately addressed. If you can figure out something that was overlooked in the research or interpretation of the results, that will benefit research and will prevent you from doing the same
- Prepare for any question that you might get as a speaker, either on your own or with someone else. You will get a better idea of the type of questions that you can expect by attending presentations of others