

Measure Smart, not Harder: Developing novel optical tools for biology and human health

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It is critical to the quest to understand human biology and improve health that we develop new tools. In this effort, my work focuses on developing unconventional tools and techniques that are able to provide easier, cheaper, and more informative measurements. My research has two main thrusts: (1) New Raman spectroscopy techniques and applications for biological studies and (2) Low-cost, portable optical systems for field diagnosis. I will give an overview of my research, followed by two examples: a compressive sensing spectrometer for fast spectral unmixing, and the development of a portable Raman scattering instrument for field diagnosis of anemia.

Speaker:

Mary J. Smith received his B.S. and Ph.D. in Optics from the University of Rochester's School of Optics, in Rochester, New York. His thesis work was titled "Integrated Raman and Light Scattering of Single Biological Cells". Since 2009 he has been at the Center for Photonics at the University of California, Davis, working on the development of new photonics instrumentation. At UC Davis he has designed a compressive spectroscopy system, developed new algorithms to follow subtle spectral changes over time, and developed portable diagnostic tools built on cell phones. In 2012 he was promoted to Assistant Project Scientist and selected as an Entrepreneurial Fellow, working with the Tahoe Institute for Rural Health Research to develop and commercialize a portable complete blood count device. His work has been highlighted in Wired and National Public Radio. In addition to his research duties, Zach is also involved extensively in educational outreach, including as guest lecturer, lab instructor, and internship mentor.

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