

# ICPP BRINGS “WICKED SMAHT” PEOPLE TO BOSTON: A FABI STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

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Several FABI postgraduate students, including PhD candidate Darryl Herron, descended on Boston, Massachusetts, to attend the International Congress of Plant Pathology (ICPP) from 28 July to 3 August. The congress brought together more than 2400 people from almost every corner of the globe to share in over 400 talks and 1200 posters focused on the importance of plant health in a global economy.



The choice of location for this particular conference couldn't have been more perfect. Boston and its neighbouring suburbs are filled with historical, cultural and intellectual sites. Across the Charles River is Cambridge – home to Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) – two of the best institutions of higher learning in the world. We were fortunate enough to get to see some of Boston and these two amazing schools.



While touring Harvard and MIT, we were told about a souvenir shop that sold a variety of gifts and apparel with Boston, Harvard and MIT branding. This shop was tiny and packed wall-to-wall with everything from Harvard mugs to MIT-branded golf balls. In the corner of the shop, hidden beneath the Harvard branded T-shirts, I found a pile of bright green shirts with the words

“Wicked Smaht” printed across the chest. Many may be familiar with the phrase, said in a

Boston accent, from the movie “Good Will Hunting.” A common phrase in New England and Boston, it means “very smart” and it is appropriate for the ICPP.

This simple novelty T-shirt put into perspective what we need to solve some of the challenges brought on by the global economy: smart people. This meeting brought together some of the best researchers on the planet to participate in workshops, strategy meetings, idea cafes and to present at more than 70 concurrent sessions covering diagnostics and extension, taxonomy, management strategies, policy making, plant protection, resistance, climate change, and pathogen-plant interactions, to name a few.



I used this opportunity to attend a variety of sessions so that I could expose myself to policymaking, new technologies and research. One message kept coming up while I was getting more policy savvy and familiarising myself with global plant protection organisations and the

microbes of onion soils: the problems facing every stakeholder on plant health will intensify in the face of climate change, increasing human populations and globalisation.

Tackling these challenges will require the global community to work very differently than it has in the past. It will require a collective effort from not only scientists but governments, policy makers, businesses, growers and consumers too. Science provides better understanding of the challenges and technology but people come up with the science and funding and ensure its translation to technology that will solve these problems. There are many smart people out there but if they aren't talking to each other they will not make progress in addressing global issues. We all need to be “wicked smaht.”