

NEWS[Local](#)[Bucks County
Courier Times](#)[Burlington
County Times](#)[The Intelligencer](#)[Hometown
Pennsylvania
New Jersey
National
World](#)[Health
Washington
Elections](#)[Columnists
Obituaries
Opinion
Lotteries
Weather](#)[Home](#) / [Burlington Times](#)**Forensics becoming a big hit in the classroom**By **MIKE MATHIS**

Burlington County Times

So, you want to be a crime scene investigator or a forensic scientist?



It wasn't so long ago that the path leading to a career in solving murders and other crimes began out on the streets, where aspiring detectives took the first steps to-ward their goal by going out on patrol, writing tra-ffic tickets and an-swering alarm calls.

Today, the process of solving crimes has evolved into specialized investigative and scientific disciplines. It has also become a major area of study at numerous colleges and universities around the country, including Centenary College in Hackettstown, Warren County, and The College of New Jersey in Ewing, Mercer County.

At TCNJ, prospective investigators and forensic scientists learn the techniques and skills for analyzing evidence such as DNA and fingerprints in the field and in the laboratory, and how to present that evidence in court during prosecutions.

Those who run the criminology and forensic science programs at the two colleges cite the popularity of television dramas such as "CSI: Crime Scene Investigation" as one of the main reasons for the high level of interest in the studies offered at their schools.

"This is an emerging discipline," John Krimmel, associate professor and chairman of the Department of Criminology and Justice Studies at TCNJ, said of the forensic classes. "High school students are coming here desiring to study forensic science, and TV has a lot to do with it. These programs are going to start popping up (elsewhere)."

With its Department of Chemistry's new forensic science concentration, launched in January, TCNJ is the only college or university in the nation capable of producing undergraduates certified to testify in court on DNA evidence, according to the college.

TCNJ estimates it will take \$2.2 million to fully implement the program over the next 10 years. The college has received \$225,000 in federal funding to help get it under way.

Gail Simmons, dean of the school of science, noted that the funding would "help support students in internship opportunities, help us outfit our laboratories to teach various aspects of forensic science, help us develop a seminar series and conferences on forensic science, and give us resources to support both faculty and students in forensic research."

The college has an agreement with the state Attorney General's Office to offer DNA internships at the state's new Technology and Forensic Science Center in Hamilton Township.

Five students participated in the DNA internship this summer at the state forensic center, and the college hopes to have 10 in the program next year, spokeswoman Mandy Wilton said.

More than 300 students are enrolled in TCNJ's criminology program in the School of Culture and Society, and 15 students in the School of Science are chemistry majors with a concentration in forensics, said Krimmel, a former Bristol Township, Pa., police officer.

TCNJ last year named Dr. John Allison as the first director of the chemistry department's forensic science program. Allison moved to the college from Michigan State University, where he was director of the mass spectrometry facility and a professor of chemistry. His expertise is in the biochemical and forensic applications of mass spectrometry.

The mass spectrometer is an instrument used to separate the components of mixtures, including those involving drugs.

Krimmel said the employment market for forensic scientists and technicians has expanded, with more jobs available in state law enforcement agencies and federal agencies such as the U.S. Border Patrol, the FBI and the Drug Enforcement Agency.

Many of these are jobs open to civilian technicians, he said, meaning those interested in a forensic career don't necessarily have to become a law enforcement officer.

Last fall, Centenary College began offering a criminal justice major with a concentration in forensic science and introduced 10 new courses, said Norman Cetuk, a professor at the school.

Ninety full-time and 50 part-time students are enrolled in the program, which covers psychology, laws of evidence, death scene investigation, photography, arson investigation and DNA analysis.

"There was a need for it, for law enforcement (personnel) and the traditional student," Cetuk said.

Cetuk, who spent 13 years as a Bridgewater police officer and 16 years as an investigator with the Somerset County Prosecutor's Office, said it can be difficult for college graduates to break in to crime scene investigation for law enforcement agencies.

"You're not going to step into a CSI job," Cetuk said. "You have to work your way up in the ranks like any other job."

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics says those who graduate as forensic science technicians can look forward to a good job market.

Overall, the bureau said, employment for science and laboratory technicians should increase about 10 to 20 percent per year through 2012.

The American Academy of Forensic Sciences offers a list on its Web site of colleges and universities with programs accredited by the organization's Forensic Science Education Programs Accreditation Commission.

The range of majors and concentrations in criminology and forensics is extensive, as are the number of institutions now offering the programs.

According to the American Society for Clinical Pathology, the impact of shows such as "CSI: Crime Scene Investigation" has made forensic sciences the fastest-growing program at some universities, while others schools are scrambling to develop courses or entire programs to meet student demand.

Linda Jankowski, director of the DNA laboratory at the state Technology and Forensic Science Center, also credits the crime dramas for helping to spur interest in forensic disciplines, particularly among biology students.

"There's a lot more kids going into forensics because of ("CSI")," she said. "We're like celebrities now."

The Society for Clinical Pathology, meanwhile, was so impressed by the effects of "CSI" that it chose to present its Special Recognition Award last year to William Petersen, who stars in and co-produces "CSI: Crime Scene Investigation." The award was given to Petersen to demonstrate "our appreciation of the positive portrayal of pathology and laboratory sciences that he presents to the world in his work" on the television show, the society said.

Apparently, the admiration is mutual.

In an interview in Playboy magazine earlier this year, Petersen said the award was "way better than an Emmy."

Petersen also teamed with the society to film a public service announcement that promotes laboratory professionals as the "real heroes."

In the message, which ran during National Medical Laboratory Week in April, Petersen said, "I want to salute pathologists and laboratory professionals across the country. Every day, they use their skills and knowledge to save lives and solve crimes."

BCT staff writer Paul Leakan contributed to this story.

Email: mmathis@phillyburbs.com

August 29, 2004 7:18 AM

Story Options: [Reader Comments](#) [Print this story](#) [Email a friend](#)

©2005 Copyright Calkins Media, Inc. All rights reserved.

[back to top](#)