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# Forensics students dig into real-world research

Friday, April 15, 2011 - 2:47pm

Alain Latour

[news.utm@utoronto.ca](mailto:news.utm@utoronto.ca)

Enforcement tactics on indoor marijuana grow operations. The use of ground-penetrating radar to locate clandestine graves. Whoever said university life can be boring did not make it to U of T Mississauga's Annual Forensic Science Day (FSD), which was celebrated April 6 in the Matthews Auditorium of the Kaneff Building.

During the FSD event, fourth-year Forensic Specialist students presented the results of their mandatory research project FSC481Y5, which is now in its fifteenth year.

Conducted at a forensic agency under the guidance of a mentor, the course teaches proper research design and methodology, as well as ethics, professional communication skills, expert witness testimony and other issues as they pertain to the field of forensic sciences.

Next, students conduct research out of the class and in an actual forensic unit, attempting to understand its daily operations.

According to Professor Tracy Rogers, director of U of T Mississauga's Forensic Science Program, only a few of the fourth-year experiential learning courses taught elsewhere focus on research.

The ones in Canada that [do] emphasize it are newer programs that were modeled after the UTM program, said Rogers, who worked as a lead expert on B.C.'s Robert Pickton homicide case. Students did seem to appreciate the course.

I wanted to take it right from my first year, said student Clayton Asano, the first presenter at the FSD. As part of his project, Asano worked for the Forensic Identification Bureau's Imaging Lab at York Regional Police in Aurora.

We took a thermal-imaging camera that was originally made for home inspections, the FLIR B200, and used it to find hidden evidence such as handguns, especially through drywall, said Asano, adding that it was he who ran with the idea and showed his supervisors how the camera was especially suited for the task.

Other students said they got more from the research project other than hands-on experience. The networking part of the project is very important, said student Jason Hu, who collected research data at Hamilton General Hospital's Forensic Pathology Unit. In many ways, FSC481Y5 is the best course in the Forensics program.

Rogers said she was pleased with the FSD. The time, effort, and knowledge our mentors devote to the students was essential to their success, and it often has far-reaching impacts on their career choices (...) I would like to thank the mentors and the agencies that support and allow mentors to participate in our program-it is encouraging to see how many forensic-based institutions and agencies recognize the value of experiential learning and research, and the benefits that mentoring can provide to both the student and the agency, said Rogers.

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## University of Toronto Mississauga

3359 Mississauga Road ( [View Map](#) )  
Mississauga, ON L5L 1C6  
Tel: (905) 569-4455

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