Forensic scientists are popular characters on television today. Tara Chambers, a student in the Master’s in Forensic Science and Law program at Duquesne University, wants to give college-bound teens a dose of reality never seen on TV.

Forensic science was just beginning to explode into pop culture when Tara Chambers was graduating from high school. She didn’t know much about the field, but her biology teacher helped her make the decision to pursue it. Now she wants to help other college-bound teens do the same.

Chambers is a fourth-year student in the Master’s in Forensic Science and Law program. She and other members of the Phi Sigma Lambda, the professional fraternity for forensic science majors, organized a four-day workshop for high school students to investigate forensics at Duquesne University, held June 28-July 1, 2004.

“I want the students to have a better understanding of the components of forensics.” Chambers said. “It’s not CSI – it’s much more than that.”

The daily agenda included lectures from Duquesne faculty and special guest speakers, such as Kirk Bloodsworth, the first man on Death Row to be exonerated through DNA evidence. He and John T. Rago, associate dean and assistant professor of law, discussed the ways forensic science has revolutionized the criminal justice system. Dr. Cyril H. Wecht, world-renowned medical investigator and Allegheny County Coroner, also will speak to the group.

In addition to lectures, hands-on laboratory sessions were presented by the members of Phi Sigma Lambda, including fingerprints, hair and fiber analysis, arson investigation, teeth impressions, thin layer chromatography, gunpowder analysis and drug analysis.

The 17 high school juniors and seniors registered for the workshop completed a comprehensive application process that continued on page 16

During the forensic science workshop, high school students learned about fingerprint investigation.
continued from page 12

included a 250-word essay. “I was very impressed with the caliber of students,” Chambers noted. “Most of them had 4.0 GPAs, and their essays were fantastic.”

A native of Ford City, Chambers considered attending other universities, but was attracted to Duquesne’s program because of the unique law component and the entry-level master’s degree. She and her peers are members of the first class in the five-year master’s program, expected to graduate in spring 2006.

“This program can take you in many different directions,” she noted. “Some of us want to work in a crime lab. This degree will allow us to do that when we graduate. Some of us want to go on to law school after this. I want high school students to know that there are so many options in the field.”

After she graduates, Chambers hopes to earn a doctorate in serology, the study of blood and other bodily fluids, so that she can specialize in solving sexual crimes. “I think that sexual crimes are some of the most heinous, and so often they are overlooked. We hear about thousands of rape kits getting thrown out before they are even processed, and I think that’s terrible. One day I would like to help find a solution to that,” she said.

—LVM

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