Video promotes forensic science

Program will teach application

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Ohio University faculty who specialize in areas of forensics are sharing their skills and passion with potential scientists of the future.

On Friday, six of the university’s faculty members participated in the filming of a McGraw-Hill Publishers educational video, each discussing and demonstrating real-world applications of forensic science.

Produced by Horizons Companies of Columbus, the video is intended for high school students and designed to complement what they are learning in their textbook studies.

“...The first goal of the video is to reinforce facts they are learning in their textbooks,” said Chris Weber, a producer from Horizon who was at OU for the filming.

Weber said Horizon is working on a series of educational videos, but added, “Forensic science is kind of a hot topic among young people right now with television shows like ‘CSI.’”

He said OU was selected for the project in part because there aren’t many universities that offer undergraduate forensic science programs.

And, Weber added, “The folks we have been dealing with here have been really nice.”

Featured in the video are: Glen Jackson, assistant professor of chemistry and biochemistry; Nancy Taterek, professor of sociology and anthropology; Scott Moody, professor of biological sciences; James McKean, law enforcement technology coordinator; Peter Harrington, professor of chemistry and biochemistry; and Howard Dewald, professor of chemistry and assistant dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

Topics featured in the video ranged from body recovery, UV detection of body fluids, bones, ballistics and fingerprinting, gunshot residue analysis and the detection of explosives.

“It was a great opportunity and an honor,” Taterek said of being selected to participate.

A professor of sociology and anthropology, Taterek’s area of expertise is bones and her forensic skills are called upon to assist with criminal investigations.

Taterek estimated that she’s been involved in about 70 cases during the past 10 years. Last year, she helped identify the remains of a Columbus area woman who went missing in 2000 and was found in 2002. Currently, she is working on about three or four cases, including a case involving bones recently discovered off Athens County Road 58 (Frost) in Coolville.

Taterek said most cases she works on start with that initial phone call, asking for her help. The first step in the process, she said, is usually determining whether the bones are from an animal or human, which, she said, she can usually tell at first glance.

She said there are 206 bones in the typical adult human, but added that some humans will occasionally have an extra rib or vertebrae or won’t develop certain bones.

“Human variation is one of the best parts of working with bones,” Taterek said, adding that children have many more bones than adults because their bones have not yet fused together.

Taterek said two things she enjoys about helping out in criminal investigations is using her skills in a practical way and getting to meet people she would otherwise meet.

“It’s always interesting,” she said.

At that same time, she said the job can sometimes be stressful and upsetting but that she separates herself from those aspects of the work. In the video, she discussions identifying trauma to a person’s skull and shows examples of skulls with shotgun wounds and those suffering from blunt force trauma.

“Sometimes it can be really difficult,” she said, adding, however, that it can be really rewarding when she helps a family come to closure concerning a loved one.

“It’s fantastic because I know I helped the family reach closure,” she said.

When asked what she’d like students to learn from her video, Taterek said, “I’d like students to understand a little bit more that there’s a reality behind the television shows they see” and that forensics isn’t always as easy as it’s commonly portrayed.