

cold case

UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR STUDENTS

DC students utilizing their training and education to investigate cold cases in Detroit

by Debbie Richard, '02, '04, Assistant Director of Marketing

Take two students each from the criminal justice, forensic science and digital forensic science majors, stir in a few professors, add a prosecutor from Detroit, and carefully blend in one unsolved case from Michigan. What do you get?

You get a distinctive opportunity for students to utilize their education and training to investigate an old case.

During the spring semester, six students were invited to enroll in a special class that would give them the opportunity to work on a real case. The case given to the students was classified as a “cold case,” meaning it hadn’t been solved and was still an open case. Each student was required to sign a confidentiality waiver before they were allowed to work with the information.

“The Cold Case Review Project is indeed a unique opportunity for our students,” said Dr. Don Knueve, associate academic dean and professor of criminal justice. “The Wayne County Prosecutor’s Office has been great in utilizing students in three majors, criminal justice, forensic science, and digital forensic science. In important cases it is quite possible today that the knowledge and skills being provided in all three majors will be essential in solving these cases. The first experience in the spring semester of 2010 has proved this to be true.”

The opportunity came from a connection DC President Mark C. Gordon had previously developed with Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy. As is evident many places, the prosecutor’s office had recently gone through a budget reduction and was functioning with limited resources. Because of this, many of the old cases had lain dormant. This created a unique opportunity for the College.

“I am not aware of any other example in the nation in which a major regional prosecutor’s office is taking advantage of the skills of college students and faculty to re-examine cases which have lain dormant due to lack of staff,” said Worthy. “In an era of limited resources, we are striving to be innovative in our approach to doing our job and serving justice. Defiance College brings academic excellence and training, including its pioneering expertise in the cutting-edge field of digital forensics, and this endeavor is a win-win for the Defiance students and the citizens of Wayne County.”

The students were given access to the case file information, talked to the originating police agency, examined the evidence that had been collected, and worked with the prosecutor’s office and their chief investigator. The case given to the students was believed to have a solvability factor.

“It’s a unique opportunity to have an actual open case that they can examine and offer feedback, not only to the Prosecutor’s Office, but also to the originating agency,” said Steve Sondergaard, professor of criminal justice.

The class began as a pilot project, but all participants agree that it has been remarkably successful and are planning for its continuation and expansion. The project has drawn media attention from the *Wall Street Journal*, *The (Defiance) Crescent-News*, *Toledo Blade*, *Columbus Dispatch*, and *Detroit News*. ♦



Faculty members (left to right) Dr. Don Knueve, Professor Steve Sondergaard, and Dr. Gregg Gunsch discuss the new cold case project.

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Students to offer second set of eyes

Do you get sucked into crime shows?

If so, you might want to check out a new program at Defiance College, a private liberal-arts school in northwest Ohio, that allows students to investigate cold cases for the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office.

"I am not aware of any other example in the nation in which a major regional prosecutor's office is taking advantage of the skills of college students and faculty to re-examine cases which have lain dormant due to lack of staff," Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy said in a statement.

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Ohio college teams with Wayne County prosecutor to investigate cold crimes

Santiago Esparza / The Detroit News

The Crescent-News

DC DETECTIVES

PRESIDENT GORDON'S CONNECTION LEADS TO COLD CASE STUDY ON CAMPUS

By JENNY DERRINGER
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Due to the popularity of television shows like "CSI" and "Cold Case," the general population has become intrigued with the study of crime scene investigation over the years.

One of the fastest growing majors on the campus of Defiance College, forensic science was first introduced



Winner of the 2004 Pulitzer Prize

Article published July 05, 2010

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College course at Defiance turns up heat on cold cases

By ERICA BLAKE
BLADE STAFF WRITER



Mark Gordon, left, and Kym Worthy

DEFIANCE - When working as an assistant county prosecutor in Michigan's Wayne County, Kym Worthy recalled, she prepared for upcoming trials by reviewing her case with her father, friends, or even her hairdresser to see if they saw something she didn't in the facts.

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Now as prosecutor of the state's most populous county, Ms. Worthy said a fresh set of eyes is still what she needs to help tackle some of the area's older and colder cases.

The office has teamed up with Defiance College to create a student-based program to review cold cases. Acting as both investigators and consultants, the students offer a fresh perspective on the cases with the hope of bringing a killer to justice.

"The general rule is that if a case isn't solved in the first 48 hours, it's considered cold," Ms. Worthy said. "None of these cases are dropped because the detective wanted to drop them. It's a resource issue."