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ASU West introduces degree in forensic science



Arizona State University West campus students (from left) Angela Portament, Katherine Kaszynski and Selamawit Dubale prepare samples of their own DNA for analysis in their Biology Behind the Crime Scene lab course.

Matt Crum/Special for The Republic

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By Matt Crum
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The Republic
Tue Feb 5, 2013 10:25 AM

With forensic tools used in crime investigations becoming increasingly sophisticated, Arizona State University has added a bachelor of science degree in forensics.

The degree will prepare graduates for careers in forensics laboratories and in the research and development of new technologies in the field.

The degree is offered by ASU's New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences, the core college on the West campus, 4701 W. Thunderbird Road.

"In the fall of 2011 we added a forensics concentration to our bachelor's degree in life sciences, and with well over 100 students enrolled, it has proven to be extremely popular," said Todd Sandrin, associate director of New College's School of Mathematical and Natural Sciences and associate vice provost at the West campus.

Graduates may have an interest in pursuing advanced degrees in the sciences or law. Those graduates who choose to enter the job market should find a growing demand for individuals with the knowledge and skills they have acquired.

According to a U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics report, "Jobs for forensic science technicians are expected to increase by 20percent, which is much faster than average. Employment growth in state and local government should be driven by the increasing application of forensic science techniques, such as DNA analysis, to examine, solve and prevent crime."

Career opportunities for forensics graduates include employment in crime laboratories, police departments, government agencies, law firms, insurance companies, hospitals and consulting firms.

Community support in Arizona for the forensics degree is strong.

"The hiring of new forensic scientists that I was responsible for during the last five years of my career often resulted in jobs being offered to those applicants who had a strong familiarity with evidence handling and court testimony, not just the hard sciences," said Howard Birnbaum, a forensic scientist with 30 years of

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experience and former Scientific Analysis Bureau supervisor with the Arizona Department of Public Safety.

Among the forensics courses to be offered are Toxicology, Trace Evidence, Computer Forensics and Comparative Forensics.

In addition to its emphasis on biology, chemistry and the processing of evidence, the forensics degree's curriculum also focuses on oral communication skills.

"These skills are important in preparing graduates for the multifaceted, interdisciplinary aspects of their careers in forensics, such as providing articulate and compelling expert testimony in criminal trials," Sandrin said.

"This type of comprehensive program is as greatly needed as it is important. Certainly there is no comparable curriculum offered in this large and growing state," said Susan Ehrlich, a former assistant U.S. attorney for the District of Arizona, and former Arizona appellate judge.

The forensics degree program welcomes students who choose to enter ASU as freshmen, as well as community-college transfer students.

Colleges including Estrella Mountain Community College offer certificates in crime scene processing. Recipients of these certificates typically work as evidence technicians.

More details: 602-543-6050.

Matt Crum is a spokesman for ASU West.

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ASU at the West Campus as an Independent State University

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