

Following the Evidence with CSI students

AMANDA CUDA

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Amy Rivera stood by a dresser in the corner of the room, her eyes glued to her sketchpad. Mere feet behind her, a dead body was stretched out on a bed.

She was investigating a possible suicide. Pills were at the scene, as were alcohol and a suicide note. But Rivera couldn't be caught up in those details yet.

Her job was to sketch the scene for possible future reconstruction. It was a painstaking process, requiring her to measure everything in the room.

But Rivera didn't mind the work. After all, there are worse ways to spend summer vacation than fighting crime.

Rivera, 16, of Bridgeport, was one of 30 Connecticut high school students who participated in Crime Scene Investigation Camp this week at the University of New Haven's Henry C. Lee College of Criminal Justice and Forensic Sciences.

All week long, students learned investigative skills such as blood spatter recognition, fingerprinting, and identifying, collecting and documenting evidence.

On Friday, the last day of the camp, teens were assigned to one of four mock crime scenes, including the one Rivera was working. The "body," by the way, was actually a pink foam dummy.

Rivera said she enrolled in the program because

she's always liked the TV show "CSI: Crime Scene Investigation," and thought she might enjoy that kind of work. Though she quickly learned real CSI work is much different than what happens on TV, she's still excited about forensics.

"It's great using technology to find out who killed who," said Rivera, who will be a senior at Bridgeport's Bullard-Havens Technical School in the fall.

This was the first year of the forensic camp, which was directed by Peter Massey and Daniel Maxwell, both faculty members in UNH's criminal justice and forensic sciences program.

Massey said the camp was started partly because forensics work is becoming a popular career. The campers received the same training as university students in the forensics program. Overall, Massey said, he was impressed with the collection of budding scientists the program attracted. "I think it's going very well," he said.

Also present Friday was Dr. Henry C. Lee, nationally known forensic scientist and founder of UNH's Henry C. Lee College of Criminal Justice and Forensic Sciences. Lee went around to the mock crime scenes, and talked to the campers about their work.

Though the camp focused on forensics, Lee said the program teaches students skills they can use in most lines of work. "They learn to work as a team," he said. "They learn to be objective."

On Friday, all the campers treated their "crime scenes" as if they were real. That means most of them wore gloves on their hands and booties over their shoes. The crime scenes were even marked off with yellow police tape.

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Aside from Rivera, campers included Tim Boroski, 14, of Seymour, who was also working the scene of the possible suicide, as an evidence officer.

His job was to collect and bag all the evidence at the scene. "We're trying to figure out how she died — whether it was a suicide, homicide or natural," Boroski said of the pink foam "victim."

Though there was a suicide note at the scene, he explained it might not necessarily have been a suicide. Boroski, who will be a freshman at Seymour High School in the fall, said he saw an ad for the program and decided to apply. Campers were selected based mainly on their grade-point average and their interest in forensics.

Boroski said he'd always thought he'd want to become a forensic scientist, and decided to give the camp a shot. "I tried it, and I really like it," he said.

At another crime scene, Megan Perez, 17, of Milford, was collecting evidence in a possible homicide, under the watchful eye of her crime scene captain, Nate Dohna, 18, of New Haven.

Perez said that, like most of the other kids in camp, she was always interested in forensics. She comes by it genetically, as her father is a Bridgeport police detective. "Ever since I was younger, I was reading crime books and watching documentaries about crime," she said.

Though Perez had fun at camp, she had one lament. "I wish it was a little longer," she said.

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