Puerto Rico—Lively, Lush, Laboratory?
Graduate Student Maria Illescas Relays her Internship Experience

I was lucky to be able to conduct my internship project at an ASCLD accredited LAB during the summer of 2008.

The project consisted of the internal validation of two commercially available kits, Quantifiler® DUO DNA Quantitation kit and AmpFISTR Yfiler™ PCR Amplification kit, for in-house use. The results have already been presented at international and national meetings.

During my time at the DNA & Serology Laboratory, I was involved in staff meetings, which I took part in through summarizing articles related to the field.

As part of the shadowing experience I visited every unit in the Institute, and learned more about the procedures being performed in other laboratories.

I also got acquainted with sample processing including maintenance of chain-of-custody, photo-documentation, sample recovery, screening tests for body fluids, extraction, quantification, STR amplification and analysis.

Because of my prior experience working as a volunteer in Dr. Dawson Cruz’s Laboratory here on campus, I was involved in maintenance of the capillary electrophoresis instruments and reagent preparation for diverse procedures.

I was glad to realize that I received the proper preparation at VCU and was able to apply that knowledge in the design and execution of my internship study.

In addition to successfully completing the laboratory work for my project, and taking an opportunity to explore the country and enjoy the warm weather, I gained valuable skills that will help me throughout my career.

I will always carry with me invaluable lessons from working at the Institute of Forensic Science of Puerto Rico.
Hey Everybody! I cannot believe spring is almost here and graduation is right around the corner.

This year has been a lot of fun and full of interesting events. We have had many speakers such as, Dr. Whaley (Forensic Pathology), Tim Keel (FBI), and Margie Harris (Bloodstain Pattern Analysis).

Earlier this year, we made our mark on campus by winning $500.00 in the CAA Blood Drive and participating in the American Heart Association Heartwalk event. We successfully hosted three major open houses, talking to hundreds of prospective students and persuading many to come to VCU. We are also having limited tours of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in Richmond, which is an awesome treat to be invited inside the morgue.

In less than a month, we will have our 3rd Murder Mystery Dinner Theater event. The cast has already been working hard to make this one the best yet! The show is called “Final Cut” and the event will be set in a movie gala theme, dress party attire encouraged.

Tickets will go on sale soon (check blackboard/email for updates, locations, and times). The event will be held Sunday, March 29th 2009 at 5:30pm in the Commonwealth Ballrooms (2nd floor commons). I hope to see everyone there!

Also coming soon are group trips to the Dominion Shooting Range, Relay for Life (April 18th, 2009), more speakers and a farewell/end of the semester fun event.

I also wanted to thank everyone for making these last two years being FSSC president memorable and fun. I have met so many awesome people and I will, without a doubt, miss everything about the Forensic Science Student Club.

I am happy to announce that mission statements have been reviewed and our new president has been appointed (formal elections were not held because there was the only one applicant for president). Jennifer Tuten will serving as FSSC President 2009-2011. Please welcome her and give her the same respect and help that I have received.

I thank everybody again for a great two years and I encourage you all to come out to more FSSC events and get involved!

FSSC President 2007-2009,

Ally Woosley

Upcoming FSSC Events:

March
Monument Avenue 10K
• Team Name—“ClubDoug”
• Saturday, March 28th 2009
• Donations Welcome
• More info to come

Murder Mystery Dinner Theater
• Sunday, March 29th 2009
• 5:30pm - 8:00pm
• Commonwealth Ballrooms
• $5.00 a person
• Dinner Provided

April
Relay for Life
• Saturday, April 18th 2009
• More info to come

May
Graduation
• Saturday, May 16th 2009
• Volunteers Needed

Above: Ally and FSSC Vice President Samantha Hendel pause for a picture in front of the Washington Monument during the 2008 AAFS Conference in Washington, D.C.

Right: Candace Thompson, Cierra Pairrett, Samantha Hendel, Emily Kasky and Ally Woosley at the 2009 AAFS Conference in Denver.
While pursuing a forensic science graduate degree, it becomes easy for students to totally immerse themselves in their field of study. Unfortunately, this dedication to one’s course of study has the potential to cause students to distance themselves from other disciplines in the forensic community that are not lab-based.

The independent study provides an avenue for students to step outside of “lab boundaries”, if they so choose, and pursue educational opportunities that would expose them to other disciplines within the forensic community at large.

In fall 2008, I had the privilege of undertaking an independent study with the Virginia Fire Marshal Academy (VFMA), under the direction of Chief Robert P. Bailey. Fire Marshals are the law enforcement arm of the fire service and are responsible for the investigation of fires that occur within the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The VFMA offers one of the most intensive fire marshal training programs in the country, covering a wide variety of topics including, but not limited to: point of origin determination, burn pattern recognition, criminal investigation techniques, crime scene investigation, defensive tactics, firearms training, and arrest/interrogation techniques.

During the semester, I was given the opportunity to directly participate in the VFMA training program and was made to feel included in what was an extremely cohesive unit.

I gained a knowledge of burn patterns, information on how to process a burned vehicle, firearms operation, and even experienced physical pain during the defensive tactics exercises. At the conclusion of the independent study, I had learned of the intricacies that exist in the field of fire investigation and now understand what it takes to be a fire marshal.

Despite the readily apparent linkage between field investigations and laboratory analyses, I learned that misconceptions regarding both disciplines often times prevent a fully functional relationship between investigators and laboratory personnel.

After my experience at the VFMA, I believe that the way to diminish these misconceptions and foster a fully functional relationship is for members of both disciplines to educate themselves on the specialized skills and knowledge that exist for the other profession. When an effort is made by both fields to gain this familiarity with the other discipline, a mutual respect for one another is sure to follow. When this mutual respect is established, misconceptions existing about investigators and laboratory personnel will be drastically diminished and both entities will be more successful in the universal goal of solving crime.

My experience at the VFMA has helped shape my understanding of the forensic science community at large and strengthened my belief that the field of criminal investigations and laboratory analysis are mutually dependent on one another.

My time at the VFMA will not be forgotten, and I would encourage anyone with an interest in a non-laboratory discipline to pursue their interests and undertake an independent study. If your experience turns out to be anything like mine, I guarantee you won’t be disappointed.

-Ryan Hibbard

Above: A Fire Marshall examines evidence at the scene

Far Left: Ryan gets a “hands-on” lesson from a VMFA defensive tactics instructor from Prince George County.

Near Left: A car, fully engulfed in flames serves as a training tool for VMFA students.
Home Away from Home

UWE Forensic Science Student Kadian Fearron describes her experiences at VCU

At first glance, it seems that UWE, (University of the West of England) situated in Bristol, (Britain’s second largest city) and VCU are very different, but they are also alike in many ways.

At VCU students are allowed to choose their subjects but at UWE everyone following the same track takes the same courses. The material taught at UWE is very similar to the material here. However, the classes are less intensive and the grades at UWE are issued as numbers instead of letters.

At UWE, it is not uncommon to address lecturers using their first names, lecturers tend to be very informal and lectures are taught in large lecture halls, which is different than seminars, which are taught in rooms the size of many VCU classrooms.

The modules are spread across the entire year and classes are not held after seven on any given day because most students are full time. There is a 24 hour grace period to turn in assignments after the deadline without being penalized and there is only one cumulative exam at the end of the year to determine the final grades along with a piece of coursework.

While there are a lot of things I miss about home, mostly my family, friends, the food and the efficiency of the transport, the VCU team spirit is one of the top reasons for enjoying my stay here. There are also the perks of weather, the VCU escort service, freebies available to students and wireless internet everywhere which will make VCU memorable to me!

After I finish my degree, I hope to pursue a PhD in something in Forensics, maybe ballistics.

For those who want to spend the year at UWE, I can say that it has all the qualities you would like in a university along with the benefits of gaining a new outlook on life!

If you are interested in Studying Abroad, please review the qualifications listed in the VCU Forensic Science Undergraduate Handbook, then contact the Undergraduate Director, Ms. Sarah Seashols for more information about the UWE program.
Time for Toxicology

SOFT Meeting

Presentations from the October Society of Forensic Toxicologists Annual Meeting

Toxicology Presentations Delivered by members of the Department of Forensic Science

Society of Forensic Toxicologist Annual Meeting, Phoenix, AZ 2008

Evaluation of the Lin-Zhi International Immunoassay for the Detection of Methadone in Urine

James Bourland, Craig Secor, Carl E. Wolf and Alphonse Poklis

Comparison of Two Enzyme Immunoassays for the Detection of the Cocaine Metabolite, Benzoylcegonine, in Urine

Sarah Carney, Lisa D. Moak, Carl E. Wolf, and Alphonse Poklis.

A Novel Method for the Determination of Guanfacine in Urine by GC/MS

Carrie J. Haglock, Carl E. Wolf and Alphonse Poklis.

Upcoming SOFT Meetings:

2009: Oklahoma City, OK - October 18-23

2010: Richmond, VA - October 18-22 - SOFT’s 40th Anniversary - Meeting Host: Dr Michelle Peace

Dr Peace will be soliciting volunteers to work in the 2010 meeting! Forensic Science students will be able to enroll in workshops and attend scientific poster and platform sessions. We will also be hosting a special "permanent" poster exhibit which will highlight the history, evolution, significant contributions, and achievements in forensic toxicology and of SOFT.

Above: Alumna Carrie Haglock presents her poster at the SOFT conference.

Left: Dr. Poklis and recent VCU Forensic Science alumna Sarah Carney, pose in front of her poster at the SOFT meeting.
Many of our graduate and undergraduate students attended the AAFS 2009 Annual Conference in Denver Colorado during the middle of February.

For many students, attending an academy meeting is their first foray into the academic world of professional presentations and talks aimed at practicing Forensic Scientists.

The annual academy meeting also provides a fantastic opportunity for students to interact and network with forensic scientists from across the country, including noted experts in their respective fields and students, who, like them, are studying to join the profession. More than that, the academy meeting provides students with a glimpse into the professional life of not just the Forensic Science Community but the academy in the larger sense as well.

In addition to posters and presentations, the academy holds a business meeting and provides a forum for industry vendors.

Faculty and student participation at this year’s conference was especially strong and we thank the students and faculty who participated.

The Department wants to recognize Dr. Dawson Cruz, who was elected a Fellow in the Criminalistics section and selected as an Editor for The Journal of Forensic Science, she joins Dr. Marilyn Miller as one of two department members who are now Academy Fellows.

More complete information about students and alumni who presented can be found on the next page. We hope you’ll all plan to attend next year’s conference in Seattle.

**Above:** A large blue bear peeks into the windows of the Denver Convention Center.

**Above Right:** First year graduate students, Devonie Murphy, Lesley Merkle, Ashley Jessup and Cristina Pires get some work done at the AAFS conference.

**Below Right:** Tracey Wright smiles for the camera as she presents a poster of her findings from her internship experience.
VCU Presenters at the 2009 AAFS Annual Meeting
Join us in Congratulating VCU Faculty, Students and Alumni who participated!

Presenter: Kelly Brown
Title: dcDOP-PCR for the Analysis of Compromised Mock and Non-Probative Casework Samples
Author(s): Kelly Brown, Carey Davis, Marina Jose Illescas, Victoria Pavlova, Tracey Dawson Cruz

Presenter: Dyanne Cooper
Title: The Application of Cathodoluminescence to the Analysis and Comparison of Concrete Block Samples
Author(s): Dyanne Cooper

Presenter: Tracey Dawson Cruz
Title: dcDOP-PCR for the Analysis of Compromised Mock and Non-Probative Casework Samples
Author(s): Kelly L. Brown M.S., Carey P. Davis B.S, Maria J. Illescas B.S., Victoria R. Pavlova M.S., Tracey Dawson Cruz Ph.D.

Presenter: Carey Davis
Title: Improving Traditional Multiplex STR Amplification of Low Template DNA samples with the Addition of Proofreading Enzymes
Author(s): Carey P. Davis B.S., Lynzee A. Chelland, Maria J. Illescas B.S., Tracey Dawson Cruz Ph.D.

Presenter: David Diekema
Title: The Effect of PCR Additives and Enhancement Techniques on DNA Recovery from Fired Cartridge Cases and Compromised Samples
Author(s): David A. Diekema, Yvette Orihuela, Stephanie L. Karczynski, Katie M. Horsman-Hall, Ph.D., Susan A. Greenspoon, Ph.D., Ann L. Davis, Bradford C. Jenkins, and Jeff D. Ban

Presenter: Jenna Cromwell
Title: Human DNA Extraction and Identification from Feces
Author(s): Jenna Cromwell, Michelle Hassler, Steve Guroff, Ismail Sebeto, Paul Stein

Presenter: Ryan Hibbard
Title: Factors Affecting the Comparison of Lubricating Oils
Author(s): Ryan Hibbard, Michelle Reardon (ATF)

Presenter: Maria Jose Illescas
Title: Internal Validation of Quantifiler Duo DNA Quantification kit and AmpFISTR Yfiler PCR Amplification kit
Author(s): Carmen A. Tirado Neris2 M.S., Fernando Mercedes Fernandez M.S., Tracey Dawson Cruz Ph.D., Jose Orengo Ph.D., Jose Bloom Ph.D.

Presenter: Gabrielle Jones
Title: Raman Spectroscopy: A Solution for the Analysis of Light Colored Fibers
Author(s): Gabrielle Jones and Geneviève Massonnet

Presenter: Sara J. Kester-Florin
Title: Development and Validation of a LC-MS Method for the Determination of Guanfacine in Urine
Author(s): Sara J. Kester-Florin, Carl E. Wolf and Alphonse Peklis

Presenter: Caitlin Muse
Title: Recovery and Visualization of Touch DNA (poster)
Author(s): Caitlin E. Muse1, BS, Katie M. Horsman-Hall2, PhD, Lisa Schiermeier-Wood2, MS, Bradford C. Jenkins2, MS, and Susan A. Greenspoon2, PhD

Presenter: Marissa Olvera
Title: Comparison of Differential Processing Techniques for Development of Latent Prints on Porous Substrates
Author(s): Marissa Olvera, BA, BS; Cory Winar

Presenter: Tracey Wright
Title: Validation of the Quantifier® Duo DNA Quantification Kit
## Event Calendar

### Spring and Summer Departmental Events

A Handy Calendar of Forensic Science Events for Spring/Summer 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>March</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st Deadline for Applications to the Master’s Program</td>
<td>3rd Chesapeake Bay Region IAI Conference Concludes</td>
<td>1st Spring Classes End</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th Spring Break Begins</td>
<td>4th Undergraduate Block Party for Newly Accepted Students</td>
<td>4th MAAFS Conference Begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15th Spring Break Ends</td>
<td>23rd Advising Week Begins</td>
<td>8th MAAFS Conference Concludes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23rd Summer Registration Begins</td>
<td>28th Monument Avenue 10K</td>
<td>18th Relay for Life</td>
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<td>29th Murder Mystery Dinner Theatre Hosted by the FSSC</td>
<td>16th Graduation and Departmental Diploma Ceremony</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29th Chesapeake Bay Region IAI Conference Begins</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30th Fall Registration Begins</td>
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</table>

*Right:* Forensic Science Associate Chair, Dr. Michelle Peace, and Affiliate Faculty Member, Ann Davis of DFS are all smiles at a recent Graduate Open House.
Since I was young, I have been fostering an enthusiasm for forensic science and the philosophy that science can help prove anything— even guilt or innocence.

As I progressed through high school in Saudi Arabia, I became particularly interested in the Forensic Science program here at Virginia Commonwealth University.

As a student coming from overseas, I originally thought I would be interested in the analysis of biological fluids and DNA testing. However, as I progressed through my courses and specifically after taking Forensic Microscopy, I found my niche in trace evidence.

I chose the Forensic Chemistry track because I knew trace evidence and forensic chemistry go hand-in-hand. After taking instrumentation courses I am now especially interested in laboratory work.

My goal as an international student is to bring Forensic Science to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the future. With the experiences I am having here as an undergraduate student, and hopefully as a graduate student, I will be able to bring back a lot of the things I learned to help and improve the system.

Furthermore, my goal is to open forensic laboratories throughout the country and also improve the legal system to allow the consideration of physical evidence in criminal cases.

The help of the faculty, and the forensic science department as a whole, has improved my chances of making this dream a reality by guiding me to the right direction and providing me with the necessary foundation to begin my career as a forensic scientist.

What I Will Take Away From my Time at VCU

Senior Torki Zughaibi discusses his experiences

Did you know that there are numerous opportunities for Undergraduate Research at VCU?

In addition to finding internships and independent studies, students are strongly encouraged to investigate and pursue an undergraduate research experience.

One way to do this is through participation in the Undergraduate Research Symposium on April 2, for more information email uresearch@vcu.edu or talk to your advisor. For information about Undergraduate Research in general and specific Summer Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU’s), please visit: http://www.research.vcu.edu/vpr/ugresources/forstudents.htm

Getting Your Feet Wet

Undergraduate Research at VCU

Above: Forensic Science Senior Torki Zughaibi.

Left: Senior Candace Thompson and several recent Forensic Science alumna pose in front of former Bachelor of Forensic Science student Bethany Guckert’s poster.
News You Can Use

Being Prepared For Emergencies

Signing up for Emergency Notifications is just the first step!

Many of you have signed up for emergency text messaging services operated by the University. Please keep in mind that these services depend on you to be rigorous about updating your contact information.

So, you’ve already signed up AND your information is up to date? Fantastic. Here are some additional things you need to know to be prepared in case of an actual emergency event.

What to Do in Case of an Emergency:

• Remain calm, use common sense and give assistance as needed.
• Call the VCU Police at 828-1234 or the Richmond Police by dialing 911.
• Evacuate buildings immediately upon fire alarm activation or upon request of authorities.
• Shelter in place upon hearing a campus siren or upon seeing activation of an Alertus warning device.
• Know the location of at least two emergency exits close to your working/living areas.

What Not to do in an emergency

• In order to keep lines open, do not use the telephone except to report the emergency situation.
• Do not use elevators.
• Do not jeopardize your life and the lives of others by attempting to save property.

Keep In Touch

How You Can Keep Track of all that VCU Forensic Science has to Offer...

It’s easy to remember to check your email everyday. For most of us, email is second nature now. But what about other ways of keeping in touch with the department and keeping updated on all that’s going on? Well, this newsletter is a great start, but here are some other ways for you to keep in step with departmental news and events.

The Forensic Science Student Club is your number one connection to departmental, campus and community events. In addition to their website, the club maintains a Blackboard account and periodically sends emails via Blackboard to all club members. If you are not yet on the Blackboard list and would like to be, please email fssc@vcu.edu with your name and VCU email address.

Facebook is another means the department and the club are using in order to help communicate information to students. An added benefit is that an increasing number of alumni are also using this page and might be able to help with questions about job prospects etc.

We’re also working to keep the Departmental website more up-to-date, don’t forget that recent handbooks and newsletters are there for easy access 24/7.

Most department emails will come from the department Administrative Assistant, aebega@vcu.edu, so keep a lookout for those and for any emails from your departmental faculty advisor. As always if you have any questions, feel free to email me at aebega@vcu.edu.
Stay positive

Employers don’t want to hear about how hard it is to find a job. They’ve got an open position. Show them you want it.

Look for a job, like it’s your job

Americans on average spend 45 minutes or less each day looking for a job. Treat it like a class. Sit down for an hour or more each day and check the web sites of places you’re interested in and then write cover letters for those positions. Or, go to a function like a career fair to network.

Write tailored, well-written cover letters

If you really want the job, write a cover letter whether they ask for one or not. There is no such thing as a “general” cover letter. Each one should be written for the position you are applying for with that specific organization. Now more than ever, employers are reading cover letters because they can afford to be choosy.

For advice on how to write a cover letter and to see examples, check out: http://www.students.vcu.edu/careers/docs/JobSearchCorrespondence.pdf

Approach those who don’t have any openings

Write cold cover letters for places that don’t have anything posted. It never hurts to do this. If you don’t write the cold cover letter, then you definitely don’t get the job. For more on cold cover letters, see: http://blog.vcu.edu/hgsims/handouts/other/

Network

Networking is the number one way that people get jobs. Talk to people. Someone may know someone who knows someone with an opening. Talk to people at Career Fairs. Practice what you’re going to say so you end up with information and not just free stuff. For more on what to say email me (hgsims@vcu.edu) and I’ll send you a copy of our networking guide.

Practice your interview skills

Most of us don’t practice interviewing until after we’ve bombed an interview. In this economy, you can’t afford to blow even one opportunity. Practice! And please, practice BEFORE the interview is scheduled. Too often we put it off until we definitely have an interview and by then we only have a day or two to get ready.

Ways to practice:

Use the questions on our web site to write down your examples or practice with a friend: http://www.students.vcu.edu/careers/docs/Interviewing.pdf

Use Interview Stream (it’s a pre-recorded interviewer who asks you questions and a web-cam records your answers) – sign up at the front desk or by calling the front desk at 828-1645. Or, if you have your own web cam, use it anytime online: http://vcu.interviewstream.com/

You can schedule a mock interview with me. Just send me (hgsims@vcu.edu) the dates and times that you’re available for an appointment.

Follow-up

Most people leave out this all important step. Let people know that you want the job, but keep in mind there’s a fine line between following up and annoying an employer. Two weeks after you apply, call and say, “I applied on [date] through [method of application] and I was calling to see what the next step in the timeline is.”

Don’t call until after a week after the close date if one is listed. Even if that means that you’re waiting longer than 2 weeks. In order to do this, you have to keep track of where, when and how you apply for jobs.
Congratulations!

Honoring Our Graduates
VCU Forensic Science graduates it’s largest class ever!

Master of Science Graduates

- Jodie Carney
- Dyanne Cooper
- Carey Davis
- David Diekema
- Ryan Hibbard
- Maria Illescas
- Gabrielle Jones
- Sara Kester- Florin
- Lindsay Lambert
- Elizabeth Medeiros
- Amanda Misencik
- Brendan Mitts-Hintz
- Skye Mullarkey
- Caitlin Muse
- Marissa Olvera
- Billie Osmitz
- Erica Pusch
- Erin Tracy
- Jessica Williams
- Tracey Wright

Bachelor of Science Graduates

- Mishari Faisal Al-Adwari
- Abdullah Al Dasem
- Ali Ali Ali
- Elsa Al-Matrouk
- Girum Bahrei
- Artisha Carter
- Osmín Centeno
- Chris Claryor
- Alisha Coachman
- Kristin Cornett
- Lyndsey Durham
- Anthony Frazier
- Ashley Gesseck
- Vershaun Godwin
- Molly Goulet
- Amanda Gray
- Paula Henson
- Feras Hijaz
- Kayla Jaeger
- Deepali Karanwal
- Robert Kavanaugh
- Denise Kropaczek
- Amy Lauterstein
- Meagan McCormick
- Crystal McFaddin
- Ariane Swift McKeller
- Colleen Moore
- Katherine Moore
- Matthew Naret
- Le-Nhu Nguyen
- Nana Nti
- Amanda Paitsel
- Lori Payne
- Amanda Robertson
- Britney Russell
- Rami Tahhan
- Audrey Thacker
- Candace Thompson
- Maria (Lola) Williams
- Dana Wild
- Alyson Woosley
- Torki Zughaibi

Above: Graduates at last year’s Forensic Science Diploma Ceremony.
Kelly Brown '08 is working with the Maryland State Police Forensic Sciences Division in Pikesville, MD in the Biology/DNA section. She is working in the technical unit of that section focusing on research, validation, and casework. Kelly presented (“An Evaluation of dcDOP-PCR for the Analysis of Mock and Non-Probative Casework” at the AAFS Conference in Denver. Kelly is also recently engaged and will be getting married in September.

Cassandra Hernandez '06 was invited at the recent Academy meeting to be a board member of the Young Forensic Scientists’ Forum. She currently works in Louisiana.

Kristen Lewis ('05) was recently awarded a National Research Council Postdoctoral Research Associateship to work at the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). She will work with Dr. Pete Vallone and Dr. John Butler in the Applied Genetics Group to develop a standardized genetic and statistical approach to identify relatives in immigration cases. Kristen will finish her Ph.D. in Genome Sciences at the University of Washington by the end of 2009 and is excited to move back to the Maryland-Northern Virginia area to postdoc at NIST. Kristen and her fiance Kerry O’Connor (M.B.A., ’06) will be married in Richmond, Virginia in June 2010.

Pamela Montague ’04 is currently working at the Central Office of the Chief Medical Examiner for the state of Virginia as a Forensic Autopsy Technician. Pamela completed her Master’s Degree in Biology from Virginia State University in 2007.

Derek Monthei ’04 recently defended his dissertation to complete his Ph.D. from Virginia Tech. His research was in forensic entomology. The title of his dissertation was, “Entomotoxicological and Thermal Factors Affecting the Development of Forensically Important Flies”. Dr. Michelle Peace, a faculty member of the VCU Forensic Science department, served on his doctoral committee. Derek was also recently Commissioned in the U.S. Army Reserve as a First Lieutenant. In the near future he plans to work for the US Army as a medical entomologist.

Jenna Rice ’05 has been invited to speak on the Women in Chemistry Career Panel and now holds a position as a CT Scientist at DCLS.
Thank You

Departmental Service & Leadership Awards
Congratulations to these students who will be recognized on May 16th

Brittany Russell
Amy Lauterstein
Katherine Moore
Samantha Hendel
Anthony Frazier
Kristin Cornett
Candace Thompson
Lyndsay Durham
Allyson Woosley
Colleen Moore
Meagan McCormick
Nana Nti
Carey Davis
Lindsay Lambert
Caitlin Muse
Ryan Hibbard
Gabrielle Jones
Tracey Wright

Departmental Academic Achievement Awards
Congratulations to these students who will be recognized on May 16th

Undergraduate
Colleen Moore
Kayla Jaeger
Meagan McCormick
Katherine Moore
Rami Tahhan
Graduate
Tracey Wright
Gabrielle Jones
Ryan Hibbard
Billie Osimitz
David Diekema

Other Honors
Black History in the Making
Anthony Frazier
Nana Nti
Outstanding Senior
Allyson Woosley
Outstanding Graduate Student
Ryan Hibbard
University Service and Leadership Award
Allyson Woosley

Above: Service and Leadership and Black History in the Making Award Winner, Anthony Frazier.

Left: Two Departmental Service and Leadership Award Winners, FSSC Club President Allyson Woosley and club member Amy Lauterstein. Congratulations to all the winners of this Departmental Award!
This spring, several VCU students, faculty and alumni attended the annual conference for the Chesapeake Bay Division of the International Association for Identification.

At that meeting, VCU forensic science alumna Lauren Claytor placed first in the poster competition. Lauren is currently an employee of the Virginia Department of Forensic Science’s Central Lab. Current student Lyndsay Durham placed second in the poster competition and later showcased her work at the on campus Undergraduate Research Symposium.

Lauren and Lyndsay were joined by VCU students, Katherine Moore and Jessica Williams who also presented. Faculty in attendance included, Dr. Michelle Peace, and Affiliate Faculty Member, Mr. Pete Marone, who spoke about the impact of the NAS report.

According to its website, "(e)ducation is one of the IAI’s primary missions. The IAI strives to be the main professional association for those engaged in forensic identification, investigation, and scientific examination of physical evidence." Students and faculty who attended enjoyed the opportunity to present their findings to a receptive audience of their peers.

The next IAI Educational Conference will be held in Roanoke, WV from October 09, 2009 to October 10, 2009. For more details, about the Fall 2009 Educational Conference, visit the IAI’s website at:
I hope that you all are off to a great start to the 2009 Spring Semester. After the excitement of moving faculty and staff from the Trani Center and 1000 West Franklin, we are settled into our new digs with ginormous windows. A very pleasant change, bringing us much closer to the center of Science activity on the Monroe Park Campus. If you have not yet had a chance to stop by, it is not too late.

The next step in the process is remodeling several rooms into two teaching laboratories and a support room in Oliver North. The design and bidding process is complete, the contractor identified, and work is scheduled to last 90 days. This will give us plenty of time to move instruments, equipment and supplies from the Trani Center to Oliver North in time for teaching in the new space in the 2009 fall semester. Along with the remodeling, the Oliver North hallway will be painted and the signs replaced. We are looking forward to the many great upgrades!

The 2009 AAFS meeting was another great success for the Department. I was very pleased at the large participation by alumni, undergraduate and graduate students. Congratulations to all who presented or were co-authors of the many posters and talks. Congratulations also to the many of you who joined the Academy or moved up in your affiliation status. Of particular note, Dr. Dawson Cruz, was elected a Fellow in the Criminalistics section and selected as an Editor for The Journal of Forensic Science.

Don't forget about MAAFS and other regional and topical meetings coming up this spring. It is never too early to become involved in research. I encourage undergraduate students to take advantage of the ever-increasing opportunities through the Honor's College, HHMI, REUs and independent study. Information can be found on the Department's website and the website of the Vice President for Research. For undergraduates participating in scholarly research, please plan to participate in the Undergraduate Poster Symposia planned for this April 22 in the Commons and future spring semesters.

Looking ahead to the end of the semester, the May 2009 Departmental Diploma Ceremony will be the largest yet. With over 60 students filing graduation applications, we anticipate a rockin’ full house in Harris Auditorium on May 16th.

We are having another great semester of activities from Forensic Science Student Club, including another Murder Mystery Dinner Theatre on March 29, with great food, great friends and a great director and cast.

On a less positive note, academia is not immune to the economic woes all are currently slogging through. There has been a lot of belt tightening on campus, including within the Department, with the primary goal of protecting our core mission: providing our students with a high-quality education.

With the guidance of the college, and a great spirit of “we are all in this together,” the effects of the cutbacks have been softened. Perhaps the greatest impact has been in some reduction in course offerings.

My advice is, keep trying to register and have a plan “B” ready to go if registration plan “A” does not work. Finally, in between study, work, and home, keep up with the many great activities on campus, including the FSSC calendar, and participate in all that you can.

On a positive registration note, three Forensic Science courses and Physical Chemistry currently are planned to be offered over the summer. Look to the summer course schedule for details.

As always, if I can be of assistance, please don’t hesitate to call, email or drop in.

Stay focused on your studies, stay safe, and have a great semester!

See you soon,
Dr E