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Crime Lab/University Partnership Is Mutually Beneficial

By Darren McRoy

Why did the forensic science student cross the road? To get to his internship at the top-notch professional facility on the other side.

The University of Central Oklahoma's (UCO) Forensic Science Institute is partnering with the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation (OSBI) to share their respective new buildings — which, conveniently, are located directly across from each other on opposite sides of 2nd Street in Edmond, Oklahoma. The OSBI's new Forensic Science Center opened in March 2008, and its partner building, UCO's Forensic Science Institute, will be completed in November of this year.

Representatives said the affiliation will produce a mutual benefit for each organization. "We have a synergy between the two institutes," said Dr. Dwight Adams, director of the Forensic Science Institute. "We provide continuing education to the forensic science professionals, [and] their facility now provides readymade access for our students to do internships, right across the street, to work side by side with professionals."

UCO students can spend entire semesters at the Forensic Science Center, either training in a specific forensic discipline or rotating between units for a wide perspective. OSBI pros will also help teach classes at the university. This semester's core forensic science analysis course at UCO — designed around impression evidence — will be partially instructed by the head of OSBI's Latent Fingerprint Section, Jim Stokes.

In return, UCO's Institute will provide free continuing training and re-training for OSBI professionals. And the university staff and students can help in another way as well, said Charles Curtis, assistant director of OSBI. "We might identify some areas in which research needs to be conducted — but we need to spend our time on casework," Curtis said. "Where we might not have the time and manpower, they would. We can work with them on research projects.

"[Students] get the experience, and we get the benefit of a new forensic arson database."

The partnership is the result of a vision shared by UCO president Roger Webb, OSBI director DeWade Langley, and Edmond city officials: dual, shared facilities for training and enabling the best forensics specialists and criminologists in the state. Each facility was designed by famed Oklahoma City architecture-engineering firm Frankfurt Short Bruza.

Also included in the new FSI building will be the AT&T Digital Forensics Laboratory, a task force of law enforcement officials working with criminal digital evidence. "The FSI will house the digital-forensics laboratory; we will purchase all of their equipment and provide all of their training in order for the laboratory to provide digital-forensics training for all law enforcement in the state of Oklahoma," said Dr. Adams.

"[The partnership] allows us and the police departments and anyone interested in doing computer forensics to all be in the same location," added Curtis. "And there may be benefits we don't even know

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about yet... We just really need to think outside the box as to what the possibilities are for this partnership.”