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Summer camp digs deeper

Students take a look at real-life forensics

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HIGHLAND HEIGHTS - In what can be thought of as Northern Kentucky's own spinoff of the popular television series, NKU-CSI is developing a new generation of scientists to help solve problems - criminal or otherwise. The summer camp is designed to encourage young sleuths and show them the reality behind what they see on television.

"We look for students who are interested in using science to answer questions about real-life situations," said Karen Ware, program manager at the Center for Integrative Natural Science and Mathematics (CINSAM) at NKU. "An interest in the popular forensic shows is nice, but we try to stress the concept of using science as a tool to solve problems and obtain data."

About 110 middle and high school students spent last week at NKU's Highland Heights campus applying scientific techniques and learning about various scientific fields to solve fake crimes.

"Students investigated a 'robbery' learning about gunshot residue and scanning electron microscopes and facial identification using computers and special facial-composite software," Ware said. Students also investigated "bloodstains left in a room learning about human versus animal blood, the use of luminal to detect trace evidence, and DNA."

Kelsey Taylor, an eighth grader at Newport Middle School this fall, is a fan of the CSI shows.

"It's really interesting and the program really helped me in math and science," Kelsey said.

In one case, she analyzed a ransom note using chromatography. "Black ink has a lot of colors in it and each ink is different. We used a solution to separate an ink into its different colors," she said. She was then able to determine what type of pen wrote the demands.

Students also saw the work of real-life crime scene professionals.

The Kentucky State Police's cadaver dog found two bodies buried on the NKU campus - in reality bones buried with rotted chicken parts. Advanced students visited the Hamilton County Sheriff's Department Crime Lab.

CINSAM sponsors NKU-CSI. The center's goal is to conduct outreach, teaching and learning across various scientific disciplines.

Its four staff members teach the camp along with local middle and high school teachers. NKU faculty members also lead discussions on topics in their particular field.

The final session of the camp for this summer concludes this week. It will return again next summer. Cost is \$50-\$75 to participate. For more information, visit www.cinsam.org.

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