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Backgrounder 2: Centre for Forensic Research

Contact: David Burley, [Phone removed]; burley@sfu.ca
Mark Skinner, [Phone removed]; mskinner@sfu.ca
Gail Anderson, [Phone removed]; gail_anderson@sfu.ca

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SFU's new Centre for Forensic Research, the first university-based facility of its kind, will become a hub of sophisticated research in forensics - raising the bar on solving crime. Dubbed 'the jewel in the crown' of the new Arts and Social Sciences Complex (ASSC1) by Robert Gordon, School of Criminology director, the centre's specialized laboratories are built with high-level security measures - some are contained within steel-lined walls, others require iris-scans and finger-print identification. The centre will facilitate research on new crime-solving methods and technologies, enhance casework services and benefit forensic science worldwide.

Such work - which often involves handling crime investigation material - will help law enforcement agencies to focus their investigations, identify victims and suspects, eliminate non-suspects and help secure convictions.

The centre is shared by forensic scientists in the Department of Archaeology and the School of Criminology and contains numerous new labs, including an autopsy room, entomology and osteology labs with crime labs and evidence rooms, DNA labs and a radioisotope suite.

State-of-the-art autopsy and forensic osteology laboratories supervised by forensic anthropologist Mark Skinner will enhance a variety of research. For example, Skinner and graduate students are studying developmental stressors, such as child abuse, preserved in the forming enamel of children's teeth.

Forensic DNA labs will also advance the work of archaeologist Dongya Yang, who is researching new ways to detect and measure DNA degradation in ancient and forensic skeletal remains.

Criminologist Lynne Bell's work focuses on cutting-edge DNA work - how traces of chemicals in the body can aid police in homicide investigations and even help determine whether individuals have visited certain countries. 'New labs in geoarchaeology, zooarchaeology, paleobotany and bone chemistry, together with faculty expertise, will provide facilities and a wealth of expertise that can be drawn upon for forensic casework when needed,' says David Burley, Archaeology chair.

They'll also allow for more handling of casework says criminologist Gail Anderson, who researches insect colonization on victims of homicide. 'We will be doing a variety of innovative and exciting new research in forensic science and can now handle case work that can't be done at a police forensic lab.

'Skinner says graduate students are involved in all casework. 'The centre provides a secure and 'marvelously equipped space to coordinate our work. It will unite us as a team.

'SFU is a leader in the field of forensic science and was one of the first universities in North America - largely drawing on Skinner's pioneering efforts - to offer services to police and coroners. Such work became a catalyst for establishing new research directions in forensic science.

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