



Forensic and Investigative Sciences

Annual Newsletter
2020-2021 Academic Year

A Note from the Director



Howdy Forensic Science Aggies! This has been quite a year. Our graduating seniors dealt with more than a year of COVID-19

restrictions and a ridiculously, unreasonably long (for Texas), and cold winter storm that was so bad the University cancelled a week of classes and made us delay due dates for assignments and exams. That's quite a sendoff! If there is one trait I think most exemplifies this class of Aggie FIVS majors – its resilience.

So – even in the midst of chaos, what did our FIVS majors accomplish?

They participated in a variety of internships and research experiences. This academic year FIVS students participated in 19 such experiences. These included working with the FBI, College Station PD, Texas Department of Public Safety, Houston PD, Colin County DA's Office, Houston Arson Bureau, the Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences, Rick Davis and Associates Law Firm, Utah PD, Travis County Victim Services Unit, and forensic entomology and nursing research on campus (including an award winning research poster at Student Research Week!).

Our Aggie Forensic and Investigative Sciences Organization also weathered the storm of this academic year. They held zoom events related to Forensic Trivia and Bingo. One major achievement for the year was to line up a talk with Dr. Henry Lee! Another major undertaking of the group was to reinstitute the banquet in cooperation with the Undergraduate Entomology Student Organization. They held the event virtually, but were able to share the collective achievements of the department with faculty, staff, and parents; something that was not possible last year and is one step toward a return to normalcy (whatever that is nowadays). FIVS majors received several awards this year. Courtney Reid was a Texas A&M University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Merit Award winner.

Congrats to the outgoing officers (Heather Kavaloski, Grant Walford, Abigail Drago, Ruby Pena, Sabrina Lancaster, Erica Masi) for weathering the storm and to the incoming officers (Grant Walford, Abigail Drago, Erica Masi, Emily Erwin, Sabrina Lancaster) on their new responsibilities.

This year, we say goodbye to twenty-seven graduates from the FIVS program. You all will be missed! But we are also excited to see these graduates move on to the next adventures in their lives. We wish everyone the best in their upcoming adventures!

What's coming down the line next year? With a little luck, we will be back to normal classes (this is the initial signal from administration, which in this climate we all know can change rapidly if conditions change). We also have every indication to think that, unless conditions deteriorate, the Summer Abroad courses to Trinidad and to the UK will be back on. Keep your eyes open for announcements about those programs and for a chance to do research abroad! If circumstances limit your chances to do one of these trips, keep your eyes out for Online Virtual Exchanges that are being planned in the college, including for the FIVS program.

We are proud of our resilient Aggie FIVS majors. In the midst of a rough year, our freshmen exhibited one of the best retention rates in this tough major. On the other end, our graduating class is one of the biggest the program has graduated as well. As ALL FIVS majors remember, staying in the major is not necessarily an easy task, our GPA requirement and the pre-med load of

courses keep you all busy and on your toes. Keep up the good work FIVS majors!

Dr. Aaron Tarone

A Note from the Assistant Director



Hello everyone, and congratulations on a successful year! Last August the Forensic and Investigative Sciences Program changed leadership along with the Department of Entomology. We are proud to have Dr. Phillip Kaufman as the new Department Head of Entomology, Dr. Aaron Tarone as the Director of Forensic and Investigative Sciences, and myself as the Assistant Director of Forensic and Investigative Sciences. I would like to thank Dr. Jeff Tomberlin for his leadership, organization, and vision over the past 13 years. The program would not be where it is today without his unflagging work and enthusiasm. Luckily, we are only losing him as a director and not a valued faculty and research member of the FIVS team.

The 2020-2021 academic year started with students, faculty, and staff facing challenges we could never have predicted even a few years ago. I am happy to note that our students exceeded all of our expectations, and we have had a successful year with a new cohort of students moving into their sophomore years. Most of our students were unable to experience the in person classes, service, socialization, and other activities so integral to forming a successful cohort in FIVS, and yet each student stepped up and made the best of the situation. I'm incredibly proud of every student, and cannot wait to meet each of you without a screen between us.

I would like to take this time to brag a bit about how our FIVS students met the challenges of learning during a global pandemic. The Aggie Forensic Investigative Sciences club, AFIS, came up with a way to continue their activities virtually. They used their ideas to secure a live lecture from the incredible Dr. Henry Lee, one of the top (and easily the most famous) forensic scientists in the world. He joined our students through Zoom from his home in Japan and gave his time to our students. Other FIVS students had their hard-earned internships cancelled, but decided to engage in research instead. We had a record number of students developing and carrying out their own novel research projects, which have now answered forensically relevant questions from effect of fire ants on carrion colonization to vulture feeding to the effect of common solvents on hemoglobin visualizations techniques. We even had several of our students virtually present their work at conferences and win awards for their work. What could have been an unmitigated disaster for students and their learning, our students turned into opportunity. The sheer resilience and unflagging optimism of these students is inspiring. I am proud to know each and every one of you, and I cannot wait to see what you do in the future.

Now that we are moving towards normalcy again, we look towards the future. We have a record number of new students starting in the fall, a new leadership team, and a slew of new ideas to expand the program even further. Dr. Tarone and I are currently working on a 20 year plan for the program, setting our sights on being the

best forensic sciences undergraduate program in the world, while giving our students unique experiences and the opportunity to make memories that will last a lifetime. Our plans would be nothing without the students, their families, and the incredible support from everyone involved. I want to thank you for your tireless efforts, and here's to a great 2021-2022!

Dr. Adrienne Brundage

Senior Merit Award Winners

The Department of Entomology and the Forensic and Investigative Sciences Program awarded Ms. Angelica Rodrigues, Ms. Courtney Reid, and Ms. Michelle Shannon with the 2021 Senior Merit Awards for the department. This award is presented to the best of the best graduating seniors.

2021 Graduates

Despite unprecedented challenges this past year, our students successfully graduated the program.

The faculty and staff of the Forensic and Investigative Sciences program would like to wish each and every new graduate all the success in the world.



Mary Brown, Class of 2021

Mary successfully graduated in May 2021 with a degree in Forensic and Investigative sciences. Ms. Brown plans on attending graduate school for a degree as a Pathologist's Assistant, and said that the highlight of her educational journey was the upper division forensics courses and the Certificate of Public Health, offered by the department of entomology.



Kassandra Tenorio

Kassandra has finished up her undergraduate training in forensics and is currently working on her paralegal license. Her end goal is to attend law school and earn her place as a lawyer, a dream that we all know she will reach one day. During her tenure at TAMU, Ms. Tenorio served as vice president of the Ballet Folklórico Celestial, a traditional Mexican dance group. She also is officially able to claim the title as the first member of her family to graduate college.



Heather Kavaloski

Heather graduated with a FIVS degree in May 2021, and is planning to put her French minor to use to facilitate communication with a wide variety of agencies. She will be taking a position with a bio-hazard and crime scene cleaning company in Minneapolis, and plans on using her knowledge in the industry to volunteer as a headstone cleaner at local graveyards. Ms. Kavaloski wishes to use her time and effort to honor those who have passed and preserve the rich history of her town.



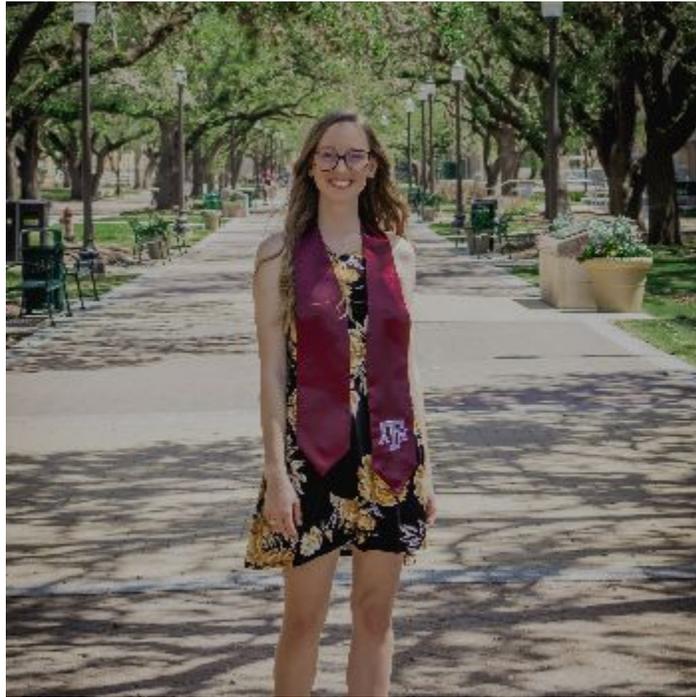
Caitlin Haslett

Caitlin graduated Summa Cum Laude with a 4.0 GPA and as a member of the Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society. She plans on working for the Texas A&M University Health Science Center through the College of Dentistry in Dallas, TX. She will work as a research assistant, gaining practical lab experience that she can take to a forensic laboratory in the future. She is currently busy planning her wedding in November of this year.



Nicholas Roy

Nick graduated spring 2021, and has been busy applying to law school. He plans to attend either Texas Tech School of Law or South Texas School of Law, Houston starting in the fall. Nick graduated with Magna Cum Laude honors and a minor in sociology, and spent his free time as a member of the TAMU Quiddich team.



Amanda Hanse

Amanda has accepted a position as a Serologist with DNA Labs International in Florida. During her time in the FIVS program, Ms. Hanse had two summer internships with the Houston Forensic Science Center, one in person on site and one virtual due to Covid restrictions.



Danielle Dessellier

Danielle is a future police officer, and is planning on attending the police academy as soon after graduation as possible. Ms. Dessellier would like to thank Dr. Brundage, Ms. Pool, Dr. Hapes, and her amazing classmates for constantly providing support. She is excited about the future, but sad to be leaving the department and TAMU.



Eric Villarreal

Eric graduated the program with a 4.0 GPA with Honors (Cum Laude), and on the Dean's list fall 2019. He also minored in psychology, and hopes to use his new knowledge to start a career as an investigator in a federal agency.



Rachel McNeal

Rachel is planning on continuing her education after graduation, and has been accepted into a PhD program at Texas A&M University. She is joining the lab of Dr. Jeff Tomberlin, and will be working towards her PhD in entomology. Ms. McNeal had many accomplishments during her time in the program, and is most proud of winning an undergraduate research award at the 2020 NAFEA conference for her work on habitat preference of forensically important Diptera in Trinidad.



Amanda Heddins

Amanda recently accepted a position at Armstrong Forensic Laboratories, a private forensics lab in Arlington Texas where she will be using her new degree to analyze evidence. Ms. Heddins completed an internship at the College Station Police Department during her time in the program, and has been volunteering her time as the Kids Team Leader at the Central Baptist Church in College Station.



Caitlyn Thoene

Caitlyn is continuing her work with the A&M Forensics and Engineering, Inc, where she has served as an assistant throughout her time in the program. Ms. Thoene recently presented her undergraduate research with Dr. Stacy Drake at the 73rd Conference of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences as well as at student research week on campus. She received first place in the undergraduate poster presentation for her work. Interested scholars can find her work here: Thoene, C., Dr. S. Drake, M. Foster, and A. Pickens. 2021. *Medicolegal Death Investigator Workplace Safety Hazards: A Scoping Review of the Literature*. Manuscript in preparation.



Cori McDougal

Cori is currently entering the job market as a forensic scientist, and is using her time to further her practical skills.



Kiara Dietze

Kiara has decided to continue her education, and will be attending Sam Houston State University to earn her master's in forensic science. She is planning on applying to forensic toxicology labs associated with the military after grad school. Ms. Dietze is most proud of carrying out original research in Trinidad, and presenting and publishing this work at the NAFEA annual conference.



Jaden Martinez

Jaden is planning to head to Michigan for the summer directly following graduation to shadow a Medical Examiner in the region. Afterwards, Ms. Martinez will move back to Colorado to be with her family, and will be working with local psychiatric hospitals as a mental health tech. She is currently studying for the MCAT and plans on attending medical school in the fall of 2023.

Alumni Updates

Our alumni are accomplishing great things after graduation. Here are some highlights from our students who graduated prior to 2021!



Andrew Chapman, a FIVS alumnus, is the first student to be awarded a place at the Texas A&M University College of Medicine, through a newly minted Cadet to Medicine Early Assurance Program. This program launched in 2019 to recruit top military personnel to medical school. Andrew graduated with a bachelor's in forensic and investigative sciences in 2020, and was admitted to this program during his sophomore year. This program will continue into the future,

allowing our top students a direct pipeline to medical school. To read more on this story visit <https://today.tamu.edu/2021/06/09/cadet-will-be-first-to-enter-college-of-medicine-through-pipeline-program-this-fall/>



Katherine Donovan recently started her position as an IBIS support technician at the Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences. She will be responsible for a variety of duties, including test firing appropriate calibers and types of firearms, restoring obliterated serial numbers on firearms, and testifying in court. Katherine has always embodied the best of TAMU, and we are so proud of her journey so far!