

CSI Centralia: College Criminal Justice Program Stages Mock Crime Scene

By Natalie Johnson / njohnson@chronline.com | Posted: Friday, February 26, 2016 9:34 am



Centralia College Mock Crime Scene

A student takes a photo of Centralia College's criminal justice program's mock crime scene investigation on Thursday morning.

Students walking to and from classes through the Centralia College esplanade Thursday morning saw a scene straight out of "CSI," complete with fake blood, boot prints and a murder weapon.

Associate professor Tadd Belden, of the college's criminal justice program, said it's important for students to get practical experience through mock crime scenes.

"Describing it and doing it is two different things," he said.

Belden, who was a police officer and crime scene investigator before he began teaching at the college, told The Chronicle on Thursday that he set up the mock crime scene to raise awareness and exposure for the criminal justice program on campus.

Centralia College's criminal justice degree is part of its Workforce Education program. The program has about 100 students, he said.

"We've always had a strong program," he said.

Belden and first-year criminal justice student Tailor Albright set up the crime scene. In the simulated scene, a person was attacked and bludgeoned with a pipe on the path, then dragged behind trees and an electrical box. The scene included the supposed murder weapon, footprints, blood spatter and a dead body — played by a borrowed medical dummy from the nursing program.

The scene attracted dozens of curious students between classes.

Student Matthew Fritz said he stopped to check out the scene before his lunch break.

"It's awesome," he said, after snapping some pictures of the scene.

The mock crime scene was on display between about 10:30 and 11:30 a.m. Thursday.

"It's more detailed than I expected," said student Eric West.

Belden and Albright strictly controlled access to the area, while demonstrating for passersby how to process the evidence crime scene investigators might collect.

"You've got to preserve the crime scene," Belden said.

Albright said she has been interested in criminal justice for years, and enrolled in the program after graduating from high school last year.

"I'm not taking these classes until next quarter so everything I learned today was new," she said.

He showed students and teachers passing through the area how investigators use specialized camera equipment to take detailed photos of shoe prints. Many of the skills he displayed are taught in the school's crime scene photography and technology classes, he said.

"That takes special equipment, a special tripod, a special camera," he said. "It takes work ... Doing a crime scene is a lot of detailed work."

College degrees are not required for police officers, but Belden said the advanced education is helpful.

"I think the extra education prepares them for the hiring process," he said. "They've had ... exposure to the criminal justice system. They're not going into it blind with unrealistic expectations."