Distributed by UW News Service, December 1, 2025

Link to original story: <https://www.uwplatt.edu/news/making-impression-forensic-investigation-students-contribute-state-crime-lab-first-its-kind>

**Making an impression: forensic investigation students contribute to State Crime Lab in first-of-its-kind partnership**

Written by Christine Bellport, University of Wisconsin–Platteville

It’s one thing to learn about your chosen profession within the confines of your major, but it’s another to put that knowledge into practice, especially when it could help solve a crime. That’s exactly what the Forensic Investigation Club at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville is doing. The group is gaining applied experience that few students get before graduation.

“It’s incredible that we’re using advanced equipment and teaming up with the Wisconsin State Crime Lab while we’re still students,” exclaimed Cassie Kniess, a senior forensic investigation major from Verona. Kniess has learned to skillfully operate the 3D scanner for evidence collection.

In a groundbreaking collaboration, students partnered with the university’s [Forensic Investigation program](https://www.uwplatt.edu/program/forensic-investigation) and the [Huff Family Innovation Center](https://www.uwplatt.edu/huff-family-innovation-center) to create footwear impressions that will be used by the Wisconsin State Crime Lab. The immersive event marked the first time students directly contributed physical forensic evidence to a state database, helping to advance investigative capabilities across Wisconsin.

“Through our partnership, forensic students get the opportunity to practice real-world evidence collection while the Wisconsin State Crime Lab will receive new reference prints for the database each semester,” said forensic anthropologist and UW-Platteville Professor Dr. Janamarie Truesdell. “To my knowledge, UW-Platteville’s Forensic Investigation program is the only one in the state with this kind of partnership, enabling students to collaborate closely with the agencies they hope to join while making a positive impact well before they step into their professional careers.”

Many crimes are solved or furthered through shoe print evidence collected at crime scenes. However, maintaining an up-to-date database of footwear impressions is essential. As shoe manufacturers continually release new designs, collecting fresh impressions ensures the database accurately reflects current footwear trends.

“The Wisconsin State Crime Lab appreciates the opportunity to collaborate with the UW-Platteville Forensic Investigation Club on our Footwear Investigative Lead database,” said Laura Matson, Fingerprint and Footwear examiner-advanced with the Wisconsin State Crime Laboratories. “In order to keep the system current, new shoe impressions need to be collected, and that’s where UW-Platteville comes in. With their assistance, we will be able to obtain many more footwear outsole designs that will then be used to help generate investigative information in real cases.”

The project was a direct result of the students’ recent visit to the Madison State Crime Lab, where they toured the facility, observed professionals at work and discussed how their contributions could support ongoing forensic efforts statewide.

“Being able to go to the Madison State Crime Lab and learn from those who do this on a daily basis was a truly phenomenal experience,” said Danielle Baier, a sophomore and president of the Forensic Investigation Club. “Collaborating on something that will be used on a national level, while coming from a smaller college, was inspiring. Touring the lab and seeing each division deepened our forensic interests even more.”

The event took place inside the Huff Family Innovation Center where students engaged in forensic data collection using professional-grade tools and technology. Students scanned outsoles using advanced 3D scanning equipment and produced impressions on a variety of surfaces to simulate real-world conditions. Participants also created traditional powder-based footwear impressions, that will be analyzed and stored in the crime lab’s footwear database—a critical resource used by law enforcement to link suspects to crime scenes.

Andrew Woodard, director of the Huff Family Innovation Center, said the event embodied the mission of the center to provide students with access to the tools and resources they need to push boundaries and apply their learning in meaningful ways.

“The Huff Family Innovation Center offers a diverse array of pathways for students to adapt to their project goals,” remarked Woodard. “Our 3D scanners are cutting edge and allow for extremely accurate digital scans to be taken that capture minute details—in this case—a shoe print of a potential assailant.”

The event compliments an already popular field of study. UW-Platteville is one of only 49 in the country offering a dedicated bachelor’s degree in forensic investigation, and it is the only public university in Wisconsin to do so. The curriculum integrates science, criminal justice and investigative analysis, with hands-on training in facilities like the [Forensic Investigation Crime Scene House and Research Facility](https://www.uwplatt.edu/department/criminal-justice-forensic-investigation/labs-and-facilities).

Dr. Will LeSuer, Criminal Justice and Forensic Investigation Department chair, noted the significance of the event as both a learning opportunity and a professional milestone.

“This is what forensic education should look like: students applying classroom knowledge in a meaningful way that has real-world impact,” said LeSuer. “Working with the State Crime Lab bridges the gap between education and professional practice and prepares our students for the demands of the field.”

As the footwear impressions are processed and incorporated into state systems, UW-Platteville’s students can proudly say their work is playing a small but vital role in supporting justice efforts across Wisconsin.

“Before enrolling in the program, I wasn’t big on joining groups, but the faculty really encouraged me to get involved and the resources continue to give me authentic experience before I even graduate,” said Kniess.