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Dr. Paul Newhouse and Julie Dumas, a post-doctoral research associate, think that estrogen therapy has potential for improving cognition. (Photo: Bill DiLillo)

A few years ago, actress and model Lauren Hutton was singing the praises of hormone replacement therapy in a national advertising campaign. Since then, media coverage of estrogen has gotten uglier. But Professor Paul Newhouse thinks estrogen therapy might have a positive role in the brain, and his National Institute on Aging research is exploring it.

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Test of Faith One of the first things Abby Swift did when she arrived on campus was find a church. That was the easy. Dealing with the many students who did not understand her religion was harder.

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Mysteries It's CSI Burlington, right on the UVM campus. About three minutes into Dr. Paul Morrow's March 5 lecture on gunshot, blunt force and sharp injury trauma, he brings up a slide: a close-up shot of a man with a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head.

THE WEEK IN VIEW

March 11, 7 and 10 p.m. Film: *In America*, by Jim Sheridan. Free admission (UVM Affiliates only), CC Theater, Billings.

March 11, 7 p.m. Panel: "From Candidate to Teacher: How to Get Hired." Memorial Lounge, Waterman. Information: 656-3450

March 12, 7:30 p.m. UVM Lane Series: Lyonel String Trio, playing works by Haydn and Martinu. UVM Recital Hall. Information: [Lane Series](#)

March 17, 7:30 p.m. UVM Lane Series: "St. Patrick's Day with Altan." Flynn Center. Information: [Lane Series](#)

March 23, 6 p.m. Community Medical School: "Can a Damaged Lung Be Repaired? How Adult Stem Cells Might Help," Dr. Benjamin Suratt, UVM/Fletcher Allen pulmonologist. Carpenter Auditorium, Given. Registration: 847-2886 or [CMS](#)

NEWS BRIEFS

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In a scene more reminiscent of Duke University than the University of Vermont, basketball fans camped out overnight in the Patrick Gym lobby to purchase tickets to see the Catamounts vie for their second-straight conference tournament championship. (Photo: Gordon Woodworth)

Catamount Crazies Camp for Cats

If you want to watch the men's basketball team play for a conference title and second-straight trip to the NCAA tournament at Patrick Gym on March 13, you better hope you have tickets already – fans camped out in the wee hours of March 10 and snarfed up all remaining tickets in less than an hour.

But for those who were in bed during the last call for tickets, there is ESPN.

The game between the Catamounts and the University of Maine Black Bears tips off at 11:30 a.m. It will be televised nationally on ESPN and aired on the radio on AM 620 WVMT and on the Internet at SportsJuice.com. The game will be the second-ever nationally televised sporting event at Patrick.

The UVM Tournament Central page offers live in-game statistics and other information and is available at [UVM Athletics](#).

Osher Institute Grant to Benefit Over 50s

The university's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute has received a second \$100,000 grant from the Osher Foundation to continue its development of a statewide education network that will serve Vermonters over the age of 50.

UVM used the initial grant to establish four

UVM's Alternative Spring Break Program Considered One of Best in Nation

When Dan McCabe is asked to give an example of a model alternative spring break program, the executive director of Break Away, a national nonprofit organization that oversees and supports alternative spring break programs at colleges and universities across the country, often cites the University of Vermont.

"UVM is definitely one we're proud of, especially because of its focus on quality rather than quantity," McCabe says. "There are schools that have larger programs, but UVM incorporates all the things we strive for – like diversity, reflection and community involvement. It's definitely one of our better schools, and one that I always mention to the media."

UVM's program has been featured in *USA Today*, *Good Morning America*, *CNN.com*, and is expected to be in an upcoming issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

UVM's spring break service program, one of 105 similar efforts nationwide who join with about 300 non-profit partners, started in 1991 with two trips and 27 participants. This year's spring break features 10 trips, all focused on different subjects ranging from homelessness and troubled youth to AIDS awareness and advocacy and Native American issues.

Since the program's inception, more than 1,000 volunteers have donated 45,000 volunteer service hours. Each trip has two site leaders and eight participants. In preparation for the trips, which have included projects in Philadelphia, Mississippi, Kentucky, Minnesota, Virginia, Florida, Arizona and California, students work with local organizations that deal with the program's themes. The students going to Kentucky, for example, worked with local homeless shelters to better understand the needs of that population before arriving in Cranks Creek, Ky., to help build homes and offer other forms of support.

Another group worked with area school systems in preparation for their trip to Philadelphia where members will work closely with Americorps volunteers in classrooms to help plan short-term programs based on specific skills or interests, after school activities, and community-based efforts. The mission of the group headed to Salinas, Calif., is to empower low-income immigrants and refugees through direct services, community education, leadership development and policy advocacy.

Some universities such as Vanderbilt, Florida

statewide institutes in Brattleboro, Montpelier, Rutland and Springfield. "The response to establishing member-driven lifelong learning institutes in communities throughout Vermont has been tremendous," notes Deborah Worthley, director of the Osher Institute. "The success of these institutes clearly demonstrates that Vermont's older citizens need opportunities to stay mentally active and challenged."

During the past year, each community has formed volunteer boards that have developed and implemented more than 60 non-credit courses and programs for community members age 50 and over. To date, the institutes have attracted close to 300 members, and the numbers continue to grow.

Plans for 2004 include establishing two additional institutes, as well as an on-campus Summer Conference for all members, where UVM President Daniel Fogel will be the featured speaker.

Data Detective to Speak on Gender Inequality Trends

Paula England, professor of sociology at Northwestern University and faculty fellow of the school's Institute for Policy Research, will speak on "Gender and Inequality: Trends and Causes" on March 22 at 4 p.m. in Memorial Lounge, Waterman. Her talk is part of the President's Distinguished Lecture Series.

England is known for her interdisciplinary research in the areas of gender inequality, labor markets and family. Her current research is focused on using data to understand the role that gender, power and emotional skills play in couples and families.

"I like the detective work of analyzing data to see which parts of gender equality are changing quickly, which parts are sluggish and trying to figure out why," says England. "For example, why have women's employment and job choices changed so much faster than men's participation in traditionally female activities such as child care?"

England's studies have been funded by the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes for Health and the MacArthur Foundation. She has served as an expert witness in a number of Title VII discrimination cases and has received the American Sociological Association's Jessie Bernard Award in 1999 for her career contributions to the study of gender.

A former editor of the *American Sociological Review*, England is the author of two books: *Households, Employment, and Gender* and *Comparable Worth: Theories and Evidence*.

The President's Distinguished Lecture Series, established by President Daniel Mark Fogel in October 2002, brings top researchers to enhance the academic experience; showcase faculty, students and programs; and bring the campus community together. Information: 656-3236

State and Michigan have larger programs with as many as 20 trips planned. But as McCabe points out, UVM's chapter focuses on high quality trips that are based on year-round training efforts. Jason Landis, one of UVM's alternative spring break directors, said the interest in the program grows each year with a record 150 students applying for 70 spots this year.

Landis said the experience on a UVM trip, unlike a beach-oriented spring break, is often life-changing. It's also a year-round commitment that produces friendships and a better understanding of important social issues. Landis said he was deeply affected by an encounter with a homeless man in Florida who had a Ph.D and was the author of two books. The man's life unraveled after he was hit by a car. Lacking health insurance from his employment as a freelance writer, the man racked up insurmountable hospital bills, was forced to mortgage his home and eventually wound up on the streets.

"It makes you realize that unexpected things can happen as you try to make it in the world," Landis said. "It's really powerful to see how these [shelters] help people get back on their feet. These trips take you away from Burlington and the college bubble we live in and into some very diverse settings."

EVENTS



Othello and Desdemona, as portrayed by members of the Aquila Theatre Company. The ensemble performs "Othello" and Kipling adaption March 24-25. (Photo: Richard Termine)

Theatre Company Brings Shakespeare, Kipling to Lane Series

Aquila Theatre of New York and London will bring two productions to Lane Series events held at the Royall Tyler Theatre on March 24-25. The highly regarded company will present "Othello" on March 24 at 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. and an original adaption of Rudyard Kipling's "The Man Who Would Be King" on March 25 at 7:30 p.m.

The company, which has built an audience in Burlington through Lane Series appearances over the years, will perform for the first time in the intimate, 300-seat Royall Tyler. The group's production of "Othello" is part of Shakespeare in American Communities, a national theatre touring initiative sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts in cooperation with Arts Midwest.

Some tickets for the shows are still available. Order them from the Flynn Center Box Office at 863-5966 or online at [UVM Lane Series](#).

Speech by Climber-Doctor Headlines Mastering the Maze

The 2004 edition of UVM's annual Mastering the Maze staff development conference, scheduled for March 18, will feature a keynote speech by Dr. Geoff Tabin titled, "Impossible Dreams – The Last Unclimbed Face on Mt. Everest and Eradicating World Blindness."

The overall theme of this year's all-day meeting, which incorporates dozens of sessions covering everything from "Grant & Accounting Jeopardy" to

Community Medical School Opens with Stem Cell Research

Stem cells – the often-controversial topic frequently found in news headlines – and their potentially therapeutic role in treating lung disease will be the focus of the first lecture in the spring series of Community Medical School. The free lectures will take place Tuesday evenings March 23 through April 27, from 6 to 7 p.m. in Carpenter Auditorium in the Given Building on the UVM campus.

Now in its sixth year, Community Medical School offers local citizens a glimpse of current medical science through lectures by the expert physicians and scientists of UVM/Fletcher Allen Health Care. Spring lecture dates, topics and speakers include:

March 23: "Can A Damaged Lung Be Repaired? How Adult Stem Cells Might Help," by Dr. Benjamin Suratt, assistant professor of medicine and Fletcher Allen pulmonologist

March 30: "What Lies Beneath: The Latest Imaging Tools for Medical Research," by Douglas Taatjes, research professor of pathology, director of the UVM Microscopy Imaging Center and Fletcher Allen psychiatrist

April 6: "Hot Flashes and Memory Lapses: How Estrogen Affects the Postmenopausal Brain," by Dr. Paul Newhouse, professor of psychiatry and director of the Clinical Neuroscience Research Center

April 13: "Losing Sight: Defining the Process of Macular Degeneration," by Dr. David Weissgold, associate professor of surgery and Fletcher Allen ophthalmologist

April 20: "The New Role of Statins: Are They the Latest 'Wonder Drug'?" by Dr. Deborah Ornstein, assistant professor of medicine and Fletcher Allen hematologist/oncologist

April 27: "The Brain's Circulation During and After Stroke," by Marilyn Cipolla, assistant professor of neurology, obstetrics and gynecology and pharmacology

Community Medical School is free and open to the public. Free parking is available onsite.

Trio Lyonel to Play at Recital Hall

The UVM Lane Series will present the string ensemble Trio Lyonel, performing at UVM Recital Hall on March 12 at 7:30 p.m. The program will

Abenaki outreach, is “Daring to change, empowering the vision.”

Faculty and staff are welcome to attend the event with prior registration at [Mastering the Maze](#) or 656-2484. The event features a free lunch, and a drawing for prizes, including airline tickets from Jet Blue Airways. Mastering the Maze is designed to provide administrative staff with skills and new approaches to accomplish the university's business, including training in finance, human resources, computer technology and management.

Keynote speaker Tabin is an associate professor of surgery.

include works by Mozart, Martinu, Dohnányi and Swiss violist and trio member Hugo Bollschweiler.

The other two members are American twin sisters Christina and Rebecca Merblum (violin and cello, respectively). The three met at the Yellow Barn Music Festival in southern Vermont in 1999. They began playing together as the VOX Piano Quartet, with the pianist of Eighth Blackbird, Lisa Kaplan.

The trio creates programs that highlight both American and European compositions, and hopes to present a comprehensive view of the string trio literature by infusing the canon of masterworks with lesser-known repertoire.

Information, tickets: FlynnTix Regional Box office, 863-5966 or [Lane Series](#)

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NOTABLES

March 10, 2004

Awards and Honors

Rick Vanden Bergh, assistant professor of business administration, has been named to the editorial board of the journal *Business and Politics* beginning this calendar year. *Business and Politics* solicits articles within the broad area of the interaction between firms and political actors. It is particularly interested in the use of non-market corporate strategy and efforts by policy makers to influence firm behavior through regulatory, legal, financial, and other government instruments.

Publications and Presentations

Sarah Abrams, assistant professor of nursing, recently had an abstract accepted for presentation at the 15th International Nursing Research Congress on July 22-24 in Dublin. The abstract is titled, "Caring for Persons with Dementia: Service Use and Policy Implications."

J. Tobey Clark, director of the Instrumentation and Technical Services Program, presented "Medical Device Safety and Performance Testing in the U. S." to the National Institute of Metrology in Shanghai on March 8.

In Memoriam

Francis Haggarty, UVM farm superintendent from 1968-1988, died March 2. Haggarty was well known as a leader of local and state Holstein associations, 4-H clubs, and the Addison County Field Days and Fair. The Francis Haggarty Addison County Field Day Fund has been established and contributions may be made c/o Ken Button, Treasurer; 843 Cave Road; Weybridge, Vt. 05753. Or contributions may be made to the Addison County Home Health & Hospice, Inc.; PO Box 754; Middlebury, Vt. 05753.

March 3, 2004

Publications and Presentations

The Jan. 11 edition of the Rutland Herald gave front-page coverage to the **Julie Roberts**, professor of communication sciences, for her research on the Vermont dialect. Her work examines the ways in which the accent of Vermont speakers is changing across generations. Roberts has found that some features, thought to be dying out are appearing in the speech of young Vermont children, either from imitation of elders or from other sources.

Charlie Barasch, adjunct instructor in communication sciences, has had several works accepted for publication. *The New York Times* printed a presidential-themed crossword puzzle of Barasch's own creation on President's Day, and the paper will publish another on March 2. In addition, the *Washington Post* plans to publish a third puzzle on Father's Day. Two of his poems, about presidents John Adams and Dwight Eisenhower, will be published in the spring issue of *The Alembic*, Providence College's literary magazine.

Kathleen Liang, assistant professor of community development and applied economics, presented a paper, "Gender Diversification Relates to Entrepreneurial Cognition and SBDC's Functions," at the 2004 Small Business Institute Annual Conference in Clearwater, Fla., in February. Her article presented an on-going study to evaluate the effectiveness of the Louisiana SBDC workshop since 2002 and examined the differences between female and male participants in their entrepreneurial cognition related to the workshop

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Investigating Estrogen's Other Side

By Jennifer Nachbur



Dr. Paul Newhouse and Julie Dumas, a post-doctoral research associate, think that estrogen therapy has potential for improving cognition. (Photo: Bill DiLillo)

A few years ago, actress and model Lauren Hutton was singing the praises of hormone replacement in a national advertising campaign. Since then, media coverage of estrogen therapy has gotten uglier. But Dr. Paul Newhouse, professor of psychiatry and director of the Clinical Neuroscience Research Unit, thinks the therapy might have a positive role in the brain, and is pursuing National Institute on Aging-funded research to

explore it.

Long-prescribed to treat menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes and night sweats, HRT was also believed to help prevent osteoporosis and heart disease. Then, in July 2002, alarm struck postmenopausal women worldwide when the National Institutes of Health put an early stop to the estrogen/progestin arm of the landmark Women's Health Initiative study due to evidence of the role of long-term HRT in increasing heart disease risk. More apparently negative findings have appeared since then, and just two weeks ago, the NIH halted the second half of the WHI when results showed the women involved were receiving no heart benefit and a slightly increased risk of stroke from taking estrogen alone.

According to some scientists, the two varieties of HRT tested in the WHI studies – one combination estrogen/progestin and estrogen alone – may not be the optimal or even appropriate hormone combination approach to use. The risks reported in these findings were sufficient to scare postmenopausal women, but neglected to answer one key question: Is HRT worth taking at all? Research is ongoing, but Newhouse, for one, sees hope on the horizon for the divisive therapy.

"Estrogen – despite its currently controversial status right now – appears to have a good side," says Newhouse, who is studying estrogen's role in the brain, specifically in regards to postmenopausal women's mood and memory systems, as well as its effect on Alzheimer's disease. "A large number of epidemiologic studies suggest that estrogen administration after menopause is helpful for preserving brain function. Estrogen may act on the cholinergic system of the human brain, which is believed to be critical for attention, learning, memory, and psychomotor performance."

Thinking estrogen

Newhouse, who is collaborating with, among others, Dr. Julia Johnson, professor of obstetrics and gynecology, is pursuing a three-tiered project funded by a five-year National Institute on Aging grant focused on the cognitive benefits of short-term estrogen use. In one study, participants receive either a single dose of estrogen or three months of estrogen and will undergo cognitive function testing to compare the effects. Another study compares the effects of estrogen plus progesterone, estrogen alone, and placebo on participants'

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[Test of Faith](#)

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cognitive function. And a third study examines how tamoxifen – the “anti-estrogen” drug widely prescribed to breast cancer patients to prevent recurrence – compares to placebo in its effects on cognitive function over a period of three months. Participation in the study will take nine months to one year per person.

Estrogen research is not a new area for Newhouse, or for his colleagues across the country. In 1999, a groundbreaking study at Yale using functional magnetic resonance imaging provided evidence that estrogen changed brain activation patterns in postmenopausal women that were performing memory tasks. Prior to receiving his NIA grant last fall, Newhouse conducted smaller-scale studies on estrogen’s effects, in combination with other therapies, on cognitive function. One of his early study participants was 60-year-old Patty Levi of Burlington.

“My dad had Alzheimer’s and my mother and sister had cancer, so I hadn’t taken estrogen yet, but I had been curious about it,” Levi says. During her study participation, Levi took computerized tests and verbal tests, which included making lists and retelling stories. “I didn’t know whether I was getting estrogen or the placebo, but I did experience some relief of menopausal symptoms after taking the first pill,” she says. She said she was not able to determine whether or not the hormones had an impact on her cognitive performance, but had more difficulty with the verbal tests.

Newhouse reports that almost daily, he receives scientific articles showing the positive effects of estrogen on brain function. “Because of the WHI, we now have confirmed evidence that long-term use of HRT is not a beneficial therapy for primary cardiovascular disease prevention, but there are still a lot of potential benefits to hormones that scientists haven’t even scratched the surface on,” he said. “We are really trying to understand the mechanisms – what estrogen is doing to the brain – and to better define how it can be beneficial for protecting cognitive function in postmenopausal women.”

Study volunteers sought

Postmenopausal women age 50 and over who are non-smokers, not currently taking HRT or antidepressants, and have no history of breast cancer, are eligible to enroll in the studies, which include free physical and cognitive screening, free study medications, and reimbursement for time and travel expenses. For more information, contact Sally Ross-Nolan in the department of psychiatry at 847-9488.

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Test of Faith

Religious life at UVM both reflects and contradicts national campus trends

By Jon Reidel



Clergy on campus, including Rev. Sue Marie Baskette, sometimes face a challenging task in trying to get students to participate in faith-based activities.

One of the first things Abby Swift did when she arrived as a first-year student in the fall of 2000 was find a church. Having attended services regularly and participated in youth groups while growing up in Pittsford, Vt., Swift wanted to continue that part of her spiritual life in college.

Being Catholic, the UVM Catholic Center was the perfect venue for her to do so. But while finding a place to worship,

study, and spend time with others who valued religion was easy, dealing with the many students who didn't understand her faith was harder.

"It's definitely not easy to practice religion on this campus," Swift says. "My freshman year especially, I got a lot of, 'she's the one that goes to church.' It bordered on harassment at times, but people have come to accept it more now."

That was four years ago. Swift, co-president of the Catholic Student Association, says things have changed over the past two years with students seeming more accepting of religion. More of them attend Mass, prayer meetings and use the Catholic Center to study than in the past, she says. "I've seen more people this year and last year. We hold night prayer and maybe three or four people used to show up. Now there's 20 or more."

The recent upswing in attendance observed by Swift mirrors data from a number of recently completed studies, although it isn't reflective of religious trends at UVM as a whole, based on attendance reported from other denominations.

A survey on spirituality conducted by UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute found that of 3,700 college juniors surveyed, 77 percent said they pray, 71 percent consider religion personally helpful, and 73 percent say religious or spiritual beliefs have helped develop their identity. The depth or frequency of prayer was not specified – so, "Oh God, let me pass this exam," might have qualified.

In the same study, 55 percent said they were satisfied with how their college experience provided "opportunities for religious/spiritual development," while 62 percent say their professors "never encourage discussions of spiritual issues."

An article in the *Christian Science Monitor* called the results more of a "snapshot than a measure of change," but added, "those on campuses say the trend is noticeable." "Religion on campus – particularly evangelical groups – is thriving these days, but it doesn't always find an easy home in the intellectual,

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secular world of higher education," the article concludes.

Not necessarily the norm

On this campus, the results are mixed. Swift says the reason for the increased numbers at Mass and prayer groups could be that students feel more comfortable about making their religious beliefs known due to a more accepting student body, and because the Catholic Center has facilities that students want to utilize.

Eli Goldberg, Jewish Student Life Coordinator at UVM Hillel, tells a different story. He says he's been disappointed with the participation by the roughly 700 Jewish students on campus, though he believes a lack of religious enthusiasm is common at UVM, regardless of an individual's religious affiliation. "We may see only a 150 students on the highest of [Jewish] holidays," he says.

Goldberg says Vermont may be one of the most secular states in the nation, and that UVM seems to attract similarly minded students. He points to the recent showing at an interfaith banquet, an event open to students from all denominations, where only 35 to 40 people showed up, as indicative of the lack of religious interest on campus.

"I tell people what I do and they look at me as though I'm insane for devoting my life to something they see as wrong, or even divisive," he says. "Vermont might be the most secular state in the country."

Despite the apparently cool level of overall religious interest in religion here, there are nonetheless many religiously related activities at UVM.

The Spiritual and Religious Life Council, which operates under the auspices of the Center for Cultural Pluralism, has a mission of strengthening the provision of spiritual guidance and pastoral care to the UVM community, and serves as the umbrella to all religious activity on campus.

When students arrive on campus, they can fill out a form stating their religious preference and which organization they might be most interested in receiving information from or joining. SGA-Spiritual and Religious approved student organizations include: Catholic Student Association; Chabad House Jewish Student Center; Hillel (Jewish Student Union); Intervarsity Christian Fellowship; Muslim Student Union; Navigator's; and Vermont Pagans. The Unitarian Universalist Society, Christ Church Presbyterian, Catholic Center, and Cooperative Campus Ministry also have websites and representatives on campus.

Spirituality trumps religion

Like Goldberg, Rev. Sue Marie Baskette, is trying to encourage students to use her and other religious organizations for support and guidance while away from home. Baskette, who runs Cooperative Campus Ministry, an inclusive ecumenical campus ministry funded by five main-line Protestant denominations, holds services on Sunday and is available for counseling.

Baskette says a small number of people typically attend services, but that others come to see her about various issues. She adds that students seem more receptive to attending events that use terms like spirituality or meditation, as opposed to religion. "A lot of students are more comfortable talking about spirituality, especially when they feel uncomfortable in a church."

Religion lecturer Erica Hurwitz, who teaches the course, Religion in America, says a student's perception of religion at UVM can depend heavily on where they're coming from. She had a student from the south who was shocked at the lack of a religious preference on campus, while many others seem indifferent, she says.

"From what I've seen, students here don't seem that open to going to church," she says. "But in religious studies (at UVM), there doesn't seem to be a soul searching goal for students. In New England, religion is a private choice, in other places like the south it's part of public life."



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Unlocking Forensic Mysteries

Seminar series and new biology concentration explore growing field

By Lynda Majarian



Bill Kilpatrick, associate professor of biology, is an expert on DNA fingerprinting, a technique he is sharing with students in a new forensic biology seminar. (Photo: Bill DiLillo)

It's CSI Burlington, right on the UVM campus. About three minutes into Dr. Paul Morrow's March 5 lecture on gunshot, blunt force and sharp injury trauma, he brings up a slide: a close-up shot of a man with a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head.

It's a very small, round wound that superficially doesn't suggest the damage it caused on its way through the brain. Morrow asks students to look closely for the presence or absence of

specific features around the entrance wound, such as a rim of abrasion, "wipe off" debris from the firearm, or an abrasion "collar," which would indicate the bullet entered at an angle. Then they look at the exit wound on the other side of the man's temple; it is wider, with a more irregular shape – what Morrow calls "yawing."

Morrow, who is Chief Medical Examiner for the State of Vermont, was last week's guest lecturer at the university's first-ever seminar series in forensic biology. The seminar is the cornerstone of a new concentration in forensic biology in the College of Arts and Sciences Department of Biology that "has already been of great interest to prospective students," says Judith Van Houten, professor and chair of biology. As television programs such as *CSI* glamorize the important role of forensic scientific techniques in solving crimes, more and more students are gravitating toward colleges that provide training and prepare them for careers in the field.

Morrow next shows a slide of another person with a large purplish spot on the bridge of his nose. "Entrance or exit wound?" Morrow quizzes the students. The answer: it's an entrance wound, messier than the usual because the bullet passed through the unlucky person's eyeglasses. Knowing what the bullet encountered before it hit the victim, Morrow says, is imperative to getting a full picture of the crime.

The austere classroom is packed with students. The walls are bare except for a poster of the periodic table, the air quiet except for the hum of the slide projector. Students occasionally ask questions, and when the lecture runs overtime, few take the opportunity Morrow gives them to leave. The medical examiner is only one of several guest instructors at the weekly seminar, in a roster that includes State Toxicologist William Bress; Detective Sergeant Joseph Lehy of the Vermont State Police; Eric Buel, Director of the Vermont Forensic Laboratory; and Vermont Attorney General William Sorrell. Discussed are subjects such as DNA technology, post-mortem changes, investigating arson and various techniques used in forensic laboratories.

Painful subjects

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Take rifle and handgun injuries, for example. Different types of firearms create different types and severity of wounds. When fired, every gun produces bullets with unique grooves and ridges, called tool marks, that makes it possible to match any bullet to a particular gun. "It's always important to get the bullet," Morrow says. (And by the way, never handle a bullet with metal – it compromises the unique markings.) Moreover, the explosion that sends the bullet spinning through air also expels hot gases, smoke, soot and little bits of burning gunpowder. It's the presence, absence and/or location of this debris, along with ballistic testing, that lets crime scene investigators know at what range the gun was fired.

"Medical examiners are always reminding emergency-room personnel to save patients' clothing," says Morrow. "The clothing can tell you more of the story." He shows a slide of skin surrounded by a small, round gunshot wound that suggests a gun was fired at tight contact, against the victim's body. But in this case, a Harley Davidson decal on the victim's vest (shown on another slide) absorbed the telltale debris that reveals to investigators the gun was fired from further away.

Morrow moves on to blunt trauma, such as blows, beatings and falls. Contusions, or bruises, often hemorrhage internally into tissue. He brings up a slide that shows a bruised brain. The distribution of bruises, scrapes and cuts "can tell us something about the injury," Morrow says. In this case, the bruising was induced by a motorcycle accident. There are also characteristic patterns on victims of automobile accidents. And the location of wounds provides even more information. Cuts on the hands can often be defensive wounds from warding off an attacker. Drag wounds show up on the victim's skin, indicating foul play.

Sharp force injury is yet another source of trauma. Cutting, stabbing and puncture wounds "tend to gape according to the normal elastic lines of the body," Morrow explains. Consequently, the edges of sharp injury wounds must be re-approximated before they are measured for potential weapons. And, as with blunt trauma, the distribution of injuries helps medical professionals determine cause of death, from the slashed wrists of a suicide to the patterned puncture marks of a pitchfork injury.

Morrow then shows slides of a victim and a crime scene to summarize a case involving a body that washed up on the banks of the Winooski River. The victim suffered a severe head injury, but how? Both from bodily evidence and from bloody sneaker prints and blood on a rock near the area where the body was recovered, Morrow deduced that the victim had been struck on the head with the rock, and then dragged to the water for disposal.

Add a few good-looking actors, and it might be a plot for an upcoming episode of CSI.

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