

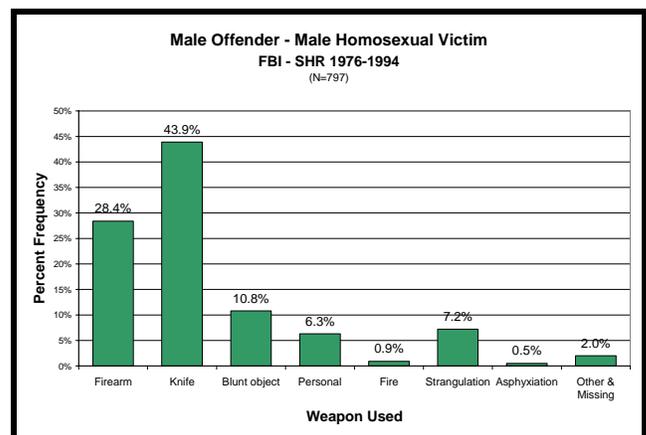
FBI SHARP-EDGED WEAPONS PROJECT

The Center for Homicide Research has begun collaborating with the Federal Bureau of Investigation to collect data for an FBI research project. The Center was approached by the FBI in 2007 when it hosted the summer meeting of the Homicide Research Working Group. Two agents from the Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime proposed the mutual project. Agent Timothy Keel and Agent Yvonne Muirhead visited the Center's data lab to better understand the role of the Center. It was then that the agents shared their idea for a research project to investigate sharp-edged weapon use in homicide.

Choosing the Center for this work was no accident. Agent Keel had met Dallas Drake on previous occasions while attending trainings and professional conferences. It was there Keel developed an intense interest in the National GLBT Homicide Database being constructed at the Center. This is because the database contains a disproportionate percent of knife homicides; nearly 44% of GLBT homicides involve knives as weapons. This was an early and continuing finding by the Center's researchers. The study will not investigate GLBT homicide per se, but knife homicides that happen to involve GLBT people as victims.

Very little is known about the use of knives in homicide, because most homicides in the United States are committed with firearms, not knives. This project seeks to construct useful knowledge about all types of sharp-edged weapons including any weapon used to cut or stab, like a shard of glass, an ice-pick, razor blade, or other conventional types of knives. Agent Keel hopes to write his article for publication in a peer-reviewed journal.

Although this project involves sharing previously collected data, in some cases new data will be required, and data access should improve given the status of our new partnering agency. Each agency will be responsible for its own expenses, but the Center will be specifically credited for its contribution. 



BOARD OF DIRECTORS EXPANDING

Two new members have joined the Center for Homicide Research's Board of Directors.

Anne Cross is an Associate Professor of Criminal Justice at Metropolitan State University, specializing in research methods, diversity issues and constitutional law. She holds a Master's degree in Political Science from the University of Minnesota and a Doctorate degree in Sociology from Yale University. She served as Department Chair of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice at Metro State from 2007-2009.

Phil Miner of Minneapolis holds a Master's degree in Liberal Studies from the University of Minnesota where he focused on Contemporary Marketing Techniques for Nonprofit Organizations. Currently, he works as Correspondence Administrator for the University of Minnesota's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB is where all the University's research projects are sent for ethical review. Along with his many accomplishments, Phil is a former student intern at the Center for Homicide Research in fall of 2003.

The Center for Homicide Research is still in need of an additional four professionals with experience in fundraising, grant-writing, or organizational management to lead CHR and its team of researchers, interns, and volunteers.

If you are interested in becoming a board member for CHR, contact Dallas Drake at dallas.drake@mindspring.com. More information is also available at www.CHRonline.org. 

STUDENT ALUMS

In looking toward the future, the Center has decided to try to capitalize on former student interns and service-learners. The Center has hosted over 300 students since the Student Internship Academy began in the spring of 2004. CHR students know more about the center than almost anyone due to their hands-on role in the day-to-day operation of the Center. As they move out into the community it is likely they will become ambassadors for the Center and its mission. They have endured the impact of what few people can imagine.

Staff is updating contact information on all past students in hopes of organizing occasional social networking events. Our students are now spread far and wide. Many are already working in their chosen occupation. It is our hope that they will not only spread the word that homicide is preventable, but that they might assist in ensuring the continued survival of the Center and its newest students. 

INTERN PROFILE: PETER ESPENSON

Peter Espenson came to the Center for Homicide Research in May of 2010 to complete a full research internship. He will complete a 160-hour requirement as part of our Internship Learning Academy. Espenson is a shining example of the type of student researchers we have working at the Center.



Many of our student interns arrive with impressive academic and community involvement backgrounds and Espenson is no exception. He grew up in Duluth, Minnesota where he graduated with many awards and honors. He was Valedictorian of his class with a GPA of 4.0. Espenson was a finalist in the Section 7AA, Triple A Award for excellence in arts, athletics and academics. He was also awarded the National Yale Book Award, which is awarded annually to junior students with great scholastic promise.

Currently Espenson attends Hamline University where he is majoring in Communications Studies and Social Justice. He has been selected to pursue collaborative research with the Chair of the Communications Department around the topic of discourse on gay rights.

Espenson's academic and course work has led to an interest in legal advocacy. His future plans include attending law school to "become a legal advocate to the GLBT community" and "to promote legal justice." He spent the summer of 2009 as a canvasser for the Human Rights Campaign, along with several other political organizations, by working for Fund for the Public Interest.

In reflecting on his internship thus far, Espenson said, "It cultivates my abilities to partake in legal research once I begin law school. Studying the relationship between homicide and the GLBT community delves into the very issues that I am most passionate about."

"Work at the Center fits really well with my goals," said Espenson, "since criminal activity is one of the most interesting parts of the law. Analyzing forms of deviant behavior such as homicide is not only useful in studying law, but it is also extremely interesting. Espenson especially likes the collaborative paper writing. He said, "Checking reference sources, and editing research papers is truly extensive and further hones my academic skill." Working in collaboration with other students creates a very rich learning environment.

Espenson said that he appreciates the way students get such close supervision from their mentor, all in the same office, with direct one-on-one learning. "The learning environment is important," he said, "because looking at all the homicides is a traumatic experience. Although it is emotionally difficult part, the benefit is that you get a more comprehensive and clear idea about how people interact in a an unusual context. 

OFFICE MOVE AND PAPERLESS/DIGITIZATION PROJECT

Criminal justice has experienced unprecedented challenges over the past year. As with most nonprofit organizations and agencies, the recession has hit the Center for Homicide Research hard. Many nonprofits have closed their doors in unprecedented numbers in response to receding finances. The MN Council on Foundations reports that 30% of foundations expect grant-making to decrease this year (40% decrease last year), with greater focus on "basic needs" such as food, housing and jobs.

The Principal Researcher along with the Board of Directors met this past fall to discuss the challenge ahead and took action to protect gains made by the Center thus far. According to Dallas Drake, Principal Researcher, much of the work over the last 10 years has been to construct the infrastructure needed to make research possible.

A large volume of case data has been amassed which allows the development of empirical knowledge about homicide and its prevention. Our board felt it important to protect the gains made thus far, especially because of the unique contribution made by the Center toward understanding homicide nationally.

To safeguard our process and the capacity to continue this ground-breaking research, the Board moved to seriously change how the Center accomplishes its mission. First, the Center offices (the data laboratory, library and administrative spaces) were dramatically reduced 60% by moving to new space within the same building.

Second, the research lab has redesigned its data-collection process to go 90% digital. All reports are now digitally imaged, or digitally processed with online coding schemes. Several software improvements over the last five years have made this possible, though the over-all changeover is disruptive. This change will help safeguard data, and reduce the demand for office space. This reduces our impact on the environment and saves on paper and toner expenses. Transforming current files to digital will continue to take time.

And lastly, the Center has changed its Internship Learning Academy by charging for student placements. This \$500 fee helps off-set the expense of providing state of the art computers for each computer, since most research work is computer-dependent. The Center has never had a shortage of qualified student interns. Placement at the Center is in high demand not only from Minnesota, but from other states as well. Time will tell whether enough students will have the capacity to keep this as a continuing source of support.

To discuss the program and enrollment, contact Principal Researcher, Dallas Drake at dallas.drake@mindspring.com or by telephone at (612) 331-4820, or visit the Center's website at www.CHRonline.org. 

INTERN PROFILE: AGATHE PANARETOS

Originally from Madison WI, Agathe Panaretos began her work at CHR in January of 2010 as an unpaid research intern. She is completing her Bachelor's degree at the University of Minnesota this fall where she majors in Sociology and Cultural Studies. Panaretos is focusing on crime and the courts as preparation for her long-term goal of studying law this next year.



Panaretos chose an internship at CHR to serve as a companion placement with her work at the WATCH program, where she serves as a court monitor. "I not only wanted to put the theory I've learned into practice," she said, "but I wanted what I do to actually be of use."

How much work goes into producing scholarship was something that Panaretos said she didn't realize until her work at the Center. She spent this spring and summer editing case write-ups and developing research briefs on missing homicide victims, and helping to refute the Smiley Face Murder Theory. "Its a lot of work to make sure we have everything covered, and to argue both sides of a topic," Panaretos says, "I think of what I knew in January, and I think I've changed a lot. I think what we are doing is really important. I feel a lot more comfortable throwing ideas out and getting things wrong. Now I can challenge ideas or help develop them better." She continues by describing herself as a work in progress. 

CHURCH SHOOTING DATASET NOW AVAILABLE ONLINE

After three long years of waiting, the Center's Church Shooting Dataset has been placed by ICPSR (Inter-University Consortium on Political and Social Research). Placing a dataset with ICPSR is not an easy task and there are expenses involved with getting it ready. Once placed however, the placement is permanent and access is public. If you search using Google and enter the key terms: Church Shooting Data, the catalogue listing should appear along with data documentation.

Center researchers collected every instance of shootings on church property over 25 years and detailed various data elements about each instance. It has been named the, United States National Church Shooting Database, 1980-2005. The project was funded using grants from Philanthrofund Foundation, Gill Foundation, Minnesota State Bar Foundation, and the Otto Bremer Foundation .

While waiting for placement of this dataset, a gay-friendly church was attacked by an anti-gay gunman in Knoxville, TN. The churches priest was killed in the 2008 shooting. 

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ABOUT THE CENTER

The Center for Homicide Research is an independent, volunteer-driven, non-profit organization dedicated to increasing the capacity of the community, criminal justice professionals, and law enforcement to become more effective in identifying, solving and preventing homicide.

Research began in 1992 and incorporated in 1999 as a nonprofit organization called the Minnesota Gay Homicide Study. In 2004, the name was changed to the Center for Homicide Research.

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