

Carleton student earns prestigious grant

HEIDI ANDERSON
Special to The IFP

Georgetown native Alyssa Taylor was recently awarded a \$17,500 scholarship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) for the 2006/2007 school year.

Taylor, who specializes in forensic psychology at Carleton University, where she is currently pursuing a masters degree, was awarded the scholarship for her thesis research entitled, "The Effectiveness of Firearms Training Simulators (FATS) at a Canadian Police Academy".

"Currently in Canada, FATS is used to teach police trainees use-of-force decision-making skills, however these simulators have rarely been scientifically tested," said Taylor. "This project seeks to examine FATS in order to determine if the skills learned will transfer to real world police settings. Any research that can make police training more effective will not only potentially save lives, but also significantly improve police-community relations and overall community cohesion."

In June of this year, Taylor received the Canadian Psychological Association Student Poster Award for Criminal Justice Section at a Calgary conference. She is also the Ontario Psychological Association Representative for Carleton and does volunteer work at a local crisis centre in Ottawa.

The recent shooting tragedy at Dawson College in Montreal has

revived the issue of gun control in Canada and Taylor hopes that her research will be able to generate the kind of knowledge that is necessary when these types of tragedies occur.

"The events of Dawson College are the kind of tragedy we all hope will never happen," said Taylor, a Georgetown District High School graduate. "However, it is situations like this that police officers must be trained to handle. Any research into training methods will hopefully contribute positively to the preparation of our police to handle this kind of situation professionally and effectively."

Taylor says her supervisor at Carleton, Professor Craig Bennell, has been a great supporter in her quest to produce this kind of research.

"He is a dedicated researcher to the area of investigative psychology and policing, and specifically he is very interested in conducting applied research that can have a real impact on the policing community," said Taylor. "It is not only his passion for practical research, but also his friendly and approachable attitude that has made the first year of my graduate degree so productive and enjoyable."

"I can't say enough good things about Alyssa," said Bennell. "As a

supervisor, she is the type of student you hope for."

He says one of the things that makes Taylor's research stand out is that, "she never loses sight of the big picture—the fact that our research is meant to help the police make better decisions in critical incidents."

Conducting practical research that can help build safer communities in Canada is one of the goals of Carleton's Forensic Psychology Program.

"Her thesis," Bennell says, "represents one of the first attempts to determine whether computer simulators can be used to train Canadian police officers to make effective decisions. Research like Alyssa's is one way of ensuring that officers who will be exposed to such situations (like that at Dawson College) receive training of the highest possible quality."


Taylor is one of 57 graduate students who were recently awarded a total of more than \$2 million in master's, doctoral, and postdoctoral fellowships and scholarships from SSHRC.

As for her future plans, Taylor says, "The previous year has shown me how much I enjoy practical research in the policing area. I plan to continue on the academic path to examine various aspects of police training, use of force and police stress in response to critical incidents."

Anyone wanting further information on Taylor's research can go to the Carleton Police Research Lab website, server.carleton.ca/~cbennell/, or e-mail her directly at ataylor5@connect.carleton.ca.



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(John 4:23, 24)

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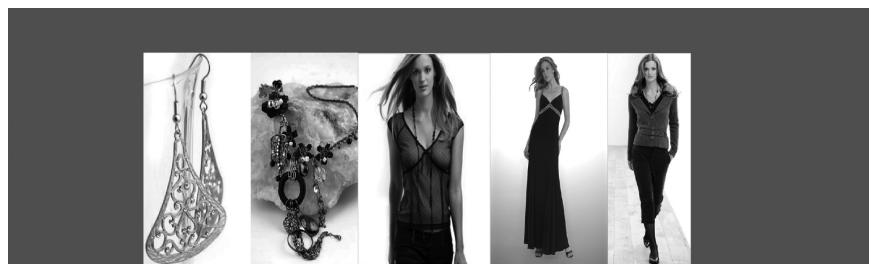
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