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College internships launched Crawford's crime-fighting career

When he was growing up, David Crawford '99 was "the kid who watched a lot of the police shows on TV. There was always something intriguing to me about serving people and having fun doing it," he says.

Now, David is living out that dream as a special agent with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, specializing in violent crimes and criminal enterprise. It's a challenging and rewarding job, he says, and it's one that doesn't always end at quitting time.

"As an FBI agent investigating drug-trafficking organizations, kidnapers and bank robbers, I don't have a nine to five job," he says. "Balancing work life with home life is, by far, the most challenging aspect of my job. Fortunately, I have an understanding and supportive family."

David's work is more complex than the police television shows he watched as a child. For one thing, TV officers are rarely shown working at their desks.

"Most law enforcement agencies are consumed by paperwork, and the FBI is no exception," he says. "Documentation is the key to successful casework and prosecution, so I find myself behind the computer almost every day." David also takes advantage of the option of "applying for different collateral duties. For example, I am a firearms instructor, SWAT team member and physical fitness advisor. When I need a break from case work, these extra responsibilities offer me just that."

David majored in sociology and double-minored in psychology and criminology at Illinois Wesleyan. He regards his college experience as important preparation for his current job. "As an FBI special agent, I encounter people of all walks of life. The liberal arts education I received at IWU exposed me to different ways of looking at the world, making me more tolerant of opposing viewpoints and different types of people."

Through Wesleyan's Hart Career Center, David also completed several internships that guided him toward his career. Following a summer internship at the Illinois Department of Corrections headquarters in Springfield, he worked for a semester in the Normal Police Department, where he got a close look at police work doing "ride-alongs" with patrol officers. As a junior, he interned with Elizabeth Robb, chief judge of Illinois' 11th Judicial Circuit and a 1978 IWU



A badge and a gun: tools of the trade for FBI agent Crawford, whose photo is not included in this story for security reasons. (Photo courtesy of the FBI)

graduate. “Judge Robb was wonderful in that she allowed me to observe many different court cases, including a murder trial.”

An even bigger break came when David was picked for the FBI Honors Internship Program. Assigned to the Behavioral Science Unit at the FBI Academy in Quantico, Va., he worked for an entire summer with the unit’s criminal gangs specialist, an agent who became David’s “mentor and friend. He taught me about the FBI and so much about life. I became addicted to jogging and physical fitness because he included me in his daily runs around the academy grounds.

“I came into this internship thinking I wanted to be an FBI agent and left knowing I wanted to be an FBI agent.”

After graduating, David worked three years in Danville, Ill., as a special agent for a multi-jurisdictional drug task force operated by the Illinois State Police. He spent the next four years as a patrol officer with the Decatur Police Department and began the FBI’s rigorous application process.

Prospective agents must pass a written test before being granted an interview that is “designed to give the candidate the opportunity to showcase his or her background,” David explains. “I believe the average age of new agents is above 30, so the interview seems to be tailored to those with ample work experience.”

That experience doesn’t have to be in law enforcement, he adds. “The FBI does not place any more value on a police-officer applicant than it does, say, a computer scientist, an attorney, an accountant or a chemist.

“Keep in mind that the FBI employs more professional-support employees than it does special agents,” David adds, “so if you’re not interested in carrying a gun and arresting people, the FBI has so many other opportunities ranging from intelligence analysts to linguists to forensic scientists.”

To current students and recent graduates, David also offers more general advice.

“Don’t settle for something just because you may make more money doing it,” he says. “Or because your friends or family think you should do it, or because you’ve always been expected to do it. Choose a career where you’ll never look back after retirement with regrets. Work should be fun, not a burden.”

This story is based on an interview of David Crawford by David Buesing '10 that appeared in the April 2009 Career Connections newsletter produced by the IWU Hart Career Center.