Psychology grad hopes research will help first-responders

Edmonton—While researching where to go to university, B.C native Carson Flockhart read a paper by psychologist Dr. Jayne Gackenbach, who was studying video games and dreams at MacEwan University. The hard-core gamer decided to email Gackenbach and offered to assist in the research.

Flockhart started at the bottom, coding data and taking notations for other researchers, and then worked his way up to his first solo work – an independent study that looked at whether video games offer a nightmare protection effect for first-responders. “Many people in these roles suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, and one of the horrifying parts of that is re-traumatizing nightmares,” said Flockhart. “Gackenbach had already published research showing that video games offered a nightmare protection effect for hard-core male gamers in the military.”

Flockhart went to fire halls and police stations looking for volunteers to anonymously fill in a form and submit a description of one of their dreams for the study. “My first study was challenging, but we were able to replicate the findings in Gackenbach’s earlier study that showed when males play a certain amount of video games they experience less threat in their dreams,” said Flockhart. “The dreams are still scary in content, but you can tell by the language the person uses to describe them that they are less fearful.”

The hard work paid off last summer when Flockhart shared his research at the Toward a Science of Consciousness 2105 conference in Helsinki, Finland. “I met some of my research heroes and got an open invitation to do a PhD fellowship there in the future. Although he has technically graduated, his research continues and right now he is writing a paper with Gackenbach that will be submitted in January.

Flockhart will receive his degree during the Fall Convocation ceremonies on November 17 at the Winspear Centre.

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Founded in 1971, MacEwan University inspires its students with a powerful combination of academic excellence and personal learning experiences. Offering more than 65 programs including undergraduate degrees, applied degrees, diplomas, certificates, continuing education and corporate training, the university provides a transformative education in a creative, collaborative and supportive learning environment where creativity and innovation thrive. Located in Edmonton, Alberta Canada, MacEwan University offers a unique student experience that opens up diverse pathways for achievement and growth.