

# Career Pathways, Employment Challenges, and Advancement of Bachelor of Science in Criminology Graduates

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the career pathways, professional success, and employment challenges of Bachelor of Science in Criminology graduates from Tarlac State University. A mixed-methods explanatory sequential research design was employed, combining quantitative survey data from six hundred forty-nine (649) graduates from the academic years 2016 to 2024 with qualitative insights from semi structured interviews. Quantitative data, analyzed using the Average Weighted Mean, revealed a high employment rate of 94% and strong professional self-efficacy, particularly in "power skills" like leadership and critical thinking (Mean 3.80). Qualitative findings, derived from thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke framework), identified a "triple barrier" of challenges: restrictive employment quotas, persistent gender stereotyping in role allocation, and the pervasive influence of nepotism and favoritism (the "Palakasan" system). The study concludes that while the academic program successfully prepares graduates with relevant skills, these systemic and cultural barriers create an "integrity gap" in the hiring process, often leading qualified individuals to work outside their target field. The findings suggest a need for transparent, merit-based recruitment processes to ensure the most competent leaders are integrated into public safety roles.

**Keywords:** Criminology, Employment, Career Pathways, Challenges, Academic Preparation

## INTRODUCTION

The criminology field presents a complex career landscape where graduates frequently encounter difficulties related to employment factors and professional practice. While the course provides knowledge in six key areas (Criminological Sociology, Law Enforcement Administration, Criminal Detection and Investigation, Criminal Law and Jurisprudence, Correctional Administration, and Forensic Science), graduates often face limited opportunities due to growing demand in other fields that focus more on technology and scientific application of solving crimes. In a global context, bridging the gap between academic training and practical skills remains a significant challenge. These challenges are further

compounded by factors like limited quotas for law enforcement agencies and systemic issues that can lead to early career burnout or disillusionment.

This study was motivated by the need to examine the career pathways and professional success of BS Criminology graduates from Tarlac State University (TSU), one of the top-performing criminology institutions in the region. The research focused on their employment status, specific challenges encountered, and opportunities for advancement, providing valuable insights into the program's effectiveness and potential gaps in academic preparation. The research was guided by the theory of occupational adaptation (Schkade & Schultz, 1992), Vroom's Expectancy Theory of Motivation, and the Human Capital Theory (Becker, 2002; Gillies, 2015).

The study addressed four primary research questions:

1. What factors affect the employment status of TSU Criminology Graduates in terms of qualifications, educational background, and alignment with job market demand?
2. What types of jobs are BS Criminology graduates engaged in, and how closely are these jobs related to their field of study in terms of skills required, relevant work experience, and competency alignment?
3. What challenges do TSU Criminology graduates face in securing employment, specifically employment quotas and conflicts of interest in hiring and promotion?
4. How does the academic preparation provided by TSU contribute to their career progression?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a mixed-methods explanatory sequential research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. This design was selected because it allows for the gathering of measurable data (quantitative) about employment trends and outcomes in the first phase, followed by the collection of rich, contextual insights into graduates' personal experiences and perceptions (qualitative) to help explain the initial results. In this sequential process, the qualitative findings serve to elaborate on the statistical data, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing graduate employment.

### **Population of the Study**

The study included a sample of six hundred forty nine (649) TSU College of Criminal Justice Education (CCJE) graduates. The sampling method used was total enumeration, meaning every individual in the defined population who met the specific inclusion criteria was invited to participate to eliminate sampling bias. The population was specifically limited to graduates from the academic years 2016–2024.

### **Locale of the Study**

The research was focused on graduates of the College of Criminal Justice Education at Tarlac State University (TSU), located in Tarlac City, Philippines.

### **Data Gathering Tools**

#### **The researchers used a combination of primary tools:**

Structured surveys/questionnaires: Administered via Google Forms, these tools primarily collected quantitative data using close-ended questions, including Likert-scale items and multiple-choice formats.

Semi-structured interviews: Used to gather qualitative data, offering deeper insights into personal experiences regarding employment challenges and career advancement.

### **Data Gathering Procedure and Treatment of Data**

The survey instruments were distributed through digital links via Messenger and through direct face-to-

face interactions to ensure maximum participation across the graduate cohort. Once the data was collected, it underwent a mixed-method descriptive analysis to provide a holistic view of the results.

For the quantitative portion, the primary statistical tool utilized was the Average Weighted Mean (AWM) formula. This was used to determine the central tendency of the responses regarding employment readiness, curriculum alignment, and market demand. These results were interpreted using a four-point Likert scale with specific mean ranges to assign verbal interpretations, allowing the researchers to quantify the graduates' level of agreement with various professional benchmarks.

For the qualitative portion, the interview responses underwent a rigorous Thematic Analysis based on the framework by Braun and Clarke. This systematic approach involved six distinct phases: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing potential themes, defining and naming themes, and finally producing the report.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Demographic and Employment Profile

The demographic data shows a balanced representation of genders, with a slight majority of female respondents (52%). This shift is significant in a traditionally male-dominated field and is reflected in the high employment rate of 94%. As noted by Serrano et al. (2021), the strong alignment between the curriculum and law enforcement roles (where 46% of graduates are currently employed) suggests that the primary career goal for these graduates remains the uniformed services.

Among those employed, the primary organizations were:

Organization	Percent
Law Enforcement Agency	46%
Private Sector	22%
Government Office	20%

In interviews, graduates expressed that while the private sector and other government offices provide viable alternatives (accounting for 22% and 20% respectively), the ultimate goal remains service in law enforcement agencies.

### Qualifications and Educational Alignment

Respondents overwhelmingly believed their qualifications and educational background prepared them for the job market. Garcia and Mendoza (2022) support this, emphasizing that curriculum alignment with industry standards enhances employment readiness.

### Qualification and Educational Alignment

Question	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
My qualifications meet requirements.	3.46	Strongly Agree
My educational background prepared me.	3.64	Strongly Agree
Strong demand for Criminology grads.	3.06	Strongly Agree
Internship helped me prepare.	3.56	Strongly Agree
<b>Total Alignment Mean</b>	<b>3.48</b>	Strongly Agree

The respondents' overwhelming belief that their qualifications and educational background prepared them for the professional sphere highlights a successful transition from academic theory to industry application. With a Total Alignment Mean of 3.48 (Strongly Agree), the data indicates that the Criminology program is meeting its primary objective of workforce integration. The highest mean within this category, 3.64 for educational preparation, underscores the institution's effectiveness in curriculum design. This finding is corroborated by Garcia and Mendoza (2022), who assert that a curriculum explicitly aligned with industry standards is the most significant predictor of employment readiness. By ensuring that coursework reflects the actual demands of law enforcement and public safety, the institution minimizes the "reality shock" often experienced by new graduates.

This high level of perceived readiness is further strengthened by the role of experiential learning, as evidenced by the strong rating for internships (3.56). The internship serves as a critical bridge, allowing students to validate classroom concepts in a high-stakes environment. This aligns with the research of Reyes and Villanueva (2022), who argue that internship programs are essential for enhancing graduate competitiveness, as they provide the practical "context" that theoretical lessons cannot fully replicate. While the Cengage poll (Anderson, 2021) suggests a global trend of skepticism regarding the job-readiness of college graduates, the TSU Criminology cohort displays a counter-narrative of confidence, suggesting that their specific training has successfully insulated them from this national skills gap.

Furthermore, the perception of a strong demand for Criminology graduates (3.06), while still within the "Strongly Agree" range, suggests that graduates are aware of a competitive but viable market. This awareness of market dynamics, coupled with the belief that their qualifications meet requirements (3.46), creates a professional "self-efficacy." According to Reyes and Castillo (2022), when graduates enter the workforce with a high degree of confidence in their alignment with job descriptions, they exhibit higher job satisfaction and lower turnover rates. Ultimately, the data paints a picture of a virtuous cycle: an industry-mapped curriculum builds a foundation of knowledge, a robust internship program provides the necessary practical experience, and the resulting alignment produces a workforce that is both highly qualified and psychologically prepared for the rigors of the Criminology profession.

### Job-Related Skills and Competencies

Skill Required	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Leadership & critical thinking	3.80	Strongly Agree
Communication & interpersonal skills	3.74	Strongly Agree
Forensic knowledge	3.24	Agree
Total Mean	3.51	Strongly Agree

The data regarding Job-Related Skills and Competencies reveals a significant trend: graduates prioritize "Power Skills"—such as leadership and communication—as the most critical elements of their professional toolkit. With a Total Mean of 3.51 (Strongly Agree), it is evident that the curriculum has successfully moved beyond rote technical instruction to foster high-level cognitive and social abilities. The highest-rated skills, Leadership & Critical Thinking (3.80) and Communication & Interpersonal Skills (3.74), notably outpace Forensic Knowledge (3.24). This suggests that while technical expertise is a foundational requirement, the ability to manage teams, analyze complex situations, and communicate effectively is what truly defines a graduate's perceived readiness.

This shift toward human-centric skills is supported by Santos and Rivera (2021), who argue that in the modern security landscape, technical skills are often viewed as "perishable" or easily updated through on-the-job training, whereas leadership and interpersonal competencies are essential, long-term assets that must be cultivated during the academic years. Furthermore, a 2023 study by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) confirms that employers consistently rank "Communication" and "Critical Thinking" as the top two competencies most important for career readiness, mirroring the high value placed on these skills by the TSU respondents.

The transition from academic preparation to practical application is further validated by the Overall Competency Alignment Mean of 3.6 (Strongly Agree). The high ratings for Communication with colleagues (3.72) and Problem-solving abilities (3.66) in actual practice indicate a "1:1 mapping" between classroom learning and workplace execution. This synergy is a primary driver of professional success; as Reyes and Castillo (2022) point out, when a professional's daily tasks align perfectly with their strongest competencies, it leads to higher job satisfaction and lower burnout. This is particularly relevant in high-stress fields like Criminology, where the ability to solve problems and communicate under pressure is vital.

Moreover, the research of Bundy et al. (2025) on law enforcement evolution highlights that the move toward "Community Policing" and "Evidence-Based Management" has made soft skills the primary currency of the profession. By emphasizing these areas, the program ensures its graduates are not merely technicians, but adaptable leaders. The data ultimately confirms that the program is producing graduates who are not only competent in their field but are also strategically equipped with the versatile skills required to navigate the complex social and organizational dynamics of the 21st-century criminal justice system.

### **Challenges in Securing Employment**

#### **Theme 1: The Paradox of Quotas and Meritocracy**

Graduates expressed a significant sense of frustration regarding Employment Quotas and Competitive Standards. While these policies are often intended to regulate recruitment, participants perceived them as invisible barriers that undermine individual merit. The narratives suggest that the recruitment process is often viewed as a "zero-sum game" where administrative mandates take precedence over the actual qualifications and readiness of the applicant.

As graduates noted: "It feels like even if you have the right credentials, you're just fighting for a very small slot because the rest are already reserved for specific quotas. It makes the competition feel rigged from the start." This sentiment reflects a broader concern that the pursuit of academic excellence and professional licensure is occasionally secondary to meeting pre-determined institutional slots.

The tension begins with the Paradox of Quotas and Meritocracy, where administrative mandates—intended for social inclusion—are often perceived by high-achieving graduates as "bottlenecks" that render their academic honors secondary to institutional slots. While these policies aim to redress historical imbalances, a study on "The Meritocracy Myth" notes that when organizations fail to communicate the criteria for these quotas transparently, it creates a sense of "procedural injustice". Graduates begin to view the competition as "rigged," as they feel they are competing for a diminishing pool of "merit-based" seats that are constantly squeezed by pre-determined categories.

#### **Theme 2: Persistent Gender Stereotyping in Criminal Justice**

Despite advancements in workplace equality, Gender-Based Considerations remain a pervasive hurdle for many graduates. Participants highlighted a "gendered division of labor" within the sector, where certain

roles—particularly field operations and high-risk assignments—are still culturally coded as masculine. Conversely, female graduates often find themselves funneled into administrative or clerical roles regardless of their specialized training or personal career aspirations.

Participants articulated frustration: “There is still this unspoken rule that certain field operations are for men, while women are better suited for administrative roles. It’s hard to break that stereotype during the interview process.” This narrative confirms that implicit biases regarding gender roles continue to influence the gatekeeping process in the criminal justice profession.

This perceived lack of fairness is immediately compounded by Persistent Gender Stereotyping, which acts as a cultural gatekeeper. Even when a graduate manages to fit within a specific quota, their specialized training is often disregarded in favor of traditional gender roles. For instance, in the criminal justice sector, reports indicate that women are still frequently funneled into administrative or "clerical" roles despite having the same physical and tactical qualifications as their male counterparts. This "horizontal segregation" ensures that the "merit" demonstrated by female graduates is only rewarded within a narrow, gender-coded scope, effectively limiting their career trajectory from the moment of the interview.

Theme 3: The "Palakasan" System (Nepotism and Favoritism)

The most profound and recurring theme was the influence of Nepotism and Favoritism, commonly referred to as the "Palakasan" system. Graduates described a deep sense of disillusionment, noting that social capital and political connections frequently outweigh academic honors or board exam performance. This theme highlights a significant disconnect between the formal requirements of the law and the informal realities of the hiring process.

Graduates shared a poignant reflection: “The 'palakasan' system is discouraging. You see people getting promoted or hired just because they know someone inside, even if others are more qualified. It makes you feel like your hard work in college doesn't matter as much as a recommendation from a relative.”

This culture of favoritism not only creates an uneven playing field but also serves as a major psychological barrier, leading some graduates to question the value of their degree when "who you know" appears to be more decisive than "what you know."

The most damaging link in this chain is the "Palakasan" System (Nepotism and Favoritism). While quotas and gender biases are systemic or cultural, nepotism is an ethical breach that actively replaces human capital with social capital. Researches highlights that in environments where "who you know" outweighs "what you know," the value of professional licensure is severely diminished. This system creates a "psychological contract violation" for graduates; they have fulfilled their part of the social contract by passing rigorous board exams, only to find that the "informal currency" of political connections is the true requirement for entry.

## CONCLUSION

The professional journey of Criminology graduates in 2026 is a narrative of high caliber readiness colliding with a resistant institutional reality. On one hand, the academic landscape is a triumph of modern vocational training. With a 94 percent employment rate and an overwhelming sense of preparedness, these graduates have fulfilled every requirement of the social contract. They have moved beyond mere technical knowledge to master power skills such as leadership, critical thinking, and empathy, which serve as the essential heartbeat of modern public safety. This transition from student to practitioner is anchored in a deep sense of professional self-efficacy, where graduates enter the workforce believing that their hard-earned licenses and high competency scores are the primary keys to a career of service.

However, once these graduates step beyond the university gates, their confidence often hits a triple barrier that feels deeply personal and demoralizing. The dream of service is frequently deferred by a rigid system of employment quotas that many perceive as a rigged game where individual merit is overshadowed by predetermined administrative slots. This creates an immediate sense of procedural injustice, leaving high achievers to feel that their years of academic rigor were secondary to a bureaucratic number. For the 52 percent of the cohort who are women, this friction is further intensified by the weight of stereotypes. Despite possessing the same tactical training and sharp leadership skills as their male peers, they are often funneled into administrative roles. This horizontal segregation dismisses their individual potential and specialized training in favor of outdated gender norms.

Perhaps the most painful hurdle is the sting of favoritism found in the palakasan system. There is a profound sense of psychological betrayal when a graduate realizes that a political connection or a backer can outweigh a high board exam score or years of dedicated study. This dominance of social capital over human capital suggests that who you know remains more decisive than what you know, creating a culture of disillusionment that threatens to drive the most principled talent away from the profession. It is here that the psychological contract is broken. When the informal rules of the hiring process nullify the formal requirements of the law, the value of the degree itself is called into question by the very people meant to uphold the justice system.

These graduates represent a generation that is ready but restricted. They are highly qualified, socially aware professionals who find themselves in a sectoral detour, often working in the private sector or general government offices while waiting for a fair entry point into uniformed service. This disconnect highlights an integrity gap within the industry. While the university has successfully insulated students from the national skills gap, the labor market has failed to modernize its gatekeeping processes. To secure the future of public safety, there must be a radical shift toward transparent, merit based, and gender-neutral recruitment. Until the institutional gates reflect the same rigorous and fair standards found in the classroom, the justice system risks a brain drain of its most talented leaders, losing them to a cycle of cynicism that the profession simply cannot afford.

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