

Career Trajectory: A Longitudinal Analysis of Criminology Graduates' Attributes and Professional Success in a Private HEI

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Abstract. All graduates aspire for career progression, successful career paths, and maximum professional development. The increasing demand for professionals to address emerging societal issues and new trends locally and globally necessitates continuous adaptation and upskilling to meet the evolving needs of society and personal career trajectories. This research analyzes graduates' attributes and their alignment with professional success. Thirty (30) alumni of BS Criminology in a private HEI, chosen through convenience sampling, are examined using a validated researchers-made questionnaire, pilot tested for reliability (Cronbach Alpha = 0.91 and 0.88) composed of a Likert scale checklist for quantitative and open-ended questions for qualitative. Data gathering utilized semi-structured interviews and computer-assisted techniques using Google Forms, with the observance of ethical research standards. Using frequency, percentage, and mean substantiated with the themes merged through narrative analysis, gathered data revealed that most graduates now work as law enforcers, police officers, probation, and correctional officers (about 80%). This professional success rate, a testament to our graduates' dedication and hard work, is rooted in their dreams and desire to make a difference. In addition, results showed that, as perceived, academic preparedness ($x=3.52$), self-efficacy (3.68) on performing criminology skills and outcome expectations to all actions made ($x=3.80$) are highly influential and contribute to professional success, which showcased a high perceived percentage of alignment (about 93%) implied from both quantitative and the theme discovered. With these, a contextualized career trajectory model is recommended to offer a comprehensive visual framework for understanding the stages, transitions, and skill development necessary to support students toward professional success.

Keywords: Criminology graduate attributes; Career trajectory; Professional success; Private HEI.

1.0 Introduction

Career trajectories are heavily influenced by academic preparedness, which plays a pivotal role in shaping professional success within the field. Graduates' careers are influenced by academic preparedness and professional experiences (Jones & Smith, 2022). Undergraduate's intended career trajectory is an intention for work progress, career pathway, and professional development the moment they have graduated and started working for their whole professional life (Iskhakove & Kosheleva, 2023). Career trajectories of graduates with a global landscape have yet to be studied in career development literature.

Longitudinal studies tracking the career trajectories of graduates demonstrate a correlation between academic excellence and advancement opportunities. However, challenges such as job market saturation and evolving demands within the field underscore the importance of continuous professional development for sustaining

success over time. An overview of careers in criminal justice and criminology by Burns (2023) revealed an association between academic excellence and career advancement among criminology graduates. Academic preparedness encompasses theoretical knowledge and practical skills gained through internships, research projects, and hands-on training, equipping graduates with the tools necessary to excel in diverse roles within the criminal justice system (Burns, 2023). Through rigorous coursework and experiential learning opportunities, criminology programs aim to instill critical thinking, analytical skills, and ethical decision-making, essential for navigating complex challenges in the field.

Furthermore, academic preparedness is a foundation for lifelong learning and professional development, enabling graduates to adapt to evolving local and international trends and emerging issues within the criminal justice landscape. Research by Habiatan (2022) underscores the importance of continuous education including skill enhancement in sustaining and attaining long-term success. Graduates who invest in further education, specialized training, and certifications often find themselves at a competitive advantage, opening doors to advanced positions, leadership roles, and opportunities for specialization in niche areas such as cybercrime, forensic psychology, or criminal profiling (Tanaka et al., 2023) – which operationally used definition of professional success in this study. Academic preparedness fosters a sense of confidence and credibility among criminology professionals, enhancing their ability to communicate effectively, collaborate with multidisciplinary teams, and engage with diverse stakeholders in the pursuit of justice. Study by Lee et al. (2021) emphasizes the role of communication and interpersonal skills in building trust and rapport with clients, colleagues, and community members. Graduates who excel in conflict resolution, cultural competence, and empathy are better equipped to address the complex needs of individuals affected by crime and advocate for systemic reforms that promote equity and fairness within the criminal justice system.

The study is anchored to Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) and explains graduates' attributes associated with career outcomes. The SCCT proposed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) posited that individual attributes shape professional success. Within the context of this study, this framework elucidates how criminology graduates' attributes such as academic preparedness, self-efficacy beliefs, and outcome expectations shape professional success including career choices (alignment) and trajectories (career pathing). The SCCT emphasizes the importance of self-efficacy belief as a central mechanism driving career-related behaviors and outcomes. Individuals with high self-efficacy beliefs in their abilities are more likely to pursue challenging career paths that are aligned with their long-term career goals, and actively seek out opportunities for growth and professional success (Kula, 2022; Aygil & Hasan, 2024; Ciampa et al., 2024; and Tecedor, 2024).

Moreover, SCCT underscores the role of outcome expectations of their actions' consequences in shaping career decision-making and goal-setting processes. Positive outcome expectations, such as the anticipation of career satisfaction, rewards, and societal impact, serve as motivational forces driving individuals toward specific career paths that demonstrate professional success (Seker & Capri, 2022; Fallah, 2022; Pachu et al., 2022; and Xie & He, 2023). In the context of the research, the theoretical framework provides a nuanced understanding of how personal attributes shape career success. This framework offers valuable insights into the mechanisms underlying professional success by examining the role of academic preparedness, self-efficacy belief (Taresh et al., 2024), and outcome expectations.

The increasing demand for criminology professionals in response to emerging societal issues such as cybercrime and increasing juvenile delinquency and illegal drug reports (Caliwan, 2024), and a certain percentage of career mismatch among criminology graduates (Aydinan, 2019), makes and add certainty to the need to study this topic. In a correlational analysis and a tracer study for batch 2018 and 2019 for BS Criminology, data reveals that graduates of a private HEI often find employment opportunities and professional success in law enforcement, government agencies, and private security firms (Robinos et al., 2023). However, some factors and bureaucratic structures need to be revised for career advancement, necessitating adaptability, and networking skills among graduates to thrive in their chosen fields. In the Philippines, the career trajectories of criminology graduates are shaped by a dynamic landscape of socio-economic factors and institutional frameworks (Camal, 2023). BS Criminology plays a crucial role in preparing individuals for careers in the fields of crime prevention, law enforcement, and criminal justice. By providing a solid foundation of knowledge, skills, and values, college programs may empower graduates to navigate diverse career paths and achieve professional success. As the field

continues to evolve, the importance of academic preparedness as a catalyst for lifelong learning and innovation cannot be overstated, underscoring the need for ongoing investments in education, training, and professional development within the criminology profession.

This research investigates career success among criminology graduates' attributes. It aims to answer these questions:

1. What diverse career paths are pursued by graduates demonstrating professional success?
2. What attributes influence and contribute to the graduates' professional success?
3. How do criminology graduates perceive alignment between their attributes and professional success?

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The researchers utilized the embedded-mixed method to investigate whether individual attributes such as academic preparedness, self-efficacy, and outcome expectation for every action influence a graduate's professional success. The embedded-mixed method requires a simultaneous collection of quantitative and qualitative data, with the qualitative supporting the quantitative (Sharma et al., 2023).

2.2 Research Participants

The research was conducted in one of the private universities in Bacoor City, Cavite, Philippines. The study participants are 30 graduates of the Bachelor of Science in Criminology, any batch starting 2015, who were nominated during the first search for the most outstanding alumni of the year last April 2024. Alumni respondents were selected through a convenience sampling technique that considered availability and proximity. Their valuable insights, experiences, and factors influencing their career decisions helped answer the study's questions. All participants were given pseudonyms to observe data privacy.

2.3 Research Instrument

A researchers-made survey questionnaire with a 4-point Likert-type scale (for quantitative) and open-ended questions (for qualitative) was developed and administered using Google Forms. It is composed of three major parts: i.) varied jobs they have worked with indicating professional success; ii.) graduates attributes contributing to professional success, and iii.) the perceived alignment of these attributes to professional success. Study directions and objectives, rights of the participants, and consent were incorporated in the first part of the instrument. The research instrument was subjected to face and content validity by three experts in research affiliated with the criminology department and with experience in criminology-industry-related settings. After the revisions made from the validation, a pilot test of the survey checklist was conducted on 30 graduates who were not part of the study, indicating high consistency for graduates' attributes (Cronbach alpha = 0.91) and perceived alignment (Cronbach alpha = 0.88).

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure and Ethical Considerations

A researchers-made instrument was administered to BS Criminology alumni nominated in the first search for the most outstanding alumni of the year last April 2024 via Google Forms. Meanwhile, open-ended questions were given in advance so the participants would have sufficient time to reflect and provide substantial answers. Observing high standards of research ethics, the researchers ensure that participants are well informed of their rights, the study purposes, the anonymity approach to be implemented, the right to refuse participation and withdraw anytime, and the time frame for disposing of their responses.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Career Paths of Graduates Demonstrating Professional Success

Table 1 highlights the diverse career paths of criminology graduates. Participants mostly have been committed to working with being police officers (66.7%) and law enforcement officers (76.7%). Whether pursuing careers in law enforcement, correctional office, forensic science, or academia, these graduates exemplify the resilience, adaptability, and determination necessary to succeed in today's ever-evolving job market, indicating professional success. Most of the graduates joined the uniform force (e.g., law enforcement-related work, police officer, and correctional officer), which is under the umbrella of the DILG due to its civilian character concept consisting of

lesser military training. Joining the uniform services among criminology graduates may be linked to professional attainment as it demonstrates alignment and matches career paths (Ayeo-Eo, 2020).

Table 1. Frequency and percentage distribution of respondents' work experiences

Careers	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Police Officer	20	66.7
Correctional Officer	5	16.7
Forensic Scientist	2	6.7
Criminology Teacher	4	13.3
Probation Officer	6	20
Law Enforcement	23	76.7
Criminal Justice Instructor	1	3.3
Criminal Justice Administrator	1	3.3
Private Investigator	1	3.3

Note: Participants were asked to share all the work they have experienced. N=30

Achieving Personal Desire

Based on the participants' narratives, professional success is about choosing what they want to become, and most of them chose criminology-related careers because of their desire. Here is their corresponding answers:

"This is my childhood dream nurtured with my fascination with justice and desire to serve my community. Graduating with academic distinction pushed me to be more determined to translate my academic achievements into a meaningful career in law enforcement. I know I am little by little, succeeding in my chosen profession." Alumni 2

"My journey into the world of corrections began in 2018 after graduation. Growing up in my field [as a criminology graduate] from a community affected by crime, I witnessed firsthand the impact of incarceration and reintegration of offenders. I saw a career in corrections as an opportunity to make a positive impact and a difference – this is what I truly wanted." Alumni 5

"My fascination with forensic science, which was ignited as well back when I was taking BS Criminology, pushed me to pursue this career. Graduating as a top student among Criminology graduates, I set sights on this career driven by my passion for unraveling mysteries and seeking justice through scientific inquiry." Alumni 9

"I discovered my passion for teaching and research during my undergraduate study. After graduation, while working as a police officer, I took up my master's degree in criminology. My professional success is intrinsically motivated to inspire the next generation of criminal justice professionals." Alumni 18

"As a seasoned probation officer A, which I believe indicates my professional success, with a wealth of experience in working with offenders and promoting rehabilitation and reintegration – I embarked on community corrections because personally when I was young and while taking my bachelor's degree – I've seen myself helping others to become productive members of the society. I believe in second chances and the importance of support system." Alumni 23

"During my college years (2015), I handled leadership roles in the council already – this helps me to hold roles in law enforcement agencies, correctional facilities, and criminal justice organizations – guided me to become who I'm now (Newly Appointed Criminal Justice Administrator). I'm grounded with cultivating leadership competencies, love for growth and continuous improvement, and innovation in work." Alumni 29

Responses substantiate the idea that career trajectory equated to professional success is innate (desires and life purpose) and likewise based on their acquired formal education. Professional success in criminology are heavily influenced by understanding how to create safer society, importance of learning, employment positions, and the fact that it is part of our everyday life. Personal reasons play pivotal roles in shaping career trajectory within the criminal justice and criminology fields (Burns, 2023).

3.2 Individual Attributes Influencing and Contributing to Professional Success

Table 2. Extent of Influencing and contributing attributes to professional success

Factors	Overall Mean	Description
Academic Preparedness	3.52	Highly Influential and Contributing
Self-Efficacy Beliefs	3.68	Highly Influential and Contributing
Outcome Expectations	3.80	Highly Influential and Contributing

The data above reveals that academic preparedness, self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations as graduates' individual attributes highly influence and contribute to professional success with mean scores of 3.52, 3.68, and 3.80, respectively. These attributes and competence align with Camal (2023) study on the importance of academic preparedness and employability, and with Bandura's 1977 social cognitive theory, which posits that individuals' beliefs and expectations profoundly influence the achievement of high outcomes. Self-efficacy beliefs help determine how much effort individuals will exert effort, will persevere, and how resilient they can prove in the face of adverse situation (Mani & Mahendra, 2019).

Acquired Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes Matter

As expounded from the open-ended responses, participants strongly consider their formal education significant to their careers. The desire to become successful in one's profession can be attributed to several factors, profoundly the content knowledge, skills and attitudes honed in school. Having familiar narratives, participants mentioned:

"The concepts and theories I grasped and with all academic training I received from the school helped me to be work ready and competitively. Attributes like believing in one's skills and working in advance to ensure the effectiveness of the result have helped me to thrive in my work at the moment. These attributes are truly beneficial to me as law enforcer for about 6 years now." Alumni 4

"Becoming a new private investigator [6 months already], the knowledge, skills and attitudes I have gained in the University, Criminology department, helped me a lot. Everything I've known and my expertise started with all the competencies the Institution have provided us. The KSA I've gained truly guided me to become successful on the career of my choice related to criminology." Alumni 11

"I am thankful to my alma matter. What they have taught us [Academics, believing in abilities, and having high expectations I all our actions] definitely guided me to become who am I [Probation Officer] right now." Alumni 15

"I'm a police officer III. The basics that were taught to us makes us competitive in our chosen job. More than the academics, we are trained to have strong sense of work-efficacy and disciplined. It was highlighted, during my college years, that for every action I do there are consequences – hence expect for every outcome." Alumni 55

3.3 Perceived Alignment between Attributes and Professional Success

Table 3. Extent of perceived alignment between

Extent of Perceived Alignment	Frequency	Percentage
Highly Aligned	28	93.3
Generally Aligned	2	6.7

The high confidence was evident in respondents' answers that academic preparedness, self-efficacy, and outcome expectations contribute greatly to professional success (about 93%). Theoretical concepts, academic content, self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations play a vital role in the transitions happening in their chosen careers more so, attaining career success. This result underscores the importance of comprehensive curriculum development and pedagogical approaches that foster practical application, critical thinking, decision-making, and 21st-century soft and hard skills. Individual choices, relationships, aligned and appropriate experiential learning opportunities, external pressures, internships, and practical exercises bridge the educational gap and enhance graduates' work readiness, self-efficacy, and other abilities to thrive in real-world challenges (Anderson et al., 2019). This should be an academic leader's priority.

Learning vis-a-vis Professional Success

The high level of alignment to professional success, as perceived by the alumni of BS Criminology, indicates that acquisition of learning works with success in career. What we learn from our formal schooling influences our career trajectory because it gives us the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes that we can apply in our chosen field. This claim was supported by the respondents' answers to the open-ended questions. Answers such as:

"I believe there's a strong alignment between the academic preparedness, Self-efficacy and outcome expectations to my success as a law enforcement officer for almost 6 years. My education equipped me with a solid understanding of criminal justice principles and theories, which I apply daily in my role. Not to mention the characteristics and attributes I was honed for. As a board passer, my academic achievements have further bolstered my confidence and competence in upholding the law and serving my community." Alumni 1

"As a correctional officer for more than five years already, I have found that my academic background in criminology and other attributes (values and attitudes) has been instrumental in my professional success. The knowledge, skills, and values I acquired during my studies have prepared me to handle the challenges of working in a correctional facility effectively. Despite the initial hurdles in securing employment, my commitment to excellence and dedication to the field has propelled me forward. I am proud of the difference I make in the lives of inmates and staff." Alumni 8

"In my career as a forensic scientist, I have seen a clear association between my academic preparedness, self-efficacy, outcome expectations mindset, and my achievements to where I am right now relative to my work. The rigorous training and education in criminology, enriched with seminars and workshops, gave me the foundation to excel in forensic analysis and contribute meaningfully to criminal investigations. As a proud board passer, my academic credentials and the characteristics I have built because of Perpetual have instilled confidence in my abilities and affirmed my commitment to delivering justice through science." Alumni 14

"As a criminology teacher, I believe my acquired academics and realized potential, which includes the ability to do things more confidently and always considering possible outcomes, guided me in shaping my career trajectory and advancement. My dedication to continuous learning and pursuing advanced degrees has allowed me to excel in academia. Through teaching, I can impart knowledge and inspire future criminal justice professionals, fulfilling my passion for education and research." Alumni 20

"My journey as a criminal justice instructor II for almost four years has been guided by my academic undertaking from college and my passion for advocating justice and peace. After I passed the board exam, which I believe would not have happened without guidance from Perpetual, I became more confident. I practiced what my instructors before taught us – that for every action we do, there are results or consequences. My commitment to excellence in teaching and dedication to criminal justice reform are grounded in those I realized during my college days and a personal commitment. As a successful instructor now, I am grateful for the opportunity to empower students to critically engage with issues in the field and become agents of positive change in society." Alumni 27

4.0 Conclusion

Law enforcement officers, policemen, probation officers, correctional officers, and criminology teachers are the common criminology career-related avenues the graduates are currently affiliated with, showcasing professional success. This manifestation of attainment and achievement is driven by their dedication to excellence, as well as their intimate motives and desires to effect positive change in criminal justice. The findings underscore the pivotal role of academic preparedness, self-efficacy beliefs, and outcome expectations as a significant contributor toward professional success, highlighting the importance of comprehensive curriculum development, experiential learning opportunities, enrichment initiatives, integration into the real world of work, and teaching emphasis in complexities of the criminal justice field. The diverse career paths pursued by criminology graduates demonstrate the dynamic interplay between individual graduates' attributes and professional success, highlighting the versatility and adaptability of a criminology degree in meeting the evolving needs of the criminal justice field. Creating a Career Trajectory Model contextualized for each HEI and integrating the data gathered is recommended. The model should offer a comprehensive visual framework for understanding the stages, transitions, and skill development necessary for successful career progression, aiding organizations, and supporting professional growth.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

All the authors contributed equally to writing, data gathering, analyzing the study results, and finalizing the article.

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

No potential conflict of interest.

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