

From Internship to Industry: Exploring the Impact of Internship Experience on Criminology Graduate's Career Success

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the impact of internship experience on criminology graduate's career success. It showed how experiences in the internship program influences the career success of criminology graduates, especially in terms of skills development, career development, and higher employability. This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in Colaizzi's transcendental phenomenology. Twelve criminology graduates who passed the Criminologist Licensure Examination (CLE) from Academic Years 2019 to 2024 and were residents of Misamis Occidental were purposively selected as participants of the study. Data were gathered through semi-structured researcher-made, face-to-face interviews and analyzed using Colaizzi's seven-step phenomenological method. The findings revealed three major themes: (1) Internship as Foundation for Career, which showed the influence of internship experience on criminology graduates' career choices and expectations; (2) Internship Benefits, which highlighted the key skills and knowledge gained by criminology graduates from their internships and their contribution to job search and employment; and (3) Career Impact, which described the impact of internship experience on the employability of criminology graduates, including challenges and opportunities. The study concludes that a well-structured internship program can play a vital role in promoting career success among criminology graduates. To improve internship quality, it is highly recommended to strengthen the collaboration between academic institutions and criminal justice agencies.

Keywords: career success, criminal justice system, criminology graduates, employability, internship experience.

INTRODUCTION

Rationale of the Study

Internships are widely acknowledged as a pivotal element of higher education, particularly in applied disciplines such as criminology (Libradilla et al., 2025). Serving as a vital link between theoretical instruction and the practical realities of professional practice, internships provide aspiring criminologists with indispensable opportunities for hands-on engagement, which significantly influence their career trajectories and professional development (Malbuayo et al., 2024). Through experiential learning, graduates are able to deepen their understanding of industry operations, refine essential competencies, enhance adaptability, and build professional confidence — all of which contribute to a seamless transition into their chosen careers (Libradilla et al., 2025).

The impact of internships extends beyond mere skill acquisition; they are instrumental in preparing criminology graduates for the intricate realities of the criminal justice system (Mapangdol, 2024). Through direct engagement in real-world scenarios, interns hone practical skills such as effective cooperation with law enforcement, investigative methods, and problem-solving, which are critical for success in diverse roles within the field (Asta & Balmores, 2024). These opportunities are considered “door openers” to the labor market, significantly improving a candidate's ability to acquire an interview (Solis et al., 2024).

Despite the widely acknowledged benefits, criminology interns often encounter a range of challenges during their programs. These include emotional stress, financial constraints, difficulties in dealing with people, health issues due to exhaustion, and time management problems, especially when balancing OJT with academic commitments (Lumingkit et al., 2024; Solis et al., 2024). Such obstacles can impact their overall learning

experience and academic performance, highlighting the need for robust support systems within internship programs.

While existing literature emphasizes the broad advantages of internships and their role in skill development and career readiness, a notable research gap persists regarding the specific mechanisms through which these experiences translate into long-term career success for criminology graduates. The ultimate purpose of this thesis is to address these identified gaps by thoroughly exploring the multifaceted impact of internship experiences on the comprehensive career success of criminology graduates. The study therefore aimed to explore the impact of internship experiences on the career success of criminology graduates. It sought to examine how internships contribute to the development of essential skills, professional networks, and industry knowledge that influence graduates' employability and long-term career growth.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to examine how criminology graduates' internship experiences have influenced their career success. Specifically, it sought to answer the questions:

1. How do criminology graduates perceive the influence of their internship experience on their career choices and expectations?
2. What key skills and knowledge do criminology graduates gain from their internships, and how have these contributed to their job search and employment?
3. How does internship experience impact the employability of criminology graduates, and what challenges and opportunities arise from it?

METHODS

A qualitative research design was used, including Colaizzi's phenomenological technique. The study looked at the lived experiences of criminology graduates and the impact of internships on career success. A phenomenological study aims to provide a thorough knowledge of people's perceptions, emotions, and interpretations of their lived experiences by focusing on meaning-making in natural settings.

The research was conducted at a private non-sectarian higher education institution in Oroquieta City, Misamis Occidental, Philippines. Twelve criminology graduates were purposively selected as participants based on the following criteria: completion of a Bachelor of Science in Criminology, successful completion of the Criminologist Licensure Examination (CLE), residency in Misamis Occidental, and willingness to participate.

Data collection was conducted through one-on-one, face-to-face in-depth interviews utilizing a semi-structured interview guide. Data analysis followed Colaizzi's seven-step phenomenological method. During the study, ethical considerations were strictly observed, in compliance with Republic Act No. 10173, also known as the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Informed consent was obtained before data collection, ensuring voluntary participation and the option to withdraw at any time.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Theme 1: Internship as Foundation for Career.

Participants expressed that the internship influenced how they were perceived by others, noting that even children and adults in their community started referring to them as a police officer because of their appearance and behavior. This supports the idea that internships function as a turning point where students internalize the values, discipline, and standards expected in their chosen profession (Asta & Balmores, 2024). Exposure to actual duties, structured environments, and workplace expectations guide students in moving away from a purely academic identity toward a professional one (Janes, 2023). Through practice and accountability, they begin to carry themselves differently, demonstrating responsibility, respect, and awareness of their roles (Kakar, 2025).

Participants shared that being punctual and completing tasks on schedule became part of their daily routine, emphasizing how the internship instilled time and task management skills at an early stage. Although the workload was initially overwhelming, the structured assignments eventually trained them to prioritize and organize their responsibilities. Unlike the academic setting where flexibility is often available, the workplace demands punctuality, responsibility, and the ability to complete multiple tasks efficiently (Stratton et al., 2024). The process of reporting on time, following instructions, and meeting deadlines builds habits that prepare students for professional life (Galvez & Balongoy, 2022). Over time, these experiences develop a sense of accountability and adaptability, helping them recognize the importance of balancing multiple responsibilities while staying organized and productive (Bartle et al., 2025).

Participants explained that they learned the value of following the chain of command, stressing that orders and reports had to be completed properly without shortcuts. They shared that respecting hierarchy was not only a matter of discipline but also connected to safety and teamwork, as each member had a specific role within the organization. As Cosmiano et al. (2023) stated that internships provide students with firsthand exposure to this culture, where following protocols and observing the authority of superiors is crucial for effective operations. Respecting the established structure ensures smooth communication, prevents errors, and reinforces discipline, which are all vital to the functioning of any law enforcement agency (Janes, 2023). Through these experiences, students not only understood their individual responsibilities but also realized the importance of collective coordination, where every role is interconnected and contributes to overall success (Nayoyos-Refugia et al., 2024).

Participants stated that the internship taught accountability, as failing to complete a report or follow a directive had direct consequences on the entire shift. In the same way, they also shared that interns were treated like real officers, expected to answer for both their actions and inactions, which pushed them to become more responsible. Internships expose students to real tasks and responsibilities where their contributions directly affect operations and outcomes (Moriarty & Parsons-Pollard, 2024). This environment reinforces the idea that professionalism is not only about skills but also about being dependable and consistent in one's duties. As studied by Manuel Jr. and Paglinawan (2025), being entrusted with meaningful tasks and expected to deliver, students begin to understand the weight of responsibility and the consequences of neglect. Such experiences strengthen their work ethic, improve discipline, and build reliability, which are essential traits for future roles in criminology and law enforcement careers (Mapangdol, 2024).

Participants shared that engaging in daily duties such as writing reports, assisting in operations, and attending briefings gave them a realistic feel of workplace life. The responses confirm that exposure to workplace routines during internships plays a vital role in preparing students for their transition from school to employment (Moriarty & Parsons-Pollard, 2024). Unlike academic settings where tasks are largely flexible and individually managed, the professional environment requires individuals to operate within structured schedules, follow daily assignments, and coordinate with a team (Stratton et al., 2024). Experiencing these routines early helps students learn how to balance multiple responsibilities, adhere to deadlines, and maintain efficiency under supervision. More importantly, it fosters a deeper appreciation for the rhythm of organizational life, where discipline and structure guide not just tasks but also teamwork and accountability (Lumingkit et al., 2024).

Theme 2: Internship Benefits

Participants expressed that the benefits of internship, particularly in boosting confidence, prepared them for the challenges that come with law enforcement work. The responses confirm that internships are crucial in boosting students' self-confidence, especially as they transition from the academic environment to professional practice (Galvez & Balongoy, 2022). Confidence is often built through exposure, and the opportunity to apply learned skills in real-world situations reduces uncertainty and fear of making mistakes (Mishra & Chaudhary, 2025). By allowing students to take part in meaningful responsibilities, internships create a sense of competence and accomplishment. This experiential learning helps them realize that they are capable of meeting workplace expectations, handling complex tasks, and contributing effectively to their teams (Libradilla et al., 2025).

Participants shared that their assignment to the Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) guided their decision to serve in that particular unit, as it resonated with their interests and values. They expressed that

exposure gained during the internship allowed them to realize their desire to pursue forensic investigation as a specialization. The responses affirm that internships are valuable in guiding career decision-making by allowing students to explore different fields and determine where their strengths and interests align (Manuel Jr. & Paglinawan, 2025). Academic knowledge alone may not be sufficient in deciding on a career direction, but practical exposure gives students the chance to test whether a specific role or environment suits them (Ouellet et al., 2023). Through hands-on tasks, direct involvement with officers, and immersion in specialized units, students gain realistic insights into the demands and rewards of various career options (Stratton et al., 2024).

These experiences confirm that internships are not just a form of exposure but also an important platform for developing hands-on job skills that classroom learning alone cannot provide (Asta & Balmores, 2024). Through direct involvement in tasks such as inspections, documentation, reporting, and emergency response, students were able to translate theoretical knowledge into practical applications (Manuel Jr. & Paglinawan, 2025). Such immersion enhances their competence and builds their readiness for the workplace. By learning the specific procedures and technical requirements of law enforcement agencies, interns become familiar with the standards and expectations of their chosen fields, which equips them with confidence and competence to handle real responsibilities once employed (Taguba, 2022).

Participants emphasized that criminology is not only about laws but also involves paperwork, people skills, and community relations. While academic learning emphasizes theories, principles, and technical knowledge, the internship experience allows students to encounter the practical aspects of the profession ranging from administrative duties and community engagement to law enforcement operations (Nayoyos-Refugia et al., 2024). Such exposure helps students appreciate that criminology is not confined to law enforcement alone but encompasses a wide range of skills and responsibilities (Solis et al., 2024). By bridging the gap between theoretical instruction and the realities of the profession, internships give students a holistic understanding of their future roles, which enhances their professional identity and preparedness (Moriarty & Parsons-Pollard, 2024).

Theme 3: Career Impact

Participants explained that the internship gave them a competitive edge during job interviews, making them stand out among other applicants. Internships provide graduates with advantages that go beyond classroom learning, offering them a practical foundation that employers value (Cosmiano et al., 2023). Real-world exposure enhances professional competence, builds networks, and fosters trust with future employers, giving graduates an edge in the competitive job market (Concepcion, 2022). It demonstrates that organizations view internship experience not only as training but also as proof of readiness for professional duties. As such, Manuel Jr. and Paglinawan (2025) affirm that internships often function as a bridge that transforms academic knowledge into employable skills, helping graduates' transition smoothly into the workforce with greater confidence and credibility.

The connections built with supervisors, mentors, and colleagues often become crucial links to career opportunities after graduation (Libradilla et al., 2025). Networking during internships allows students to demonstrate their abilities to potential employers, receive career guidance, and gain referrals that strengthen their chances of employment (Janes, 2023). Such relationships contribute to professional identity formation and make graduates more visible within their chosen field. By building these connections early, interns gain an advantage in transitioning from students to professionals (Nayoyos-Refugia et al., 2024).

Participants already knew what to expect in terms of workload and discipline, which allowed them to adjust quickly after graduation. Internships bridge the gap between theoretical learning and the realities of professional practice, making the shift from being a student to a worker less overwhelming (Ouellet et al., 2023). Internships expose students to organizational culture, workplace expectations, and professional conduct, which reduces the shock often experienced by fresh graduates entering the workforce (Moriarty & Parsons-Pollard, 2024). Through hands-on experiences, interns gain familiarity with the daily tasks, schedules, and demands of the profession, which equips them with confidence and adaptability (Cosmiano et al., 2023). This alignment between academic preparation and workplace realities strengthens the transition process and eases their integration into professional roles (Taguba, 2022).

Participants' experience gave them direction toward their long-term goals, specifically aiming to become an officer and work toward faster promotion until becoming a commissioned officer. It serves as a steppingstone toward broader professional aspirations by helping students clarify their career paths (Concepcion, 2022). Exposure to real work environments allows interns to explore areas of criminology where they feel most capable and passionate, such as forensic work, law enforcement, or correctional services (Mishra & Chaudhary, 2025). Through these experiences, they gain insight into the demands of different career tracks and the qualifications needed for advancement (Nayoyos-Refugia et al., 2024). By linking classroom knowledge with practical application, internships motivate students to set clearer objectives and develop strategies to achieve them, such as pursuing further training, examinations, or leadership roles (Concepcion, 2022).

CONCLUSION

Based on the participants' narratives, it can be concluded that internships are essential for shaping the careers of criminology graduates. When criminology graduates gain early experience in real criminal justice settings, they can connect what they learn in the classroom to what happens on the job and apply it. This helps them understand different roles in the criminal justice sector and set realistic career goals. Graduates in criminology make better career decisions that align with their individual preferences and goals by working directly in the area. Additionally, the study found that graduates who have undergone internships have a higher employment rate and foster their long-term professional development. Students who participate in internships gain valuable skills, practical experience, and professional connections that clearly strengthen their employability rate and better equip them to face different challenges. To put it briefly, internships are essential for professional success and motivate criminology graduates to continue developing in the criminal justice industry.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The CHED, in partnership with criminology institutions and other law enforcement agencies, should ensure that internship programs are systematically designed to align with students' professional standards and career goals and can enhance learning outcomes and increase career readiness. In addition, criminology schools should strengthen internship training by emphasizing the development of practical skills, professional discipline, ethical conduct, and applied knowledge. Next, the national government agencies should develop comprehensive joint programs and strengthen institutional partnerships. These efforts will expand employment opportunities, better align academic training with industry needs, and support a smoother transition from internship to professional practice. Moreover, future research should extend the scope of this study by investigating additional dimensions of internship experiences and their long-term effects on career success among criminology graduates.

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