

**CAREERS FOR THE  
CRIMINAL JUSTICE MAJOR**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Dr. Tomas C. Mijares** became a member of the Criminal Justice faculty at Texas State University-San Marcos after retiring from the Detroit Police Department in 1991. He spent the majority of his career as a sergeant in patrol supervision and tactical operations. He earned his master's degree from the University of Detroit and his Ph.D. from the University of Michigan. Dr. Mijares serves as a member of the Training Advisory Board for the Texas Tactical Police Officers Association. His research findings in police crisis management have been presented in several professional conferences and published in a variety of academic journals. He is the coauthor of *Training the SWAT Trainer: Legal Mandates and Practical Suggestions for Improving Police Tactical Performance* and *The Management of Police Specialized Tactical Units*. Finally, he has often testified as an expert witness in matters pertaining to the tactical use of force by police officers.

# CAREERS FOR THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE MAJOR

A Practical Guide to Course Selection, Descriptions of  
Entry-Level Positions and Best Prospects for  
Career Development

*By*

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When I taught my first collegiate level criminal justice course for Wayne County Community College, I was impressed with three realities. First, most of the students in the class were the first in their family to pursue any level of education beyond high school. The campus was a building that had been a Catholic high school on Detroit's east side until the early 1970s. The neighborhood automobile factories had already moved to the suburbs and beyond simply because it was cheaper and more efficient to build new facilities than to refurbish old ones. The workforce followed the factories to the suburbs and beyond causing the demographics of the urban neighborhoods to change dramatically. The resulting changes were reflected in the composition of the student body. The student body at this campus was approximately three-quarters African-American and one-quarter Caucasian. All had come from families that had been auto workers. Regardless of their ethnicity, the students regarded postsecondary education as the first step toward social and economic upward mobility.

Second, the students were taking coursework in criminal justice primarily for vocational purposes. Approximately one-half of the students in my first class were already employed as police officers who anticipated that the substance of the coursework and the associated academic discipline would assist them with promotional testing. These already employed students were taking advantage of the educational benefits of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968. The third quarter of the students were military veterans who were using various federal educational benefits and looked to apply their skills and discipline to a new environment. The more traditional students who were in the remaining quarter were curious about the field of criminal justice but they did not have specific career goals and did not know what questions to ask. They were not unfocused—they were simply unguided about the realities of the field and the available career opportunities.

Finally, over the past 40 years the ethnicities and numbers may have changed, but the vocational concerns remain the same. Through the educational process students expect to be prepared for the job market and employers expect to obtain the best possible job candidates from the colleges and

universities. The criminal justice curriculum may have been expanded and the credentials and research production of the faculty may have improved considerably. However, after more than four decades of improvements to make the discipline more academically “respectable,” little effort has been directed toward the vocational needs of students, particularly at the undergraduate level. Little can be achieved in this book by rationalizing the current state of the discipline and even less can be achieved by pointing the finger of blame. If anyone seeks improvement in the delivery of criminal justice services, it can be gained only when the system is staffed by the correct personnel.

The completion of any book requires more than the work of any author. I wish to thank many people for their support and assistance. First and foremost, I must thank my wife, Janet Mijares, for her patience and encouragement throughout my writing projects. I must also acknowledge her tolerance and indulgence during my lapses into single-mindedness when I am in the writing mode. Michael Payne Thomas and Sharon Moorman have always been helpful with the “nuts and bolts” of the book-length publications that I have undertaken. I must also thank my daughter, Lindsay, for her work with the photos that have comprised the covers. Daughters Kristin Mijares, Jaime Kane, and Staci Freer along with my sixth-grade teacher, Patricia Ryan, and my longtime colleague Jeff Shouldice served as proof-readers before the manuscript was submitted to the publisher.

In the movie classic, *Magnum Force*, Dirty Harry Callahan remarked, “A good man knows his limitations.” I must admit that my expertise in the fields of corrections and in the new advances of digital technology is limited. Accordingly, I must thank former graduate students Glen McKenzie and Dr. Kevin Jennings for their contributions in Chapters 4, 7, and 9.

I also wish to acknowledge the recruiters from hundreds of different law enforcement agencies, correctional facilities, and private security companies as well as the admissions officers from several law schools and graduate programs. They have provided a high level of insight pertaining to the characteristics desired from incoming employees and how the students might be able to prepare themselves to enter the field. They have also provided updates about the legislative and court-ordered requirements that must be satisfied throughout the recruiting and employment process.

I must also thank my former and current colleagues from the applied worlds of law enforcement, corrections, and private security. These professionals have created the standards of their respective vocations. They have never regarded their positions as just a job, but as a calling. They are the true experts in defining the type of coworker who would not only help in achieving an organization’s mission, but would also be able to make continuous

improvements in this honorable and expanding field. As a member of both the National Tactical Officers Association and the Texas Tactical Officers Association, I have been a regular attendee of the various conferences and competitions held around the country. It has been at these events where I have observed the continuous innovations in the tactics, techniques, and technologies of this very specialized area of law enforcement. However, in all instances it has been the human factor that demands the most attention and it is the human factor that determines the success or failure of any criminal justice operation.

Special thanks must be given to my students who have provided me with the ideas that have become the basis for this book. A common concern raised by the students has been their questions of what they can do with a degree in criminal justice and where can they obtain good advice about how they can apply their degree to a rewarding and satisfying career. Students in the field of criminal justice not only need to know where to look for employment, but also need to know how to look and what to expect during the process. For a variety of reasons, this material is rarely discussed during a college classroom setting. Because careers in criminal justice are vastly different from other fields, even the collegiate offices of career services are of limited utility. Thus, this book is intended to fill the void of information defined by current students.

Finally, I must acknowledge the former students who have made the ultimate sacrifice to safeguard others. There is no question that a career in criminal justice can have its physical as well as emotional risks. Nine students have been killed in the line of duty either as law enforcement or military personnel since I became a member of the criminal justice faculty at Texas State University in 1990. Accordingly, all royalties for the sale of this book will be donated to the *Yari Mokri Memorial Scholarship* and to the *Jessica Hollis Memorial Scholarship*.





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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

College students in general often ask, “What can I do with this major?” Students majoring in the study of criminal justice are no exception to this plight. Criminal justice professors in many universities hear this question regularly. They often respond with a shrug of the shoulders and state that the intrinsic value of the college experience is the continuous quest for knowledge. They could answer like a politician and emit some form of glittering generality that any degree will make the student a more informed citizen for the electoral process. They also appeal to the altruistic desire found in so many young people that the overall elevation of education among the entire populace will make the world a better place by saying that positive change is possible only through education. Each of these answers may contain an element of truth. However, they do not answer the basic question about what sort of career can be obtained by this degree and major?

At the beginning of an academic term, the same professors could ask their students what they expect from the class and what they want from the professor. Usually the students’ first concern is to complete the class satisfactorily and receive a good grade. Some may mention a desire to finish the overall degree requirements. Relatively few respond in terms of career preparation. Anecdotally and privately many of these students indicated that the mere possession of a degree should automatically qualify them for an upper-level or a specialized position in the field of criminal justice. Because law enforcement, particularly at the municipal level, has usually been considered the “dirty work” of

the criminal justice system, many students tend to hold entry-level policing in low esteem.

Among the few students who have given any thought to careers before their senior year, various patterns begin to emerge. First, many students have expressed a frustration about the lack of career advice available from members of the criminal justice faculty. This dissatisfaction is particularly evident in research universities where graduate level studies are emphasized and where undergraduate courses are often taught by doctoral students who have never worked in the field as practitioners. Many new members of criminal justice faculties are relatively young, freshly-minted holders of a Ph.D. and commonly do not consider themselves to be in a second career. As a result, they do not possess the breadth and depth of experience as practitioners and are less able to provide the same level of employment assistance in terms of contacts, advice, and interest as their predecessors were able to offer.

When criminal justice was first recognized as an academic discipline during the 1950s, the faculty came largely from the ranks of retired practitioners in law enforcement and corrections who usually possessed a Master's degree at most. While they did not possess the theoretical background or formal research training found in today's faculty, they brought two very important assets to the undergraduate classroom: Their own experiences and perceptions in the criminal justice job search process and their direct contacts with the recruiters from various agencies. In addition, an exceptionally large number of criminal justice students during the 1970s were already employed in the criminal justice system and were using the opportunities available under the Law Enforcement Education Program of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration created in the Department of Justice under the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968. These students were in the university classroom primarily to enhance their chances of promotion during their careers. By their very presence, the employed students were also able to perform the function of providing career advice and contacts for the traditional students.

Second, many students have not been exposed to the criminal justice system beyond the classroom or a family member who was a police official. Their knowledge usually comes vicariously or from theoretical sources, and their perspective comes from the entertainment

and news media. Since the entertainment media are geared solely toward providing dramatic amusement, law enforcement is seen through the perspective of excitement and spectacle. Hollywood depictions fail to capture the human interaction experienced by the beat-cop on patrol on a daily basis. In entertainment productions such as *21 Jump Street* and *The Shield*, people in entry-level positions in law enforcement and are portrayed as a combination of incompetence, brutality, and questionable ethics performing mundane tasks that can be carried out by anybody. Dramatic presentations such as *Orange is the New Black* and even older motion pictures such as *Cool Hand Luke*, personnel from the institutional element of the correctional system are portrayed as being composed of sadistic sociopaths with marginal intelligence. Community-based employees are rarely portrayed at all. Staff members of the judiciary are merely shown in the background. Anyone working in private security is generally shown as a blundering oaf similar to the title role seen in *Paul Blart: Mall Cop* or as an aspiring police officer who does not possess the intellectual acumen or physical ability to become employed in public law enforcement. Consequently, few students want anything to do with the entry-level positions in the criminal justice system where the “hands-on” tasks are performed and where the ability to develop the skills and experience for promotion is developed.

This book is intended to fill the void of organized information about careers in criminal justice in several different ways. First, realistic descriptions of the various entry-level positions will be offered. Information about where these positions can lead will be provided in each of the elements of the criminal justice system. All too often, even after earning a four-year degree, many students have developed their perceptions about the duties of criminal justice personnel from dramatic (and sometimes comic) portrayals from the entertainment media. Hopefully, this book will dispel these delusions.

Second, practical information will be provided to maximize efficiency in the selection of academic courses that will improve a student’s likelihood of success during the application process. This sort of efficiency will have the side benefit of enabling the students to complete their studies in a timely fashion. Because of the continuously rising costs associated with the college experience, students are often under pressure from their parents to finish their degree requirements

as quickly as possible. Some states have recognized the need for students to finish quickly and may even provide a financial incentive to complete the requirements within a given time and within a given number of credit hours. This book will address these concerns by explaining which electives will improve a criminal justice student's marketability in the job search process.

Third, this book is intended to describe how potential employees can find the sites where employment might be sought and what to expect at these sources. The job search process is not a fishing expedition. No amount of success can be expected by merely emailing a resumé with the hope that it will be found in the net of an employer.

Finally, even after finally recognizing the wide and varied range of employment possibilities in the criminal justice system, many students still have an unrealistic expectation of the nonacademic foundation steps needed to attain these specialized positions. In addition to the need for students to follow their necessary coursework, these steps come in the forms of behavioral and physical preparations, appropriate experience, and proper networking. Thus, this book is also intended to help prepare college students for the rigors of the selection and training processes. Both physical and mental fitness are mandatory for selection. While most college students should be able to pass the written testing portion successfully, today's society and its material ease have created a sedentary population that is incapable of undergoing the rigor of modern law enforcement without failure or injury. Applicants for employment in criminal justice represent a microcosm of society and would not fare well without preparation. The mere possession of a degree does not guarantee that an applicant possesses the intellectual ability to succeed in the field or even during the job quest. Depending on the specific job, additional specialized coursework and preparation may be necessary. This book will address the steps and performance levels needed for a successful job hunt and satisfying career.

In addition to benefitting students directly, the material presented in this book will also furnish criminal justice faculty members with resource material when students ask them for vocational advice. This material will particularly aid instructional faculty members teaching classes in the introduction to criminal justice, and in more specialized courses describing law enforcement, the judiciary, corrections, and private security. Also, the material will particularly help instructors