

# Majoring in . . . .

## Criminal Justice

### Description of Criminal Justice

#### What is criminal justice?

Criminal justice is the study of crime, public safety, law enforcement, and judicial and correctional processes.

#### What do criminal justice majors study?

Criminal justice students learn about the criminal justice system, how it is organized, and how it functions with other areas of law enforcement, such as the courts, corrections institutions, security services, and the juvenile justice system. This major includes instruction in criminal law and policy, police and correctional systems organization, the administration of justice and the judiciary, and public attitudes regarding criminal justice issues.

#### What skills are important for a criminal justice major?

Criminal justice majors should:

- Have the ability to work well with others;
- Be curious; and
- Have good oral and written communication skills.

#### What else do criminal justice majors study?

Criminal justice provides a background through a combination of liberal arts and professionally-oriented courses. Students in this major take a variety of courses to develop knowledge and skills that can be applied in both personal and professional settings.

Liberal arts courses provide a background to strengthen critical thinking; problem solving; written, oral, and interpersonal communication; quantitative, analytical, and reasoning skills. These skills are also considered very important for success in the workplace.

### **Course Requirements**

**General education:** About 60 credit hours of general education courses are required. These courses give a broad range of knowledge in foreign languages, science, math, writing, arts, ethics, civilization, literature, human behavior, and urban environment.

**Major courses:** A minimum of 36 credit hours of criminal justice courses are required. Criminal justice majors are required to take the following courses:

- Case studies in criminal procedure
- Criminal law
- Foundations of criminal justice
- Justice system survey
- Research methods in criminal justice

All criminal justice majors must also select an 18 credit hour concentration in either justice or forensic crime scene investigation. The justice concentration is designed for students interested in a broad theoretical and practical education in the field of criminal justice.

The forensic crime scene investigation concentration is offered for students interested in careers in crime scene investigation at the local, state, or federal levels. Required courses in this concentration include:

- Crime scene evidence, law and trial procedure
- Criminalistics and crime analysis
- Computer forensic investigation
- Principles of criminal investigation
- Violent crime scene investigation

**Electives:** About 24 credit hours are required.

Some criminal justice majors use their electives toward a minor (18-21 credits) for an additional specialization.

## **Careers in Criminal Justice**

The criminal justice major provides a good background for entry to any number of occupations. Some of these careers include:

- Airline security representative
- Animal treatment investigator
- Bailiff
- Body guard
- Border patrol agent
- Child welfare caseworker
- Corrections officer
- Court administrator
- Detective (police)
- Drug enforcement agent
- Fish and game investigator
- Foreign service officer
- Non-profit organization advocate
- Park ranger
- Police officer
- Probation/parole officer
- Public safety officer
- Secret service agent
- Security guard
- U.S. marshal

Further training, including graduate school, is required in order to work in these areas.

- Attorney
- Criminal investigator
- Criminal justice professor
- FBI/CIA agent
- Law librarian
- Public defender

- Warden

### Next Steps

If you are interested in learning more about becoming a criminal justice major at VCU, consider doing each of the following things. Check them off as you complete each step.

- Check out the VCU School of Government & Public Affairs webpage.
- Take an introductory criminal justice course.
- Read about the criminal justice major in the *Undergraduate Bulletin*.
- Review the criminal justice major graduation worksheet with an academic advisor.
- Talk to one or more upper-level criminal justice students about their major.
- Discuss the major with one or more criminal justice professors.
- Go to the Career Center to read about careers in criminal justice.
- Go to the VCU bookstore and browse in the criminal justice textbook section.
- Explore internship possibilities through the Career Center and the School of Government

& Public Affairs.

- ☐ Check out the American Society of Criminology website at [www.asc41.com](http://www.asc41.com) for information on topics related to the study of criminal justice.

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