

Criminology @ Unisa

A guide to preparing for
career opportunities



Define tomorrow.

UNISA



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The information in this publication is correct as of 17 February 2026. Visit the Unisa Counselling and Career Development [downloads page](#) to check for updates.

Please check the Unisa qualifications webpage (<http://www.unisa.ac.za/qualifications>) regularly for updates related to available qualifications and the admission requirements to study.

How will this brochure help you?

- It will provide you with some insight into what studying criminology involves.
- It will help you gain more information about the skills needed in the field of criminology.
- It will help you identify possible career opportunities related to criminology.
- It will assist you in finding criminology-related qualifications offered by Unisa.

What problems do you want to solve

“Don’t ask kids what they want to be when they grow up but what problems they want to solve. This changes the conversation from who do I want to work for, to what do I need to learn to be able to do that.”

Jaime Casap, Google Global Education Evangelist

One way to think about your career is by focusing on the **problems you care about**, not only on job titles. This shifts the question from “*What do I want to become?*” to “*What do I want to contribute?*”

Activity

1. Write down some problems or challenges you care about — in your family, community, South Africa, Africa, or the world.
2. Think about how you might contribute to solving them.
3. Ask: *What skills or knowledge would I need to prepare myself for that role?*

Example: You may want to address the challenge of reducing crime and improving safety in urban communities. Think about the different individuals who can contribute to solving this challenge: criminologists, law enforcement officers, policy analysts, urban planners, community development practitioners, social workers, and local government officials.

As a criminologist, you may analyse crime patterns, identify risk factors, and evaluate prevention strategies to inform evidence-based interventions. Law enforcement officials may implement targeted policing strategies, while policy analysts research and recommend effective crime prevention and justice policies. Community development practitioners and social workers may work directly with communities to address underlying social issues such as poverty, substance abuse, and youth vulnerability. Urban planners and local government officials can contribute by designing safer public spaces and allocating resources to crime prevention initiatives.

Together, these roles demonstrate that reducing crime and promoting community safety requires collaboration across multiple sectors and that a background in criminology equips you to play a vital role in understanding crime, informing policy, and contributing to safer, more resilient communities.

Understanding criminology

Before you start: Why choose criminology?

Before considering pursuing this field of study, here are some basic questions you can ask yourself:

- Why are you interested in studying criminology?
- Where does your interest come from?
- Where are you hoping to be in five years? In ten years?
- What opportunities are you hoping to prepare for by completing a qualification in criminology?
- Which career opportunities can I pursue with a criminology background?

What is criminology?

Criminology is the scientific study of crime, criminal behaviour, and society's responses to crime. It examines the causes of crime, patterns of offending, victimisation, and strategies for prevention and intervention. Criminology is a multidisciplinary field that draws on concepts

and methods from sociology, psychology, biology, statistics, economics, anthropology, and law.

Criminology focuses not only on crime itself, but also on its broader social, economic, and individual consequences. By understanding why crime occurs and how societies respond to it, criminologists contribute to safer communities, improved criminal justice systems, and the protection and empowerment of victims.

Crime affects all societies. Criminology plays a crucial role in understanding the causes and consequences of crime, supporting victims, improving rehabilitation efforts, and developing effective crime prevention strategies. This knowledge helps inform policy decisions, strengthen justice systems, and promote community safety and social well-being.

What do criminology students study?

Topics commonly covered in criminology include:

- Crime typologies and patterns
- Offenders and criminal behaviour
- Victimology and victim support
- Crime risk and prevention strategies
- Social and legal responses to crime
- Child and youth misbehaviour
- Youth justice and diversion programmes
- Criminological evaluation and assessment

Students are also trained in research methods, data analysis, and the evaluation of social policies. These skills enable graduates to critically analyse crime-related issues, interpret evidence responsibly, and contribute meaningfully to research, policy development, and practice.

What skills and qualities are needed for this career field?

Individuals working in criminology-related fields typically demonstrate:

- Strong problem-solving abilities
- Clear written and verbal communication skills

- Analytical and logical thinking
- Attention to detail and accuracy
- Curiosity and a questioning mindset
- Ability to work with large volumes of information and data
- Interest in social justice, ethics, and community well-being

Careers in criminology

Some of the specific areas that criminology focuses on include:

Criminology addresses a wide range of issues, including:

- Frequency and distribution of crime
- Causes and types of crime
- Individual and social consequences of crime
- Victim experiences and responses
- Public, community, and governmental reactions to crime
- Crime prevention and intervention strategies

Where do criminology graduates work?

It is important to understand the difference between a criminology graduate and a criminologist.

A criminology graduate is someone who has completed a BA (or Honours) degree with criminology as a major. At this level, graduates may qualify for entry-level or operational positions in various sectors.

A criminologist, in the formal academic sense, is typically someone who has completed a Master's degree (MA) in Criminology or higher. At this level, individuals are trained to conduct advanced research, analyse crime trends, develop policy recommendations, and work in academic or specialist research roles.

Your level of qualification will influence the type of roles for which you may be considered.

For example:

- An MA in Criminology is generally required to work as a researcher, academic, or specialist policy analyst.

- A BA in Criminology may qualify you for entry-level roles in institutions such as SAPS, the Department of Correctional Services, or private security companies.
- An Honours degree may strengthen your competitiveness for analytical or supervisory roles and prepare you for postgraduate study.

Understanding this distinction can help you plan your studies more intentionally.

Employment opportunities by sector

Criminology graduates may find employment in a variety of sectors, including:

Law Enforcement and Security

- South African Police Service (SAPS)
- SAPS Forensic Science Laboratory
- SAPS Crime Information Analysis Centre
- Private security and risk management firms

Criminal Justice and Correctional Services

- Department of Correctional Services (prisons, parole, rehabilitation programmes)
- Courts and legal services (e.g. offender assessments, victim impact support)

Government and Intelligence

- South African National Defence Force
- National intelligence and security agencies
- Policy and crime prevention units within government departments

Community and Non-Profit Organisations

- Victim empowerment and support services
- Youth development and diversion programmes
- Rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives

Financial and Corporate Sector

- Fraud investigation units
- Risk and compliance departments
- Forensic auditing environments

Research and Academia

(Generally requires an MA or higher qualification)

- Universities (lecturing and research)
- Research organisations such as:
 - Institute for Security Studies
 - Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention
 - Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC)
 - Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)

Sample tasks in criminology-related roles

Depending on your qualification level and role, you may be involved in:

- Crime data analysis and profiling
- Criminal and financial investigations
- Fraud detection and prevention
- Policy research and evaluation
- Diversion and rehabilitation programme design
- Victim support and advocacy
- Youth intervention programmes
- Compliance and risk assessment
- Teaching and training

Criminology and Forensic Science

Although criminology and forensic science both deal with crime, they focus on different questions.

Criminology (social science)

Criminology asks:

- Why do people commit crime?
- How does crime affect victims and communities?
- How can crime be prevented?
- How do policing, courts and correctional systems function?

Criminology draws on sociology, psychology, law and public policy.

It is concerned with human behaviour, social systems and justice processes.

At Unisa, Criminology is offered as a major subject in the College of Law and College of Human Sciences.

Typical career areas:

- Policy and research
- Community safety and crime prevention
- Victim support services
- Law enforcement and investigation
- Intelligence and security analysis
- Corrections and rehabilitation
- Lecturing at a higher education institution

Forensic science (natural and applied science)

Forensic science applies scientific methods to legal questions. It is laboratory- and evidence-focused. The word “forensic” means “for the courts”. Forensic scientists must be able to explain their findings clearly in court and withstand cross-examination.

Forensic science asks:

- What physical evidence is available?
- What does this evidence show?
- Can this evidence link a suspect, victim and scene?

Forensic scientists typically start with a Bachelor of Science degree in life sciences, such as microbiology and chemistry.

Forensic science is:

- Highly technical
- Evidence-driven
- Laboratory-intensive
- Often repetitive and procedural
- Strictly regulated

Examples of forensic science specialisations include:

- Forensic DNA analysis
- Forensic toxicology
- Ballistics (firearms and toolmarks)
- Forensic document examination
- Bloodstain pattern analysis
- Digital forensics
- Forensic anthropology and pathology

Forensic science in South Africa

In South Africa, forensic science work is mainly conducted through:

- The South African Police Service (SAPS) Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL)
- Private forensic laboratories (e.g. DNA and paternity testing)
- Universities and research institutions
- Independent forensic consultants

Further reading

- [South African Academy of Forensic Sciences \(SAAFS\)](#)
- [SAPS Forensic Science Laboratory](#)

Exploring and researching careers

Making informed career decisions means going beyond what you already know. Career research helps you explore opportunities in criminology, understand what employers are looking for, and identify the steps you can take to prepare yourself.

Try this:

Here are some simple activities to help you explore opportunities in criminology. Choose 2–3 to start with:

1. **Online search**

Search “career in criminology South Africa” or “entry-level jobs related to criminology” and make a list of the qualifications and skills mentioned.

2. **Occupational information websites**

Visit the South African Department of Higher Education and Training’s [National Career Advice Portal](#). Search for specific job titles and read about work activities, skills, and job outlook.

3. **Job search portals**

Check portals like [Indeed](#), [Career Junction](#) or [PNet](#). Type in specific job titles to see which employers are currently hiring and the requirements.

4. **LinkedIn**

[Search for Unisa alumni](#) who studied criminology to see where they work. What career paths do they follow?

5. **AI tools**

Use ChatGPT or Google Gemini to ask: “What are emerging careers in criminology in South Africa?” Compare the results with what you see on job portals.

6. **Talk to others**

Set up an informal chat with someone working in the field or at an organisation you are interested in to learn more about their career journey and daily work.

7. **Attend a careers fair**

When Unisa or professional organisations host career fairs, look for employers related to criminology. Prepare 2–3 questions to ask them about entry routes into the profession.

8. **Join a professional organisation or network**

- Criminological and Victimological Society of Southern Africa ([CRIMSA](#))

9. Volunteering

Look for volunteering or vacation work opportunities. Note the skills you develop through these experiences.

For more detailed steps and extra activities, see our [Career Research brochure](#).

Preparing while you study

Many students believe that a degree will lead directly to a specific job. In reality, your career path is shaped by more than your major. It is also about the **skills you build, the experiences you gain, and how you prepare along the way**. While you study, there are many things you can do to get ready for opportunities.

Your degree is one part of your career journey. By building skills, gaining experience, keeping a portfolio, and investing in your confidence, you'll be better prepared for opportunities during and after your studies.

Develop your transferable skills

Your studies give you subject knowledge and valuable skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, working independently, and adapting to new situations. Reflect on what you're learning and practise explaining these skills in ways that employers will understand.

Activity

- List three skills you've strengthened this year and one example of how you've used each.
- List three skills you intend to strengthen and how you plan on doing so.

Build a career portfolio

A portfolio helps you keep track of your achievements, experiences, and goals. Include your skills, certificates, volunteering, work experience, and career ideas. Over time, this will become a powerful tool for applications and interviews.

Useful resource

- [Unisa Career Portfolio](#)

Gain experience (volunteering or part-time work)

Getting experience outside your coursework helps you explore fields of interest, build networks, and develop workplace skills. Volunteering is especially valuable when done responsibly and with respect for the community.

Think about

- Which organisations could benefit from your skills?
- What could you gain in return (skills, networks, insights)?
- How will this experience link to your career goals?

Enhance your employability

Employability means your ability to get, keep, and grow in fulfilling work. Today's careers are flexible: people change jobs and industries often, and success can mean many different things. You can boost your employability by:

- Managing your personal brand (how others see your professionalism).
- Developing job search skills (CVs, cover letters, interviews, networking).
- Exploring flexible career paths and lifelong learning opportunities.

Useful resources

- [Unisa Prepare for Job Opportunities](#)
- [Counselling and Career Development YouTube channel](#)
- [PNet Grad Pack](#)
- [GradNext](#)

Grow your self-confidence

Believing in your ability to succeed is just as important as skills and knowledge. Low self-confidence can hold you back from studying effectively, applying for opportunities, or connecting with others.

Ways to strengthen your confidence

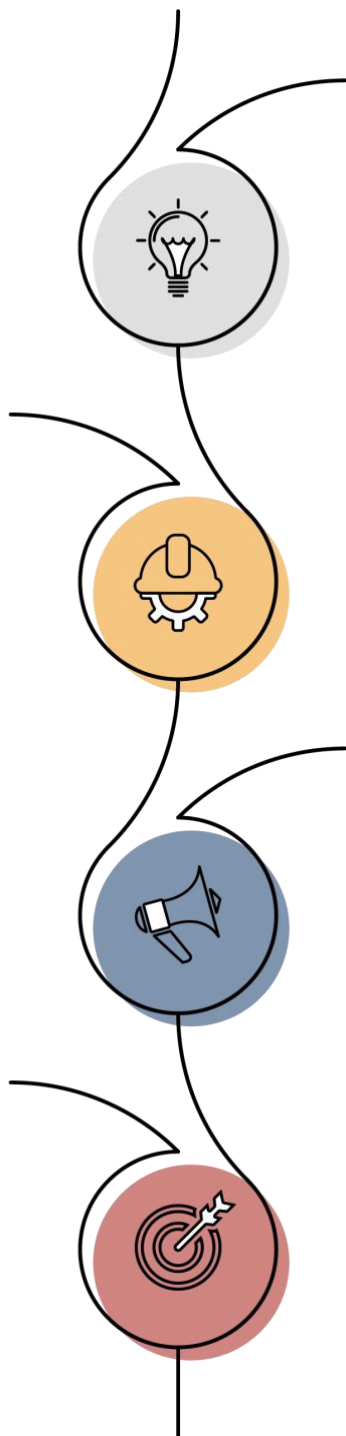
- Focus on your strengths and successes.
- Ask for help when needed: it's a sign of strength, not weakness.
- Practise self-talk that encourages growth instead of fear.

Remember: confidence grows with action. The more you try, the more you'll believe in yourself.

Your roadmap to success

Embarking on a career journey while studying can feel exciting and overwhelming. This roadmap will guide you year by year, helping you to stay intentional, informed, and adaptable.

Careers are rarely straight lines. Think of this roadmap as a flexible guide: you can move between stages depending on your opportunities and goals.



Year 1: Explore and build foundations

- Reflect on your interests, strengths, and career goals.
- Research career paths linked to your qualification.
- Plan your modules and think about postgraduate options.
- Identify key employability skills to develop.
- Create a basic CV and LinkedIn profile.
- Join a student or professional organisation.

Year 2: Grow and gain experience

- Focus on excelling in your studies.
- Apply for internships, part-time jobs, or volunteer work.
- Attend workshops, webinars, or conferences.
- Gain certifications (if relevant).
- Expand your professional network.
- Update your CV and portfolio with new experiences.

Year 3: Refine and specialise

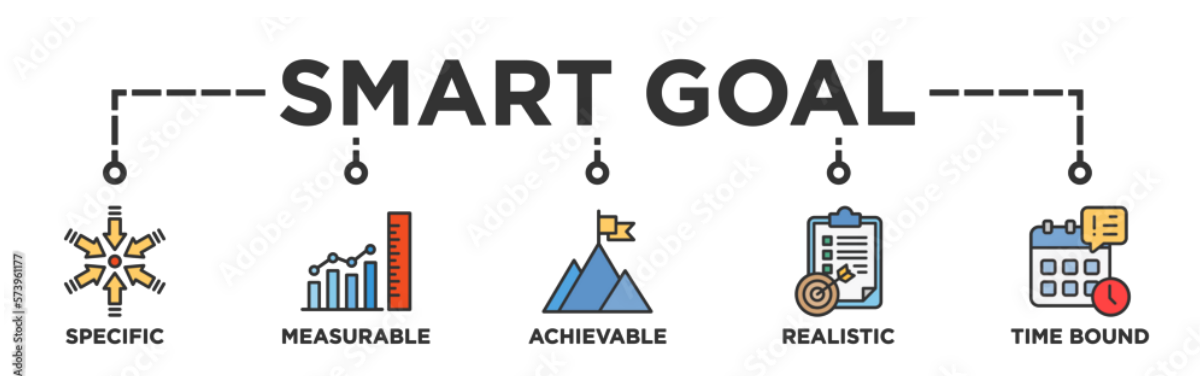
- Revisit your career goals and explore specialisations.
- Connect with alumni and seek mentorship.
- Strengthen your professional presence (LinkedIn, portfolio, personal website).
- Practise with mock interviews and improve communication skills.
- Contribute to professional discussions online or at events.

Final Year: Launch your career

- Start an intentional job search (LinkedIn, job boards, company websites).
- Tailor your CV and cover letters for each application.
- Practise interviews and refine your elevator pitch.
- Attend career fairs and networking events.
- Evaluate and negotiate job offers with guidance from mentors.
- Commit to lifelong learning and professional development.

My career learning plan: Next steps

Your next step is to plan how you will get the information that you still need to make optimal career decisions. Use SMART goals to help you plan your career research.



S – Specific: What exactly do I want to find out?

M – Measurable: How will I know I've done it?

A – Achievable: Can I realistically do this step?

R – Relevant: Does this help me make better career decisions?

T – Time-bound: By when will I do it?

What career questions do I still need answers to?

My career question	What steps will I take?	By when?	Who/what can help me?	Done?	What's next?
E.g. What jobs can I do with a degree in criminology?	Search LinkedIn profiles of Unisa criminology graduates	15 Oct	LinkedIn, Alumni page	Yes	Connect with 3 alumni

Career planning is not about having all the answers right now. It is about staying curious, setting small goals, and building momentum.

Study opportunities at Unisa

Undergraduate qualifications

College of Law

- [Higher Certificate in Criminal Justice](#)
- [Bachelor of Arts in Criminology](#)
- [Bachelor of Arts in Police Science \(Criminal Justice stream\)](#)

College of Human Sciences

- [Bachelor of Arts \(General\) \(Select criminology as one of the major subjects\)](#)

If you do not meet the admission requirements for a Bachelor's degree, then you will need to explore the option of applying for a [relevant Higher Certificate](#). Completing a relevant Higher Certificate programme will enable you to meet the requirements for a diploma or degree.

Visit the Unisa website at <http://www.unisa.ac.za/qualifications> for more information about the admission requirements for these degrees.

Postgraduate qualifications

Honours degrees

- [Bachelor of Arts Honours in Criminology](#)

Master's and PhD

- [Master of Arts in Criminology](#)
- [Master of Arts in Criminal Justice](#)
- [Doctor of Philosophy in Criminal Justice](#) (Corrections Management; Criminology and Security Management; Police Science, Forensic Science and Technology)

Read more about the Research Focus Areas [here](#).

Counselling and career development services at Unisa

The Unisa Directorate for Counselling and Career Development offers career, academic, and personal counselling services to Unisa students and the broader community. You can talk to a counsellor about:

- **Career decisions.** I am not sure which career path to follow; I don't know which qualification would be best; I want to change my career direction...
- **Career information.** How can I find out more about a career in ...
- **Employability.** How do I market myself to employers? How can I look for work? How can I compile an effective CV? How do I go about networking with others? How do I put together my career portfolio? How can I meet potential employers? How can I improve my interview skills?)
- **My studies at Unisa.** How can I get started with my studies? How do I plan my studies? How can I study more effectively? I don't feel motivated to continue with my studies... I feel worried about preparing for/ writing the exams. I failed my exams – what now? I need to improve my reading/ writing/ numeracy skills
- **Personal issues and mental health.** How can I have better relationships with others? How can I cope more effectively with issues that impact my studies?

Contact us

- Send an email to counselling@unisa.ac.za.
- Make an appointment to see a counsellor:
 - [In-person at a Unisa Centre](#)
 - [Online \(on MS Teams\)](#)

Further self-help resources for career, academic and personal development

Our website: www.unisa.ac.za/counselling

Our YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/unisacareers