

Frequently Asked Questions about Criminal Justice

1. What do I take to be in the FBI?

The FBI gets thousands of applicants each year, for a very few number of openings. There are over 100 federal agencies with some law enforcement responsibilities, from Federal Food Stamp Fraud Investigators with the US Department of Agriculture, to US Marshals and FBI agents. So, it is important to consider all of the agencies, not just one. The FBI expects applicants to have a very clean background investigation, good physical fitness, be 21-37 years old, and the applicant will be subjected to a very detailed background, medical, psychological, financial, and physical fitness investigation.

Typically, most new FBI agents are recruited from law schools, from CPA programs, and from other federal law enforcement agencies. We have two of our program graduates who now are FBI agents, but both of them started as FBI civilian clerks and worked their way into the Special Agent ranks. Another former student is a Special Agent, but she went to law school and then applied to the FBI.

2. I want to be working in a CSI position.

First, you need to understand the television shows are entertainment, not fact. You won't be working as they do, carrying weapons, driving Hummers, arresting the bad guys, working one case intensively with a large team of specialists, and you certainly won't be working with Marg Helgenberger.

For the most part, crime investigation is divided into two parts, the crime scene and the lab. For lab jobs, we recommend a strong science background, rather than CJA. Sure, you may want to take CJA 127 Criminalistics and CJA 226 Criminal Investigation, but your focus should be on majoring in Chemistry or one of the other physical or life sciences.

3. Will my Minor in Possession case keep from a career in Criminal Justice?

No, but..... First, you need to make sure you keep this foolish behavior in your past. The career field can understand and ignore youthful mistakes, but you certainly don't want to have repeated alcohol cases in your record. Agencies will look back to about age 13, so everything does count, but an MIP at age 16 is much less damaging than another one, or having one at age 20. And, of course, you're expected to report your MIP in the application process. Lying about or covering up parts of your record are grounds for immediate dismissal or non-selection.

4. I have a disability. Can I still be in this field?

Agencies have their own standards. You need to be aware of what your situation is, what THEIR rules are, and what your choices are. One of our graduates is hearing impaired in both ears. They went into a Probation Officer position, with superior skills and experience (classes, internship, Honors, active in WSCJA and APS) so the agency was willing to consider the whole candidate, and hired her. Another hearing impaired graduate was hired in an office job, dealing with multiple computers in an intensive supervision program, where he isn't in the field interviewing probationers.

5. I'm pretty heavy. Will this hold me back?

Yes. We urge you to get to a healthy weight and maintain it through your college years. Agencies have their own standards. Generally corrections agencies are a little less stringent about weight requirements than is law enforcement. However, corrections still seeks and selects physically fit candidates. And, in the career field, sudden bursts of action may be required, so being fit is important.

6. I smoke. Will this hold me back?

Yes. Aside from the impact on your personal health and the health of others in your household, smoking may be a reason for an agency not to hire you, or to limit your assignments. Many public agencies prohibit smoking in offices and vehicles, and may prohibit smoking in uniform.

7. Can I be a CJA major and be in athletics at the same time?

Yes. All athletes have the same degree requirements as others in their programs. The personal discipline it takes to be a successful athlete at the college level is the same self discipline, time management, and dedication it takes to be successful in the classroom. All athletes have a form for instructors to complete every two weeks, indicating progress and/or problems in each course each semester. The coaches want you to be successful in the classroom in order to be eligible to participate in athletics. When athletes get on the bus, they're carrying books too. Our varsity athletes have a higher than campus average grade point average. The problem with athletes is they have to dedicate themselves to being effective and efficient students, with strong time management skills. And, if the coaches are doing their jobs, you're too tired to study at night, wanting to sleep or soak something instead of studying at 9 pm. The trick is to find a quiet place and time during the day, in order to get study done. We have one person whose entire job is to monitor each student athlete's academic progress in order to keep them eligible for participation. WSC expects our athletes to be student athletes who complete their degrees on time.

8. What about transfer from a community college?

WSC is part of a statewide transfer agreement wherein students who have a completed AA degree from a Nebraska community college can transfer to WSC as a junior and have all the General Education requirements met, with the exception of one course, EPS 300 Educated Perspectives Seminar. Students from other states or other colleges may have General Education requirements still to meet, plus whatever remaining requirements in their particular degree program. Our Registrar can advise on what courses will transfer in to WSC. In Criminal Justice, we have an almost seamless transfer from the CJA program at Northeast Community College. See a CJA faculty member for details and an unofficial assessment of your transcript.

9. Do you have internships?

Yes. CJA allows internships, as elective rather than required, for good students who are juniors or seniors. The internship is 1-6 credit hours, depending on your program needs. Interns in public sector agencies seldom are paid internships, while those in private placements usually are. The CJA 497 handbook, available on this website under Internships may answer your specific questions. See your academic advisor for details.

10. Can I be a part time student and work outside of college?

Yes. However, college is suppose to take you to some limits, with outside reading frequently, and tests and writing assignments and projects in may courses each semester. Some students can thrive under this load and hold down a job too, but others decide something has to be adjusted, either their work schedule or their college load. Be sure to know your own particular financial aid situation before accepting a job position. And, if you can choose among job opportunities, one in your career field, or one developing job related skills is preferable to doing some job you've done since high school, just for the money. Our Career Services office and help you with employment listings and applications. Talk with your academic advisor, too.

11. Who do I see for help?

All WSC students can take advantage of the wide range of student services available on this campus: the Writing Help Desk, individual counseling services, Student Health, Career Services, Library Help Desk, the student tutors and many others.

Each student is assigned an academic advisor, a faculty member assigned to work with you to make academic decisions. In CJA, your advisor is one of the CJA faculty. See us for discussions of your academic progress, scheduling for next semester, conversations about the career field, graduate schools, job applications, internships and cooperative education opportunities, and the career search. We try to keep in touch with our alumni after graduation. Please remember to keep in touch with us.