

THE LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF ACADEMIC YEAR 2025 GRADUATING CRIMINOLOGY STUDENTS OF PHILIPPINE COLLEGE FOUNDATION

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the learning experiences of Bachelor of Science in Criminology students at the Philippine College Foundation during the Academic Year 2024–2025. Using a purposive sampling method, fifteen fourth-year students participated by responding to researcher-developed open-ended questionnaires. Data were analysed thematically to understand students' personal, academic, and professional growth throughout their program. Four major themes emerged: (1) Values Formation, highlighting the development of respect, discipline, and kindness through formation activities and institutional practices; (2) Challenging Growth, reflecting how rigorous coursework and academic demands fostered resilience, perseverance, and a growth mindset; (3) Supportive Community, emphasizing the role of peer, faculty, and institutional support in promoting engagement, motivation, and personal development; and (4) Resource Limitations, indicating challenges in accessing practical facilities, updated materials, and hands-on experiences essential for professional competency. Findings demonstrate that holistic student development relies on the interplay of ethical cultivation, academic rigor, social support, and adequate resources. Based on these insights, recommendations are provided to enhance values education, academic challenge, community support, and resource availability in criminology programs. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how higher education institutions can foster well-rounded, competent, and socially responsible future professionals in the field of criminology.

Keyword: Criminology education, learning experiences, values formation, academic growth, supportive community, resource limitations

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a transformative process that shapes students not only intellectually but also personally and professionally. In higher education, learning experiences extend beyond classroom instruction; they encompass social interactions, practical training, and personal development that collectively prepare students for future careers. For students in the Bachelor of Science in Criminology (BS Criminology) program, this journey is uniquely multidimensional. They are required to integrate theoretical knowledge with practical skills through hands-on activities, simulations, fieldwork, and community engagement. These experiences aim to equip them with competencies essential for law enforcement, criminal investigation, and public safety.

Globally, research has shown that experiential learning enhances students' professional readiness, engagement, and critical thinking skills (Kolb, 2015). International studies in criminal justice education highlight the importance of active learning approaches, including internships and simulations, which allow students to apply classroom knowledge to real-world situations (Carter & Radelet, 2019). The Philippines also underscore the challenges criminology students face, such as difficulties in understanding complex concepts, lack of resources, and the need for more applied, hands-on learning opportunities (Soriano, 2020; Dela Cruz, 2021).

Despite these findings, there is still limited research exploring the holistic learning experiences of BS Criminology students, particularly how students perceive their academic, personal, and professional growth throughout

their program. Understanding these experiences is crucial for improving instructional methods, curriculum design, and student support systems in Philippine higher education.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to explore the Learning Experiences of Bachelor of Science in Criminology Students at Philippine College Foundation. Specifically, this study answered the question:

1. How do they describe their overall learning experiences, including personal, academic, and professional growth, within the program?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the learning experiences of Bachelor of Science in Criminology students at the Philippine College Foundation. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate because the study aimed to understand students' perceptions, feelings, and interpretations of their learning experiences rather than to measure variables numerically.

Qualitative descriptive research focuses on describing phenomena as experienced by participants in their natural context. In this study, students' narratives regarding their personal, academic, and professional growth were gathered and analyzed to capture the richness and depth of their experiences within the BS Criminology program. This design allowed the researcher to identify common patterns, similarities, and themes emerging from students' responses, such as challenges encountered, meaningful learning moments, and perceptions of the program and department.

The use of this research design was suitable because it provided a systematic way to organize and interpret students' responses while remaining close to their actual words and experiences. Through thematic analysis, the study was able to present a comprehensive description of the learning experiences of BS Criminology students and generate insights that may help improve instructional practices, student support, and program development at the Philippine College Foundation.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at the Philippine College Foundation (PCF), an institution of higher education that offers the Bachelor of Science in Criminology program. PCF was chosen as the research locale because it provides the academic and practical learning environment in which the participants' experiences were formed. As a training ground for future professionals in law enforcement and criminal justice, the institution plays a significant role in shaping students' academic, personal, and professional development. Conducting the study within this setting allowed the researcher to obtain accurate and context-based descriptions of the learning experiences of BS Criminology students.

2.2. Participants of the Study

The participants of this study were selected fifteen (15) graduating criminology students of Philippine College Foundation during Academic Year 2025. The participants were selected using purposive sampling, as graduating students were considered the most appropriate respondents due to their extensive exposure to the BS Criminology curriculum, academic requirements, and departmental activities throughout their years of study.

The participants were able to reflect comprehensively on their learning experiences, including personal growth, academic challenges, and professional preparation within the program. Participation in the study was voluntary, and the confidentiality of all respondents was strictly maintained to ensure ethical research practice and to encourage honest and open responses.

2.3. Data Gathering Procedures

The data for this study were gathered using a researcher-developed open-ended questionnaire designed to elicit detailed responses regarding the learning experiences of fourth-year Bachelor of Science in Criminology students at the Philippine College Foundation during Academic Year 2024–2025. The questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions that focused on students' overall learning experiences, the best and least liked aspects of their program and department, and their personal, academic, and professional growth throughout their stay in the institution.

Prior to data collection, permission to conduct the study was sought from the appropriate school authorities. After approval was granted, the researcher informed the participants about the purpose of the study, assured them of the confidentiality of their responses, and emphasized that their participation was voluntary. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the distribution of the questionnaire.

The questionnaires were administered to the selected fourth-year BS Criminology students at an agreed time and place to ensure convenience and minimal disruption to their academic activities. Participants were given sufficient time to answer the questions honestly and thoroughly. The completed questionnaires were then collected by the researcher for analysis.

After data collection, the responses were carefully reviewed, organized, and coded. The researcher analyzed the data through thematic analysis, identifying recurring patterns, similarities, and significant themes related to the students' learning experiences. These themes served as the basis for interpreting and presenting the findings of the study.

2.4. Data Analysis

The study employed a phenomenological approach in analyzing the data to understand the lived learning experiences of BS Criminology students. Participants' responses from the open-ended questionnaires were carefully read and analyzed using thematic analysis. Significant statements were identified, coded, and grouped based on similarities in meaning. Emerging themes were then formulated to describe the essence of the students' personal, academic, and professional learning experiences.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter discusses the findings and analysis of data from the participant's meaningful quotes and observations obtained during the interview. It includes the themes and sub-themes with textural descriptions and composite structural descriptions with literatures that supports the results. There are four themes that emerged: (i) values formation, (ii) challenging growth, (iii) supportive community, (iv) resource limitations.

Theme 1: Values Formation

Values Formation emerged as a prominent theme in the learning experiences of Bachelor of Science in Criminology students at Philippine College Foundation. Recent studies emphasize that higher education plays a crucial role not only in cognitive development but also in the formation of ethical values, social responsibility, and professional conduct (Sison & Bautista, 2021; UNESCO, 2021). In the context of criminology education, values such as respect, discipline, and kindness are especially important, as these qualities directly relate to future responsibilities in law enforcement and justice-related professions. The participants' responses indicate that PCF served as an environment where these values were consciously developed alongside academic learning.

I have a lot of learning experience in PCF especially to respect every classmate and staff and PCF give me memorable moment. (R1L5-6P1)

My experience in PCF is to teach me a respect and learn. (R3L9P1)

My learning experience... is very helpful when it comes in real life, in terms of respect, kindness obeying the rules and regulation... (R4L10-11P1)

The best part of my learning experience in PCF is while formation because you can see how respectful one in formation. (R1L36-37P1)

The participants experienced their learning journey as one that emphasized respect and positive behavior through everyday academic and social interactions. Students described learning to respect classmates, instructors, and staff, as well as internalizing discipline and kindness through formation activities and institutional expectations. These lived experiences reflect how values were encountered in both formal settings, such as formation and classroom rules, and informal interactions within the school community.

One respondent stated, "I have a lot of learning experience in PCF especially to respect every classmate and staff" (R1L5-6P1), while another shared, "My experience in PCF is to teach me a respect and learn" (R3L9P1). Similarly, emphasized that their learning experience was helpful in real life, particularly in terms of "respect, kindness, obeying the rules and regulation." These narratives align with recent findings that students internalize values more effectively when they are consistently practiced

within authentic learning environments (Almerico, 2020; Nucci, Narvaez, & Krettenauer, 2019).

The formation of values occurred through structured institutional practices and repeated social interactions. Formation activities, classroom discipline, and the enforcement of rules and regulations created a context where respectful behavior was modeled and reinforced. Through participation in these activities, students learned acceptable conduct, accountability, and mutual respect. The criminology program's emphasis on order and discipline further supported this process by aligning behavioral expectations with professional standards.

As expressed by respondent 1, "The best part of my learning experience in PCF is while formation because you can see how respectful one in formation." This suggests that values formation occurred through experiential and observational learning, where students learned by doing and by observing others. Recent literature supports this structure, noting that institutional culture and routine practices strongly influence students' moral and behavioral development (Bandura, 2020; Sia & Dela Cruz, 2022).

Values Formation constitutes a vital dimension of the learning experiences of BS Criminology students at Philippine College Foundation. The findings demonstrate that students developed respect, discipline, kindness, and positive behavior through formation activities, institutional rules, and everyday interactions within the academic community. These values are essential for criminology students, as they serve as a foundation for ethical decision-making and professional conduct in future practice. Contemporary studies affirm that when higher education institutions intentionally cultivate values within their learning environments, students experience holistic development that extends beyond academic achievement (UNESCO, 2021; Sison & Bautista, 2021). Thus, PCF plays a significant role in shaping not only competent graduates but also socially responsible and value-oriented future professionals.

Theme 2: Challenging Growth

Challenging Growth emerged as a significant theme in the learning experiences of Bachelor of Science in Criminology students at Philippine College Foundation. According to Dweck (2017),

emphasizes that academic challenges play a critical role in fostering students' resilience, perseverance, and achievement in higher education. In rigorous programs such as criminology, exposure to demanding coursework, intensive memorization, and complex problem-solving tasks helps students develop coping strategies and a growth-oriented mindset. The participants' accounts reflect how academic difficulty at PCF served as a catalyst for both personal and academic development.

My learning experience in PCF was like a roller coaster rides there is ups and downs... (R2L7P1)

Studying in Philippine College Foundation is fun and hard because of the challenge of the subjects and activities. (R10L23-24P1)

It was very challenging because there's a lot of areas to handle it specially in memorization. (R8L51-52P2)

When my name is put on the Dean's list... all the hard work and dedication that I make pays off. (R7L49-50P2)

Participants described their learning experience as difficult yet meaningful, often characterizing it as having "ups and downs." They encountered demanding subjects, challenging activities, and heavy memorization, particularly in law-related courses. Despite these struggles, students perceived the challenges as part of their growth process, recognizing that hardship strengthened their academic skills and determination.

According to respondent 2 "My learning experience in PCF was like a roller coaster rides there is ups and downs" capturing the emotional and academic fluctuations experienced during their studies. Another respondent state that "Studying in Philippine College Foundation is fun and hard because of the challenge of the subjects and activities". Similarly, Respondent 8 emphasized the intensity of academic demands, noting that learning was "very challenging... specially in memorization." According to the studies Bjork & Bjork, (2020), Darling-Hammond et al., (2020), indicating that productive struggle enhances deeper learning and long-term academic success.

The experience of challenging growth occurred through rigorous academic structures, including difficult coursework, high expectations from

instructors, frequent assessments, and performance-based evaluations. These structures pushed students beyond their comfort zones, requiring sustained effort, time management, and perseverance. Recognition systems, such as inclusion on the Dean's List, further reinforced the value of persistence and hard work.

As expressed by Respondent 7, "When my name is put on the Dean's list... all the hard work and dedication that I make pays off." This reflects how achievement emerged as a result of enduring academic pressure. From a structural perspective, such experiences mirror educational environments that intentionally promote resilience by balancing challenge and support (OECD, 2021; Yeager et al., 2019).

Challenging Growth represents a core dimension of the students' learning experiences at Philippine College Foundation. The findings demonstrate that academic difficulties were not merely obstacles but essential elements that fostered resilience, motivation, and achievement among BS Criminology students. Through exposure to demanding academic tasks and recognition of effort, students developed a stronger sense of perseverance and confidence in their abilities. Contemporary research supports this conclusion, emphasizing that meaningful challenge in higher education cultivates growth-oriented learners capable of succeeding in complex professional environments (Dweck, 2017; OECD, 2021). Thus, the criminology program at PCF effectively transforms academic challenges into opportunities for growth and excellence.

Theme 3: Supportive Community

Supportive Community emerged as a key theme in students' learning experiences at Philippine College Foundation. Participants highlighted the importance of peer, faculty, and institutional support in fostering academic and personal growth. According to Kuh et al., (2019) indicates that a collaborative and inclusive educational environment enhances student engagement, motivation, and well-being.

I've met a lot of people, instructor who motivated me when I'm feeling down on my academic and encourage me to do my best. (R5L14-15P1)

The instructors explain well, over all it was fine. (R11L25P1)

I've learned a lot made great friends and grown both academically and personally. (R12L26-27P1)

My teachers and classmates were always there to help each other which made my learning more encouraging. (R13L62-63P2)

One respondent shared, "I liked the supportive community the most. My teachers and classmates were always there to help each other". These experiences illustrate that students perceived learning as a socially embedded process where relationships mattered as much as content mastery (Astin, 1999; Zhao & Kuh, 2004).

Supportive relationships were formed through collaborative activities, mentorship, and recognition of student achievements. Classroom projects, group discussions, and instructor accessibility facilitated interaction and mutual encouragement. Supportive academic communities cultivate resilience and academic success (Tinto, 2017; Kuh et al., 2019). According to respondent 7 being acknowledged on the Dean's List reinforced their sense of belonging and motivation.

According to Zhao & Kuh, (2004) emphasizing the role of social support in student retention and success in higher education. Supportive community within PCF significantly contributes to student learning, motivation, and confidence. Interaction with peers and approachable instructors created an environment conducive to both academic achievement and personal development.

Theme 4: Resource Limitations

Resource limitations in educational settings significantly affect the quality of student learning and practical skill development. In the context of criminology education, students require access to specialized equipment, laboratory facilities, and practical activities to translate theoretical knowledge into practice. The data collected from participants reveal that students often encounter barriers related to inadequate facilities, insufficient practical exercises, and limited access to updated materials. According to Abad & Dizon, (2020) limitations can hinder the comprehensive development of professional competencies necessary in the field of criminology.

The criminology department don't have facilities to be used by the students. (R11L121P4)

Sometimes there weren't enough practical activities or hands on experience. (R12L122-123P4)

The lack of materials and equipment because criminology is more on hands on and laboratory examination. (R13L124-125P4)

Limited access to update the equipment and resources at times. (R15L127P4)

Several participants highlighted specific challenges related to resource inadequacies. One participant noted, "The criminology department don't have facilities to be used by the students" (R11, L121, P4), emphasizing the absence of essential infrastructure. Others reported a lack of experiential learning opportunities: "Sometimes there weren't enough practical activities or hands-on experience" (R12, L122-123, P4). The practical and laboratory-focused nature of criminology further exacerbated this issue, as one student explained, "The lack of materials and equipment because criminology is more on hands on and laboratory examination" (R13, L124-125, P4). Limited access to updated resources was also noted: "Limited access to update the equipment and resources at times" (R15, L127, P4).

Resource limitations can be understood through three interrelated aspects. First, infrastructural insufficiency refers to the lack of dedicated facilities and spaces where students can practice criminology-related tasks. Second, practical engagement gaps highlight the limited availability of hands-on activities and laboratory exercises, which are essential for developing technical competencies (Reiner, 2015). Third, resource obsolescence and accessibility underscore the difficulty in acquiring updated equipment and materials needed to keep pace with advances in the field (Abad & Dizon, 2020). Together, these dimensions illustrate that resource limitations are both physical and functional, affecting not only the learning environment but also the professional preparedness of students. This structural perspective aligns with educational literature emphasizing that sufficient and updated resources are critical for practical disciplines like criminology, where theoretical knowledge must be complemented by hands-on experience (Reiner, 2015; Abad & Dizon, 2020).

Resource limitations hinder students' ability to acquire essential practical skills and professional competence. Addressing these issues through improved facilities, increased practical activities,

and access to updated equipment is crucial for enhancing the quality of criminology training (Reiner, 2015; Abad & Dizon, 2020).

4. CONCLUSION

The learning experiences of BS Criminology students at Philippine College Foundation are shaped by the interrelated influences of values formation (Sison & Bautista, 2021; UNESCO, 2021), challenging growth (Dweck, 2017; OECD, 2021), supportive community (Kuh et al., 2019; Zhao & Kuh, 2004), and resource limitations (Reiner, 2015; Abad & Dizon, 2020). Students developed essential ethical values such as respect, discipline, and kindness through structured formation activities and everyday interactions, while rigorous academic challenges fostered resilience, perseverance, and confidence. Supportive relationships with peers, instructors, and the institution enhanced motivation, engagement, and personal development, creating a nurturing environment for learning. However, limitations in facilities, equipment, and practical resources constrained students' opportunities to gain hands-on experience and fully develop professional competencies. Collectively, these themes demonstrate that holistic student development depends not only on academic rigor and social support but also on ethical cultivation and adequate resources, highlighting the need for a balanced, well-resourced, and value-driven learning environment.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

This study provides a perspective view of the readers, as the respondents (BS Criminology students) share their lived learning experiences with the researchers. The researchers are honored to conduct this qualitative study and offer the following recommendations for relevant stakeholders based on the themes identified:

1. Continue structured formation activities, ethics workshops, community service, and peer mentorship programs to reinforce respect, discipline, and kindness among students.
2. Maintain rigorous academic tasks, problem-solving exercises, and performance-based assessments to develop resilience and a growth mindset, complemented by recognition systems such as Dean's List awards.

3. Encourage collaborative learning, accessible faculty-student interactions, mentorship programs, and peer support groups to foster motivation, engagement, and personal development.
4. Invest in updated laboratory equipment, modern facilities, and teaching resources; schedule regular hands-on activities and consider partnerships with external institutions to provide practical experiences.

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