

# career center

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Focus On...

## LAW ENFORCEMENT



Law enforcement specialists are a vital component of many law enforcement agencies, relieving law enforcement officers of some of their workload and allowing them to spend more time in proactive patrol.

By Genni Choate

At any moment you can turn on the television and find several programs about criminal justice. There's an attractive brunette handcuffing a murderer, a kidnapping halted by a handsome actor in uniform or inconceivable technology like holograms of floating fingerprints.

The "CSI effect," the attraction to law enforcement because of the way it is portrayed in entertainment, is what Shawn Livingston, Criminal Justice department head at Trident Technical College, believes helps keep interest in the industry at a constant high. However, the glamour on television is about as realistic as the floating fingerprints.

"Criminal justice and law enforcement careers on TV are shown as exaggerated versions of reality. Individuals interested in these careers need to understand that these careers need professionals who will be engaged in serious business," Livingston said.

Challenges faced by law enforcement professionals include continually facing dangerous situations and using their communication skills to work with people from different walks of life. Those interested in training and education in law enforcement can find a path to success with Trident Technical College's Criminal Justice program. TTC's Criminal Justice program offers two associate degrees, Criminal Justice and Homeland Security Management, and four certificates, Law Enforcement, Corrections, Crime Scene Investigation, and Emergency Management and Protection.

Livingston has been in law enforcement since 1992, working years in the field before becoming a full-time instructor at Trident Tech in 2006. He believes professional experience like his is what differentiates the Criminal Justice program at Trident Tech.

"The instructors who teach these courses have all been practitioners. I was in law enforcement for 18-plus years, and my colleagues also come from similar backgrounds as mine, which adds credibility and real-life examples to our classroom instruction," he said.

Communication is an area of emphasis in TTC's Criminal Justice courses. Students need to learn effective skills to do their jobs well. Constant interactions with people can be challenging, but professionals prepared with polished communication skills can be effective and efficient. A career in law enforcement will offer a great deal of diversity, not only with job duties, but also with personal interactions. Livingston said

change is a constant in a law enforcement career, and the unexpected nature of the business makes it crucial for law enforcement professionals to possess excellent communication skills.

"You're the referee in many circumstances, and there's no room for immaturity or inappropriate reactions," he said. "People will look to you to provide decisive leadership."

There are 500-plus students in the college's program well on their way to becoming law enforcement professionals, many of whom are getting real-life training.

"We try to place our students in internships where they gain firsthand experience with the kind of responsibilities they may have after graduation. An added benefit is that many of our students get hired as a result from working with those agencies," Livingston said.

Livingston aims for his students to be prepared by practicing for realistic encounters. There isn't much room for error in the field, so Livingston said the most valuable skill students learn from being in these real-life situations is being able to respond to the circumstances at hand without having to stop and think about what to do.

The program aims to enable students to serve as protectors of the community, offering safety and security. Students become officials who put themselves in the face of danger for the good of the community.

Livingston advised students interested in entering the world of law enforcement to practice common sense in staying out of trouble and using good judgment. With the expansive world of social media, it's easy for others to gain information about your current and past actions.

"Keep your private life unsullied. For example, don't post compromising pictures of yourself on social media. Departments are paying much closer attention to this than in the past, and having a potential employer find out about a past indiscretion may cost you a job," Livingston said.

Livingston compared a life in law enforcement to living in a fishbowl, since officers are expected to serve as examples of honorable behavior.

Under the direction of Livingston's team in the Criminal Justice department, students are prepared to be successful and effective law enforcement professionals, which is also promising for the communities where they will serve.

"This career is public service, giving back to the community," Livingston said.

Career Cluster:  
Law, Public Safety and Security

## QUICK FACTS

### Skills

Law enforcement professionals need to have excellent communication skills and good judgment. They must have the physical strength to detain suspects and meet the daily demands of the job.

### Education and Training

#### Schooling

Trident Technical College offers an associate degree in criminal justice. The college offers four certificates (Criminal Justice: Corrections, Criminal Justice: Law Enforcement, Crime Scene Investigation, and Emergency Management and Protection). The degree requires 66 credit hours, including courses such as correctional system and criminal evidence.

#### Financial Aid

Grants, scholarships, loans and work/study programs are available for college students. South Carolina lottery-funded tuition assistance, which can pay more than 50 percent of tuition costs, is available to TTC students. To qualify for most of this aid, high school students must submit a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), which is available online at [www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov). For more information on federal financial aid and programs or to apply online, visit the U.S. Department of Education website at [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov).

### Opportunity

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment for police and detectives is projected to grow 5 percent from 2012 to 2022.

### Working Environment

Law enforcement officers work in stressful and dangerous situations. Their work is also highly physically demanding. They often have to work at all times of day and night in shifts.

## Q&A



Alan Williams  
Instructor, Law-Related Studies

#### Q. What is a law enforcement specialist? What does a law enforcement specialist do?

A. Law enforcement specialists typically provide support to law enforcement officers. Law enforcement specialists carry out functions which relieve law enforcement officers of part of their workload and allow them to spend more time in proactive patrol. The specialists are a vital component of many law enforcement agencies, allowing such agencies to use their sworn personnel more efficiently fighting crime.

#### Q. Where do most law enforcement specialists work?

A. Law enforcement specialists can work as community service officers, prisoner transport officers, evidence technicians and records clerks, and they can carry out many other duties within law enforcement agencies.

#### Q. How do you get started in a career as a law enforcement specialist?

A. Typically there are multiple job openings for these kinds of positions each year in many departments. For many of these positions, a high school diploma is required. Trident Technical College offers a three-semester certificate in Criminal Justice: Law Enforcement that prepares students for law enforcement and security positions where a degree is not required. This certificate includes courses such as criminology, police community relations, criminal justice report writing, and introduction to security, which provide a solid foundation for someone desiring to begin a law-enforcement career.

#### Q. What characteristics and skills does a successful law enforcement specialist need?

A. Dependability, honesty, ethics, a knowledge of police systems and practices, and knowledge of the criminal justice system. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, applicants may have to pass tests for vision, strength, agility and hearing, as well as lie detector and drug tests. Having a felony conviction may disqualify a job applicant for a law enforcement specialist position.

#### Q. What are some of the benefits of working in this field?

A. Many law enforcement officers have begun their careers working as a law enforcement specialist. Their employers recognize their work ethic, skills and knowledge, and take these into consideration when they apply to become law enforcement officers.

#### Q. What is the employment outlook for a law enforcement specialist?

A. There is a 5 percent job growth expected in this field from 2012 to 2022.

#### Q. What advice would you give to someone considering a career in this field?

A. This is an excellent field to enter as a foundation to a broader career in law enforcement. After high school, continue to learn and make yourself marketable to employers by taking law enforcement courses and training.

Trident Technical College  
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ONLINE:

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, [www.atf.gov](http://www.atf.gov)

Customs and Border Protection, [www.cbp.gov](http://www.cbp.gov)

Federal Bureau of Investigation, [www.fbi.gov](http://www.fbi.gov)

Department of Homeland Security, [www.dhs.gov](http://www.dhs.gov)

USAJOBS, free web-based federal jobs board, [www.usajobs.gov](http://www.usajobs.gov)

U.S. Secret Service, [www.secretservice.gov](http://www.secretservice.gov)

## Jobs in this field:

### Occupation

Correctional Officers/Jailers

Police Patrol Officers

Security Manager

Security Guard

### Wages by Area\*

US \$26,700-\$71,700+  
SC \$24,600-\$44,100+  
CH \$25,400-\$38,300+

US \$32,700-\$90,700+  
SC \$26,300-\$52,600+  
CH \$31,600-\$56,100+

US \$53,900-\$164,600+  
SC \$41,000-\$125,700+  
CH \$51,900-\$137,100+

US \$17,500-\$43,200+  
SC \$16,600-\$46,300+  
CH \$16,500-\$53,000+

\*Source/Note: Wage data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and SC Department of Employment and Workforce. Wage levels vary by skill level, tenure, and geographical areas. For more occupational information, contact Gary Crossley of LovetoWork.org, LLC at [lovetoworkorg@yahoo.com](mailto:lovetoworkorg@yahoo.com) or 843-452-4121.