



Criminal Justice Student Works Toward Reform Through CIT

WRITTEN BY | Hope Aucoin



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Brooke Perez

MAJOR
Criminal Justice

HOMETOWN
New Orleans

Brooke Perez, of New Orleans, always knew she wanted to pursue criminal justice.

After her father became a reserve sheriff's deputy while Perez was in high school, she gained a close-up view of law enforcement. Enrolling in the University of Louisiana at Lafayette's [criminal justice program](#) expanded her

perspective of the justice system, including both crime and how agencies respond.

“One thing that definitely stood out to me was that the system is flawed, and the only way that you can actually do anything to fix it is to be one of those people who cares to make the change,” says Perez.

Perez is starting her role as a change agent as she completes her degree requirements by interning online with the Louisiana Crisis Intervention Team.

Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) programs aim to address mental health crises and ensure those facing mental health challenges receive treatment instead of jailtime.

“That’s such a toxic environment for people who have mental illness, and they’ll probably never be rehabilitated and get better,” Perez says. “So the first step to changing that is to get the law enforcement to properly deal with them and put them in an environment that can help them get better.”

Some Louisiana agencies have implemented independent initiatives, including the **Calcasieu Parish Sheriff’s Office**, **Lafayette Parish Sheriff’s Office** and **St. Charles Parish Sheriff’s Office**, but Perez says the Louisiana CIT program aims to scale these efforts across the state.

“Mental health is pretty low in Louisiana compared to the rest of America, so it is something that really needs to be done,” says Perez.

As part of her internship, Perez will be crisis intervention-trained, earning an additional professional certification alongside her bachelor’s in criminal justice degree, which she is also completing online.

Perez found herself traveling frequently between Lafayette and New Orleans, and then regularly out of state with her partner. The online criminal justice program allowed her to continue taking the same courses available on campus, in a format that better suited her lifestyle.

“I loved it because I could build the structure around how I wanted it to be and what works for me,” she says.

At UL Lafayette, online courses are taught by the same faculty teaching on campus, trained and certified to deliver their content in dynamic and innovative ways.

In criminal justice, that means gaining insights from faculty with both rich research and professional experience.

“Two of my favorite instructors were a police chief and then a judge,” says Perez. “We got to go beyond the textbook to hear about how things go in the field and the courtroom.”

Knowing all she now knows, Perez wants to focus her criminal justice career in research and analysis, potentially joining fellow **UL Lafayette alumni at the Louisiana State Analytical & Fusion Exchange**.

“They’re investigating at every level — local, state, national, and international,” Perez says. “They’re basically the connecting piece to everything.”

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