
THE KOREAN CRIMINOLOGIST



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KOSCA SPRING NEWSLETTER

ADVANCING CRIMINOLOGY THROUGH COLLABORATION, INNOVATION, AND GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

Dear Members of the Korean Society of Criminology in America (KOSCA),

I am Hyesun Kim, honored to serve as the 9th President of the KOSCA. It is a great privilege to work with esteemed and distinguished Korean criminologists for the next two years in service for the KOSCA.

The KOSCA currently has approximately 100 registered members, including active faculty and graduate students. Since its founding in 2009, the KOSCA has achieved steady growth through the ongoing dedication of its executive board and members. Moreover, as one of the first societies within the American Society of Criminology established on the basis of an ethnic group, the KOSCA has gained significant recognition. While our membership size may be modest, the society's impact is substantial and meaningful.

The continuous research efforts, scholarly achievements, and professional service of our members in the fields of criminology and criminal justice have greatly contributed to elevating both the reputation of KOSCA and the academic and professional standing of Korean criminologists. During my service, I will make every effort to further highlight and build upon the accomplishments of previous Executive Boards and our members.

In particular, the 9th Executive Board has set the following priorities:

(1) strengthening communication and camaraderie among members, (2) expanding academic exchanges with Korea, and (3) promoting crime prevention within the Korean-American community.

First, to enhance member communication and camaraderie, all KOSCA events will be organized with a member-centered approach. We plan to host events that allow members to actively engage, interact, and share experiences, and we sincerely encourage your participation and support.

Second, to systematically showcase the research achievements and scholarly contributions of our members in Korea, and to lay the foundation for collaborative research between Korea and the United States, we have planned a joint academic conference with Korean research institutions and societies. By holding this conference in Korea, we hope to foster greater academic exchange between the two countries.

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In addition, as part of the conference program, we are organizing an information session to encourage Korean students to pursue graduate studies in criminology, criminal justice, and related fields. We would greatly appreciate your support in facilitating participation from your institutions.

Finally, the KOSCA aims to take a leading role in crime prevention within the Korean-American community. We believe that sharing our criminological knowledge and expertise with the community to raise awareness about crime and contribute to its prevention is a fundamental mission of Korean criminologists. We respectfully ask for your active involvement in this mission.

Over the next two years, I sincerely hope for your continued interest and participation in the initiatives our Executive Board will pursue. With your engagement and collaboration, I hope KOSCA will serve as an academic bridge introducing U.S. research in Korea, while also taking a leading role in protecting and ensuring the safety of the Korean-American community in the United States.

Thank you.

Hyesun Kim
9th President, Korean Society of Criminology in America

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ASC 2025 HIGHLIGHT

KOSCA–KICJ JOINT ROUNDTABLE: AI-BASED RECIDIVISM PREDICTION VS. TRADITIONAL RISK ASSESSMENT TOOLS

This roundtable served as the opening session of the KOSCA Annual Meeting, held during the American Society of Criminology (ASC) 2025 conference in Washington, DC, and provided a meaningful forum for academic exchange jointly organized by KOSCA and the Korean Institute of Criminology and Justice (KICJ).



In this session, KOSCA and KICJ engaged in an in-depth comparative discussion on the reliability, limitations, and ethical implications surrounding AI-based recidivism prediction and traditional risk assessment tools. Several representatives from KICJ attended and contributed to the discussion. Dr. Jisun Choi and Dr. Yoori Seong (KICJ) presented both the potential of AI-driven recidivism prediction and the important risks that must be carefully considered. They also emphasized the need for balance in evaluating the validity, practical applicability, and ethical considerations in assessment tools.

KOSCA members also participated, expanding the discussion to include the transparency and explainability of predictive models, and the appropriate role of tools as decision-support mechanisms in practice. The conversation also addressed how to evaluate and manage ethical costs that cannot be captured by metric accuracy alone.

As invited external discussants, Dr. Raymund Narag (Southern Illinois University) and Judge Marlon Moneva (the Supreme Court of the Philippines) further enriched the conversation by highlighting the importance of procedural legitimacy, the ability to articulate the basis of decisions, and accountability when research findings are translated into policy and judicial practice.

This KOSCA–KICJ Joint Roundtable marked a meaningful starting point in exploring responsible innovation in criminal justice in the age of AI through international and interdisciplinary collaboration. It is expected to serve as a foundation for the continued expansion of related research and policy dialogue in the future.

KOSCA BMKS Scholarship & Student Award Session : Understanding Drug Crime, Crime Reduction, and Delinquency in the Digital Age

This panel examined how to understand and respond to drug crime, crime reduction, and delinquency in an expanding digital environment. It broadly covered dark web and virtual asset-based criminal markets, the contemporary challenges of Community Oriented Policing (COP), and the potential for expanding theoretical approaches. Notably, the student presenters were selected as recipients of the Student Award – Beauty Master KOSCA Scholarship (BMKS), highlighting the originality and scholarly promise of their work. This year’s BMKS Student Award recipients are the following three presenters, whose presentations are briefly introduced below.

Presentation 1) Trends in Cryptocurrency and Security in Dark Web Drug Markets : How Cybercriminals Avoid Scams

Bora Jung, University of Nevada–Las Vegas & Dr. Sinchul Back, University of Scranton

This study was motivated by the recognition that while cryptocurrency provides the anonymity that enables transactions in dark web drug markets, it simultaneously amplifies fraud and security threats. Drawing on 316 cases from four major dark web marketplaces (Ares, Torrez, Imperial, and Deep Market), the research team analyzed how transaction and security structures have evolved since 2021 in response to intensified law enforcement and internal market scams.

Key findings indicate that the use of Monero—a cryptocurrency difficult to trace—has increased substantially (55%→86%), and multisignature transactions and walletless payment methods have seen rapid growth. User security measures, including PGP encryption, DDoS protection, and two-factor authentication, have been broadly strengthened, while public wallet address exposure has decreased markedly (23%→1%). Interpreting these changes through the lens of Routine Activities Theory, the presentation characterized them as adaptive market strategies in response to law enforcement pressures and fraud risks, emphasizing the need to develop technologies to track such transactions, enhance the technical specialization of law enforcement personnel, and strengthen international cooperation.

Presentation 2) Community-Oriented Policing (COP) in the Modern Era : Challenges and Technological Solutions

Amy Lim, University of Nevada–Las Vegas & Dr. Jae-Seung Lee, Miami University

This study sought to reexamine how “citizen participation” functions to explain why Community Oriented Policing (COP) programs, despite widespread implementation, have demonstrated limited impact on crime reduction. Drawing on survey data from 176 active residents who participated in COP meetings in a Midwestern U.S. city, the research team analyzed the factors shaping citizens’ attitudes toward the police using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), examining satisfaction, fear of crime, perceptions of disorder, collective efficacy, victimization experiences, sociodemographic characteristics, and prior police contact.

The discussion underscored the structural limitations COP faces in practice, particularly the risk of participation bias. When participation is concentrated among older residents or individuals already favorable toward the police, the program may struggle to translate into meaningful crime reduction. The presentation emphasized the need to broaden participation—especially among younger residents and communities most affected by crime—and to design participatory frameworks that reflect diverse citizen experiences and needs.

PRESENTATION 3) LIFE CHANGES AND STRAIN: THE APPLICABILITY OF GENERAL STRAIN THEORY TO LIFE-COURSE STUDIES

Sunmin Hong, University of Texas–Dallas & Dr. Sungil Han, University of North Carolina at Charlotte

This study examined how the relationship between strain and delinquency varies across developmental stages, drawing on General Strain Theory and life-course criminology. Using two waves of nationally representative Korean panel data, the researchers compared adolescence and emerging adulthood through regression models and Blinder–Oaxaca decomposition, analyzing parental, economic, appearance-related, and peer stress.

The findings show that adolescents exhibited significantly higher levels of both stress and delinquency than emerging adults. Parental stress, economic stress, and appearance-related stress predicted delinquency only during adolescence, with these effects disappearing in emerging adulthood, while peer stress remained significant across both stages. Notably, decomposition results indicated that the decline in delinquency was explained primarily by changes in responses to strain rather than by reduced exposure to strain itself. The presentation emphasized that delinquency prevention during adolescence should focus not merely on reducing stress but on strengthening developmentally appropriate coping capacities.



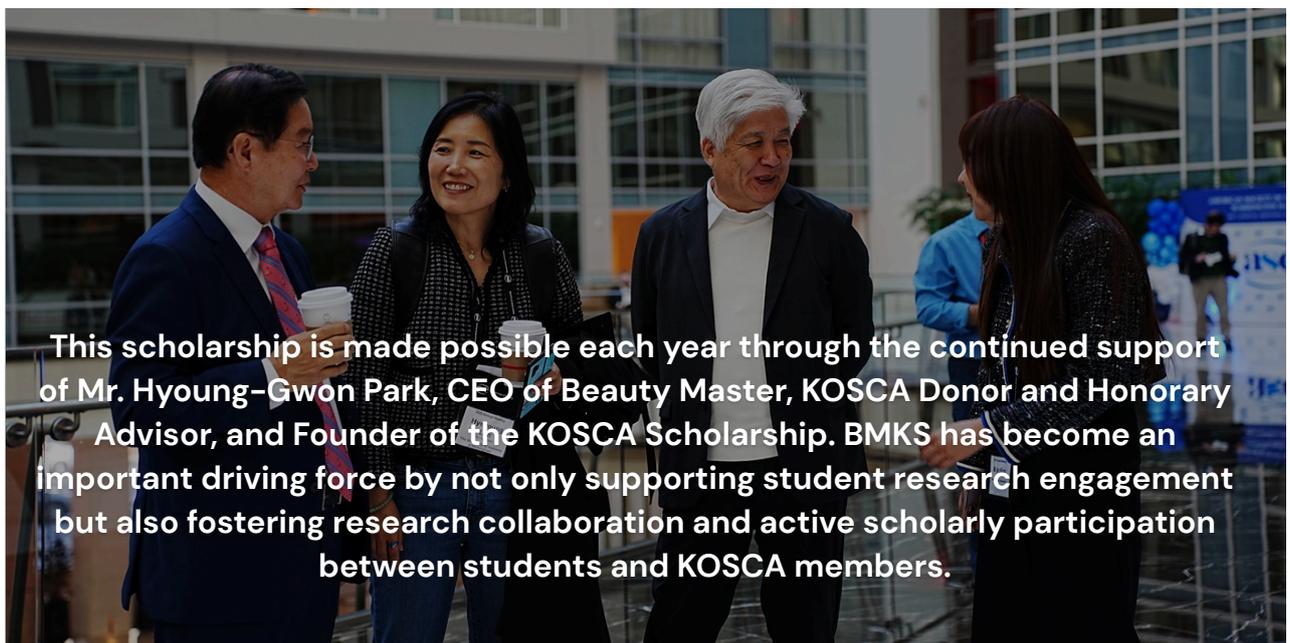
AMY LIM (PH.D. STUDENT, POLICING AND PUBLIC SAFETY DIVISION MEMBER, UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA–LAS VEGAS)



BORA JUNG (PH.D. STUDENT, CYBERCRIMINOLOGY DIVISION MEMBER, UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA–LAS VEGAS)



SUNMIN HONG (PH.D. STUDENT, CRIMINOLOGICAL THEORY AND JUVENILE JUSTICE DIVISION MEMBER, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS–DALLAS)



This scholarship is made possible each year through the continued support of Mr. Hyoung-Gwon Park, CEO of Beauty Master, KOSCA Donor and Honorary Advisor, and Founder of the KOSCA Scholarship. BMKS has become an important driving force by not only supporting student research engagement but also fostering research collaboration and active scholarly participation between students and KOSCA members.

KOSCA STUDENT MEETING

The KOSCA Student Meeting opened with a brief introduction to the student subdivision, highlighting its role within KOSCA and its future direction. The session also introduced the newly appointed student subdivision chairs, Amy Lee (University of Nevada, Las Vegas) and Insang Lee (University of Texas, Dallas).

The chairs expressed their commitment to strengthening communication with student members and expanding engagement opportunities. They plan to use email and the KakaoTalk group chat more actively to share timely and valuable information, including scholarship opportunities, to encourage greater student participation.

We ask for your continued support for the new chairs and look forward to your active involvement in upcoming initiatives.



THE OFFICIAL ANNUAL MEETING AND CONGRATULATORY ADDRESS OF KICJ



The KOSCA Annual Meeting was held on-site at ASC as the organization's official annual meeting, bringing together members and invited guests to review the year's activities and discuss future directions. The program included introductions of distinguished guests, welcoming remarks, and committee reports, offering an overview of KOSCA's operations and initiatives.

A highlight of the meeting was the congratulatory address by Dr. Woong-Seok Jeong, President of the KICJ. He emphasized the importance of research-informed policy in criminal justice and reaffirmed the value of continued collaboration between KOSCA and KICJ.

KICJ also introduced opportunities for conducting criminology and criminal justice policy research in Korea, highlighting the diversity of research topics, a supportive research environment, and the potential for meaningful policy impact.

INTRODUCE LINER (AN AI RESEARCH TOOL)

Liner is an AI-powered research support tool designed to help scholars quickly identify and synthesize key insights from academic materials. During the KOSCA Annual Meeting, Liner presented a live demonstration showcasing its capabilities in topic exploration, literature search, summarization, and research organization. Liner illustrated how the tool can save researchers time and streamline workflow, especially for the research design and literature review. KOSCA and Liner also expressed their intention to continue fostering collaboration in related areas moving forward.

2025 KOSCA EXCELLENCE AWARDS

KOSCA celebrated exceptional academic accomplishments and significant contributions through its 2025 Excellence Awards. The Faculty Research Award was presented to Dr. Jimin Pyo (California State University, Northridge) for outstanding research contributions. The Junior Faculty Award was presented to Dr. Sungil Han (University of North Carolina at Charlotte) for achievements and potential as a notable scholar. Additionally, KOSCA is honored to present the Special Contribution Award to Honorary Advisor Hyung-Kwon Park (Founder of the KOSCA scholarship and CEO of Beauty Master) in appreciation of his continued support for the association’s operations and scholarship initiatives.



HYOUNG-GWON PARK
(KOSCA HONORARY ADVISOR,
FOUNDER OF KOSCA
SCHOLARSHIP, CEO OF
BEAUTY MASTER)



DR. JIMIN PYO
(CALIFORNIA STATE
UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE)



DR. SUNGIL HAN
(UNIVERSITY OF NORTH
CAROLINA AT CHARLOTTE)

Following previous awards and presentations honoring the research achievements, we also acknowledged the dedication of the 2024–25 KOSCA executive board members through the *Executive Board Officer Award* for their leadership in the operation and academic activities of this organization.

DR. STEPHANIE MIZRAHI: SPECIAL GUEST & PRESIDENT OF ACJS

Dr. Stephanie Mizrahi, the president of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS), attended this KOSCA reception as a special guest. Dr. Mizrahi expressed his congratulations and highlighted the high value of KOSCA's academic contributions in the field of criminal justice. The message also conveyed the hope for continued close cooperation and active participation with ACJS in the future.



DIVISION REPORT

DIVISION OF CRIMINOLOGY THEORY AND JUVENILE JUSTICE

Chair: 백현인 (Dr. Hyunin Baek)
New Mexico State University
h0baek01@nmsu.edu

The Division of Criminological Theory and Juvenile Justice seeks to broaden the understanding of the etiology of criminal and delinquent behaviors from diverse theoretical perspectives. The Division is committed to fostering and promoting open and constructive dialogue, rigorous scientific research, and collaboration among academic scholars, practitioners, and policymakers to develop effective and comprehensive programs and strategies to prevent delinquent and criminal behaviors.

Division members write several papers together using Korean data sets. Recently, two papers have been revised and resubmitted to peer-reviewed journals. Our division continues to explore more research topics related to juvenile delinquency. We encourage KOSCA members, particularly student members, to engage in the research projects and collaborate with us.

Please contact Dr. Baek for more information and membership.

DIVISION OF POLICING AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Chair: 한성일 (Dr. Sungil Han)
University of North Carolina
at Charlotte
shan27@charlotte.edu

The division seeks to contribute professional expertise to policing and public safety through research, collaboration, and professional networking. Given the proliferation of new practices in policing and the growing importance of collaboration between police practitioners and researchers, the division provides valuable opportunities for members to engage in joint research projects and to share their expertise through multiple channels, including academic conferences, discussion boards, and social media.

Researchers and practitioners with interests in policing and public safety are welcome to join. Please contact the Division Chair, Dr. Sungil Han, at shan27@charlotte.edu.

DIVISION OF AI AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Chair: 박형아 (Dr. Hyoungah Park)
Saint Peter's University
hpark1@saintpeters.edu

The AI & Criminal Justice (AI & CJ) Division applies artificial intelligence to address the complex challenges of modern criminal justice systems, aiming to shape a rule-of-law-based future where technological innovation aligns with the protection of human rights.

The Division examines predictive policing and public safety analytics, including crime and recidivism prediction, smart crime mapping, AI-enabled surveillance, and abnormal behavior detection. It also studies biometric identification, digital forensics, cybersecurity, and tracking technologies such as license plate recognition and social network analysis to improve investigative efficiency.

A central focus is placed on trustworthy AI governance, emphasizing algorithmic fairness, transparency and explainability (XAI), bias mitigation, judicial automation, and the social and legal impacts of AI adoption. Through regular study sessions and collaborative research projects, the Division fosters interdisciplinary engagement between scholars and practitioners to address real-world justice challenges.

DIVISION OF CYBER CRIMINOLOGY

Chair: 최신용 (Dr. Sinyong Choi)
Kennesaw State University
Schoi35@kennesaw.edu

The Division of Cybercriminology at the Korean Society of Criminology in America (KOSCA) is dedicated to advancing global cooperation and academic discourse in cybercrime and cybersecurity. We are currently working on multiple projects, including the SHIELD project (Seniors Harnessing Internet Education for Lasting Defense), which is sponsored by the Boston Police Department and the 2026 International White Hat Conference.

We actively invite scholars, practitioners, and students to join our network and contribute to scientific exchange in this critical domain. If you are interested in contributing to our division, please contact the Division Chair, Dr. Sinyong Choi, at Schoi35@kennesaw.edu.

MEMBER NEWS

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON SEX OFFENDING (PUBLISHED IN JANUARY 2026)

KOSCA is pleased to share the publication of *Global Perspectives on Sex Offending*, released in January 2026. This volume is an interdisciplinary scholarly work co-edited by Dr. Jiseun Sohn (Southern University and A&M College) that offers a broad examination of sex offending from a global perspective. The book also reflects the expertise of several KOSCA members, whose contributions are featured across multiple chapters.

In particular, Dr. Hyesun Kim (Worcester State University) authored Chapter 3, which explores the psychology of sex offenders. Hyeeseon Noh (University of South Carolina), a doctoral student, contributed Chapter 2, which provides a foundational overview of the theories of sex offending. In Chapter 4, Dr. Sinyong Choi (Kennesaw State University) and Dr. Lisa Thompson (Kennesaw State University) examine the relationship between technology and sex offending as a contemporary issue. In Chapter 8, Dr. Doyun Koo (University of Memphis) analyzes the characteristics of sex offending in Asian countries, expanding the discussion within an international context. Finally, in Chapter 11, Dr. Jiseun Sohn and Dr. Hyejin Kim (Korean National Police University) provide a comparative examination of sexual offenses against children in Korea and Western countries, offering an integrated discussion of offender and victim characteristics as well as broader trends.

This publication is a meaningful achievement that highlights the research excellence and international scholarly contributions of KOSCA members. We hope it will also serve as an opportunity further to promote research and academic exchange in this critical area.

DR. YOUNGKI WOO: PROMOTION TO ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

KOSCA is pleased to share that Dr. Youngki Woo (University of Texas Rio Grande Valley) was promoted to Associate Professor in Fall 2025. This news is especially meaningful as it reflects his consistent achievements and dedication across research, teaching, and service.

We warmly congratulate Dr. Woo on this well-deserved promotion and look forward to his continued contributions to the field of criminal justice in his new role.

DR. HYOUNGAH PARK: INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE PRESENTATION

KOSCA is pleased to share that Dr. Hyoungah Park (Saint Peter's University) presented his research at an international conference hosted by the Korean Institute of Criminology and Justice (KICJ) in 2025.

Dr. Park delivered a presentation titled Toward an Adaptive Model of International Criminal Cooperation: Lessons from Field Experience in Cambodia in a session focused on transnational organized crime and human trafficking, which examined kidnapping and unlawful detention cases in Cambodia. Drawing on his field experience in Cambodia, he shared practical insights into international criminal justice cooperation and its implications for policy and practice.



This presentation is a meaningful example of the research accomplishments and international scholarly contributions of KOSCA members. We hope it will also serve as an opportunity to further strengthen related research and academic exchange in the future.

DR. MOONSUN KIM RECEIVES THE SUNY CHANCELLOR'S AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN FACULTY SERVICE

KOSCA is delighted to share that Dr. MoonSun Kim (SUNY Brockport) was selected as a recipient of the 2025 SUNY Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Faculty Service.

This prestigious honor is awarded across the State University of New York (SUNY) system to recognize consistently outstanding professional achievement and excellence in service, while also encouraging the continued pursuit of excellence among members of the university community. Dr. Kim's recognition is a meaningful accomplishment that reflects not only his scholarly achievements but also his sustained service and leadership in support of both the university and the broader community.

This award is a significant example of how the professionalism and dedication of KOSCA members are being recognized in higher education. We look forward to Dr. Kim's continued contributions and expanding academic impact in the years ahead.

DR. SUJUNG CHO NAMED REGIONAL DIRECTOR FOR NORTH AMERICA OF THE KOREAN ASSOCIATION OF CRIMINOLOGY

KOSCA is pleased to share that Dr. Sujung Cho (Southern Illinois University) has been appointed Regional Director for North America of the Korean Association of Criminology.

In this role, she is expected to play an important part in representing the North American region and in supporting the association's operations and scholarly exchange. We congratulate Dr. Cho on this appointment and look forward to her continued contributions to the expansion of the Korean Association of Criminology's international network and to the advancement of the field of criminal justice.

MEDIA FEATURE: BEAUTY MASTER PRESIDENT HYUNGKWON PARK FEATURED ON KBS

KOSCA is pleased to share that Mr. Hyungkwon Park, President of Beauty Master, a KOSCA sponsor, was featured on the KBS New Year special program Global Korean Journey: Kim Young-chul Goes (aired on February 17, 2026). The program's first episode focused on Park as the godfather of K-beauty in Atlanta and highlighted his story as a Korean business leader in the local community.

The broadcast includes reflections on the early days of his business, the story behind his first store, and his connection to the local Korean American community. Members who are interested may watch the clip through the link below.

Hyungkwon Park Remembers the History of His First Store
"Remembering the History of His First Store"

from Global Korean Journey: Kim Young-chul Goes | KBS 260217



We sincerely thank Mr. Hyungkwon Park for his continued warm support of KOSCA.

OUR JOURNEYS ABROAD

KOSCA Newsletter is pleased to introduce a new section, Our Journeys Abroad. This space is dedicated to sharing sincere essays and personal reflections from our members—stories about the realities of studying abroad, moments of adjustment, and the challenges of navigating language and cultural barriers. It is also a place to reflect on the advice we might offer our past selves along the way. We believe that one person’s story can become a source of guidance and comfort for another, and even inspire the courage to take on a new challenge. Below, we are delighted to share the first story in this new series.

JUST ANOTHER STUDY ABROAD STORY

Sinui Park
Ph.D. student
School of Criminal Justice
University of Cincinnati

From as early as I can clearly remember, I wanted to visit Canada. There was no grand reason behind it. The first foreigner I ever met happened to be a kind Canadian, and for no reason more substantial than that, I quietly decided that I would go to Canada someday. Perhaps that small decision naturally grew into a broader desire to live abroad. In middle school, I wanted to attend high school overseas. In high school, I hoped to go to college abroad. As a freshman, I dreamed of becoming an exchange student. Yet at every stage, things did not unfold as I had imagined. Even so, I carried with me a quiet promise: if not Canada, then somewhere—someday—I would live abroad.

Until college, I was not particularly close to studying. No one, including myself, would have predicted that I would pursue an academic path. It was only after unexpectedly receiving good grades in college that I began to take an interest in learning. At the time, I was studying corrections, and perhaps it was not entirely accidental that I remained in this field. As I searched for what I cared about and what kind of life I wanted to build, I found myself drawn to restorative justice. At first, I was intrigued by the idea of conflict resolution, and restorative justice seemed to embody that concept within criminology and corrections. My conversations with a professor about restorative justice and my future eventually led me to consider graduate school. The desire to go abroad had never quite left me, and when my professor suggested that I consider studying in the United States, that quiet hope began to take clearer shape.

Looking back, I think several things were intertwined: an unspoken hesitation about living abroad, my own lack of information about graduate systems overseas, the fear that I might need more preparation before leaving Korea, and practical concerns about tuition and living expenses. Together, they led me rather hastily to the conclusion that I should complete a master’s degree in Korea first. By “hasty,” I do not mean that I regret that time. It is more a gentle acknowledgment that, had I looked more carefully, I might have learned things that would have broadened my view.

During my master's program in Korea, I met many good people, began to think seriously about research, and started dating the woman who is thankfully my wife now and lives with me in the United States. I have no regrets about that chapter of my life. What I mean by "hasty" is simply this: when practical worries meet limited information, one's perspective can narrow without one even noticing. Embarrassingly, at the time I did not fully understand what an integrated master's–Ph.D. program meant. Because overseas graduate websites did not explicitly use that term, and because I had heard that master's programs rarely offered funding, I concluded that it would be safer to complete my master's degree in Korea. Only later did I realize that when a Ph.D. program lists a bachelor's degree as sufficient for admission, it often functions as an integrated program.

For someone who had always imagined living abroad, I suppose I left later than I might have. Still, I do not feel troubled or dissatisfied. There is no way to experience the counterfactual version of my life in which I left earlier, and so there is little reason to dwell on it. And as I mentioned, my years in Korea hold deep meaning for me. That alone is enough to quiet any lingering what-ifs.

Preparing to study abroad while completing a master's degree is no small task. The master's program itself is demanding enough, and on top of that, there is the GRE to prepare for, the financial burden of studying overseas, and the quiet but persistent uncertainty of whether this path is truly one's own. Even the application process felt like stepping into the unknown. I was never entirely sure whether my documents had safely reached the admissions office, nor whether I had filled everything out correctly. I moved through the process with more doubt than confidence.

Because I was not in a comfortable financial position, hiring a study abroad agency was never an option. Fortunately, I was in the master's program with a friend who was preparing for overseas study at the same time. We made plans together, studied together, shared information, and walked through the process side by side. Simply not being alone was a tremendous source of strength. In the end, despite the fear that I might be rejected by every school I applied to, the results were kinder than I had dared to expect. The guidance of my professors, the support of colleagues in the lab, and the advice of seniors who had already completed their Ph.D.s abroad and become professors were invaluable throughout the process.

For someone whose familiarity with the word "doctor" once extended no further than humming a childhood song (Coca-Cola song) about asking the "wise doctor" for answers, the reality that I somehow entered a doctoral program and am now living in the United States occasionally feels surreal.

When the acceptance email arrived, and as I chose a school, booked my flight, and prepared to leave, I felt a strange excitement about life in America and the Ph.D. journey ahead. At the same time, I was not yet married, and my girlfriend and I had many serious conversations about whether we should marry before I left or wait until I had experienced life there. I was certain about the person, but uncertain about the timing. Having never even visited the United States before, I decided that it would be wiser to go first and then decide. (I remain deeply grateful for her generosity and patience.) And so, with a heart both buoyant and unsettled, I arrived in America.

Contrary to my expectation that my relatively adventurous personality would make adaptation easy, I found far more unfamiliarity than I had anticipated. Nearly everything felt different from Korea, and adjusting took longer than I had imagined. For almost two years, I lived without a car, relying on the kindness of countless people. I, who once ate out nearly every meal in Korea, began cooking after experiencing the intimidating cost of dining out (tips played no small role in that education)—though in truth, instant noodles remained my closest companion. I walked distances no one else would consider

FROM SEOUL TO KANSAS CITY: AN EIGHT-YEAR REFLECTION

Byunggu Kang
Assistant Professor
Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology
University of Missouri–Kansas City

A famous Michelin-star chef, Sung Ahn, once said in a YouTube video, “There is no such thing as a right decision. You make a decision first, and then you make it right.” This quote summarizes my academic journey over the past eight years. I never knew what the right decision was. But once I made a decision, I tried my best to make it the right one.

At the beginning of my academic journey, I did not know whether research was the right career path for me. Still, I started, kept going, and worked to become a researcher, and now it may look like it was the right choice. Back in 2016, I was a master’s student in Korea preparing for PhD applications. I did not have a strong reason for why I needed to study abroad, especially in the United States, to study crime and criminal justice. I did not have a specific school in mind, and I did not have a particular faculty member I wanted to work with. I was simply interested in studying crime and analyzing crime data. I was not even sure whether that was enough motivation to leave my home country and start a PhD program in the US. Yet I wanted to give it a try because I thought having a PhD from a US institution would not hurt and might even help me get a job later in Korea.

When I was admitted to UAlbany, I was excited that I got into the PhD program where Robert Sampson had studied. But at the same time, I quickly felt small and behind at the starting line. Many of my cohort members already had well-developed research interests, while I did not have a clear research agenda. Adding to that, I was not fluent in English. So during orientation, when people asked about my research interests, I honestly said, in my far-from-perfect English, that I did not have one yet. Fortunately, no one thought that was a bad answer. In fact, faculty members told me it was the best answer because it meant I had room to develop one.

As faculty members assured me during my first days in the program, it did not take long to begin developing a research agenda. My first real research interest emerged during my first criminological theory class. I became interested in the age-crime relationship. Why is the Korean age-crime curve so different from the one in the US? If the Korean pattern is not simply an outlier, and if the age-crime relationship can vary across time and context, would that challenge some underlying assumptions in criminological theories? Questions like these began my research path, and through my coursework I was eventually able to develop them into my dissertation. It took six years, and it may seem like a long time for a single research topic. Some researchers even advised me not to use Korean data for my dissertation or to avoid focusing on Korea because they worried that I might be labeled as “the Korean researcher who only studies Korea-related topics.” However, many faculty members at UAlbany, especially my dissertation chair, believed in the potential of my research. Because of their support, I was able to complete and defend my dissertation. I did not know at the beginning whether this was the right topic, but in the end, I was able to publish the work in Criminology.

My career path was another example of the same idea. I did not know what the right move was at the beginning, but things became clear only after I made a choice and kept going. During COVID, because

of budget issues, I was told that I would not receive funding in my fifth year. On the same day, I came across a job flyer. A research institution was looking for a research assistant with training in demographic techniques and experience working with Census data, which seemed like a good fit for me. I submitted my CV right away. Later, when I was invited for an interview, I realized the position was actually at the Center for Health Workforce Studies. Of course, health workforce research was completely unfamiliar to me. The interview went better than I expected. I acknowledged that I was not familiar with health workforce research, but I also explained that I could learn quickly and already had the skills they needed for the role. The interviewer, who later became my boss, liked my answers, and I started there as an intern. I was fortunate to work with a supportive boss and senior researchers who guided me and helped me learn health workforce and policy-related research. I eventually moved into a full-time position at the Center. I enjoyed the job, but I was still not sure whether I should stay in this field or start a new career in criminology, the area I was originally trained in. In the end, I decided to go on the criminology job market and interviewed at several schools. During those interviews, I learned something important. My time at the Center was not a detour. It made me look more versatile and helped me frame my research in a broader way. Again, I did not know at the beginning whether joining the Center was the right decision, but it became one over time.

I am still a junior faculty member, and I am still in front of many important decisions. Sometimes I find myself spending too much time trying to figure out the right choice. Will this help my career? My tenure or promotion? But when I look back on the past eight years, I realize I rarely knew the answer in advance. What mattered more was not making the right decision at the beginning, but making a decision, keeping going, and doing my best to make it work. So I try to remind myself to focus less on finding the right path and put more effort into building it.

KOSCA warmly welcomes ongoing submissions for Our Journeys Abroad. Members are invited to share pieces on any aspect of their study abroad experience, including personal reflections, practical tips, and memorable episodes. Submissions may be sent at any time to the KOSCA Newsletter Team at Newsletter@kosca.org

ANNOUNCEMENTS

ONLINE SEMINAR (ZOOM)

KOSCA will host an online seminar on April 10, 2026 (Friday), focusing on the latest trends and practical applications in the field of AI.

■ Event Overview

- Title: Current Status and Future Prospects of AI in Criminal Justice
- Date & Time: Friday, April 10, 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM (Eastern Time, U.S.)
- Organizer: The Korean Society of Criminology in America (KOSCA), AI & CJ Division
- Zoom Link: <https://saintpeters-edu.zoom.us/j/84882075212>
- Contact: Dr. Hyungah Park, Chair of AI & CJ Division (hpark1@saintpeters.edu)

■ Speakers

- Kwangho Jang (CEO, CNAI): Key Issues and Research Directions of Artificial Intelligence in Policing
- Byungseok Lee (Director, Drone Security Strategy Institute, Soonchunhyang University)
: Current Status of Drone Terrorism and Trends in Chinese Drone Technology
- Max Jang (Liner, AI Research Tech. Co.)
: Understanding Large Language Models (LLMs) and Their Applications in Crime Prevention

This seminar will be conducted in Korean. We are pleased to invite three distinguished experts to engage in an in-depth discussion on the theme, Current Status and Future Prospects of AI in Criminal Justice. We warmly welcome the participation of those who are interested in this field.

KOREA–U.S. JOINT ACADEMIC CONFERENCE AND STUDY-ABROAD INFORMATION SESSION

KOSCA will host the Korea–U.S. Joint Academic Conference and Study Abroad Information Session on Friday, June 26, 2026, at Dongguk University. This event will consist of a morning student session providing information on studying in the United States and graduate school admissions, followed by an afternoon academic program featuring research presentations and scholarly exchange focused on strategies for enhancing public safety.

■ Event Overview

- Theme: Strategies for Enhancing Public Safety in Response to Emerging Crimes and Technological and Environmental Change
- Date: Friday, June 26, 2026
 - 10:00–12:00 Student Session (Study in the U.S. Information Session)
 - 13:00–17:00 Korea–U.S. Joint Academic Conference (Research Presentations and Poster Session)
- Location: Dongguk University, South Korea

■ Organizers

- The Korean Society of Criminology in America (KOSCA), Korean Association of Public Safety and Criminal Justice, Korea CPTED Association, Korean Society of Criminology, and Police Science Institute

■ Program Highlights

Student Session (10:00–12:00)

- Overview of U.S. graduate programs (MA/PhD): program structure, admissions requirements, and application procedures
- Information on financial aid and assistantships
- Study abroad experience presentations (4 speakers), followed by a panel discussion and Q&A
- 13:00–14:00 — School Booth Visit: Consultations at university booths and distribution of informational materials
- 14:00–15:00 — Individual Clinic: One-on-one personalized academic advising sessions

Korea–U.S. Joint Academic Conference (13:00–17:00)

- Discussion of public safety strategies in response to emerging crimes and technological and environmental change
- Research presentations and discussion sessions
- Now accepting proposals for presenters and discussants (interested participants are welcome)

■ Target Participants

- Korean undergraduate and graduate students considering graduate study in the United States
- Researchers and practitioners in public safety, criminal justice, and criminology
- Representatives of institutions and universities interested in international exchange and collaborative research

■ Participation Information

- Institutional advertisements and promotional pages included in the conference program booklet
- Opportunity to display brochures and recruitment materials at booths
- Optional opportunity to deliver an institutional/program introduction presentation
- Interpretation and on-site staff support provided for booth operation

■ Inquiries: Registration, Sponsorship, Presentation, and Discussion Proposals

- Contact: Dr. Byungjoon Cho, bcho@westfield.ma.edu

This event is expected to provide graduate study information to approximately 150 Korean students while expanding opportunities for recruiting outstanding talent. At the same time, it will contribute to strengthening institutional partnerships between Korea and the United States and promoting academic exchange. We sincerely appreciate your interest and active participation in this event.

[US-KOREA CONFERENCE \(UKC\)](#)

You are cordially invited to attend the 39th U.S.–Korea Conference on Science, Technology, and Entrepreneurship (UKC 2026), which will be held from August 5 to August 8, 2026, in Orlando, Florida, USA. Organized by the Korean–American Scientists and Engineers Association (KSEA) in celebration of its 55th anniversary, UKC 2026 brings together leaders from academia, industry, government, and research institutions to advance global collaboration and innovation.

■ Event Overview

- Title: The 39th U.S.–Korea Conference on Science, Technology, and Entrepreneurship, UKC 2026
- Date: August 5 (Wed) – August 8 (Sat), 2026
- Location: Orlando, Florida, USA, Omni Hotel Orlando at ChampionsGate
- Organizer: Korean–American Scientists and Engineers Association, KSEA)
- Theme: From Imagination to Innovation – Into Reality
- Contact: ukc@ksea.org/ (703) 748-1221

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