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Community Policing and Education: The College Connection

The organizational, societal, and technical demands of policing are greater today than at any previous time. Coupled with the move toward a philosophy of community policing and greater community involvement, there is a need to have well-educated, culturally sensitive, and technologically sophisticated officers. The information one must possess to become a police officer in today's ever-changing society appears to be increasing exponentially. Additionally, the level of scrutiny police officers receive has never been greater. These important factors have rekindled the drive to increase the educational requirements of police officers.

History/Background

The idea of requiring police officers to obtain a college education is not new. During his tenure as Berkeley, Calif.'s, police chief in the early 1900s, August Vollmer, known as the father of police professionalism, was a staunch supporter of increased officers' educational requirements and

encouraged the hiring of degreed applicants (Walker 1992). Vollmer required his officers to attend classes at the University of California, Berkeley, and designed a sequence of courses he felt were important to his officer's education and professionalization. He believed so strongly in the importance of education, his heavily recruited college students for police service became known as "Berkeley's college cops" (Carte 1973).

Vollmer's position, however, was not widely embraced at a time when professionalism was more a consideration of reducing outside political influences than increasing the standards and requirements of those in policing. It was not until the latter 1950s and early 1960s that a minimum requirement of a high school or general equivalency diploma (GED) was established and minimal training standards begun.

With the widespread civil unrest of the 1960s, a renewed call for increasing officers' formal education was reestablished. The *President's Com-*

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mission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice (1967a) identified the need for college-educated personnel to address the increasing complexities of society. The Commission concluded that "the ultimate aim of all police departments should be that all personnel with enforcement powers have baccalaureate degrees" (p. 107). This conclusion was further emphasized by the *Task Force Report: The Police* (1967b) which called for the "need to elevate education requirements to college degrees for all future personnel," (pp. 126-127) and advocated a baccalaureate degree from accredited institutions of higher learning. A 1965 Advisory Committee of the International Association of Chief's of Police report also suggested that we must look to college-educated individuals to become the police officers of the future.

One governmental approach to address this issue was to infuse educational funds through programs such as the Law Enforcement Educational Program (LEEP), ostensibly to increase the educational standards for all officers across the nation. Unfortunately, with little oversight or program evaluation, LEEP was not as successful as could have been imagined. While some officers did benefit from a college degree, the curricula were often inadequate to meet the Commission's goals, and some were little more than advanced academies. Researchers suggest that some colleges and universities rushed to acquire the flowing federal funds without giving proper consideration of the Commission's ideals; that is, to provide a broadened educational background that would facilitate present and future officers in their changing and increasingly challenging roles. In fact, the National Advisory Commission on Higher Education of Police Officers (1979) found that many college criminal justice programs were little more than extensions of academy-based courses. This was contradictory to the broad-based social sciences approach to understanding and dealing with human behavior that Vollmer and the President's Commission had envisioned.

Research conducted during the early 1970s and 1980s addressing the benefits of college-educated police officers was equivocal, at best. Some researchers found the college experience to be of little value, while others supported the notion that a college-educated police officer was better able to handle rapid changes, increased diversity, and technological innovations that were becoming more prevalent in law enforcement (Buckley, McGinnis and Petrunik 1992; Carter and Sapp 1990; Radelet and Carter 1994). These contradictory findings are not surprising, given that proper analysis was virtually impossible. Large curriculum variances, the relatively few officers who actually attained baccalaureate degrees during this time, the naturally-occurring delay between attaining increased education and seeing its impact on the profession, and the spate of uncontrolled or confounding variables all attributed to these results. Additionally, those officers who did obtain a college degree were often viewed as suspect by fellow, non-degreed officers, and few, if any, organizational changes occurred to attract or retain college-educated individuals. Only now are we seeing those with higher education becoming the chiefs and administrators of police agencies and the impact they can have on the policy and philosophy of law enforcement.

Unfortunately, the on-going debate over the potential benefits of receiving a college education dominated the 1970s and 1980s. Rather than moving forward to enhance entry requirements and modify curriculum, decision makers continued to struggle over the merit of higher education. There seemed to be an interminable argument over the training versus education issue; a debate long ago resolved in favor of college degree requirements for other professions. Yet, critics of enhanced police college education requirements continued to reference the problems encountered in the early 1970s and 1980s in order to de-emphasize the potential importance of a college degree. However, the increased attention on the philosophy of community policing and the need to have



educated officers who are better communicators and better able to handle diverse situations and populations is spotlighting the current state of police educational standards.

Unfortunately, this debate continues, despite more recent promising evidence. While decision makers have been wallowing in a quagmire of semantic debate, the complexities of policing have continued to burgeon. The state of college education for police officers has improved significantly over the years. From a research standpoint, enough time has elapsed to better examine the role of the college educational experience. Recent studies, while still not without their detractors, have emphasized some of the benefits associated with a college education. In addition to studying ethics, diversity, law, and history, researchers (see Carter and Sapp 1990; Radelet and Carter 1994) have reported a number of advantages for college-degreed law enforcement officers:

- they develop a greater empathy and tolerance for persons with different lifestyles and ideologies which can significantly enhance communication skills;
- they develop broader decision making skills and can apply enhanced discretion when addressing individual issues as opposed to the "one-rule-fits-all" approach;
- they learn responsibility, maturity and social development;
- they become innovative and flexible when confronted with difficult or uncertain situations or complex policing strategies;
- they develop a more professional demeanor and greater adaptability, communication and behavioral styles;
- they are better able to cope with stress and readily accept and adapt to organizational changes; and
- they are better equipped to perform tasks and manage situations without direct supervision.

Of course, many would prefer the debate to continue, seeking an unattainable absolute answer as to whether or not a college education is beneficial for police officers. Unfortunately, this standard is not possible in policing or any of the other professions which require such education. A quote often attributed to Einstein suggests that "everything that counts cannot be counted, and everything that can be counted may not count." We cannot quantify everything, and many other professions do not question the value of a college education in preparing to meet the challenges of their chosen field.

Much research has demonstrated that a good college environment challenges the student to seek and answer questions and to develop a proclivity to inquiry. Conversely, training is oftentimes developed around solutions that can be quickly implemented through a one-way dispersement of procedures, skills training, and presentation of facts. This discussion is not to suggest that college is the panacea for all of the difficulties associated with policing. Nor should this be interpreted as a replacement for valuable academy training. Education must complement both field experience and the technical training necessary to carry out law enforcement activities. Some states have adopted tailored education models that incorporate both aspects. In Texas, for example, the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education (TCLEOSE) adopted a program designed to encourage the hiring of college-degreed police officers. The Criminal Justice Center at Sam Houston State University was the first four-year institution to operationalize this approach (Blair 1988). The curriculum provides students with a sequence of college classroom courses (in addition to the many university-designated degree requirements) recognized by The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. These courses meet more than one-third of the 230+ performance objectives of TCLEOSE's Basic Peace Officer Licensing Course. "Hands-on" training is conducted and coordinated within the traditional academy setting and is offered on a schedule that coincides with most Texas college and university



summer semesters. This process develops a graduate that is both college-educated and academy-trained; an individual who may be better prepared for police service.

The importance of a college education for police officers should not be confined to criminal justice programs. In fact, research demonstrating the benefits of a college education on policing finds little distinction in one's major course of study. While there may be some advantages in programs geared toward criminal justice, those officers with degrees in psychology, sociology, public administration, accounting, government, etc. are also benefited. Research suggests that the college experience, coupled with the required courses that colleges and universities demand, combine to form a more well-rounded and better prepared officer. Worden (1990) found that higher educated police officers (regardless of major) tended to be less ridged, had better discretionary judgment, exhibited more positive attitudes towards policing's legal challenges, and held a broader perspective of the police role. Clearly, the college experience can provide the future officer with a well-rounded background and a level of performance beyond a high school diploma or a GED.

Educational Requirements in Texas

Many of the recommendations proposed by presidential commissions, task forces and other groups suggesting a college education requirement for police officers have never fully been realized. At the time the recommendations were made, several impediments were present, including inadequate salaries to compete for college-educated individuals, a cultural bias among longtime officers opposed to requirements that might jeopardize their positions or promotability, insufficient college programs, and a fear of litigation against those departments considering raising their standards. However, some researchers contend that several events have converged making this the time for change. Many of the impediments of a college educational requirement have been addressed. For

example, the salaries in most major police agencies are commensurate with other occupations that require a college degree, and the organizational climate opposed to increased standards has changed. In fact, while few departments require a college degree, many find that their best candidates are those who have one. In many ways a degree has become a de facto requirement in departmental hiring and promoting (Sheehan and Corder 1995); however, the actual minimum standard for licensing in Texas is a high school diploma or GED. Finally, the courts have consistently held that college educational requirements for police officers are a Bona Fide Occupational Qualification (BFOQ) (e.g., *Davis v. Dallas* 777 F.2d 205, 5th Cir. 1985; see also Scott 1986), and these standards have not had an adverse effect on women or minority recruitment (Carter, Sapp and Stephens 1988; Carter and Sapp 1990). In fact, Carter and Sapp (1990) found that among police officers "all minority racial/ethnic groups contained higher percentages of graduate degrees than did whites" (p. 67).

A recent survey was conducted among Texas police departments to examine the educational or college requirements for entry or promotion and to determine if agencies provided incentives for their personnel to attend college. Seventy-two law enforcement agencies were telephonically surveyed. Almost all of the largest departments, as well as a stratified random sample of smaller agencies, were studied. These agencies represent more than half of the peace officers licensed in this state.

The results revealed that only 10 of these departments have absolute mandatory college requirements. Another 10 departments have a college requirement but allow for exceptions or waivers for circumstances such as an honorable military discharge or prior police service (see Table 1).

Further, the type of educational requirements utilized by these 20 agencies varies greatly. The range extended from 15 hours of non-specified



Table 1
Police Department's College Educational Requirements

Absolute College Educational Requirement for Entry	College Educational Requirement with Possible Exceptions or Substitutions
Abilene Police Department	Alief Independent School District Police Department
Addison Police Department	Carrollton Police Department
Arlington Police Department	El Paso Police Department
Austin Police Department	Eules Police Department
Dallas Police Department	Grand Prairie Police Department
Deer Park Police Department	Houston Police Department
Garland Police Department	Jefferson County Sheriff's Department
Midland Police Department	Mesquite Police Department
Prairie View A&M University Police Department	North Richland Hills Police Department
Tyler Police Department	Waco Police Department

college credit to a bachelor's degree. Most of these agencies with educational requirements involved some combination of college and/or police or military experience (n=12). One department required 15 hours, four required 30 hours, one had a 45 hour requirement, and one additional agency implemented a minimum standard of 60 college hours. Of the sampled agencies, only Deer Park reported an absolute requirement of a baccalaureate degree for entry to their police service.

Only five of the 72 departments surveyed reported that they had an educational requirement to be eligible for promotion. Table 2 identifies these agencies and their particular requirements. For the purpose of this survey, the educational standards were assessed only for those ranks below that of chief (or its equivalent).

The question regarding incentives for increasing college education was also addressed. Of the 72

Table 2
College Education Required for Promotion

Agency	Sergeant	Lieutenant	Captain
College Station Police Department	30 Hours	60 Hours	N/A
Coppell Police Department	N/A	N/A	Bachelor's Degree
Deer Park Police Department	Associate's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree or Bachelor's and FBI Academy or LEMIT
Odessa Police Department	Associate's Degree	Associate's Degree Plus 30 Hours	Associate's Degree Plus 45 Hours
Tarrant County Sheriff's Department	N/A	Associate's Degree	Bachelor's Degree

surveyed departments, 52 agencies (72%) reported offering some sort of incentive for obtaining a college education. Forty-two reported various forms of tuition reimbursement. This was often a result of a citywide policy rather than a specific

departmental-specific standard, as long as the course was related to their job. Thirty-two of the 52 agencies asserting the use of incentives report offering higher pay for those with degrees (see Table 3).

Table 3
Incentives for Obtaining College Education

Tuition Reimbursement	Higher Pay for College Degrees
Addison Police Department	Abilene Police Department
Alamo Police Department	Amarillo Police Department
Amarillo Police Department	Austin Police Department
Arlington Police Department	Beaumont Police Department
Austin Police Department	Carrollton Police Department
Beaumont Police Department	Cleburne Police Department
Carrollton Police Department	College Station Police Department
Cleburne Police Department	Corpus Christi Police Department
Coppell Police Department	Dallas Police Department
Corpus Christi Police Department	Deer Park Police Department
Dallas Police Department	Denison Police Department
Deer Park Police Department	Eulesse Police Department
Denison Police Department	Fort Worth Police Department
El Paso Police Department	Galveston Police Department
Eulesse Police Department	Garland Police Department
Fort Worth Police Department	Grand Prairie Police Department
Garland Police Department	Houston Police Department
Grand Prairie Police Department	Irving Police Department
Irving Police Department	Jefferson County Sheriff's Department
Lake Jackson Police Department	LaMarque Police Department
LaMarque Police Department	Laredo Police Department
Lancaster Police Department	Lubbock Police Department
Laredo Police Department	Mercedes Police Department
Mansfield Police Department	Mesquite Police Department
Mercedes Police Department	Midland Police Department
Midland Police Department	North Richland Hills Police Department
Missouri City Police Department	Odessa Police Department
McKinney Police Department	Rosenberg Police Department
North Richland Hills Police Department	San Angelo Police Department
Odessa Police Department	San Antonio Police Department
Pasadena Police Department	Texarkana Police Department
Plano Police Department	Tyler Police Department
Port Neches Police Department	
Richardson Police Department	
San Antonio Police Department	
Southwest Texas State University Police Department	
Tarrant County Sheriff's Department	
Travis County Sheriff's Department	
Tyler Police Department	
Victoria Police Department	
Waco Police Department	
Wichita Falls Police Department	

Other incentives offered by various agencies included the use of vehicles for transportation to classes, time off to attend college courses, and scheduling preferences to accommodate the college semester. It is important to note that these categories are not mutually exclusive. That is, one department may employ one or more of these incentives.

Finally, there were some distinctions between a department's size (measured by number of sworn officers) and the presence of increased educational requirements. Half of those agencies with 1,000 or more officers had enhanced education standards, while only 12 percent of those departments with 50 or fewer officers had implemented such as requirement (see Table 4).

Table 4

Department Size and Presence of Increased Educational Requirements

# of Officers	# of Agencies	# of Agencies with some Requirement	Percentage
15-50	26	3	12
50-100	8	3	38
100-250	18	8	44
250-500	9	2	22
1,000+	8	4	50

Support for Requiring a College Education for Entry Level Police Officers

There are sound arguments to be made in support of a college degree requirement for entry level police officers.

Organizational changes. Today's policing organizations are much different from those that existed when LEAA and LEEP were begun in the 1970s. More officers involved in police service now have college degrees, and the police cultural bias against "college cops" has abated signifi-

cantly. In fact, Carter and Sapp (1990) found that 65.2 percent of officers had one year or more of college credits and 22.6 percent had attained a bachelor's degree. As a result of time and experience, more police managers and administrators are college-educated and are incorporating organizational changes that are commensurate with the needs of a college-educated force. The challenges of community policing require today's officers to exert more discretion in problem solving and decision making. They must be attuned to the cultural differences and sensitive to the community's needs. Officers must also recognize and value the diversity that they encounter. Studies have suggested that a successful community policing approach is dependent on the quality of educated police officers an agency can attract.

Because of these organizational changes, departments can now recruit college-educated officers and provide them with salaries commensurate to other entry level occupations requiring degreed candidates. As indicated above, most police organizations throughout the country, as well as Texas, offer incentives to those officers who continue their education or pursue a college degree. While few states require a college education as a minimum qualification for police service, more and more departments are moving in this direction.

Interestingly, while the qualifications posted by many agencies do not necessarily require a college degree, researchers have found that in the hiring and promotional process, college is a clear advantage. Hopper's study (1988) revealed that four-year college graduates rated highest in police academy performance, and Garner (1996) found that 97 percent of those graduating in the top 10 percent of a pre-service regional police academy were college graduates. In some ways, a college education has become a de facto requirement, although not always formalized into policy. Further, when police chiefs and administrators were surveyed, they overwhelmingly identified a college education as an essential requirement for

those entering police service today. This was especially pronounced in agencies which were implementing the community policing and problem-solving philosophies.

Interestingly, police managers may give little credence to those applicants that hold only a high school diploma. Once a predictor of a minimum skill and education, today there are individuals receiving high school diplomas through social promotion rather than demonstrated competence. Many university professors contend that, as a group, the communication and analytic skills of incoming college freshmen are less developed than a decade ago. Again, this issue further supports the argument favoring a college education requirement for police officers.

Organizational challenges in policing are greater than ever before. The move toward community policing, problem solving, and solution-oriented policing requires officers to possess reasoning skills beyond those that were required in the past. Research has demonstrated that officers with college degrees possess a greater sense of problem solving and analytic ability and a greater sensitivity to the community's diverse needs. The philosophical shift toward community policing has caused departments to realign their management and organizational goals. Line officers, for example, are given greater discretion and are encouraged to develop innovative ways to address their mission. According to Radelet and Carter (1994), "given the nature of this change, the issue of college education is even more critical. The knowledge and skills officers are being asked to exercise in community policing appears to be tailored to college preparation" (p. 156).

Societal changes. Today's police officers must be culturally sensitive and willing to value ethnic differences. Interestingly, most college degree programs offer courses in areas such as cultural diversity, ethics, and cross-cultural comparisons, and some even require a foreign language. These courses are invaluable to the repertoire of today's

police professionals. Research has demonstrated that those officers who are exposed to such an educational experience fare far better when dealing with diverse community groups.

In addition, departments must recognize that members of the community are also becoming more educated. As this occurs, the citizen's expectations towards police services and activities will also increase. One would expect nothing less than to require police officers to raise their educational levels in order to represent the populations they serve. In a recent survey (Garner 1997), 89 percent of citizens believed that a college education was an important requirement for police officers. Interestingly, most respondents were surprised that a college degree was not already required.

Psychology, sociology, and human behavior courses can all contribute to a better understanding of the complex social world. The academy approach represents only one dimension of the knowledge continuum needed by the professional officer of today. The minimal amount of training hours devoted to "cultural diversity or human relations" are much less than the equivalent of an intense semester covering each topic.

Technological changes. Today's police officer is faced with more modern technology than ever before. The field notebook has been replaced with the laptop. Fingerprinting and mug shots are now taken through photo digital transfer. The conventional teletype is practically a machine of the past. We have traded our 10-code for binary transfer protocols. In addition, the Internet, World Wide Web, and e-mail have expanded resources and data collection techniques, and the emphasis on solution-oriented policing has placed greater demands on crime analysis, problem solving, and computer sophistication.

As innovative ways to address crime and social disorder are developed, departments must have officers who are able to accurately measure the

impact of these approaches with methodologically sound techniques. Again, this sophistication level was not a part of the "increased educational equation" during the time when the presidential commissions and others were emphasizing the importance of a college education making it all the more important now. Fortunately, most college degree plans require courses that are beneficial in today's technologically rich environment (i.e., computer sciences, information systems, math, research methods, statistical analysis, etc.).

Conclusions

The demands of policing in today's environment compel us to increase the educational standards envisioned more than 80 years ago by August Vollmer. A minimal benchmark for entry into police service should require a baccalaureate degree although this could be implemented in stages. The societal, technological, and organizational sophistication of policing requires this minimum criterion. If policing is ever to be viewed as a true profession, we must demand educational standards that are commensurate. The American Police Association now lists among its goals to require at least a baccalaureate degree for all officers with law enforcement authority ("College-Educated Police Form APA" 1997).

Many have said that policing is an occupation that demands the education and skills of a teacher, lawyer, counselor, social worker, doctor, psychologist, and minister. Yet, of these professions, only policing does not require a basic college degree. It is no wonder that policing is often viewed as a technical or vocational position rather than a profession. Community policing is directing us to reexamine these issues. We must consider the importance of providing our officers with the educational tools and professional acceptance that is needed in policing our ever-changing society.

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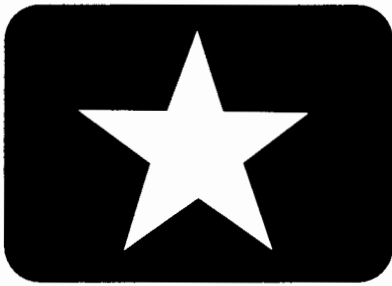
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