

The Bill Blackwood  
Law Enforcement Institute of Texas

Issues Surrounding Higher Education and its  
Availability for Texas Law Enforcement Officers

An Administrative Research Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for Graduation from the  
Leadership Command College

by  
Brian M. Frieda

Friona Police Department  
Friona, Texas  
November, 2002

## **ABSTRACT**

Friona Police Department serves a small community in the Texas Panhandle. The department, like many others, seek qualified, skilled and educated officers. Education for law enforcement has become somewhat of a forefront issue in the state, as evidenced by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education's attempts at mandating degrees for entry-level officers. Should these requirements be passed in later years, the demand on small and geographically isolated departments might prove difficult to overcome at best.

This research project sought to examine whether officers in all agencies have the same opportunities to earn degrees and whether non-traditional methods were a viable alternative to classroom instruction. It was hypothesized that there was inequity in this area. As such, research also examined alternatives for officers to gain their educations.

Research involved review of literary sources including reference books, professional journals, previous research documents, trade magazines and sources from the Internet. Inquiry was done through self-report questionnaires directed to law enforcement agencies throughout Texas, and Universities and Colleges throughout the United States.

Respondents believed that the educational opportunities are not equal throughout the state and felt that the Internet is a viable alternative to a traditional classroom education.

Wider implications of this research are discussed and include the potential benefits to the Friona Police Department as well as other law enforcement agencies in extracting ideas for their own use, along with considerations in planning future study.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Abstract

Introduction..... 1

Review of Literature .....3

Methodology..... 6

Findings ..... 7

Discussion/Conclusions.....9

References .....12

Appendices

## **Introduction**

The issue concerning college-educated officers is not a new topic of debate in law enforcement, and the latest Texas Legislative session was no exception. The Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education (TCLEOSE) attempted mandating an Associates Degree for entry level officers. Police chiefs and sheriffs alike met this attempt with varied opinions, ranging from total support, to bitter condemnation.. Several of these administrators, while agreeing with the concept of college educated officers, suggested that the requirements be left up to individual departments, rather than mandated by the state or federal government.

The argument made by TCLEOSE was with the assistance of David L. Carter Ph.D., a professor at the School of Criminal Justice at Michigan State University. Dr. Carter has conducted considerable research concerning this topic. According to Carter (2002) the advantages of college-educated officers are:

1. They develop a broader base of information for decision making.
2. College allows for additional years and experiences for maturity.
3. Course work requirements and achievements inculcate responsibility in the individual
4. Course work permits one to learn more about American history.
5. Education enhances the ability to flexibly handle difficult or ambiguous situations with greater creativity or innovation.
6. College education permits a better view of the criminal justice system.
7. Educated officers are better equipped to perform tasks and make continual policing decisions with minimal or no supervision.

These were just a few of the advantages that Dr. Carter gave to justify requiring college degrees for entry-level officers.

Given the importance of education (and the potential for future requirements) the purpose of this research was to explore if the educational opportunities are equal for officers in different geographical regions of this state. It was hypothesized that there was inequity in this area. As such, research also examined alternatives for officers to gain education. According to research, in 1997 the percentage of local police officers employed by a department with some type of education mandate for new officers was 31 %. This was twice the rate of 1993 (15%), and three times that of 1990 (10%) (Reaves & Goldberg, 2000). The agencies surveyed for the purpose of this project varied in size and geographical locale. For example, the number of officers ranged from as few as 7, to as many as 5400.

Research in this study was done through surveys, personal interviews, and extensive review of literature. This review included books, college catalogs, articles, and sources from the Internet.

The impetus for this project was to explore the potential benefits for the Friona Police Department by showing viable alternatives to attending classes, and ultimately providing for a more educated force. Moreover, these benefits may also benefit other agencies facing similar challenges. The hope is to encourage administrators of law enforcement agencies, state licensing boards, and University staff members alike, to see not only the need for college educated officers, but also that these agencies and bodies should seek out alternatives for those officers employed in isolated jurisdictions. Moreover, as a side benefit, the project may help shatter many of the myths surrounding distance education programs.

## **Review of Literature**

To determine the availability of higher education for law enforcement officers across the state, one would normally turn to published studies addressing this issue; however, this topic seems not to have been considered except as a cursory matter in prior examinations. The focus of most studies has dealt primarily with the controversy surrounding whether a law enforcement officer should be required to have a degree at the time they are hired. It seems educating currently employed law enforcement officers has taken a backseat. The information reviewed by authorities concerning this topic has not provided adequate information thus far concerning the availability and viable options for educating our law enforcement professionals, specifically those in rural areas where educational institutions are either nonexistent or are located a great distance away.

One could surmise that because many departments in Texas are located where there are no institutions of higher learning, that those living and working there do not have the same opportunities as officers living in metropolitan areas. Simply stated, it is difficult to go to school when there is no school around. As such, this project must explore alternative methods for officers lacking the same opportunities as their counterparts in the larger cities.

Mirroring research by Carter, Sapp, and Radelet have noted benefits to employing college educated officers:

1. A greater understanding and tolerance for persons with differing lifestyles and ideologies.
2. Broader base of information for decision-making.
3. Responsibility, maturity and social development.
4. Innovation and flexibility in complex programs.

5. Increased professional demeanor and greater adaptability.
6. Better abilities to cope with stress and adapt to changes in the organization.
7. Enhanced ability to work independently (Carter & Sapp, 1990; Radelet & Carter, 1994 as cited in Garner, 1998).

With these obvious benefits outlined, methods for obtaining education must now be considered. For simplicity, this paper will look at four:

1. Traditional classroom instruction
2. Distance via print-based instruction
3. Distance via video/audio
4. Distance via the Internet

Traditional classroom instruction, for the purposes of this study, deserves only limited consideration, primarily because the goal of this paper focuses on areas where officers do not have this luxury. For those seeking this method, but who live in isolated areas, travel back and forth is the norm. There are, however, alternatives in some areas. For example, Southern Methodist University and The University of North Texas offer off-site instruction in certain areas. These areas are not in isolated locations though, but rather smaller cities within the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex.

Looking next to print-based instruction, one institution offering this option is Texas Tech University (Texas Tech University, 2002). Class materials are sent through the mail. Once completed, students return their assignments for critique and grading by the same method. The program at Texas Tech is in general studies and requires proctored testing at a local institution. This, in itself, could prove difficult for officers separated from educational institutions.

The option of video and audio instruction is also available from several institutions. The University of Texas is an example of a college offering this option (University of Texas, 2001). Students can take classes on CD-ROM, audiotape and videocassette. As with other programs, class topics are still somewhat limited, especially criminal justice classes. The program at the University of Texas is not a terminal program; therefore the student cannot earn their degree.

The last option researched is education by use of the computer; specifically, Internet based instruction. A simple query in a search engine reveals thousands of hits for web-based courses. Obviously this method of education is a rapidly growing option. It seems safe to consider that like other areas, college education is entering the global arena. Research for this project found several accredited programs that were specific to law enforcement. As mentioned earlier, even the highly respected Sam Houston State University offers Internet learning, though still restricted to graduate studies. Kaplan College, The University of Phoenix and Baker College also offer this option.

### **Methodology**

Revisiting the research questions for this project, the goal was to (a) determine the equality of obtaining a degree through out the state, and (b) to seek viable options in obtaining degrees through non-traditional means. It was hypothesized that officers across the state do not have the same opportunities to attend institutions of higher learning, and, as such, it was necessary to explore alternatives.

The participants in this study were law enforcement agencies throughout Texas selected to represent the state geographically. Respondent size ranged from small towns to large metropolitan agencies. The number of participants was (N=21).

A questionnaire was the primary material source utilized for data gathering. The document itself was two pages in length, printed on white paper. There were a total of ten questions, but only two were utilized for this project. The additional questions were included to gather data for future study; however, they are not included with this paper. A brief summation of the research was included on the cover page. Questions allowed for short and concise responses. The questionnaires were direct mailed to several agencies and faxed to others.

Data gathered included general information such as agency size, name, and geographic location. Related to this study, participants were asked (a) whether they felt that officers across the state have the same opportunities to attend college, (b) whether they saw the Internet as a viable alternative to traditional studies. Responses were recorded and entered into a Microsoft® Excel datasheet. This allowed for data compilation and creation of incorporated charts that reflect query results. Analysis was conducted through data comparison, directed to identification of common responses.

## **Findings**

Information obtained for the figures to follow came from the use of questionnaires mailed and faxed to law enforcement agencies throughout the state. Of the thirty surveys distributed twenty one were returned. All of the questions were sent to members of the agencies command staff, or the Chief of the agency. The information gathered from the surveys were very informative, in that administrators, and other command staff members are resisting the attempts of the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officers Standards and Education to require entry level officers to have at the minimum an associates degree. The majority of the agencies surveyed stated that if the state were to require degrees of entry level officers, the state should make funds

available to assist veteran officers in obtaining their degrees, in order to remain competitive in their chosen career field.

Another survey was distributed to Universities and Colleges in regards to alternative options of attending institutions of higher learning. Of the twenty surveys mailed only two were returned. In another attempt to gather the information needed for this topic of discussion telephone interviews were attempted. Upon interviewing members of fifteen universities and colleges twelve thought the Internet to be a viable option for attending institutions of higher learning, however, they insisted that there would need to be stringent guidelines in place to safeguard the quality and level of the course work in question. A few of the guidelines mentioned repeatedly was the requirement of the student to be at least 23 to 24 years of age, and must be employed working at a minimum of 32 hours a week.

Institutions interviewed, only three felt that this option of education did not deserve to be considered as an option at all, and were unwilling to participate any further with the interview. During the course of the interviews it was discovered that the institutions talked to in Texas none of them offered studies at the undergraduate level for criminal justice studies. Many of the institutions interviewed stated that they offered no degree plans only general studies.

The overall findings are given in figure 1 and 2. Figure 1 suggest that respondents believe that educational opportunities are not equal throughout the state (see figure 1). The "no" responses indicate the participant's belief that opportunities are not equal.

Figure 1. Equality of educational opportunities.

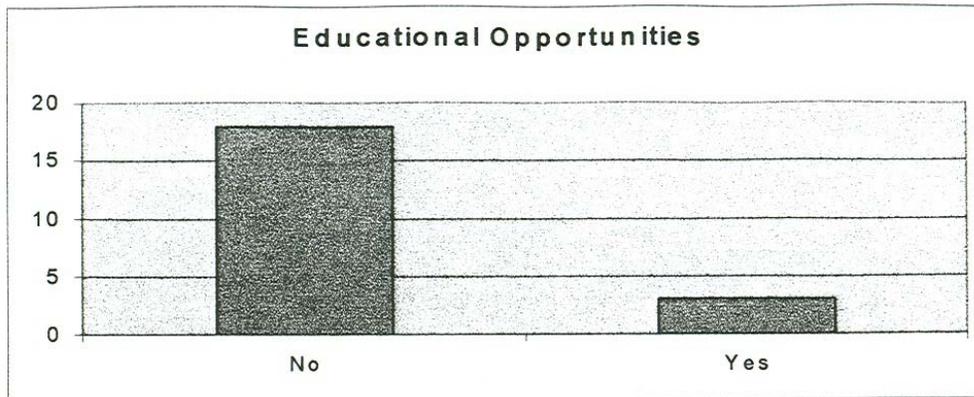
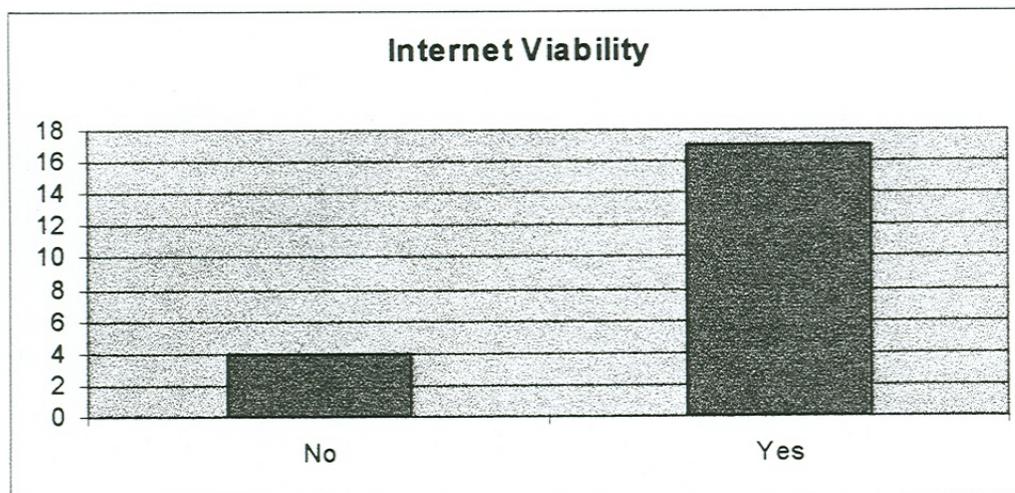


Figure 2 shows that respondents felt that the Internet is a viable alternative to classroom education (see figure 2). The "yes" responses indicate the participants' belief that this is a viable option.

Figure 2. Viability of the Internet for police education.



## **Discussions/Conclusions**

As previously stated, this project was designed to identify the equality or inequity of educational opportunities for police officers in Texas, but more specifically, the officers of the Friona, Texas Police Department. The process was done primarily through comparison of law enforcement organizations with recommendations in available literature. Research centered around the hypothesis that comparative study would lend insight into whether officers in geographically isolated locations have the same opportunities to educate themselves as officers closer to cities with major universities or even county colleges. As previously identified, officers throughout the state do not have the same prospect to gain a degree. Facing these challenges, research also needed to address alternatives to classroom instruction. As discovered, one of the possible methods is the use of the Internet.

Considering the Internet then as an option, it is important to discuss whether the same level or quality of instruction is possible, along with the opinions of academics concerning this area. Looking at one example of a distance program, the University of Texas does offer the option of instruction via computer. A closer look, however, reveals that though education is possible, there is not a specific program in criminal justice. This is not to say that liberal arts study is not beneficial; however, officers seeking administrative positions later in their careers may prefer a program structured more to law enforcement management and administration.

Another distance program, offered by Texas Tech University in Lubbock, offers a Bachelor of General Studies through print-based approaches. The same argument could hold true as before; though the student could obtain higher education, it may not fit with the person's goals.

Still another example is the programs offered at Sam Houston State University. Obviously this institution is well respected for its criminal justice course work. Even so, the option to obtain undergraduate degree via the Internet is not available, even though graduate level work can be done in this manner.

Looking outside of Texas, there are programs more centered toward policing. Two examples include Kaplan College in Boca Raton, Florida and Baker College in Flint, Michigan. Cost for these programs can vary considerably. The Kaplan College program approaches \$700 per class. This is roughly one hundred dollars less than two graduate classes at Sam Houston State University. A popular on-line program through the University of Phoenix costs about \$533 more per class than the Kaplan program. Cost becomes even more noticeable when one considers that students can attend classes at most junior colleges for roughly \$100 each.

It is obvious that cost is a factor. However, one must consider that in most out of state programs students do not incur travel costs, and other incidentals. Moreover, of the programs examined, the cost of books *was* included in the course fee. A third "benefit" is that out of state programs generally do not require the TASP test, which could prove beneficial for those who have been out of school for some time. Still another attractive benefit is many of these programs are either accelerated (where the student can work at a faster pace) or are done over periods often up to one year (for the slower-paced learner).

Returning to the original introduction of this paper, the idea of requiring degrees for 'police officers does have merit. As previously outlined, the benefits are clear. However, it would seem that the availability of college for officers (or potential offers) is not equal and therefore must be considered before such a mandate can be possible.

Examining another area, the opinions of universities / academics vary concerning non traditional education. As outlined here, many colleges have jumped into the information age. Conversely, Baylor University and Texas Christian University saw no need for such programs.

As with all research, it is important to explore confounds of the study. First in this case is the sample size. Statistical conclusions are generally more accurate where participant numbers are larger. Second, one must consider the internal and external validity of the study. From an internal standpoint, is the research measuring what it is intended to measure. Externally, can the conclusions be generalized, or even applied singly to the Friona Police Department. It is difficult to accurately assess these factors.

One could assume that non-traditional methods are a good option. It is tempting to draw facile conclusions based on the growing number of programs. However, treading cautiously and evaluating the quality of individual programs might be the most prudent course. Even if much of this study showed statistical significance, it may not be generalizable and therefore not accepted simply on face value.

Aside from the obvious confounds, there are possible benefits from this area of study and research. It is obvious that education is important. It is also obvious that to mandate college requirements for police departments would most likely handicap many agencies, especially those in rural areas. Future study should further explore alternatives as well as involve appraisal of the quality of non-traditional methods. The original hypothesis of this study holds true in that there is obvious inequity in the availability of educational opportunities. However, to put full stock and faith in all non-traditional programs as viable alternatives should be avoided as it might prove foolhardy. Seeking out established universities might be a better course, especially where the non-traditional approach is the method of choice or is the only choice available.

### References

- Baker College (2002). Baker College 2002 Undergraduate Catalog. pp.3-4.
- Carter, D.L., & Sapp, AD. (1989, August). The effect of higher education on police liability: implications for police personnel policy. American Journal of Police 8.(1). pp. 153-163.
- Carter, D.L. & Sapp, AD. (1990). Higher education as a policy alternative to reduce police liability. Police 2. pp. 1-3.
- Carter, D.L., & Sapp, AD. (1990, March). The evolution of higher education in law enforcement: preliminary findings from a national study. Journal of Criminal Justice Education (1). p. 59-83
- Carter, D.L. (n.d.). Critical issues related to police college education. Paper prepared for class discussion points.
- Ferreira, B.R. (1997, May). The importance of law enforcement education. Law and Order 45. (5). pp. 30-32.
- Gamer, R.L. (1998, January). Community police and education: the college connection. Telemasp Bulletin. 4 (10). p.3.
- Hayeslip, D. W. (1989). Higher education and police performance revisited: the evidence examined through meta-analysis. American Journal of Police 8. (2). pp. 49-58.
- Hickman, M.J. & Reaves, B.A. (1996, April). A LEMAS report: local police departments, 1999. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice. p. 1.
- Kaplan College (2002). Kaplan College 2002 Criminal Justice Degree Catalog. Kaplan College, M-CJ-BROCH01/02. pp. 1-11.
- Reaves, B.A (1996, April). ALEMAS report: local police departments, 1993. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice. p. 1.
- Reaves, B.A (1997, February). A LEMAS report: local police departments, 1997. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice. p. 1~
- Stevens, D.J. (1999, December). College educated officers: do they provide better police service? Law and Order, 47. (12). pp.37-41.
- Texas Tech University (2002). Texas Tech University 2002-2003 Extended Studies Catalog. Vol. LXXIX, (4). pp. 17-45.

Travis, J. (1995, February 5). Education and law enforcement: beyond the college degree. [On-line]. Available: <http://www.ojp.usdoj/nij/speeches/police.htm>

University of Texas (2001). University of Texas 2001-2002 Distance Education Catalog.

Watt,1. (1988). Police higher education and training in the United Kingdom. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois at Chicago.

Watt,1. (1994). The police staff college. Bramshill: command education and training in the United Kingdom. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois at Chicago.

September 18, 2002

Lt David Mizelle  
Cedar Park Police Department  
1400 W. Whitestone Blvd.  
Cedar Park TX 78613

Dear Sir:

My name is Brian Frieda; I am the Assistant Chief for the Friona Police Department. I am currently attending the Bill Blackwood LCC series, and a part of completing this coursework is the successful completion of an administrative research paper: I have chosen the topic concerning Higher Education for Texas Law Enforcement Officers and its availability. The focus of this paper is neither to support nor attack the recent attempt of T.C.L.E.O.S.E. to require all entry level officers to have at a minimum an Associates Degree. The focus of my paper is simple, do officers across the state have the same opportunities to attend colleges or universities, and with the lack of user friendly distance education programs in this state should officers be able to obtain their degrees from an accredited institution from another state using the internet.

Please find enclosed a brief survey form and a self addressed stamped envelope. Please if at all possible complete the survey and return it to me with any input that can be used in this paper: Your assistance in this matter will be greatly appreciated. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions concerning this topic at the Friona Police Department at (806) 250-2711, or at [brianfrieda@hotmail.com](mailto:brianfrieda@hotmail.com). Again thank you for all of your assistance.

Sincerely,

Brian M. Frieda  
Friona Police Dept

## LCC SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. What is the number of sworn officers in your agency?
2. Does your agency provide any incentives that encourage your officers to seek their college education?
3. Does your agency provide any tuition reimbursement to officers that pass their College courses?
4. Do you see distance education via the internet as a viable solution to officers getting their degrees versus traditional college?
5. Do you feel that entry level officers should be required to have a college degree if so what level should they have?
6. If your answer above was no do you feel they should have some college course work? If so how many hours should they have?
7. If the state were to require degrees for entry level positions, do you feel that the State should provide incentives for veteran officers to attend college?
8. Do you feel that officers across the state have the same opportunities to attend college?
9. Should officers be allowed to obtain a degree from an institution out of state? or should officers be required to attend schools in state?
10. With the availability of officers being that it is should departments use a college reimbursement program as apart of a benefit package? (ie. Insurance, Retirement)

## LCC SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. What is your institutions current tuition rate resident vs. non-resident?
2. Do you feel that Law Enforcement Officers across the state of Texas have the same opportunities to attend institutions of higher learning?
3. Does your institution have a distance learning program in place?
4. How many degree plans are established in these programs?
5. If so is your distance program print based or does your institution offer computer based distance learning?
6. If restrictions for candidates attempting to attend an on-line college are in place Le. age of the student, employment, etc. can these candidates obtain information needed to earn a degree without stepping foot on campus?
7. What do you see as the main reason for not having computer based programs?
8. What would you see as the main reason for having computer based programs?
9. Do you see computer based course work as being graduate level only or should there be course work at all levels?
10. What level of education should law enforcement be required to have?  
A. Bachelors B. Associates C. Masters D. Some College hours. Please Explain: