

**The Bill Blackwood
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The Value of the Citizen Police Academy

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ABSTRACT

The public perception of law enforcement is a roller coaster of opinion greatly influenced by media coverage of events involving actions on the part of law enforcement agencies and those serving as members of those agencies. The highs and lows of public opinion can be directly linked to the in-depth “expose” of an agency’s troubles or the report of some law enforcement official’s misconduct. These negatives often taint the public view of law enforcement as a whole and serve to damage the needed balance of trust, respect and understanding needed between a community and its law enforcement agency(s).

The Citizen Police Academy is a program that has proven its ability to promote better understanding between law enforcement and the public. A Citizen Police Academy can be implemented at any level of law enforcement by any size agency. The commitment of resources (personnel and funding) is totally at the discretion of the host agency. The program can be implemented on a shoestring or given card blanche for spending. A survey taken of sample law enforcement agencies as well as information derived from professional publications and Internet web sites will demonstrate how a Citizen Police Academy program can benefit both the law enforcement agency and the community it serves while not adversely affecting the operational ability of the agency.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction	1
Review of Literature	4
Methodology	9
Findings	10
Discussions/Conclusions	14
References	16
Appendices	

INTRODUCTION

Poorly handled high profile criminal cases and incidents involving illegal as well as immoral behavior on the part of law enforcement over the past several years has served to tarnish the professional image of officers and agencies throughout the United States and even the world. From the O.J. Simpson case to Rodney King and from allegations of corruption in the Rampart division of the Los Angeles Police Department to allegations of abuse of prisoners by members of the New York City Police Department the image and credibility of law enforcement has suffered immensely. The public perception of law enforcement is a roller coaster of opinion greatly influenced by media coverage of events involving actions on the part of law enforcement agencies and those serving as members of those agencies. The highs and lows of public opinion can be directly linked to the in-depth “expose” of an agency’s troubles or the report of some law enforcement official’s misconduct. These negatives often taint the public view of law enforcement as a whole and serve to damage the balance of trust, respect and understanding needed between a community and its law enforcement agency(s).

Truly effective law enforcement only comes with the support and cooperation of the community it serves. Community Policing is a wide range of programs and operational procedures that serve to develop that needed support and cooperation. Under the broad expanse of the Community Policing umbrella is the Citizen Police Academy. This is a program that has repeatedly proven its ability to promote better understanding between law enforcement and the public.

Bobinsky (1994) writes, "A community that is more involved with its police agency translates into a community more willing to cooperate with its police" (p.16).

A Citizen Police Academy can be implemented at any level of law enforcement by any size agency. The commitment of resources (personnel and funding) is totally at the discretion of the host agency. A Citizen Police Academy program can be implemented on a shoestring or given card blanche for spending. A survey taken of sample law enforcement agencies as well as information derived from professional publications will demonstrate how a Citizen Police Academy program can benefit both the law enforcement agency and the community it serves while not adversely affecting the operational ability of the agency. In fact, the Citizen Police Academy, by way of its loyal and motivated alumni can serve to augment a law enforcement agency's staffing when utilized as unpaid volunteers in many areas from administration to court and even field operations when properly trained.

Law enforcement is a customer service organization with the customer base being the citizens of the community being served. A lack of respect and support for an agency by the community can be equated to a dissatisfied consumer who chooses not to patronize a specific merchant. Although the citizens of a community cannot simply stop using its local law enforcement agency they can express their dissatisfaction by becoming obstructionist on key public issues affecting the agency.

The question of this research paper will be: Does a Citizen Police Academy benefit the sponsoring law enforcement agency and the community that it serves? This will be accomplished by way of an examination of the Citizen

Police Academy program, how it affects the sponsoring agency and the community.

The indented method of inquiry will include professional publications addressing issues of community relations with law enforcement and discussions of Community Policing concepts and practices. Additional references include surveys of sample law enforcement agencies regarding the Citizen Police Academy and course evaluations written by graduates of a Citizen Police Academy. It is anticipated that the results of this research will show the continuing need for the Citizen Police Academy as an important Community Policing tool that helps overcome the shadow of negativity that can creep into a community following negative media focus on law enforcement. The Citizen Police Academy program will be shown as a vehicle for mending fences, gaining support and respect for an agency while not adversely affecting the operational ability of the agency.

Civilian law enforcement in the United States of America is not autonomous. Depending on the level of government to which the agency is responsible (city, county, state) the daily operations of an agency are shaped and guided by citizens of the community it serves through their elected officials. Support is synonymous with funding. A community that understands and trusts its law enforcement agency more openly receives requests for equipment, programs and personnel.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Much has been written on the subject of Community Policing, specifically for the program known as the Citizen Police Academy. There is no definitive source. No authority exists that designates the Citizen Police Academy as the ultimate answer to the issues of community involvement and support that currently affect the law enforcement community. Because the Citizen Police Academy is typically one of several Community Policing oriented programs that an agency may be involved in it is difficult to gather definitive data that clearly points to a single program as the reason for a drop in crime rates, better community relations or an increase in successful prosecutions.

Herrera (1998) reported "Community Policing has moved from a controversial theory to an accepted practice in many cities across the country. Community Policing is becoming more of an agency's philosophy than oriented to a single, particular project or problem. Community Policing taps into the creative resources of a department's personnel. The traditional model doesn't provide officers with opportunities for input, the opportunity to make a difference. We are witnessing a paradigm shift in the sense that we are seeing the community as our partners and allies rather than our enemy" (p.3).

Community Policing, its ideals and philosophies are the heart of the Citizen Police Academy. Over 130 years ago in 1870 Sir Robert Peel set forth 9 principles of police work which led into the organization of the first municipal

police agency in the world. In any examination of law enforcement policies or programs we should be reminded of Peel's principles.

SIR ROBERT PEEL'S NINE PRINCIPLES

- The basic mission for which the police exist is to prevent crime and disorder
- The ability of the police to perform their duties is dependent upon public approval of police actions.
- Police must secure the willing co-operation of the public in voluntary observance of the law to be able to secure and maintain the respect of the public
- The degree of co-operation of the public that can be secured diminishes proportionately to the necessity of the use of physical force
- Police seek and preserve public favor not by catering to public opinion but by constantly demonstrating absolute impartial service to the law
- Police use physical force to the extent necessary to secure observance of the law or to restore order only when the exercise of persuasion, advice and warning is found to be insufficient.
- Police, at all times, should maintain a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and the public are the police; the police being only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence

- Police should always direct their action strictly towards their functions and never appear to usurp the powers of the judiciary
- The test of police efficiency is the absence of crime and disorder, not the visible evidence of police action in dealing with it. Westminster Police Web Site (2003)

The recurring ideal throughout Peel's list of principles is the thought that the public is served by the police and that the police must be both responsible to the public and responsive to the public's (community's) needs. If the police, or whatever form of law enforcement serves a community, are to be seen as true servants of the public and not an adversarial occupying force then there must be mutual respect and understanding.

An excellent avenue for educating the public about law enforcement is the Citizen Police Academy. Hilson, J. (1994) related " The concept of a Citizen Police Academy was developed in 1977 by the Devon and Cornwall, England, Constabulary. Originally called the Police Night School, the purpose was to familiarize private citizens with the nature of police work and the organization of the police system in England. The Police Night School was taught by police personnel on a voluntary basis. The success experienced by the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary motivated several other police constabularies in England to adopt the program. In 1985, the Orlando, Florida, Police Department adopted the concept of the Police School for their agency and created the first Citizen Police Academy in the United States. The purpose of the Orlando Citizen Police

Academy was to increase understanding between the police and the citizens through education” (p.1).

The Citizen Police Academy is not a one-way lectern in which only the public is educated. Through the Citizen Police Academy the police (local law enforcement) are also educated and learn more about the needs and concerns of the community they serve. In discussing Community Policing philosophy on their web site the New England Community-Police Crime Prevention Partnership writes, (1998) “Programs such as Citizen Police Academy, Neighborhood Watches, and Bike Patrols have been instrumental in not only humanizing the police officer in the eyes of his constituents, but these programs are helping to make the police an integral part of the communities they serve.”

The Citizen Police Academy can benefit a community and the sponsoring agency in many ways. Greenburg (1991) observed, “The public’s involvement in a citizen police academy expands community-based crime prevention efforts. Academy participants become better prepared to cope with criminal incidents, are more willing to report crime, and realize the need to testify when they observe a crime” (p.11)

Members of a community leave the Citizen Police Academy with a better understanding of not only the hows of police work but also the whys. They are excited and ready to go further. They want to contribute to their community. The energy of these graduates can be harnessed for the mutual benefit of the community and the law enforcement agency. They become a ready source of ready, willing and able volunteers.

Sharp (1999) wrote “Volunteers have been used by law enforcement agencies for different jobs for years. They have done so because they have proved their worth” (p.207). The range of possibilities is only limited by the imagination of the law enforcement administration utilizing the volunteers. Hilderbrand (1993) observed “To involve citizens and make them a part of the solution to public safety issues an effective and cost-effective approach to law enforcement” (p.91).

Functions for which volunteers have been used within an agency range from clerical duties such as filing and staffing a reception area to handicap parking enforcement. One of the more well known programs involving citizen volunteers is a program wherein the volunteers form a patrol force and patrol their community, much as the uniformed law enforcement personnel. The volunteers have no “official” law enforcement authority. They serve as additional eyes and ears, reporting rather than acting. This program is commonly known as a C.O.P., or Citizens On Patrol, with varying other titles.

In 1991 the city of Fort Worth, Texas developed and implemented a program titled “Code Blue” in an effort to reduce crime and improve the quality of life.

Goals of Code Blue

- To reduce crime, with a specific focus upon violent crime.
- To improve the quality of life for all citizens.
- To increase direct citizen involvement in crime prevention efforts.
- To become a focal point through which other crime prevention programs could be developed during the year and gain prompt acceptance.

Citizens On Patrol and other programs were developed to meet these goals.

Hilson, J. (1994) (p.2).

Windham, W. (1994) related “While all of the programs involved in Code Blue have merit, perhaps the signature element of the package is Citizens on Patrol (COP), which was designed to encourage community residents to patrol their own neighborhoods and be directly responsible for reducing crimes of opportunity” (p. 54).

Hilson (1994) stated the objectives of Fort Worth’s COP program are,

- To assist the police department through observation.
- To help reduce crime in neighborhoods.
- To educate citizens on crime prevention.
- To increase public presence in the neighborhood.
- To unite residents for a dedicated reason.
- To increase crime awareness among citizens of the neighborhood.
- To provide a safe, secure environment for all neighborhood residents.
- To make a difference in the neighborhoods (p.3).

METHODOLOGY

This research has sought to determine if the Citizen Police Academy is an effective and efficient (cost effective) method to achieve the desired level of public education and understanding relating to law enforcement.

It is hypothesized that the Citizen Police Academy not only provides the needed vehicle for public education and communication but also benefits the

community as well as the sponsoring law enforcement agency. In order to gather the information and data needed to answer the research question a combination of written and telephone surveys were taken of 38 law enforcement agencies. These agencies covered a wide range of law enforcement including, but not limited to, municipal police departments, county sheriff's departments, constable's offices, marshal's offices and state agencies. Additional information was obtained from Policy Research Papers submitted to the Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas, searching the Internet as well as course evaluations completed by participants of a Citizen Police Academy.

The information gathered will be analyzed to determine the degree to which agencies and the public have (or have not) adopted the Citizen Police Academy (or not), the level of acceptance by members of the agency and the community and the cost effectiveness of the program. Additionally successful and unsuccessful programs will be analyzed to determine the key to their success or lack thereof.

FINDINGS

The Citizen Police Academy has received wide acceptance among law enforcement and the public as the benchmark program for educating the citizens of a community about the inner workings of law enforcement and establishing new levels of understanding and cooperation between law enforcement and the public. Two surveys were conducted, totaling 38 law enforcement agencies and found that 63%, 24 agencies, had an active Citizen Police Academy programs (see attached appendices). In the agencies operating academies it was found

that, across the board both the public and the members of the agency had universally accepted the programs.

Successful Citizen Police Academy programs were found to be flexible and responsive to the needs of the community. The curriculum, hours, and day of the week were selected to best accommodate the public's ability to attend. Typically the course is 10 or 11 weeks in length. Less time made the curriculum too intense and more time created increased attendance problems for the participants. Classes are held once weekly for 3 hours. The most popular time for the class is from 6:30 p.m. until 9:30 p.m., one night a week. Having class start any earlier often created a hardship for participants, not allowing enough time for them to return home from work and eat before class. Starting class later and ending later, such as 7:00 p.m. until 10:00 p.m. created the problem of keeping class members out too late.

Selection of the day of the week for the class was similar for all agencies. The days of the week with the least amount of schedule conflicts for the participants were Tuesday and Thursday. Monday was ruled out due to it being the start of a new work or school week. Wednesday was overwhelmingly a night of other commitments for class members. Friday, being the end of most people's workweek was not a day they wanted to commit to spending in a classroom. Logistically and realistically the optimum location for the academy to be held is in the police or law enforcement building. Although other facilities may be offered or even be more environmentally friendly to a classroom situation it must be remembered that the participants are there to be immersed in the police culture and the experience of being "behind the scenes" in a police department, or

sheriff's office is seen as something special and can not be duplicated.

Additionally the convenience of holding class where the instructors and items of police equipment to be used or displayed are located eliminates transportation issues.

Having a pool of motivated, qualified instructors was not found to be a problem at all. Most agencies maintain a waiting list of personnel that would like the opportunity to teach in the Citizen Police Academy. In a survey conducted of 26 agencies to determine the level of acceptance among personnel it was found that only one agency did not have a Citizen Police Academy and it listed very poor relations between itself and the community.

Instructors need no special credentials, only a knowledge of their subject matter and a willingness to share their law enforcement experiences. Instructor compensation may be one of the few issues that arise when implementing a Citizen Police Academy that could sway an agency away from the program. Other than compensation, the other related costs are few and totally at the discretion of the sponsoring agency. Copying of printed material and some type of graduation gift for the participants round out the list of usual expenditures.

Of concern to all agencies are liability questions. Maffe & Burke (1999) wrote, "Citizen Police Academies are not without limitations ... agencies may still find themselves in a law suit if a participant is injured or killed while attending the academy" (p.80). Although unlikely the opportunity for such an incident is reduced by carefully managing the type and degree of physical activity. If physical combat and restraint techniques are demonstrated but not taught the risk of injury disappears. If students are not allowed to operate fleet equipment

the threat of injury is further removed as well as the issue of damage to equipment.

One other civil liability to be considered is the possibility that a citizen may seek legal recourse and claim some type of harassment or discrimination if they have been denied the opportunity to attend the academy. If an agency has documented eligibility requirements that are reasonable and can be validated then non-selection of an applicant is not an area of concern.

Macas (1997) noted, "The overall degree of satisfaction with the Citizen Police Academy program is extremely high. The program is typically supported and embraced by the community as well as city administrators. A waiting list of candidates to attend the Citizen Police Academy is common. "A very successful program that has evolved from the Citizen Police Academy is the Citizen Police Academy Alumni Association. These associations are made up of graduates of Citizen Police Academies who have joined together to provide a support base for their local police agency" (p.10).

Several community related programs tend to spin off from a successful Citizen Police Academy. Senior Citizen Police Academy (55 and above), Youth or Junior Citizen Police Academy, COP (Citizens on Patrol), and CALM (Call and Leave Message), a senior citizen welfare contact system. The benefit to an agency, other than the positive community relations developed during the academy is the pool of volunteers formed by the graduates.

CONCLUSIONS

Does an agency need to have an active Community Policing program in order to implement a Citizen Police Academy? If we simply define Community Policing as a law enforcement agency responding to the community it serves then the answer is no. A Citizen Police Academy can be not only an individual program within the Community Policing concept but also in the absence of other programs it becomes an agencies version of Community Policing. Through the real, perceived or imagined misdeeds of law enforcement over the past several years agencies both nationally and internationally have suffered a great blow to their credibility. Although oft times falling victim to the “one bad apple spoils the whole bunch” theory, law enforcement has had to polish its image and renew its bond of respect and understanding with the public. One way that many agencies have chosen to do this is through a program of mutually beneficial public education known as the Citizen Police Academy.

Is this program an effective and efficient (cost effective) method to achieve the desired level of public education and understanding relating to law enforcement? The answer is a resounding yes. The Citizen Police Academy not only provides the needed vehicle for public education and communication but also benefits the community as well as the sponsoring law enforcement agency.

It can be concluded from this research that the Citizen Police Academy is a program that has the ability to both educate the public and provide tangible benefits to a law enforcement agency through the graduates of the academy.

The following excerpts taken from end of course evaluations completed by graduates of a Citizen Police Academy sponsored by the Farmers Branch Police

Department are reflective of many graduates' feelings. "This course has given me a new perspective and better understanding of all aspects of law enforcement" (McArtal, 1998). "I recommend this class to any one that can attend" (Earl, 1998). "Very informative and thoroughly enjoyable! Each session presented eye opening information" (Jenkinson, 1998).

The success of Community Policing programs (which, are easily staffed from the pool of volunteers created by the Citizen Police Academy) is well documented. Programs such as Fort Worth, Texas' "Code Blue" and "Citizens On Patrol" (COP) have been models for other communities.

A community's strength is dependent upon the involvement of its members in the life of the community. Every community has the need for a source of dedicated and qualified volunteers who have demonstrated their willingness to give of their time and efforts for what they see to be a worthwhile cause. The source of this needed volunteer base can be developed from the graduates of a Citizen Police Academy. A properly organized and administered Citizen Police Academy by the very nature of it's design and presentation graduates a group of highly motivated citizens ready, willing, and able to further their involvement within the community. These academy graduates are an often-underutilized resource looking for direction. The benefit of giving the graduates direction is a utilization of resources that will benefit any law enforcement agency.

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APPENDIX 1

CITIZEN POLICE ACADEMY SURVEY

(yes / no)

1. Does your agency have an active Crime Watch, Neighborhood Watch, or similar program?

2. Does your agency currently have a Citizen Police Academy?

Coordinator's name:

(If no Citizen Academy proceed to question 7)

3. Does your CPA have an alumni association?

4. If there is an alumni association, does it benefit the agency?

Briefly list any benefits:

5. Does your agency have a Citizen Patrol type program?

6. Is the Citizen Patrol Program well accepted by:

_____ Agency's sworn personnel?

_____ Citizens/community?

Briefly list any objections or problems with the program you are

aware of: _____

Your name:

Agency:

APPENDIX 2

CITIZEN POLICE ACADEMY SURVEY

(yes/no)

1. Does your agency have a Citizen Police Academy? _____
2. If yes, how long has it been in operation? _____
3. Any legal concerns encountered (civil liabilities)? _____
(Please briefly explain issue and resolution below.)
4. List any logistical problems in establishing or operating: _____
5. Is your agency satisfied with the program? _____