

The Bill Blackwood  
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas

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Is a Post-secondary Education Requirement for Selection  
as a Texas peace officer Necessary?

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An Administrative Research Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
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Leadership Command College

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## **ABSTRACT**

To require or not to require higher education for entry-level employment as a Texas peace officer is the question. There has been a continuing debate over this question and the answer is not easy to decipher. The debate must look at the necessity of the standard and weigh it against the availability of departments to meet the challenge of recruiting the higher educated applicant.

To attempt to answer the question a survey was distributed to many chief law enforcement executives to obtain current opinion for the needs and viability of such a standard being mandated within the State. The results were tabulated and reviewed for use within this paper. Along with the survey, research was conducted and reviews of articles, writings and reports to evaluate the opinions of others in this matter. The results of this evaluation process indicate that a large majority of the chief law enforcement executives and many of the authors of the writings all feel that a higher education standard should be implemented. When it will be implemented is still an unanswered question.

The conclusion of this research paper is that the need for a higher education standard can only benefit the law enforcement community as well as produce a better-educated, well-rounded officer to meet and serve society overall.

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## INTRODUCTION

The peace officer of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century must be prepared to handle the ever changing technological advances, laws, community expectations, and a myriad of other duties and responsibilities that are placed upon him/her. The community expects today's officer to be well versed in criminal law, investigative techniques, procedural matters, family matters, counseling, and advisement for everything and anything, and to do it in a professional manner. In order to meet these needs it is expected that today's officers will have a higher degree of education than their counterparts of years past. It has long been the area of discussion among leading criminal justice practitioners, the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement and The State Legislature as to whether or not a requirement of post-secondary education courses for an applicant will allow the applicant to be better prepared to address the needs of the community he/she serves.

In order to examine and evaluate the question and concept of mandating a requirement of post-secondary education courses, a review of literature from books, journals, and government reports will take place. A survey will be mailed to a number of police departments across the state in order to solicit the opinions of the agency's chief executive on this subject. The survey was presented to members of the 50<sup>th</sup> LEMIT Class while at Module 1. The results will be added to those of the solicited departments. It is anticipated that, at the end of the research and the survey, a consensus will be reached as to whether the police profession of today should be thought of as a true profession, not just an occupation, by the mandating of post-secondary education courses for entry-level employment as a Texas peace officer. The discussion of whether or not policing is a profession versus an occupation is another subject that should be addressed in a different paper. The inclusion of the "profession" terminology is intended to

clarify the perceived need of a post-secondary educational requirement as seen by those who are in the midst of the discussion of a mandate for the educational requirement.

The purpose of this paper is to show that the mandating of a post-secondary educational requirement for entry-level law enforcement officers is justified and thus a real possibility in the very near future. The principal question to be examined is whether a post-secondary education requirement for selection as a Texas peace officer is necessary?

The outcome of the research on this topic will become available to those who are looking at the concept of a mandated requirement of post-secondary education courses for entry-level peace officers. Through a review of this research it is desired that the reader will be better informed and able to make a decision on the need of an educational requirement for employment within their agency.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Familiarity of the current legislative requirements is a must prior to addressing the need for post-secondary educational requirements for entry-level Texas peace officers. The Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education (TCLE) sets the minimum standards for initial licensure as a Texas peace officer. The current standards begin with the minimum educational requirements of having passed a general educational development (GED) examination showing a high school level; be a high school graduate; or have twelve (12) semester credit hours from an accredited college or university. Additionally these standards allow for the initial licensure of a Texas peace officer if an applicant is 18 years of age and has received an associate's degree from an accredited college or university (TCLE 2003). The inclusion of these specific educational requirements tend to indicate the increasing desire of the

legislative bodies to seek qualified applicants for Texas law enforcement who have completed some higher education credits.

The concept of desiring higher education credits from applicants is not new; however, it has not always been accepted by those setting the standards. Traditional emphasis had been placed on the consideration of an officer's physical attributes, such as height and weight, physical strength, ability with firearms and in some cases the political connectivity of the applicant. The most noted early exception to this mindset is attributed to the man that many recognize as the "Father of modern professional policing", August Vollmer (McNamara 1995).

Vollmer, a law enforcement administrator in Berkley California from 1905 through 1932, was an early advocate for the need of a higher education for law enforcement officers. He recruited heavily from nearby colleges, such as The University of California at Berkley, for applicants to his department. Vollmer's ideal officer was one who combined the physical attributes with mental skills, and he firmly believed that these mental skills were developed through higher education (Polk & Armstrong 2001).

Vollmers call for higher education for law enforcement applicants and officers was echoed in the Wickersham Commissions "Report on Police" of 1931. The Commission did not establish a higher education requirement for employment in law enforcement but they alluded to the requirement with statements that showed the value of a college education for law enforcement officers. Their report indicated that every officer should be educationally sound and they observed that, through higher education, the police officer could hope to cope with the current and future crime problems facing them and society (Polk & Armstrong 2001).

Despite this call for a higher educational requirement for entry-level employment as a police officer, very little was done to perpetuate the requirement until the 1960's and 1970's.

Criminal justice practitioners were able to have funding included in the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1965. The Law Enforcement Educational Plan (LEEP) was instituted to provide loans and grants for pre-service and in service higher education. This funding became a reality in 1967. In 1970, 14.6% of American police officers had completed two or more years of college credits. In 1988 a national survey, commissioned by the Police Executive Research Forum, found that 44.7% of American police officers had completed two or more years of higher education, a 30% increase (Carter & Sapp 1990). This emphasis toward a higher education was largely attributed to the deviation of the mindset from law enforcement being only to control crime to human interaction (Armstrong 1998).

This mindset shift had begun to add the requirements of a higher education to the physical attributes for employment. Several of the higher education advantages as a bona fide requirement included:

- An enhanced understanding of police functions and the role of police
- An increased knowledge of the importance of the police in society's presence
- An improved sensitivity to the problems of people
- A better ability to communicate
- The development of skills
- An improved capability for exercising discretion
- The refinement of analytical qualities
- The consideration of moral and ethical implications of police work
- The development of personal values that are consistent with police organizational goals and objectives (Flores 1997).

Over the years other advocates of a higher education requirement for entry-level employment as a police officer have noted that college educations improve mandatory skills such as communication (written and oral), critical thinking, decision making, and a better understanding of human relations (Carter & Sapp 1990). Even with this increased interest in higher education, law enforcement has tended to be stagnate in increasing the educational requirement. This

stagnation has been an on-going matter since the early 1960's and before. Other professions have evolved their educational requirements over the years to increase the need for higher education. If the field of medicine had kept its early 1900 standards, a doctor of today would not be required to be a high school graduate (Campbell 1997). As time has passed, this stagnation has begun to be stirred up and moved forward. Over the most recent years the concept of a better-educated police officer has emerged in society. As society has relegated the role of the police officer to the handling of the social service system an expectation of a better-educated officer has arisen. The link that joins police, judicial, and correctional agencies into a system is a client drive system. The ability to handle the human interaction skills of those who staff the system have led to the needs for higher education standards (Armstrong 1998).

As the change from crime control to human interaction has taken place, society's interest in criminal justice has opened the area of participation of the political bodies in developing the standards necessary for our homeland peace keepers. In today's population a higher percentage of citizens have attended some higher education courses or have graduated from a college or university. This higher level of education of the citizenry tends to drive the need for a higher level of education for our entry-level police officers.

The belief of the need for a higher education requirement for entry-level employment is still not universally embraced. In his article in the "Justice Quarterly", Worden wrote that police officers who attained a college degree prior to entering into the field of law enforcement did not differ substantially from those who were less educated. This educational difference was also noted in the attitudes affecting the officers' ability to get along with his or her superiors (Worden 1990). Additional concerns over the needs of higher educational requirements have included the fear of a discrimination suit by minorities that may not have the financial advantage of going to

college, the uncertainty in being able to validate the higher educational requirement as a bona-fide occupational qualification, and many other areas of concern. The feeling also has been expressed that the college educated law enforcement officer may perform less effectively than a less educated counterpart. There seems to be an attitude that higher education seems to be associated with some undesirable effects on police attitudes and behavior (Sterling 1974). Thus the question of a higher education requirement is obviously controversial.

There does appear to be sufficient evidence to support the assertion that a higher education requirement does improve the quality of policing. A higher educational requirement provides both tangible and non-tangible benefits. Police officers gain new skills and knowledge while improving critical thinking and expanding their experiences in dealing with diverse cultural and racial groups (Carter & Sapp 1990). The police agency benefits from a better-educated officer who has improved written and oral communications skills as well as a better understanding of human relations. The educated police officer applicant benefits from improved academy performance and better peer relationships (Worden 1990). Additionally a higher percentage of police officers are adult students who have their own experiences and understanding of the social world and their point of view may be correct (Stevens 1999). They find themselves at the core of the argument. Police departments should begin to place less emphasis on educating the recruited and instead begin recruiting the educated. Police departments should begin the process of requiring the applicants to have a baccalaureate degree as there are sufficient numbers of college graduates who show an interest in police careers. The downside however is that administrators and politicians must recognize that a higher educational requirement is only one of the many conditions necessary for changing the face of policing and not expect higher education to be the only answer (Sherman 1978).

One Texas department that has found success in having the requirement of a higher education background for entry-level is the Arlington Police Department. For the past sixteen (16) years, the Arlington Police Department has recognized the need for higher education. The Department requires a four year college degree for entry-level applicants as well as for current officers who desire to progress within the Department. The requirement added a higher level of professionalism and innovation as well as an increase in female and minority applicants. The Department has already realized what many employers know, that degrees are expected in today's marketplace. The Department also recognizes that there is no substitute for experience, but the skills that people learn in a classroom and on a campus are essential for today's officer. Since the new recruits come to the Department with the academic training and basic computer skills, the Department is able to spend more time teaching the essentials of police issues and tactics (Bowen 2002).

In 1997 Dr. Craig Campbell produced an executive summary from the study "The Impact of Human Resource Development Activities on the Career Development and Professionalism of Texas peace officers". One of the twenty-three (23) hypotheses reviewed the need of a higher educational requirement for entry-level applicants. In the study it was recommended that a definite number of college hours should be required and then incrementally increased to require a bachelor's degree for entry into Texas law enforcement. It was also noted that the fears about the impact on minorities were not based on facts and the study went on to find that women and minorities have comparable levels of college with the exception of Hispanics. Higher education needs to become more practical and academies need to become developmentally based. A final note of the study was that TCLE should amend its rule of forty (40) hours of in-service every two years to allow college credit hours to meet the standard (Campbell 1997).

The literature review overall indicates that a higher education requirement is an important tool that should be added to the “tools of the trade” that we ask for, teach, and provide to applicants for careers in Texas law enforcement. There is a need that must be addressed and met.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The primary question that needs to be addressed is if a secondary educational requirement of applicants for entry-level into the Texas law enforcement community is necessary? In order to address this primary question, a survey questionnaire was developed asking five basic questions. The survey was then mailed to a number of police departments across the state in order to solicit the opinions of the departments’ chief executive on this subject. It was also given to the officers attending the 50<sup>th</sup> Class of the Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas. The anticipated results of the research and survey is that there is indeed a real necessity for post-secondary educational requirements for those who desire to be selected as a Texas peace officer.

The questions asked for their opinion as to whether their respective departments required a minimum of a post-secondary education or minimum of post-secondary course hours for entry-level employment with their agency and, if so, the number of required hours. They were also asked if they believed that the requirement of a post-secondary education or a minimum number of hours should be required by their departments and if answered in the affirmative, should their departments set the minimum standard or should The State. The question as to whether or not they felt a post-secondary education or minimum number of course hours provided a higher qualified individual for entry-level employment was asked. Finally, they were asked to speculate as to whether or not a requirement of a post-secondary education would be required by The State

within the next five years for entry-level employment as a Texas peace officer. The results of this survey will be looked at to establish a consensus of the recipients as to whether they felt that the need for a post-secondary education or a minimum number of post-secondary course hours is needed and is an asset to the recruitment of entry-level officers. The survey produced an 87% return on those sent out. The raw data will be reviewed to produce a percentage response to each of the five questions as well as the auxiliary data that was requested in questions one and two. In these two areas it was requested that if an affirmative answer was given then each recipient was asked to provide either the number of post-secondary hours required or if a degree was required by their department. This auxiliary information will also be included in the findings of this report. The findings will show a breakout of each question as it was asked. It should be noted that in several instances, questions were asked and personal opinions of the executives were solicited; however, exact reasons for their opinions were not asked in order to maintain a brief and workable survey.

## **FINDINGS**

A total of 107 surveys were distributed either by mail, electronic email, or in person. The number of returned surveys provided an 87% return rate. The overall response to the various questions indicates that the majority of the respondents felt that a post-secondary education or at the least some post-secondary education hours should be required and would produce a higher qualified individual for entry-level employment. The results all showed a heavy preference towards post-secondary hours over a full degree plan. Each of the questions will be reviewed on an individual basis below.

Question One: This question asked if the department currently requires either a post-secondary degree or hours for entry-level employment and, if the answer is in the affirmative, then what is required. A response of 36% indicated that they currently require some form of post-secondary education requirement. Only two of these respondents indicated that their respective departments required a full degree for entry-level employment. The remainder required varied number of post-secondary course hours for employment. The hours ranged from fifteen (15) to seventy-five (75) credit hours. Of the total respondents, 62% indicated that their department had no requirement of a post-secondary education.

Question Two: The next question asked each respondent if they believed that a post-secondary degree or number of post-secondary course hours should be required. Once again, if the respondent answered in the affirmative, it was asked whether the requirement should be a degree or a minimum number of hours. Question Two was the reverse of Question One in an affirmative response. A result of 62% indicated that they personally believe that there should be a requirement for entry-level applicants to have some post-secondary education. Within these respondents the number that would require a degree is nine (9) with the remainder asking for course hours ranging from fifteen (15) to eighty (80) hours.

Question Three: In this question the personal belief of each respondent is queried as to their feelings that a post-secondary education and or post-secondary course hours produces a higher qualified applicant for entry-level employment. A three-to-one response was in the affirmative. The overwhelming response of 74% feel that by asking for a higher education, either a degree or minimum hours, the individual entering into law enforcement will be a higher qualified person.

Question Four: This question asked if a requirement for a post-secondary education or course hours should be mandated by the respective departments or by The State. In this area the

respondents were fairly divided. A response of 57% stated that their department should be responsible for mandating any educational requirement beyond the current state requirement. The remaining 41% felt that the requirement should be a mandate from The State.

Question Five: The final question asked the respondents to look to the near future (within the next five years) and see if the requirement for a post-secondary degree will be required for employment as a Texas peace officer. A resounding 73% of the respondents answered that there will not be a post-secondary requirement for entry-level employment. Several of the respondents to the survey added a hand written note to the end of this particular question. The majority of the comments indicated that they hoped this would not happen and that “smaller department chiefs” do not and would not support this requirement. This seems to be based on the conception that a higher education requirement would mandate higher entry-level salaries for the smaller departments that face financial constraints.

Based on the final percentages garnered in the survey, it is evident that 62% of the chief law enforcement executives that responded to the survey feel that a requirement for higher education should be necessary and 74% feel that the requirement will provide a higher qualified applicant. A note on this area is that there were no parameters given or received to define a “higher qualified applicant” (would be a great concept for another paper). Finally, even with the high feelings for the need of a higher education requirement, seventy-three percent (73%) of the respondents do not believe that a requirement for entry-level into Texas law enforcement will become a mandate in the next five years.

## **DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS**

The stated purpose of this research paper is to examine and evaluate the necessity of post-secondary courses for entry-level employment as a Texas peace officer. In order to examine this issue, the question is asked as to whether a post-secondary educational requirement for selection as a Texas Peace Office is necessary. The review of the literature and the results of the survey that was administered to Texas law enforcement chief executives all indicate that the question is still being debated and that no definitive answer has been reached to the benefit of either side of the debate. According to the most recent discussions and readings it can be accepted that there is a move toward the greater acceptance of a higher education requirement for all entry-level law enforcement. When this move will take place however is still the source of the debate. The survey indicated that over 60% of the chief law enforcement executives feel that there is a very positive aspect to the requirement of higher education courses for entry-level employment. The same group of chief executives showed over a 70% feeling that there would not be a mandated requirement of higher education for entry-level employment within the next five years. This dichotomy of the issue shows the diverse feelings and expectations of the law enforcement community. With this in mind it is easy to see the difficulty that faces the legislative bodies and the chief law enforcement executives in trying to establish a workable standard that will benefit both law enforcement and society as a whole. By reviewing the outcome of the research, the survey results, and the historical information, it can be concluded that there is a consensus as to the necessity to require post-secondary educational courses for entry-level employment. The same consensus was found in the belief that such a mandate would not be required within the next five years.

If this debate over the necessity for a higher education requirement for entry-level employment is not resolved, policing will continue to see many frustrated police officers who are unhappy with their jobs and who are considering a career change (Dantzker 1991). There is a paradigm shift in policing and police officers must become problem solvers who have developed the capacity to think critically through situations they are thrust into (Campbell 1997). Higher education may better prepare a candidate for a law enforcement career but at this time there is not enough empirical research and data to give a definitive answer. This lack of absolute data and research was also noted in the responses to the survey in which the respondents felt that post-secondary educational requirements are needed. However, their departments do not require them. With a ratio of 2 to 3, it was also felt that, should post-secondary educational requirements become a standard, the respective departments should mandate the requirement and not the state.

It is only through a continuing push for a higher education requirement standard that our profession will benefit by producing a quality, well-rounded and educated police officer. Not only will the law enforcement profession benefit, the communities they service will also be better served.

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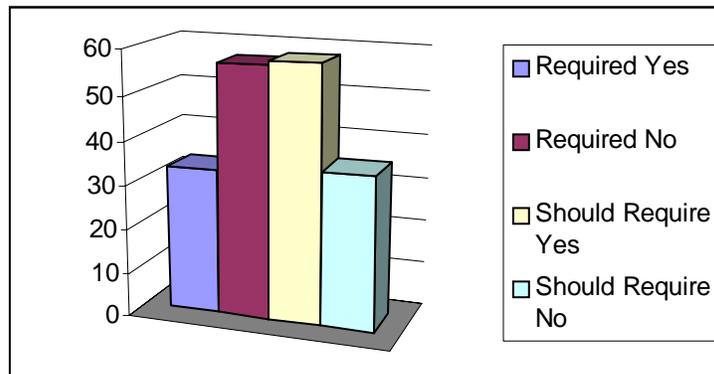
## APPENDIX 1

Responses to questionnaire titled “Post-Secondary Education as a Requirement for Employment as a Texas peace officer discussing present and future requirements for secondary education (Table I and Graph I)

**Table I**

Question	Yes	No
Is secondary education required for entry-level employment?	33	57
Should secondary education be required for entry –level employment?	58	35
Does secondary education provide a higher qualified individual for entry-level employment?	69	24
Will a college degree be required for entry-level employment within the next five years?	25	68

**Graph I**



Responses to questionnaire titled “Post-Secondary Education as a Requirement for Employment as a Texas peace officer discussing the official mandate of requirements for secondary education (Table II)

**Table II**

Question	State	Department
Should secondary education be mandated by the state or by the department?	38	53

## APPENDIX 2

Date

Chief of Police  
Nm Police Department  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip

Dear Chief Name:

I am writing to request the assistance of your department in providing answers to the attached survey. I am currently enrolled in the Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas Leadership Command College. As a requirement of the Institute, I am working on an administrative research paper, which will address an area of concern to the law enforcement profession.

I have chosen to investigate the topic of the necessity of a post-secondary education as a requirement for entry-level employment as a Texas peace officer. In order to collect the feelings of many of the Texas law enforcement agencies, I am sending this survey to department's chief administrators across the state.

The survey is a one page, five-question survey that will only take a few minutes of your time. I realize that your time is valuable and limited however I am asking that you complete the survey and return it in the enclosed self addressed envelope.

Thank you for you assistance and time in this matter.

Sincerely,

W. Jay Carey, Assistant Chief of Police  
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**APPENDIX 3**

**QUESTIONNAIRE  
Post-Secondary Education as a Requirement for  
Employment as a Texas peace officer**

1.) Does your department require post-secondary education or a minimum of college hours for entry-level employment?

YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

If Yes:

Number of college hours \_\_\_\_\_ /or/

Bachelor Degree \_\_\_\_\_

2.) Do you believe that a college degree or a minimum number of college hours should be required for entry-level employment?

YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

If Yes:

College Degree \_\_\_\_\_

College Hours \_\_\_\_\_ (put minimum number suggested)

3.) Do you believe that a college degree or a minimum number of hours provides a higher qualified individual for entry-level employment?

YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

4.) Do you believe that a college degree or a minimum number of college hours should be mandated by the state or be a departmental decision?

STATE \_\_\_\_\_ DEPARTMENT \_\_\_\_\_

5.) Do you believe that a college degree will be required for entry-level employment as a Texas peace officer within the next five (5) years?

YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_