

**THE BILL BLACKWOOD
LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE OF TEXAS**

The Pros and Cons of an
Educational Incentive Program

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by
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ABSTRACT

For the past one hundred years law enforcement in America has been struggling with the question, " should our police officials be college educated or not?" Many examples of this trend exist from the early 1900's in Berkeley, California, to the federal programs of the 1970's, and now the current cry for police officers to be better prepared to face the battles of today. There is little argument that a college degree would provide a better rounded police officer. The argument arises over the issue of whether it is necessary to provide incentives for the officer to obtain that degree, and if there is a way to make it cost effective for the cities. The answer to both those questions is yes. By the recruitment and retention of better qualified officers the cities can only benefit.

Introduction

The subject of this project is the benefits of an educational pay incentive program, and the impact this will have upon the recruitment and retention of the most qualified law enforcement officer. I intend to address the need for a better educated officer and offer a cost effective method of producing and retaining these officers.

The purpose of the research will be to determine the need for police officers to achieve levels of training which exceed the minimum required standards. Additionally, I intend to determine the need for departments to provide educational incentives in order to assist officers in obtaining higher education.

The project will address the issue of identifying a way to increase the recruitment and retention of not only better qualified officers but also the recruitment of officers motivated to continue their education.

This paper will also address the issue of providing a cost effective incentive for officers already employed by the department to obtain the increasing level of education becoming necessary to remain most effective in the field.

The intended audience is the administrators and the elected officials who approve policy change within city government. The hope is that policy makers will agree with the need to provide officers with an incentive to obtain higher education.

I intend to utilize articles in professional journals and publications as a source of information for this project. Additionally, I will interview policy making individuals of different police departments to determine various viewpoints. I will also review established policies within police departments.

My intended outcome of this project is that individuals with responsibility for approving change within the agency will review current policies and procedures as they relate to education and determine whether changes are necessary to not only remain current with police recruitment and education but also to offer a competitive financial incentive for those officers continuing and obtaining higher education. It is also my intent that these individuals will concur that establishing an educational incentive program benefits not only the officers who take part in the program, but the citizens who live within the area served.

Historical and Legal Context

The topic of requiring police officers to obtain a college education is not new. During his tenure as Berkeley, California'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) For decades, the call for professionalism in the law enforcement field focused on increasing the educational levels of police officers. The President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice (1967) and the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals (1973) both supported the 4-year degree as a prerequisite for employment in law enforcement.(Brecci 1994)

In the late 1960's, the United States experienced massive social change. And, unfortunately, law enforcement officers, as peacekeepers and symbols of government, found themselves in the middle of this conflict. All too often, questions were being asked of law enforcement. Did the police respond properly to civil unrest and civil disorder? Were the police addressing changing patterns of crime sufficiently? Why was there conflict between the police and minorities? Was the vision of a "professional police" officer realistic? (Carter and Sapp 1992)

As of 1974, only three states had plans to implement a statewide educational incentive pay program for police officers. Although some literature has been written in the recent past on the need for police officers with education beyond high school, virtually nothing has been written about providing incentive pay to officers with a college education. The Report on Police cited several municipal governments that provided incentive pay to their officers based on the officers level of education; however, only one state, Florida, was revealed to have a statewide program. (Dulin 1976)

Unfortunately, the on-going debate over the potential benefits of receiving a college education dominated the 1970's and 1980's. 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. (Garner 1998)

The average educational level of police officers has risen steadily over the past two decades. Only a small proportion of departments formally require college for employment or promotion. Many, however, have educational support policies and an "informal" criterion of college for selection and promotion of officers. Options include tuition assistance/reimbursement, education pay incentive programs, and on-duty class attendance. Minorities are being recruited effectively and hired with educational levels competitive with those of whites. Women are also being recruited successfully, with mean educational levels nearly a year higher than those of males. (Carter and Sapp 1990)

In the 1970's a program called Law Enforcement Education Program (LEEP) was established. This program was designed to stimulate criminal justice personnel to attend college. This was done

by offering financial incentives for the officers to attend college. Historically, what does this all mean? It has taken law enforcement as a community almost 100 years to determine that a college education is an important part of establishing itself as a true profession which by definition is a learned occupation. (Websters 1993) However the law enforcement officer in 1998 is faced with the same question as the officers of the last 100 years: **How do I pay for my college education?** At the same time the officer is trying to obtain an education the agency is trying to keep a maintainable budget. In the 1980's this federal money or (LEEP) became nonexistent. And with the lack of federal funding, the importance of officer education began to change or shift to the increase in violent crime and drugs. In the 1990's we are seeing yet another major shift in law enforcement. Policing has sought a return to the high degree of citizen involvement that it once possessed with the use of a Community Policing approach. (Stone 1998) In my opinion, this a good thing, but a name used to describe what we as a profession should have always been doing, serving the community we were sworn to protect. In order to more effectively serve our communities, I think it is agreed that a college education is helpful. With that understanding, we come full circle to the issue of an educational incentive program. And finally as (SunTzu) stated in the Art of War. " So it is said that if you know others and know yourself, you will not be imperiled in a hundred battles; If you do not know others but know yourself, you will win one and lose one; If you do not know others and do not know yourself, you will be imperiled in every single battle." I think that this is significant because in our battle as police officers to better serve our citizens we need to know others, and as they become higher educated we as a profession also need to increase our education to know what they know, or just to give us a better insight on their perspective.

Review of Literature or Practice

Are college educated officers better? According to research done by Carter and Sapp a conclusive "yes" or "no" answer to this question could not be found. But looking at the type of policing that the Fair Oaks Ranch Police Department practices the knowledge and skills officers are required to have under community policing appear to be tailored specifically to college education. It appears that a college education makes an officer a more effective decision maker, a better service provider, a better communicator, and one who is more responsive to to the police mission. (Carter and Sapp 1992) According to a report prepared by Lt. Tommy Ingram of the Arlington Texas Police Department Internal Affairs Division the Arlington Police Department had a decrease of citizen complaints of 62% from 1996 to 1997. The report went on to say that total complaint investigations have fallen to their lowest level in seven years. In 1986 the Arlington Police Department has required a 4 year degree. But more importantly in the last 4 years the department has added an additional 200 new officers. I don't think it would be possible to argue that the addition of this many college educated officers and the reduction of complaints are not related.

Since the reemphasis on education of law enforcement officials has begun, a few national surveys have been conducted on the issue of educational incentive programs. Fifty police departments across the United States serving populations of 250,000 or more were surveyed to obtain data relating to the administration and operation of large departments. The survey consisted of an analysis of the collected data and tally sheets of the information submitted by each of the participating departments. The median cost per citizen of policing ranged from \$43 to \$83 among surveyed police agencies. Between 41 and 86 percent of personnel were assigned to the patrol function, a median of about 55 percent. Median percentage of sworn personnel at the rank of sergeant varied from 4 to 27 among various regional and city-size groups, and the median percentage

of civilians in the departments ranged from 11 to 28 among different groups. Forty-four of the departments offered incentive pay for college credits earned by members. (Heaphy 1978)

Approximately thirty states have mandatory police training which requires all new officers to complete basic training. However, the creation of such training programs did not occur easily. Kentucky's experience was typical of the programs in most states. In Kentucky, before 1966, a great majority of Kentucky police and sheriffs departments provided no training to their officers. Legislation to make minimum training standards mandatory in Kentucky was defeated in 1968 and again in 1970. However an alternative bill supporting voluntary police training has been successful. The basic police training course is designed not only to teach laws, police techniques, and skills, but also to develop new attitudes toward many law enforcement problems. Incentive pay programs have been designed to induce officers to complete their education and a minimum annual salary of \$4,350, based on a forty-hour week, has been set. Already, 1,630 Kentucky policemen (out of a total of 2,900 believed to be eligible) have completed the necessary forty hours of in-service training. Thirty-nine have completed the basic course and thirty-one are now in basic training. (Stone 1973)

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics Local Police Departments, 1993 28 percent of all police departments offered some type of educational incentive, but by contrast 31 percent of agencies who serve a population of between 2,500 and 9,999 offer an educational incentive. (Reaves 1996) The 2,500 to 9,999 population category is where the City of Fair Oaks Ranch would fall serving approximately 5,000 people.

While conducting research for this paper I contacted numerous police departments in Texas to determine what the practices and policies of other police departments were. My findings are as follows; The city of Hurst Police Department states, "The employee will receive reimbursement

after presenting his or her grades reflecting successful completion of the training program. Reimbursement will be made as follows: 100% for an A or B, 50% for a C." The Beaumont Police Department reimburses those employees who take college correspondence courses or attend college courses which are directly job related. Costs covered include tuition, fees, books, and other related costs. The employee must make no less than a C grade to receive reimbursement. The City of Pflugerville will pay the tuition for course of study that are directly related to the duties and responsibilities of the position occupied by the employee (not to exceed \$1,000 in any one fiscal year).

A comparison was done between my department and departments in close proximity and with populations of 30,000 or less. The departments surveyed were Alamo Heights, Balcones Heights, Boerne, Castle Hills, Cibola, Converse, Fair Oaks Ranch, Fredericksburg, Hondo, Kerrville, Kirby, Leon Valley, Live Oak, New Braunfels, San Marcos, Schertz, Seguin, Selma, Universal City, Uvalde, and Windcrest. Out of these departments only Alamo Heights, Converse, Fredericksburg, Hondo, Leon Valley, San Marcos, Seguin, and Uvalde offered any type of reimbursement program. Alamo Heights, Balcones Heights, and Hondo were the only departments offering incentive for officers who have obtained a degree. This seems to place the local percentage of departments offering an educational incentive slightly lower than the national average. The overall results of this survey are summarized in the following table.

<u>CITY</u>	<u>CERTIFICATION</u>	<u>COLLEGE</u>	<u>REIMBURSE</u>
ALAMO HEIGHTS	I \$300/A \$600 per year	A \$600/B \$900 per year	Assist Prog
BALCONES HEIGHTS	I 5%/ A 5% RAISE	Considered w/cert.	No
BOERNE	NO	NO	NO
CASTLE HILLS	NO	NO	NO
CIBOLO	NO	NO	NO
CONVERSE	NO	NO	Tuition
FAIR OAKS RANCH	NO	NO	NO
FREDERICKSBURG	NO	NO	Tuition/Bks
HONDO	I \$25/A \$50/M \$75 month	\$50 month any degree	Tuition
KERRVILLE	I \$25/A \$50/M \$100 month	NO	NO
KIRBY	NO	NO	NO
LEON VALLEY	NO	NO	Tuition
LIVE OAK	NO	NO	NO
NEW BRAUNFELS	I \$25/A \$50/M \$75 month	NO	NO
SAN MARCOS	YES	NO	Tuition
SCHERTZ	Step for cert completion	NO	NO
SEGUIN	NO	NO	Tuition
SELMA	NO	NO	NO
UNIVERSAL CITY	NO	NO	NO
UVALDE	NO	NO	80% Tui/Bks
WINDCREST	NO	NO	NO

Discussion of Relevant Issues

While there are several important issues, one concern seems to be the most consistent. That is, the ever growing belief that law enforcement officials should and need to be college educated to perform their duties. The law enforcement profession is both ever changing, as technology advances, and never changing in its primary focus on serving the citizens with proactive law enforcement. Community Policing requires officers to deal with the public on a one on one basis. As society becomes better educated, so must we. A recent survey of police chiefs revealed that within 10 years a college degree would be an entry level requirement for about 50% of those surveyed. The majority of departments not requiring a degree to enter law enforcement would require one for advancement. (Sanchez 1997)

One issue I feel is very relevant is the fact that most departments offering some type of incentive offer it only if the officer is taking course work in an area or field which directly relates to his duties. One of the strong arguments that is being made in support of police officers being college educated is that it gives an officer the ability to better deal with or serve the public. Since the vast majority of citizens in the United States do not have a degree in criminal justice, would it not make better sense to encourage our officers to study a wide variety of topics?

Of the departments surveyed in the area surrounding Fair Oaks Ranch, the majority offering an incentive for education did not support the officer once the degree was completed by providing a monetary incentive for having completed the degree. Providing money for someone to work on and receive a degree would greatly help the recruitment of officers but without continued incentives the retention of that college educated officer would be hindered.

What is the monetary value that could be placed on a college degree? It is difficult to

measure the public's acceptance of the police. Can you measure the value or benefit of the ideas which would be developed by these officers gaining insight they never would have without attending these classes. Benefits to the department or to the community as a whole, are many, but again somewhat unmeasurable. A quote often attributed to Einstein sums it up "Everything that counts can't be counted, and everything that can be counted may not count." Some would argue that a college degree shows that a person is more responsible, or has the desire to accomplish more, or that he or she just may have more initiative, but could a degree just be another accomplishment for these people? I believe because of the nature of this profession most officers have the desire to accomplish many of these things they simply may not have the money.

An educational incentive pay program would be financially beneficial to both the officer and to the department. For this program to be beneficial I feel it needs to offer an incentive or reimbursement plan while the officer is attending classes. This would allow for the recruitment of officers motivated to continue their education. Officers who have been employed since prior to the reemphasis on higher education would be provided the means to attend classes to combine formal education with years of valuable "street" experience. This program also needs to offer an incentive for the officer once he or she has finished the degree. By not providing a incentive after completion of the degree the department could be used as a stop over while the officer receives help funding their degree.

The cost of the program recommended below would be approximately \$1000.00 per year per officer working on a degree, \$1,200.00 per year for each officer with a 4 year degree or advanced certificate, and \$600.00 per year for each officer with a 2 year degree or intermediate certificate.

Conclusions / Recommendations

The purpose of this research is to present the benefits of an educational pay incentive program, and the impact this will have upon the recruitment and retention of the officers of the Fair Oaks Ranch Police Department. This topic is relevant in today recruitment trend. It is my belief that although this is a small department the recruitment and retention of quality officers is of the utmost importance, even more so perhaps than a large department. Our officers often work alone without a supervisor on duty and are often times placed in situations where they must mediate or intervene in their dealings with highly educated people. Also because of the small number of officers there is a great disruption in the organization of the department if even one officer leaves the agency.

My recommendations for implementing an affordable educational incentive pay program into my departments policy is as follows. To reimburse the officer 100 percent for an A, 75 percent for a B, and 50 percent for a C. It would also seem practical to put a \$1000.00 cap on the amount of money which could be awarded to each officer per fiscal year. In addition to offering an incentive to get a degree I feel it is imperative to offer an incentive for the officers who complete their degree. A plan could be established to pay a set amount of \$50.00 a month for an associates degree or intermediate certificate and a \$100.00 a month set amount for a bachelor's degree, or advanced certificate. Establishing a set amount rather than basing the increase on a percentage of salary would keep costs down for the city. By offering an incentive for obtaining a degree it provides the officer who is willing to put forth an extra amount of effort to better him or herself a competitive salary for a degreed individual and at the same time helps to eliminate the need for across the board raises to recruit and retain the best qualified officers.

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