

The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas

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College Education:
Minimum Requirements for Texas Peace Officer Licensing

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An Administrative Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
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by
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ABSTRACT

The Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education (TCLEOSE) oversees the peace officer licensing in the State of Texas. This board sets minimum standards to become a peace officer and training requirements to maintain a peace officers license in the state of Texas. Like other out-of-state peace officer licensing boards, TCLEOSE has attempted to raise the minimum education requirements to include a college education. Although raising the standards has been a topic for decades, it has not been done. Because these requirements affect all those in law enforcement, much research has been conducted and many articles have been written on this topic. These articles were reviewed, and surveys were conducted regarding the issue. The law enforcement community has different views on whether or not to have such a requirement. The smaller agency without a doubt has the most reservations about requiring a college degree. Requiring some college education prior to becoming a licensed peace officer would affect the applicant pool, the advantages would outweigh the disadvantages. The question still remains as to how many hours of college would be needed and what courses would be required.

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Introduction

Throughout the years of law enforcement in the state of Texas, there has been the issue of raising the minimum education requirement to include college education for a basic Peace Officer license. There have been proposals to the Texas State legislatures to amend the current standards to include higher education requirements. These proposals have been rejected for various reasons.

The purpose of this paper is to determine if the current minimum education requirements from the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Standards and Education (TCLEOSE) is sufficient or should be raised to include college education prior to becoming licensed as a Texas Peace Officer. TCLEOSE currently requires a general educational development (GED) certificate, a high school diploma, or 12-semester hours credit from an accredited college or university. It is hypothesized that raising requirements will not be favored and yet it is also hypothesized that there is a need for higher educated officers.

The research will present what effect this proposal would have on Texas law enforcement organizations, from small to large departments. It will also show the advantages and disadvantages of having college-educated officers. The comparison of Texas with other state peace officer licensing commissions will be noted.

During the research, there will be various methods of inquiry used in writing the administrative research paper (ARP). These methods will include: LEMIT papers, journals, and surveys. It is anticipated that the outcome and findings will favor not raising the requirement due to hiring challenges for most departments in the state. However, it is also anticipated that there will be mixed opinions from law enforcement officials and researchers about the topic.

At the conclusion of the research, the outcome should provide a better understanding of

the factors that have kept the minimum education requirement from being raised to include college education and of the beliefs and facts of researchers who have studied the effects of not having a college-educated officer compared to that of having a college-educated officer. The implications of the research paper are to prepare not only the City of Lacy Lakeview for this realistic possibility but other departments as well. There are very few law enforcement agencies in the state of Texas that already require a minimum standard of college education. The departments that do not currently have this standard in place will have budgeting constraints in attracting college graduates and problems in longevity. The findings from this paper should benefit the law enforcement community if TCLEOSE ever requires a college education to become licensed as a peace officer.

Review of Literature

While researching the literature on higher education standards for police officers, it was found that this issue has been around for decades and has been researched by many. Education standards for peace officers can be traced back to the “father” of policing, August Vollmer. In 1936 Vollmer, who is credited with beginning what is now modern-day policing in America, believed that the complex work of police officers required the type of education and training comparable to that of most skilled professions (Vollmer, 1936).

In 1997, Dr. Craig Campbell with the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Standards and Education (TCLEOSE) wrote that the state of Texas should create a program similar to the Law Enforcement Education Program (LEEP), which the federal government used in the 1970s with such great impact on the educational levels of law enforcement (Campbell, 1997). The Texas legislature passed such a bill in 1989, but it was vetoed by the governor. Campbell also wrote that the 21st century calls for a more educated officer not a less educated officer. He

believed that if law enforcement is to attain professional status, major decisions will need to be made to change its course (Campbell, 1997). Dr. Campbell recommended that the minimum education standard for becoming licensed as a Texas peace officer include a bachelor's degree by the year 2004. The legislature and vast majority of the law enforcement community has rejected this proposal.

Futurist William Tafoya made the following projections about career development standards and milestones for law enforcement. Using the Delphi Technique, he predicted that formal education will become the standard for entry and advancement in more than 70 percent of all police agencies by 2050 (Campbell, 1997). In 2050, law enforcement will achieve professional status (Campbell, 1997).

Public administration leaders have not always supported the idea of college-educated officers. Many were afraid that an abundance of journeyman patrol officers equipped with a college education would create frustration and organizational rebellion from educated officers who could not all be promoted. Those with this concern believed that well-educated officers would feel overqualified for their jobs and eventually leave law enforcement. Further concern emanated from a belief that the officers would quickly become bored and unhappy with an autocratic management style, tired of shift work and eventually leave the job due to dissatisfaction (Saunders, 1970).

However, research indicates certain advantages of higher education for police recruits. These advantages include greater knowledge of procedures, functions, and principles; better appreciation of the professional role of police officers and their importance in the criminal justice system; more desirable psychological qualities of police officers, such as alertness, empathy, flexibility, initiative, and intelligence; greater range of interpersonal skills related to

communication and leadership; greater ability to analyze situations and to exercise discretion independently; and strong moral character (Vodicka, 1993). Studies show that college-educated police officers perform their tasks better than their non-college counterparts, that college-educated police officers are generally better communicators, and college-educated police officers are more professional and more dedicated to policing as a career rather than as a job (Vodicka, 1993).

Also a study conducted in a southern sheriff's department indicated that deputies with only a high school diploma or GED had the highest number of administrative complaints and policy violations. In terms of misconduct, this group also had the highest number of sustained allegations. Overall, the deputies in this category also had more difficulties in performing their duties in comparison with their more educated peers. However, there was no significant difference between those deputies who held associate or four-year degrees in terms of criterion (Lersch & Kunzman, 2001).

Research has also indicated disadvantages of requiring higher education for police officers. Degree requirements will negatively affect minority recruitment; college-educated police officers tend to become bored quickly and often expect special treatment and quick promotions, and sometimes cause animosity within the ranks; police officers with no college can develop the necessary skills through in-service and on-the-job training; and a college requirement limits the pool of prospective police applicants (Vodicka, 1993).

The federal government has entertained the feasibility of requiring a college education for law enforcement personnel at least three times over the past four decades. Presidential Commissions in 1967, 1968, and 1973 acknowledged the complexity of law enforcement and the need for intelligent recruits who possess tact, common sense, and emotional stability (Lersch &

Kunzman, 2001).

The Wickersham Commission (1937) and the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice (1967) both recommended post-secondary education for law enforcement officers. In its Task Force Report (1967) the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice stated that the quality of police service would not significantly improve without higher educational standards for police personnel. The commission recommended a minimum of two years of college for entry-level officers (Guthrie, 2000).

Although there are strong supporters of the college-educated officer, there are also some that do not give as much weight to the issue. Wilson (1977, p. 9) believed that those who supported the college-educated police officer were "blissfully ignorant." Especially, he noted that while college may make a person civil, it gives or reinforces for him/her his/her sense of duty. Wilson also contended that college-educated officers were excessively aggressive and arrest-prone when a gentler hand might have been better (Barnes, 1996).

Methodology

The purpose of this research is to determine an answer to the question: Should requirements from the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education (TCLEOSE) be raised to include college education prior to becoming licensed as a Texas peace officer? The goal of this paper is to determine if it is necessary to raise these standards to include higher education. It is hypothesized that there is a need for higher educated officers. TCLEOSE should raise their minimum education requirement to include accredited college hours. The following methods of inquiry will be used to analyze the above question and to draw a conclusion: A questionnaire was created by this author and distributed to the September 2002

Module I class of the Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas. Twenty police supervisors from all over the state of Texas responded to the survey. They commented on their opinions regarding this issue of college education requirements, and they provided current information about their police departments (See Appendix A). Some of the reference material used came from police and law journals.

Findings

Freedom is a precious constitutional right in American society. Since law enforcement officers are in a position to deprive citizens of this basic right, it stands to reason that these governmental representatives should be well-trained and highly educated in order to make intelligent, mature, and lawful decisions. Although every state mandates training requirements for law enforcement candidates, most agencies do not expect incoming personnel to have any education beyond a high school diploma or its equivalency (Lersch & Kunzman 2001).

During the research it was found that there are a variety of views and opinions associated with requiring higher education for police officers. Those in favor of raising the education requirement do not seem to agree with the level of education needed. The results of requiring the higher education would have different effects depending on the size of law enforcement agency. The advantages and disadvantages must be considered for each agency. The overall advantages seem to outweigh the disadvantages. Following is a list of the disadvantages in requiring a college degree or certain number of college hours (Vodicka, 1993).

Disadvantages

1. Some believe it will negatively affect minority recruitment.
2. Budgeting constraints will not attract college-educated people.
3. College-educated officers tend to become bored with their jobs.

4. They often expect special treatment and quick promotions.
5. It will exclude many otherwise qualified and motivated candidates.
6. Poor applicants do not have access to college.

The highest concern is the impact that a college requirement would have on the applicant pool.

The current strength of the economy has implications for maintaining a stream of qualified applicants; however, recruitment efforts are stymied when eligible individuals turn to better paying positions in the private sector (Lersch & Kunzman, 2001).

Likewise, there are many advantages to TCLEOSE changing its requirements to include a college degree or certain number of college hours. A list of those advantages follows (Vodicka, 1993).

Advantages

1. College-educated officers will have a greater knowledge of procedures, functions, and principles.
2. They will have a better appreciation of the professional role of police officers and their importance in the criminal justice system.
3. They are more likely to be better communicators.
4. They are more professional and more dedicated to policing as a career rather than a job.
5. They possess a greater ability to analyze situations and to independently exercise discretion.
6. They generally have a stronger moral character.
7. Studies show that college-educated officers perform their tasks better than their non-college counter parts.

8. Studies show that they have fewer misconduct allegations.

DiGrazia (1977) states that those who oppose college-educated officers offer inaccurate and inadequate reasons. Overall the well-educated officer is better prepared to face the challenges and complexities of police service in contemporary society. Twenty-seven questionnaires were handed out at the Module I LEMIT class in September 2002. Out of these, twenty were completed and returned, totaling a 74 percent participation rate. Like other advocates of this proposal, they differed on the amount of college education required. Eleven (55%) of the students in the class surveyed believed that a college education should be required prior to becoming a police officer. Out of those, ten (90%) believe that the requirement should range from 30-60 hours. Nine (45%) of the respondents believe that a college education should not be a requirement. The majority of respondents said that a minimum college education requirement by TCLEOSE would limit an already small applicant pool of qualified individuals. They believed budgeting constraints would play a major role in not being able to attract college-educated applicants. These respondents are supervisors who are experienced and who have pondered ways to improve law enforcement. This survey was also designed to determine if any departments who were represented required any college education and if so, how much. Respondents were also asked their opinions about the effects this requirement has had on their department.

Discussion/Conclusion

The City of Arlington Police Department currently requires its applicants to have a four-year degree. One Arlington employee surveyed has seen that the department is able to hire people with “better reasoning skills” and people less likely to use excessive force. However, the employee also noted that the college-educated police officers are “quicker to burnout and feel that they should promote or transfer more quickly than others”.

The City of Tyler Police Department currently requires a minimum of sixty (60) hours of college education for their applicants. It is believed by one police department employee that this requirement is good because it enables officers to write and articulate “what we do.” Also that generally someone who has taken the time to attempt to become educated will be more mature, serious, and disciplined when it comes to his work. Although this employee believes the requirement helps to hire qualified applicants, they also believe that it limits the pool of applicants.

The Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education (TCLEOSE) has proposed that applicants should meet a college education requirement prior to becoming licensed as a Texas peace officer. The legislature has vetoed the bills on several occasions. It is believed that this requirement still may be a possibility in the future. The purpose of this paper is to determine an answer to the question; should the current minimum education requirements from the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Standards and Education be raised to include college education prior to becoming licensed as a Texas Peace Officer? It is hypothesized that there is a need for higher educated officers and that there is a need to include some accredited college courses as a minimum requirement before becoming commissioned as a Texas Peace Officer.

Law enforcement officials across the state have mixed beliefs about the proposal. The most common reservation is how a department with budgeting constraints would be affected. Most college educated people would not want to work for an agency that could only pay a small salary (e.g. \$10.00 per hour). This dilemma would greatly limit the pool of applicants for smaller departments. Despite this reservation, the research reveals that the benefits of having college-educated officers far outweigh the hardships. Although it is not plausible for TCLEOSE to

require a 2-year or 4-year degree, a lower college education standard would allow departments to adapt more easily and could be used on a temporary basis to see if this change would allow law enforcement to start moving forward. If TCLEOSE required a minimum amount of college, such as 15 hours, the question would then be what courses would qualify. The recommendation would be that the hours be earned from an accredited college, and that courses should consist of a sampling of those required for a basic degree. Examples of such courses are English Composition I, Interpersonal Communication and Psychology.

In conclusion, this issue is not going away, TCLEOSE representatives will again in the near future propose that the minimum education requirement be raised to include college hours prior to becoming licensed as a Texas peace officer. It is further concluded that if law enforcement is to advance as a profession, this step must be taken. Requiring some college education of peace officers will produce a better and stronger police department. Police officers will achieve a higher status of professionalism.

Contrary to the original belief that research would discourage the passing of this requirement, one day this proposal will pass the legislature. Everyone will then be required to have some core college classes as a Texas basic peace officer. "Growing pains are painful; however, changes are important and inevitable" (Barnes, 1996, p. 12). Law enforcement must be willing to undergo changes in order to grow in professionalism and to meet the needs of the modern society.

It is becoming more common for larger departments to require a person to have a certain number of college hours to be eligible for hire. Yet many departments will nullify this requirement if the applicant has prior police experience. These findings suggest that law enforcement is moving in the direction of a college-educated police officer and therefore

supports the hypothesis. As with all pending changes, there will always be advocates and opponents of the very realistic possibility of requiring a college education for peace officers.

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APPENDIX A

Name_____

Agency_____

1. Do you believe there should be a minimum requirement for college education prior to being licensed as a Peace Officer?
2. If so, what do you believe that requirement should be?
3. How would a minimum requirement effect your Department? If your Department already has a requirement, please explain the pros and cons.

Please return survey to Steve Wilkins, Lacy Lakeview Police Department.
Your participation is appreciated.