

**The Bill Blackwood  
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**Law Enforcement Incentives  
for Higher Education**

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**An Administrative Research Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
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## **ABSTRACT**

In today's society, administrators are faced with many demanding issues that must be addressed concerning law enforcement. Modern advancements in technology have made a far more knowledgeable and sophisticated criminal in today's fast-paced growing world. The days of giving an officer a gun and a badge and telling him/her to go out and serve and protect the public without further training and a more advanced education are over. Law enforcement agencies cannot afford to be left behind in terms of motivating their officers to seek advanced training and a higher degree of education. The hypothesis to be tested considers how agencies can encourage and motivate their officers to obtain a higher education and training beyond the minimum standards set forth by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Standards and Education as well as considering the need for college degrees.

This paper examines how the Rusk County Sheriff's Office can construct and implement a plan to encourage and motivate officers to advance their education and training by doing research through books, journals, magazine articles, a survey, and interviews with administrators and officers from around the state, shows that the best type of motivation is a monetary reward for the officer. The monetary rewards can be differentiated for different levels of Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Standards and Education certificates and college degrees. This author came to the conclusion that if the county commissioners would approve and implement this type of incentive reward, not

only would the officer and department benefit, but citizens of every county statewide would benefit as well.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction .....	1
Review of Literature .....	2
Methodology .....	5
Findings .....	6
Discussions/Conclusions .....	9
References .....	11



## INTRODUCTION

Today we live in a society that is known for its educational value and the type of students that are entering into the workforce. However, in law enforcement the emphasis on education is different because all that is required to become a police officer is for someone to be at least 21 years of age and to have some college. Departments turn officers out on the streets that have completed a total of 600 hours in an academic setting and give them a gun and badge then tell them to go out into the community and uphold state and federal laws. Granted there are a lot of good officers that result from this training, but with the growing technology and pressing liability issues that every department faces, agencies must look at an incentive to motivate officers to acquire a higher education.

This research paper will address the importance, not only for the Rusk County Sheriff's Office but other agencies across the state, as well in implementing an incentive program, which promotes and encourages officers to seek a higher education other than basic minimum standards. Specifically, to look at the question: What are the benefits of providing an officer with a pay incentive to increase an officer's education, skills and retention of that officer? This research paper will also present how these benefits will relate to the officer and their department as well as the citizens they serve.

The sources of information used for this research includes: books, journals, magazine articles, a survey of officers from county sheriff's offices and from other departments across the state of Texas will be conducted. All sources will be identified in the research paper and bibliography. The projected outcome of this research is to show that there is a growing need for a higher educated and better-trained officer not

only in larger agencies but in smaller agencies as well. Also if top administrators in smaller agencies consider implementing a pay incentive program, the agency is likely to find a reduction in citizen complaints, a reduction in liability, and retain a more professional and skilled officer that will project a higher standard of professionalism in the community. The increasing recruitment of officer's by other agencies is only met by the City Council and Commissioner Courts that recognize the benefits of having officers with a higher level of education. Not only does the agency benefit, but their community will benefit as well. Administrators that have a program like the aforementioned one will confirm that their officers are more professional, make better law enforcement decisions, and reduce costly mistakes.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Policing in America has changed drastically over the past twenty years. Whether it is in response to community needs or from the lawsuits that result in issues within a department, administrators can easily see the change. In early policing, an officer could simply get a job by knowing someone or as the result of political patronage. Police officers in certain parts of early America were not trusted due to this type of recruitment. Moreover, the increasing need for citizens to become more educated, coupled with the fact that more professional jobs are being emphasized for people to study, and the growing need for law enforcement professionals to become more educated, has become more apparent.

Departments over the years have implemented ways to change this type of policing, and concentrate on the education of their officers in order to better serve the community. The belief in the importance of a college education for police officers today

derives from two movements (Harris, 1999). The first and most longstanding source of this belief considers the perceived need to reform law enforcement by professionalizing them, and the second source considers the perceived need to change police attitudes. Additionally, one of the first people in the law enforcement industry that believed in the value of educating police officers was August Vollmer, a man known to criminal justice students today as the “father of policing.” In the early 1900s, Vollmer was the police chief of Berkeley, California. He required his officers to attend the local college because he felt that education played an integral role in their training and contributed to each officer’s overall attitude and level of professionalism.

According to Shernock & Dantzker (1931), the final report of the Wickersham Commission noted that, “the great majority of police are not suited either by temperament, training, or education for their position” (p. 75). It was not until the latter 1950s and early 1960s that a minimum requirement of a high school or general equivalency diploma (GED) was established and minimal training standards began (Garner, 1998). In 1960 there was a major report that came from *The President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice* (1967) that suggested that the “the ultimate aim of all police departments should be that all personnel with enforcement powers have a baccalaureate degree” (p. 49). Some of the most notable statements the commission noted were the need for important changes in the quality of police personnel, the quality of officer preparation and training, management structure, how police relate to the community, and how police deliver services to the community. Hence, the debate over higher education was started. According to Ferriera (1998), it would be a grave misjudgment to think that lesser



educated officers will be able to handle complex legal problems and questions. Ferriera (1998) also reports that law enforcement is a field, like medicine, where both theory and practice should be included in the educational environment. Through the combination of education and training, officers are better prepared to face complex situations so often encountered in their work. There are several federal agencies, as well as numerous local level departments, who have come to realize the importance of higher education and of giving an incentive for education whether by higher pay or by extra incentives.

According to Sharp (1997), "if someone has a college degree in Criminal Justice, Police Science or Correctional Science, etc., that says several things about that person, e.g., he or she has the ability to write and think and has an interest in making law enforcement a true career or profession" (p. 28).

The question administrators must ask themselves is "how do we motivate our officers to seek advanced training and a higher education?" Today, most agencies statewide have various 8 and 12-hour work shifts and most agencies have below standard salaries. For the most part, officers have to be motivated to seek training or higher education to make it worthwhile to take night or online classes. Distance learning classes and tele-courses are also available, making it convenient for an officer to get their training or degree.

Critics often ask the question, "How will the agency benefit?" In departments that require a degree to go to work, their officers with a college degree develop a broader base of information for decision-making. It allows the officer to mature from additional years and experiences. The general education courses and course work in criminal

justice allows the officer or student to learn more about the history of the country, the democratic process and an appreciation for constitutional rights, values and the democratic form of government. A college education improves the ability to flexibly handle difficult or ambiguous situations with greater creativity and innovation. With criminal justice majors, the academics allow for a better view of the “big picture” of the criminal justice system and both a better understanding and appreciation for the prosecutorial and correctional role. Higher education nurtures a greater empathy for minority groups and their discriminatory experiences through both course work and interaction within the school environment. The officers have a greater understanding and tolerance for persons with different lifestyles and ideologies and articulate more efficient communications and community relationships in the practice of policing. The college educated officer is likely to be less rigid and more balanced in his or her decision making as a police officer, by making use of the democratic process in dealing with certain situations. The officer also tends to have a greater tendency to use discretion in dealing with individual cases, rather than applying the same rules to everything they encounter. The college experience helps officers communicate and respond to crime and service needs in the community in a competent manner while being civil and humane. Also, an educated officer tends to be more innovative and flexible when dealing with community oriented policing programs. The educated officer is often considered better equipped to perform various tasks and sometimes requires little or no supervision. Education also helps develop better relationship skills and a more professional demeanor. The performance level of the more educated officer is also noticeably exhibited and the officer is likely to deal with stress better. Moreover,

the educated officer is likely to receive less citizen complaints, fewer disciplinary cases, and little or no allegations of violating a person's civil rights for over excessive use of force. Officers with college degrees have developed better social and verbal skills from classes required to obtain their degrees. These officers also tend to develop more logical and diagnostic skills during advanced education, and then become more innovative in the performance of the day-to-day responsibilities (Carter, Sapp, & Kappeler, 1992.) Through advanced training, officers develop essential skills so that they tend to have less difficulty in solving problems and reduce their agency's liability by making the right decisions to solve the issues at hand. Once an agency has implemented an incentive pay program, officers tend to stay at that agency, thus eliminating the extra costs of retraining a new officer. The funding attributed to an incentive program is an excellent retention program.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The growing concern for officers to have advanced training and higher education is growing. Not only is this a positive need for the officer but for the department as well. With this education, there needs to be an incentive for motivation to get the officers to attend training and institutions of higher education. This motivation should be such that officers are motivated to seek and acquire more than the minimum standards set forth by TCLEOSE to maintain their current licenses. Every department must set policies to reward the officers to seek this type of training and higher education. This paper hypothesizes that the best type of motivation is in the form of a monetary reward for their certificate and degree advancements.

Statewide, there are many agencies that have proven this to be a successful way of encouraging their officers to seek advanced certificates or degrees in criminal justice. Each department, according to their size and location, will have to form their own means of motivation for their officers. A written survey consisting of pertinent questions regarding the level of education and monetary amount was conducted from agencies around the state. The survey was submitted to participants in Module one and Module two participants as well.

A total of 60 written surveys were administered to officers and departments in the State of Texas. A total of 60 surveys were completed and returned to this author for review and analysis. The information that was received was recorded and compiled to show individually departments that give a monetary reward for certificate and degree achievement. This information was then analyzed, considering the hypothesis of incentive pay as a motivation for seeking a higher education. The results of this survey are documented with charts and graphs illustrating the data of incentives for higher education.

## **FINDINGS**

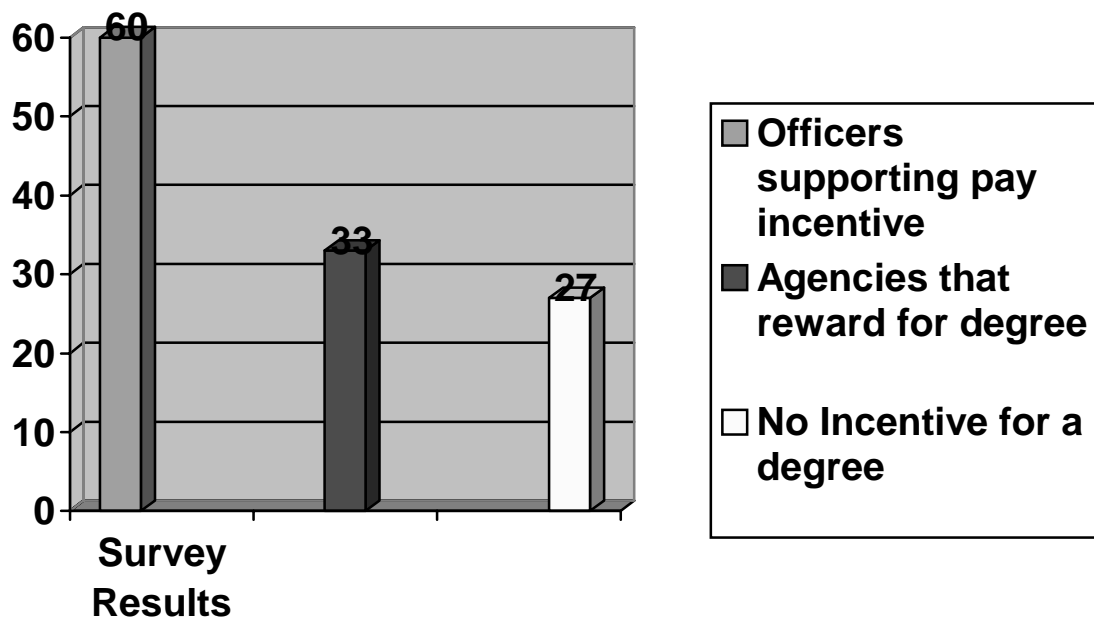
Law enforcement officers are faced with many concerns in today's society. With the growing need for advanced education and training in every profession, it is imperative to include law enforcement. Regardless of the size of a department, advanced training and higher education is vital. This survey illustrates that the size of the department did not seem to be a factor when it came to rewarding an officer with an incentive for advanced training or higher education. Of the 60 statewide agencies that were studied in this survey, over 50 percent had an incentive program for their officers.

The smallest agency that provided an incentive program was Kemah Police Department. The largest agency that provided an incentive program was Dallas Police Department. Some of the agencies had various forms of incentive programs for its officers varying from certificate pay, degree pay or college tuition reimbursement programs. The size of the department had no bearing on the amount of pay an officer received for each level. The Potter County Sheriff's department has a total of 202 officers and had the lowest TCLEOSE certificate incentive program of \$25.00 dollars for both and intermediate and advanced certificate. The smallest amount for a degree incentive was Huntsville Police Department with a total of 48 officers who only receive \$50.00 dollars if they have a bachelor's degree. The largest incentive program was at Kemah Police department with officers being paid \$1200.00 dollars a year for an associate's degree and \$1500.00 dollars a year being paid for a bachelors degree and \$1800.00 dollars a year for a masters degree and they were also the highest paying agency for TCLEOSE certificate pay. Kemah pays \$600.00 dollars for an intermediate certificate, \$900.00 dollars for an advanced certificate and \$1200.00 dollars a year for a master peace officers certificate. The average amount of incentive pay from all agencies was \$100.00 dollars a month for a bachelor's degree and \$125.00 dollars a month for an advanced peace officers certificate.

A number of agencies pay incentive rewards for both certificate pay and degree pay. The graph below illustrates the number of officers from the survey and what TCLEOSE certificates they hold.



The graph below shows the number of officers surveyed who support a monetary reward being paid for a college degree and those agencies that have an incentive program and those who don't offer an incentive program.



There were 27 agencies surveyed who did not have any type of incentive for their officer and several officers stated that it was hard to get yearly raises let alone incentive pay. Several of these officers stated that they lose officers to agencies that have

incentive programs in place. Six agencies in the survey also had a college tuition reimbursement program in place to help pay for the officers training.

## **DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS**

The main purpose of this research paper is to encourage law enforcement officers to seek higher education and their administrators to offer an incentive for this higher education. Incentive pay to promote higher education is something that has been researched extensively over the past 30 years and has been found to be a motivator for officers seeking a higher education.

As the 21<sup>st</sup> century begins, the need for an officer to have a higher education is ever more apparent to administrations and communities. Technology is advancing so rapidly that what the future holds is unknown for law enforcement capabilities. The major problem with most agencies is motivating its officers to seek a higher education upon completion of just a basic academy. Many officers at agencies with no incentive are content to simply perform their duties and go home for what pay they receive. It is clear that with the advances in technology, higher education is needed to make officers more proficient at their job. The attitudes and social skills these officers develop from higher education helps to develop the officer's ability to handle the technological advances and social changes taking place in America today.

By paying officers incentive pay for degree or certificate achievement, officers are motivated to seek a higher level of education. This author believes that these incentives will benefit not only the department but the community as well. There is no doubt that higher educated officers will cost the agencies more money, but communities will have to realize that they get what they pay for.

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