

**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

Higher Education for the Future of Law Enforcement

**An Administrative Research Paper
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ABSTRACT

Education is essential for the success of an organization. For the law enforcement to become a profession, education will have to play a crucial role in the process. The complexity of law enforcement requires officers to have solid background that includes higher education. Thirty questionnaires were used to determine the need for higher education in law enforcement, together with interviews with two-college faculty members and a law enforcement training academy director. The findings indicate that education is playing an increasing role in the recruitment and retention of college educated officers. Education is playing a significant role in the promotional process of law enforcement personnel. Law enforcement is progressing toward making higher education a requirement in recruitment and in promotions. Law enforcement must continue the path to successfully provide law enforcement services for the needs of the community and for law enforcement to become a profession.

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INTRODUCTION

The public or the community will benefit by having well-rounded educated law enforcement personnel to properly enforce the law, assure compliance with regulations and the law, make the right decisions, and stay within budgets. Law enforcement officers are given many demanding duties outside the realm of enforcing the law. This demands a law enforcement officer have the knowledge to undertake these added responsibilities. The community wants to be assured their tax dollars are used wisely and they want to have a strong sense of security.

Whether there are the demands of the community, community policing, technology, terrorism, cultural diversity, or a multitude of legal issues, they are all posed challenges to all law enforcement personnel. Traditional methods have been questioned. Traditional methods have failed and have been found to be inadequate in today's law enforcement. They have, at times, resulted in inappropriate actions in some situations. Litigation and court rulings have resulted in change for law enforcement. It may have come to the point where a high school diploma may not be enough to give an individual the ability to make the correct decision, establish critical thinking abilities and adapt accordingly to change. Law enforcement administrators, managers, and leaders need to recognize challenges posed by the need to change traditional methods especially in recruitment and promotion.

The purpose of this paper is to research, determine and identify if a vital need exists for a college education in today's law enforcement career. It also is to identify and specifically answer the question of whether a college education should be deemed a prerequisite for those working in this occupational field.

The methods of inquiry for this research included a survey of law enforcement agencies from across the state of Texas and interviews with law enforcement command staff officials, college and university faculty and a training academy director. Research included a review of periodicals and books.

The outcome is intended to determine if there is a need to encourage, motivate and establish a clear understanding of why education is crucial in today's law enforcement. The research intends to indicate whether there is an imperative need for law enforcement agencies and law enforcement regulatory entities to develop or require higher levels of education of recruits. It also intends to validate the need to encourage law enforcement agencies to seriously consider developing their command staff with higher levels of education.

The benefit of this research to law enforcement is to present a clear understanding of why the "old school" in law enforcement must change. It will give credence for administrators, managers and leaders to recognize the need for higher education, not only for their personnel, but also for themselves. It all starts at the top.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Criminal Justice System is evolving into one the most complex systems with all components going through significant changes. These changes have dictated and mandated actions to adapt to modernistic approaches to address criminal activity and community service. For example, procedures affecting an arrest to the releasing of a defendant are now dependent on technology and advances in science. In the process of these significant changes, the criminal justice system (law enforcement, corrections, and the courts) has been burdened with the task of keeping up with technology in times of declining budgets and public safety concerns.

Renovation of the criminal justice system has required changes in recruitment, training and department policies. The duties and responsibilities of the police officer, corrections officer and the court officer, require specific and significantly more knowledge. The knowledge is crucial to avoid litigation and other serious repercussions by actions of officers who are not culturally diverse, or lack sufficient skills for new law enforcement initiative. Supervisors, managers, and administrators also require skills that were not crucial just a few years ago.

Most law enforcement agencies are viewing higher education as an occupational necessity (Carter, Sapp, & Stephens). Significant changes have occurred since August Vollmer's, the father of modern policing, first emphasis on professional training and education for police in 1916. Vollmer proposed that police officers have a college degree (Elkridge & Chris, 1987). Then again in 1931, the Wickersham Commission (National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement) gave national recognition to the need for increased educational standards for the police (Carter, Sapp, & Stephens, 1988).

An officer on the street is now required to take legal and justifiable action. Some argue that the complexity of the job, understanding human nature and cultural diversity and the legal system mandates more education for police officers than only a high school diploma (Carter & Sapp, 1990) (Danterzker, 2003). Law enforcement is looking for officers who are culturally diverse and can acquire qualities to adjust to community-oriented policing and other programs which are service-oriented (FBI Nov 2001).

According to research, 83% of all police agencies require only a high school diploma (Sourcebook online 2001).

Police agencies find it difficult to attract and recruit individuals with either a degree or some college because the educational requirements limit the number of applicants and the requirement discriminates minorities (Langworth, Hughes, & Sanders, 1995) (Dantzker 2003).

The city of Richmond, Virginia has a proactive system of recruiting and attracting minorities. The city awards scholarships to juniors so they can attend Virginia Union University, a historically black college. In return, the students are obligated to serve four years on the police force (VUU Catalog 2004).

Colleges and universities across the county have made the possibility of an officer to obtain a college education by catering to working adults. Colleges are offering officers classes that are scheduled around work schedules, online courses, and in some cases organize classes on the worksite (C. Williams and M. Williams, personal communications, February 7, 2005).

Some law enforcement state regulatory agencies such as the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Educations have proposed requiring some college hours in order to license a peace officer and proposals requiring supervisors and higher command to have college degrees. (V. Polkuda, personal communication, February 14, 2005).

The law enforcement agency should definitely seek accreditation to establish a higher level of standards and provide an efficient and effective system of public safety. Accreditation is a catalyst for law enforcement to be a profession. Law enforcement is an occupation and a trade. Most, if not all, professions require some type of college degree (Police, 1973). It also reduces liability for a agency.

“When a department has a 4-year college degree standard for all its employees, this protects somewhat against various forms of supervisory negligence, such as charges relating to the failure to supervise, direct, train, or entrust, since it can reasonably be expected that college educated officers are better prepared to understand a broader range of motivation and control issues, more likely to read and understand policy manuals, temper police powers with good judgment or democratic values, and have a more professional orientation (Del Carmen, R. (1991)”. Many police administrators and executives claim that traditional police organizations were inflexible and rigid which impeded their ability to adapt to a rapid changing community (Walker, S. 1992). The needs and expectations of the community must be a priority.

Some law enforcement associations, such as the National Sheriff’s Association, International Association of Chiefs of Police, and Police Executive Research Forum, offer management training programs to police administrators in an effort to train administrators in current methods of management and administration. Some of the subjects covered are effective supervision, conflict resolution, group problem solving, and stress management (Bruns, Bill, 1989). Texas, California, and Florida have established leadership command colleges for managers and administrators of law enforcement agencies. These schools are given in a college setting and are taught by college professors (personal communications with J. Alexander).

Criminal justice managers and administrators are considered the chief executive officers and chief financial officers. In this aspect, they definitely require additional knowledge to perform their duties and responsibilities. “The quality of personnel selected for the police service determines the character of the police performance and ultimately the quality of police leadership” (Police, 1973, p320).

The complexity of the criminal justice organization demonstrates the need for managers and administrators to understand such concepts as organizational culture, organizational structure, learning organization, organizational development, and enhance critical thinking skills (Baker & Baker, 1996).

Understanding new criminal elements in cyber-terrorism, terrorism, computer crimes, and community policing add to the complexity of policing. (Adler-Mueller-Laufe, 2003). For administrators, “executive thinking skills and problem-solving are crucial in changing traditional methods of instruction (Baker & Baker, 1996). Adapting to these concepts for any criminal justice organization is crucial especially with continuous litigations, diminishing funds, ambiguous legislation, and increase public scrutiny. Education, without a doubt, results in better policing (National Institute of Justice, August 1989).

METHODOLOGY

Thirty-five individual law enforcement agencies were chosen at random for this study, which included a questionnaire sent to different sized agencies across the state of Texas.

The questionnaire was developed with an emphasis on determining if a crucial need for college education in law enforcement exists and what appears to be the trend in law enforcement in respect to this issue.

The questionnaire included inquiries about education used as a requirement for entry level and for promotion. It also included questions regarding future consideration by the agency to have a requirement for a college education at the entry level and for promotion. A question was asked about age of the youngest member of the agency’s command staff, to determine the youngest average age of the current command staff. In addition, the highest level of education for command staff members was asked.

The agency was asked if education should be consideration for entry level and or for promotion. This gives an indication as to whether the idea of education at these levels should be considered. The agency was also asked about incentives for officers to attend college. This gives information regarding methods used to motivate current officers to seek a college degree. Accreditation consideration feedback was solicited in order to establish if agencies are considering accreditation.

A college and a university faculty member were interviewed to determine if colleges and universities are willing to work with agencies by offering classes, taking into account work shift , schedules to law enforcement officers. Some colleges offer class on site while others offer classes once a week or on weekends.

An academy director was interviewed about research proposals by peace officer regulatory or licensing commissions. Indeed, proposals have been written and proposed to require some college at the entry level and on placing educational requirements for supervisors.

FINDINGS

The criminal justice system is undergoing significant change. From technology to a customer-oriented culture, change is inevitable. Law enforcement has been given additional duties to perform. The public wants law enforcement not only for security but also for readiness to handle whatever way the crime problem manifests itself.

911 has placed emphasis on learning different aspects of cultures and ideologies. New innovative recruiting programs have to be geared to promote education for recruits or recruit individual who already have some college.

Twenty-six questionnaires were completed and returned. The responses indicated college education was not a consideration or requirement at the entry level.

The responses indicated that a large majority of agencies considered or required college education for promotion. The questionnaire also asked for the highest level of education achieved by members of the command staff. The response was evenly divided between “have some college” and some “with no college.”

A question addressed the need for a college education in law enforcement. The majority believed college education was important but not a requirement for a full degree at the entry level. The responses indicated that some college was preferred over a full degree at the entry level. However, the majority of the responses indicated a college degree should be considered for promotion. Another question addresses the consideration of accreditation for the individual agency. Again, the majority indicated that they were considering accreditation. In reviewing the response from the law enforcement agencies, the overwhelming response is that for entry level, college is not required. In promoting law enforcement personnel, the response indicates that 14 out of the 26 responses require a college degree for promotion. The responses also indicate 15 out of 26 believe education should be considered as an entry requirement.

13 of the 26 agencies offer educational incentives to officers who attain a degree. For current law enforcement personnel, greater emphasis has to be placed on enhancing their education. Education incentives appear to be a successful method of motivating current employees to continue their education. Several state licensing commissions now require or have plans to require newly assigned peace officers to have at least some college.

16 out of the 26 responses indicated a belief that a college degree should be required for promotion. Linking education to promotion appears to be another method by which employees can be motivated and encouraged to pursue a college degree.

Several colleges and universities offer credits for work experience. A policy that associates promotion and experience with educational achievements will motivate those with experience to compete for promotions. In order to develop a proactive and progress organization, command staff must understand the need for change and how to effectively implement change. The best way to accomplish this is by developing supervisors, developing supervisors into managers and finally developing future administrators.

Executive development and leadership training, mentioned in the literature, is a crucial aspect that needs to be addressed in today's police organization. Out of the 26 agencies that responded, 21 agencies reported that their command staffs have at least an associate's degree while one reported a staff member with a doctorate.

The average accepted youngest age of command staff, according to the respondents is, 38 years of age. The youngest is thirty-two years of age. The author defines command staff as members of major decision-making power within the law enforcement agency.

The process has been slow, however there are agencies that are making significant progress toward developing customer-oriented, efficient, economical, and educated organizations. The age of command staff appears to be lowering. This is an opportunity for agencies to find methods

to continually further the educational level of their personnel.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

The author has been involved in academics in the criminal justice field for sometime. Over the years, the author has experienced many of the issues discussed in the literature aspect of this paper. The author strongly believes that law enforcement must develop new educational and training initiatives or rethink present models.

Curriculums that foster a new generation of police thinking and focusing on new goals and objectives, must be developed. Developing new methodology and structures to meet new needs inside and outside the police organization should be an on-ongoing process. Education must play a crucial role in this process.

The need to develop the law enforcement occupation into a full-fledged profession requires immediate attention. The occupation itself mandates it. The police role has changed significantly over the years. Issues in today's law enforcement include cultural diversity, community policing, understanding the mentally challenged and technology. They have expanded to every aspect public safety.

Understanding cultural diversity is one factor that continuous to plague law enforcement. A law enforcement agency who employs a person with the drive to seek cultural knowledge, empowers that agency. A person has to want to be open to others different from her/him. We need law enforcement to be open to the idea of differences, and the thirst to know and understand better. There are many people without college education or a degree who will do a decent job in law enforcement, but a law enforcement officer who is willing to explore and understand cultural diversity will be an asset to the agency. It has been established that a college-educated officer will most likely be more sensitive to the needs of others than a law enforcement officer who has not received as much academic or diverse educational exposure.

A police officer must be well prepared with a significant educational background to properly handle current issues in law enforcement. Educational attainment is not limited to culturally sensitive people.

An agency has to enforce the expectation of cultural diversity, be proactive, or could face litigation in today's litigious society. Some departments consider cultural diversity a yearly training issue and therefore are aware of these repercussions. College experience can help to expose a person to different cultures, races, nationalities, and religions before actually facing them on the job. A college education gives a student an opportunity to create initiative and drive to explore the many issues that face law enforcement. The development of strong command staff and supervisory staff, can enable an agency to face the many concerns that have surfaced in current years. Developing an environment in the police agency where solid solutions are derived from personnel that utilize critical thinking skills, is a must.

Linking education to promotion in law enforcement, is another method by which the author believes employees can be motivated and encouraged to pursue a college degree. Several colleges and universities offer credits for work experience. A policy that associates promotion and experience with educational achievements will motivate those with experience to compete for promotions.

To develop a proactive and progressive organization, command staff has to comprehend the need for change and how to effectively that implement change. The best way to accomplish this is by developing supervisors and managers and developing future administrators from the command staff.

There is no doubt education is crucial for law enforcement personnel. The very nature of the occupation demands a high level of education. The statistical information together with the research supports that there is a crucial need for higher education in law enforcement personnel.

The information also indicates progress has been made but needs attention. Regulatory and licensing commissions appear to be moving in the direction of requiring college degree for licensing and promotion. This ultimately will have an impact on the occupation.

Finally, agencies are moving toward accreditation. This, with the requirements for a higher level of education, without a doubt, will enhance the chances of someday having law enforcement become an accredited profession instead of a trade or occupation.

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APPENDIX 1

Questionnaire

1. Does your department require college education as a prerequisite for employment?

Yes / No

If yes, please provide your requirements: _____

If no, please provide reasons why you think college education is not a prerequisite for employment in your department: _____

2. Does your department consider college education in the promotional process?

Yes / No

If yes, please provide your requirements: _____

If no, please give reasons why you think college education is not required for a promotion in your department: _____

3. What is the age of the youngest member of your department's command staff? ____

4. What is the highest level of education achieved by members of your command staff? ____

5. Should college education be requirement for the law enforcement profession? **Yes / No**

6. Should college education be required for promotions? **Yes / No**

7. What is your age? _____

8. Does your department have incentives for officers to attend college? **Yes / No**

9. Are you facing any type litigation? **Yes / No**

10. Is your department accredited or considering any type of accreditation? **Yes/No**

APPENDIX 2

Participating agencies:

Boerne Police Department

Boerne, Texas

Borger Police Department

Borger, Texas

Brownsville ISD Police Department

Brownsville, Texas

Clute Police Department

Clute, Texas

Comal County Sheriff's Office

New Braunfels, Texas

El Paso Community College

El Paso, Texas

El Paso Police Department

El Paso, Texas

Galveston County Sheriff's Office

Galveston, Texas

Grand Prairie Police Department

Grand Prairie, Texas

Harris County Sheriff's Office

Houston, Texas

Huntsville Police Department

Huntsville, Texas

Harlingen Police Department

Harlingen, Texas

Judson ISD Police Department

Converse, Texas

Midland ISD Police Department

Midland, Texas

Missouri City Police Department

Missouri City, Texas

Potter County Sheriff's Office

Amarillo, Texas

Richardson Police Department

Richardson, Texas

Sherman Police Department

Sherman, Texas

Schulenburg Police Department

Schulenburg, Texas

Texas State Technical College Police Dept

Harlingen, Texas

Texas State University

San Marcos, Texas

University of Texas Health Science Center Police

Harlingen, Texas

University of Texas at Houston Police Department

Houston, Texas

West University Place Police Department

West University, Texas

White Settlement ISD Police Department

Ft. Worth, Texas