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An Analysis of Education Levels of
Texas Chiefs of Police

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College

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ABSTRACT

The question of whether higher education is desirable for America's law enforcement officers is complex. Proponents cite numerous advantages including increased communication skills, better problem solving abilities, and better performance. Conversely, others argue that requiring a bachelor's degree for entry-level positions will create an undue burden on departments as they attempt to recruit officers to fill vacant positions. They also argue that other skills have more value, often mentioning that common sense is of higher value than book learning.

The debate has raged for more than eighty years. None the less, numerous federal commissions have called for higher education for law enforcement. Each recommended a minimum of a bachelor's degree as the minimum education requirement for entry into the law enforcement profession. If this is a desirable attribute for recruit officers, it is logical to assume it is at least as important for chiefs of police. This is the focus of this study. A survey of Texas chiefs of police in cities of 25,000 residents or more was conducted. This study established the current education of chief executive officers throughout the state. It also determined the education levels these executives held when they received their first appointment to a chief of police position. Finally, it studied whether minimum education requirements were in place for chief of police positions when they were hired.

The study revealed a high level of education, across all population levels, and that many of these executives hold graduate degrees. The majority of these cities do, in fact, have minimum education requirements, and these requirements are similar to other cities with similar populations outside of Texas.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1918, August Vollmer, then chief of police in Berkeley, California took a radical step in police recruiting. He placed an ad in the University of California's (UC) student newspaper, the Daily Californian. He specifically advertised for "college men" to work for the Berkeley Police Department. The new officers' schedules were arranged in cooperation with the university to allow them to continue their education while working for the department. Most of these young men performed well enough to validate Chief Vollmer's belief in recruiting college students for the police service (Armstrong, 1998).

This was not Chief Vollmer's first step outside the box of traditional police work. He made an arrangement with UC's administration to offer police science courses in 1916. This led to the first police school, which had not World War I come along, might well have been the model for criminal justice programs around the country. Vollmer also established a police academy for his department in 1908 to train his troops (Armstrong, 1998).

Clearly, Chief Vollmer's actions proved his commitment to higher education for police officers. He continued his call for college education in law enforcement throughout his career, including to and with the 1931 Wickersham Commission. In his view, America needed not only well trained cops, but also highly educated peace officers.

However, not everyone agreed, nor has the debate been settled in the ensuing eighty years since he ran his ad. Critics of higher education for police officers argue that retention of these troops is difficult, that they become bored, or that they are more questioning of orders. These individuals often make the statement that common sense is more desirable than book learning.

Proponents cite a medley of advantages to educated cops. Some studies have shown better problem-solving and decision-making skills. Others

indicate higher recruit performance and fewer citizen complaints. Many studies indicate educated officers are better communicators, in both oral and written form.

This question has survived for decades, even though it has been studied many times. Five separate federal commissions considered higher education for peace officers during the period from 1967 through 1973. Researchers have tried to establish definite proof that college education is - or is not desirable for officers on numerous occasions. Generally, the weight of evidence tends to support the concept that having higher educated police officers is to the department's and nation's advantage. But, what about the chief executive officers leading these departments? What is their educational status?

This is the focus of this project. The major research question to be addressed in this study is: What are the education levels of Texas chiefs of police in cities with a population of 25,000 or more? Further, how does this compare with other cities outside Texas?

To answer these two questions, a survey was developed and sent to all of the identified cities in Texas meeting this population level. It is anticipated that the majority of these chiefs of police will be highly educated, with at least a bachelor's degree being the norm. Further, it is expected that the survey will also indicate a significant percentage of these chiefs hold graduate degrees. Further, the survey is expected to reveal that minimum education requirements are common in these Texas cities, and that as population increases, the minimum education requirement of a bachelor's degree will also increase.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The issue of higher education for peace officers has often arisen in the wake of scandal or public outcry and criticism of law enforcement. The

turbulent 1960s led to the formation of several federal commissions to study why problems with the police response to demonstrations and other problems occurred, and to make recommendations. The reports from each of these commissions all held one significant recommendation for law enforcement - obtaining higher educated police officers. This was true in the 1967 President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice's Task Force Report: Police as well as the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals' report, Police in 1973.

Yet, this concept was not universally accepted. Bernadette Palombo, in her study of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) in the early 1990s provided a summary of studies into the area of higher education for law enforcement officers. She noted seven studies which indicated higher education might have a negative impact on attitudes, attrition rates, and performance evaluations. Other potential negatives these studies indicated included more cynicism, lower respect for citizens, and more involvement in incidents of violence (Palombo, 1995). Any of these results would, if universally found, make a sound argument against higher education for police officers.

Others also voiced concerns regarding higher education for police officers. Lynch (1986) reports police administrators had concerns as to whether requiring formal education might be discriminatory and that higher salaries would be demanded by these officers. Others voiced concerns that performing mundane or boring duties such as making reports or issuing citations might well lead to the officers' resignation or becoming a problem for the department (Swanson, Territo, and Taylor 1988).

These concerns have not disappeared, nor has the belief of some that higher educated cops are not the answer to law enforcement's problems, and this is not necessarily limited to non-academics. Dennis Stevens (1999), a criminal justice associate professor at the University of Massachusetts at

Boston, in a recent article, strongly called for the separation of police training (vocational) and higher education, stating: "A degree doesn't make a poorly skilled cop a better cop. Better quality police service requires better trained ... officers ..." (P. 41).

Others opine that despite the reported advantages of a college education for peace officers, education's impact will be minimal or that other traits are more desirable. Howard Katz (2000) believes uneducated officers will see these educated cops as career threats and will belittle them. He also opines that rookie officers will be more influenced by the police environment and peers more than by their education. Others, such as Hinkle (1995), acknowledge potential benefits but feel other traits such as compassion, self-confidence, and a sense of humor are required. He does not feel a degree is equally valuable.

Palombo also noted sixteen studies which showed no differences between college educated officers and their non-educated co-workers. However, more importantly, her summary also notes a total of thirty-one studies, which revealed positive influences from a college education. Interestingly, with the exception of the higher incidence of involvement in violent situations, at least one study existed to counter the findings of the negative studies. The violent incidents may have also been addressed in such findings as fewer injuries by criminal actions, fewer excessive force complaints, and better decision making (Palombo, 1995)

Palombo's own research into the LAPD tends to support the positive aspects of higher education for peace officers. In her study, she found that LAPD probationary officers' ~~complaints~~ ~~increased~~ ~~as their education levels~~ increased. She also found that these officers' citizen complaints decreased with higher education levels. Indeed, officers with a bachelor's degree received the fewest complaints while officers with graduate work received the second smallest levels of complaints (Palombo, 1995).

As noted, studies which revealed positive impact outnumbered those revealing a negative influence by a factor of four to one, and there were approximately double the number of studies reporting positive effects versus those with no differences found. Numerous researchers found such benefits as a broader information base for decision making as well as more years for maturation and experience (Mahan, 1991), better understanding and knowledge of the police in society (Sterling, 1974), and, as noted by Saunders (1970), officer education levels should reflect those of society.

Carter and Sapp (1992) were unable to answer the question as to whether college education made better cops. However, when they considered the types of skills required for community policing, they believed education produced better decisions, higher quality service, and more responsiveness to the police mission. They also noted that better educated officers tended to be better communicators, a necessary skill for community policing.

Despite the controversy, federal commissions recommended higher education for law enforcement. The President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice (1967) was very specific as to the need for higher education, citing:

The quality of police service will not significantly improve until higher educational requirements are established for its personnel. ...the complexity of the police task is as great as that of any other profession. The performance of this task require more than physical prowess and common sense. (P. 126)

This report led to the passage of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act in 1968. A significant provision of this act was the formation of the Law Enforcement Education Program (LEEP). Its purpose was to provide funds, and perhaps incentive, for officers to obtain their degrees.

The call for higher education was echoed five years later with the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals. The

Commission (1973) called for goals to be established, not later than 1982, when all agencies would require a bachelor's degree before employment. The 1968 National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1969 Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, and 1971 Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations each made comparable recommendations (Martin, 1994)

LEEP provided the funding and an environment favorable to the concept of higher education in law enforcement. Thousands of officers took advantage of these monies and the newly developed criminal justice programs to go to school. Many of the command officers across the country today are direct beneficiaries of the LEEP program. Unfortunately, like many federal programs, it eventually died, taking the funds with it.

Former President Clinton responded somewhat almost twenty years after LEEP ended with the 1992 Omnibus Crime Bill which, among other things, established the Police Corps. This program is aimed more at bringing educated people into the profession by offering funds for college in exchange for a minimum length of service in the police field. While not as extensive as LEEP, nor reaching current officers, it provides another step toward an eventual requirement of a bachelor's degree before hiring.

In addition to the general types of advantages to higher education for police officers presented thus far, individual officers can often benefit financially from a higher education. Most states, such as Texas, have officer-licensing agencies that offer various levels of peace officer certification. The Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education (TCLEOSE) awards certifications of Intermediate, Advanced, and Master Peace Officer (MPO). This certification is based upon length of service and training points.

TCLEOSE also mandates basic academy training of at least 560 clock hours and forty hours of in-service training every two years. Training

points are awarded at the rate of one point for every twenty hours of training or one point for each college credit hour completed. The basic academy represents twenty-eight points. An officer attending only minimum training would need at least twelve years, assuming forty hours of training during the first two years of service, to obtain forty training points. This officer would have received Intermediate certification at the eight-year point, and would need all twelve years experience to obtain Advanced Certification. This officer would, receiving minimum training, have twenty years' service before being awarded Master Peace Officer status.

Officers possessing a bachelor's degree progress through the certification levels much faster. Intermediate certification is awarded after only two years, Advanced status comes after six years service, and Master Peace Officer Certification is obtained in only fifteen years. Officers with master's degrees reach MPO status in only twelve years(2001).

This accelerated pace translates into financial gain for many officers. Many agencies in Texas, such as the Amarillo Police Department, award addition payments for possession of these certifications. Other agencies also pay officers for their educations, either for credit hours or for the degrees themselves. These incentive programs are often a driving force for higher education levels in departments who have no minimum education requirements. Thus, while not formally requiring higher education, these agencies none the less provide an environment favorable to college education.

If, as indicated, higher education for law enforcement officers is desirable, it is logical to assume higher education for command and chief executive officers is at least as desirable. It would seem apparent that a chief executive with higher education would value such education for the officers that chief must lead. Thus the importance of this study becomes evident.

METHODOLOGY

To study the education level of Texas chiefs of police in cities with populations of 25,000 or more first required identifying those cities. A list was formulated from the 36th Edition of the National Directory of Law Enforcement Administrators, Correctional Institutions and Related Agencies (2000). This resource provided entries of all agencies across the country and such demographic data as population and number of officers employed. It also provided the chief executive officer's name and mailing address. The survey group was identified through review of the listings contained in this resource. It is anticipated that some cities may have obtained a population of 25,000 since this resource was published, but without official census data, this was the best source obtainable. Ninety-two cities were thus identified.

A short, simple survey was developed to obtain specific data from the targeted chiefs of police (see Appendix 2). The survey made inquiry as to the jurisdiction's population, whether a minimum education level was required upon the chief's appointment to the position, and if there was a minimum requirement, what that requirement was. Other questions were for the chief's current education level, degrees held, number of chiefs' positions held, and education level upon appointment to their current position and number of other chief's positions held, if applicable. Analysis of this data would establish the current education levels of Texas chiefs of police.

Although other information might be desired, such as education levels at various ranks throughout their careers, this data was not requested in order to keep the survey short. It was believed that a short, check-off type survey would result in a higher response rate. The surveys were mailed to the targeted chiefs, with an explanatory letter (see Appendix 1) and self-addressed, stamped envelope on January 31, 2001. McAllen PD responded that

their chief had passed away, changing the number of possible cities to ninety-one. Eighty-one (89.0%) surveys were returned.

For comparison purposes, chief of police job postings on the Internet were reviewed, also on January 31, 2001. While perhaps not valid for true statistical analysis, it was believed that a "snap-shot" of employment advertisements would provide a basis for comparison to agencies outside Texas. Ten listings were located. Seven of these positions were for agencies in the 25-50,000 population range, and three were in the 100-250,000 category. One additional listing for a university serving a population of over one-hundred thousand was located, but was not utilized in the study. The websites searched were the "job page" of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (2001), Jobs in Government (2001), Law Enforcement Jobs (2001), and Government Jobs (2001).

These methods of inquiry were chosen to answer the research questions related to this study. The questions are: 1) **What are the education levels of Texas chiefs of police in cities with a population of 25,000 or more?** 2) **How does this compare with other cities outside Texas?** It is hypothesized that Texas chief of police education levels will be high, generally of the bachelor's degree status. It is further hypothesized that a significant number of these chiefs of police will have earned graduate degrees, and further, it is hypothesized that as population levels increase, the likelihood of a minimum education requirement being in place will also increase. Finally, it is hypothesized that comparing minimum education requirements for Texas chiefs of police with requirements of outside agencies will be generally similar.

FINDINGS

The survey divided populations of the targeted cities into eight sub-categories, however, these were re-sorted into five sub-groups: 25-50,000;

50-75,000; 75-100,000; 100-250,000; and greater than 250,000. This allowed for more general analysis. The responding cities populations are demonstrated in Table I.

Table I. Number of Respondants by City Population

POPULATION: (Thousands)	25K	50K	75K	100K	>250K
	34	16	9	14	8

Each chief of police was asked for their current education level in years of college completed as well as for all degrees obtained. Further each chief was asked what education level they held when appointed to their current position. Figure 1 shows current education levels in years.

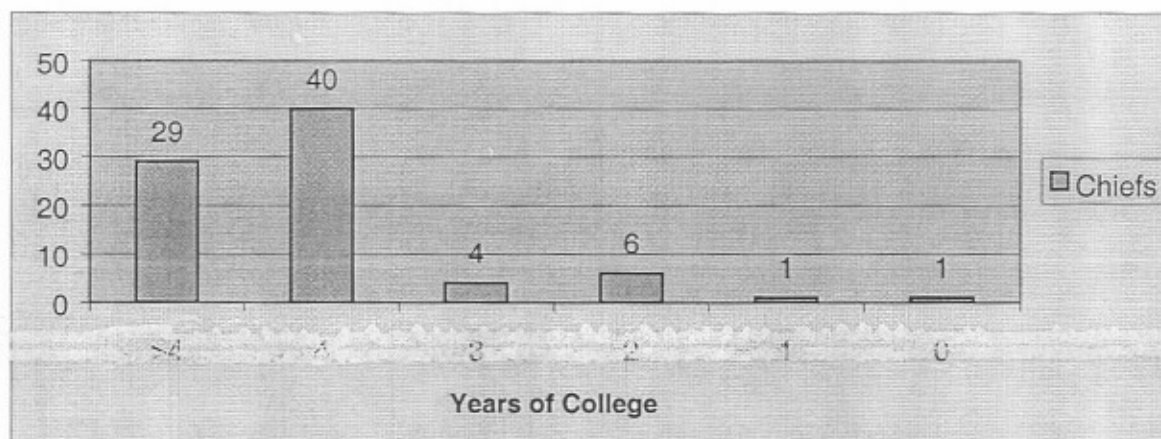


Figure 1. Current Education Levels of Chiefs

Clearly, Texas chiefs of police in cities of 25,000 or more are highly educated. Eighty-five point two percent of these executives have at least four years of college, and 98.9% have at least some college. Only one chief has no higher education. Figure 2 reflects degrees held at the time of their appointments.

Over eighty-one point five per cent of these chiefs held at least a bachelor's degree upon appointment to their current position. Ninety percent had at least an associate's degree, and 29.6% hold at least one graduate degree. Four of these executives held two graduate degrees.

Figure 3 reflects education levels compared to population groups. It is interesting to note that graduate degrees are not limited to the larger two groups. They are represented across all categories.

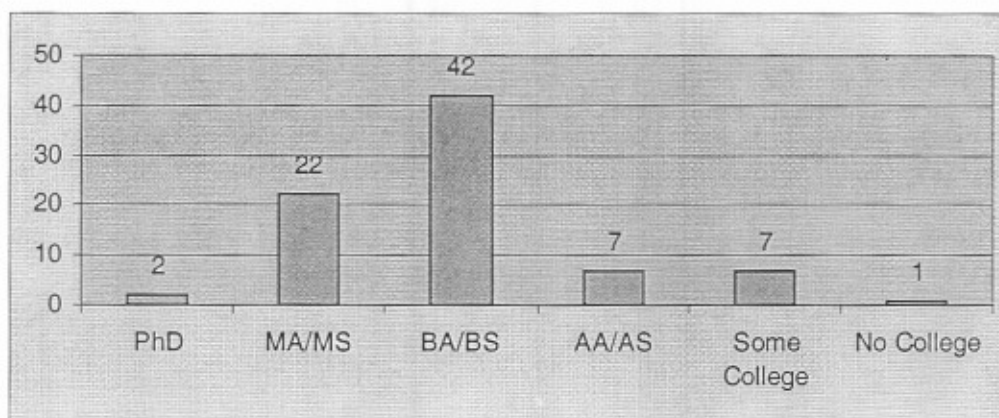


Figure 2. Degrees Held at Time of Appointment

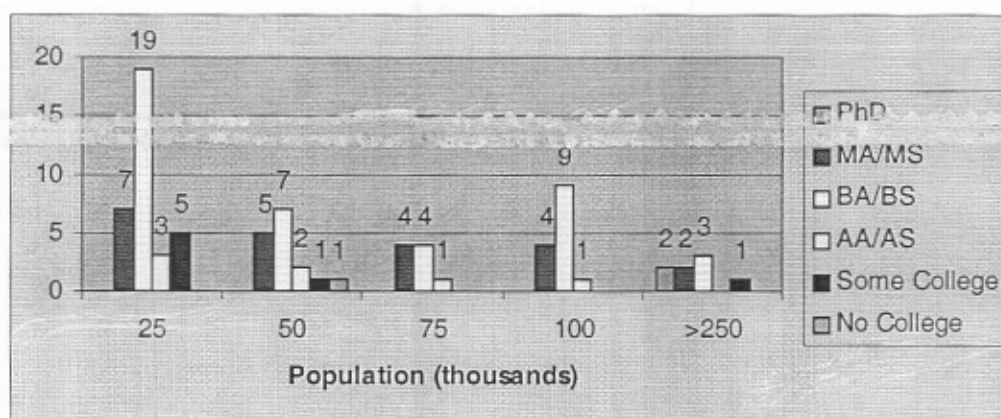


Figure 3. Education of Chief by Jurisdiction Population

Education level at the time these chiefs of police were appointed is equally high. Figure 4 reflects this data. Comparing Figure 3 and Figure 4

reveal few differences. Clearly, this group of chiefs had completed significant portions of their education prior to assuming the chief executive role.

It is apparent that the majority of hypotheses formulated for this study are correct. Texas chiefs of police in cities with populations of 25,000 or more are highly educated. The vast majority of these executives

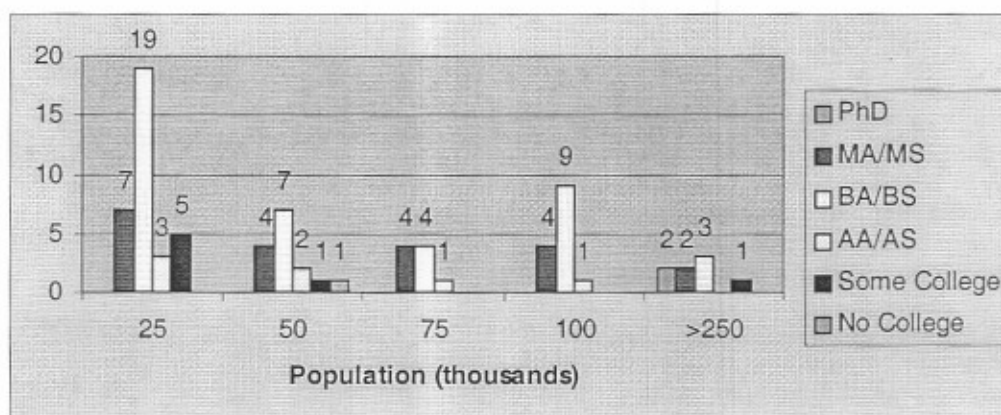


Figure 4. Level of Education at Appointment by Jurisdiction Population

hold at least a bachelor's degree and a significant percentage hold graduate degrees. These eighty-one chiefs have a combined total of three-hundred-sixty-four years of college education, or an average of 4.49 years.

The final areas in question were the hypotheses that as population increased, the number of cities with minimum education levels would also increase; and overall, the percentage of Texas cities with minimum education requirements for chiefs of police would generally reflect those of cities outside Texas. This particular area of inquiry yielded somewhat surprising results. Figure 5 shows the percentage of cities in Texas with minimum education requirements.

The majority of cities had a minimum education requirement. This was expected. However, the hypothesis that the occurrence of minimum

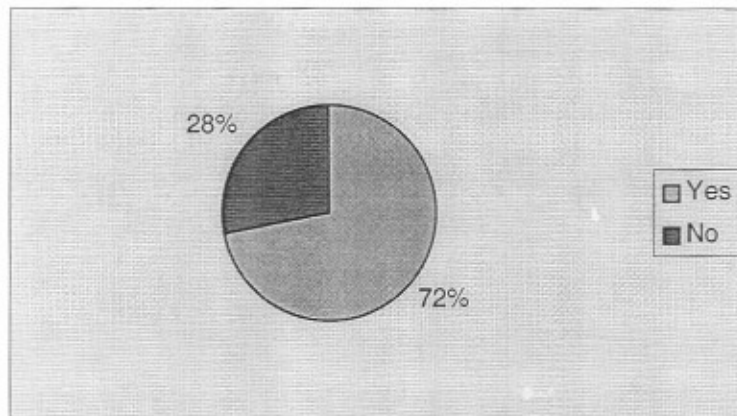


Figure 5. Minimum Education level Required for Chiefs

requirements would increase as population was not proved. At the time these chiefs of police were appointed, significant numbers of the cities in the 75-100,000, 100-250,000, and >250,000 ranges had not had minimum education requirements as shown in Figure 6.

These results may perhaps be explained when considering the tenure of Texas chiefs of police. Of the thirty-one chiefs in these three categories,

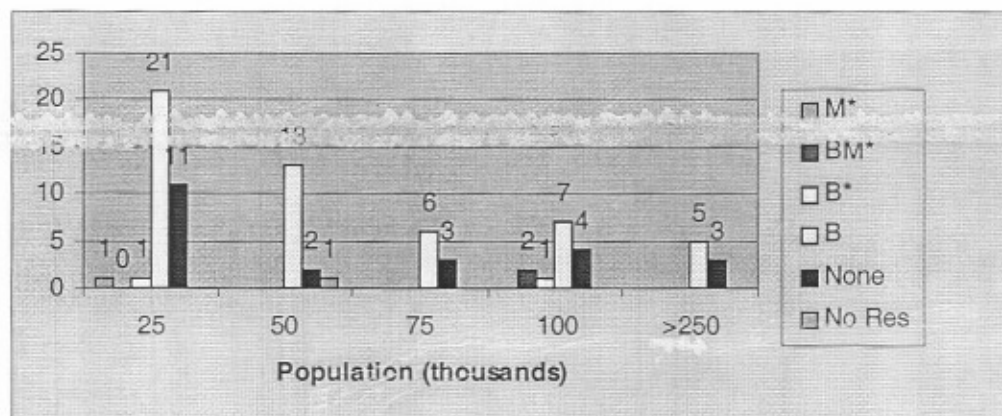


Figure 6. Minimum Education Requirement for Chiefs by Population

Legend Key: M* - MA required; BM* - BA required, MA preferred; B* - BA or experience;
B - BA required; None - none required; No Res - no response

three have more than twenty years in their current positions and ten others have been chief more than five years. Only fifteen of the chiefs reported less than five years with their current jurisdiction. Three others did not report how long he had been employed in that jurisdiction. The average tenure of these chiefs of police was 6.08 years.

Another possible explanation for this hypothesis not proving true may be found in the formation of the question itself. The survey asked if the respondent's city had a minimum education level when they were appointed. It is likely that some of the cities have since implemented such a requirement. One such city would be Amarillo.

Amarillo undertook the accreditation program offered by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) and was initially accredited in (CALEA, 1989). One of the optional standards for Amarillo's size category was that the chief executive be required to have at least a bachelor's degree (1989). Although this requirement was not in place when Chief Neal came to the department in 1980, he held a master's degree when he was hired. The Amarillo Police Department (2001) requires the chief of police and assistant chief of police hold bachelor's degrees.

The final hypothesis was that Texas cities would generally be similar to those outside the state. Ten employment ads were located on the Internet for chief of police positions in agencies serving a population of 25,000 or more. Seven of these were in the 25-50,000, and three were in the 100-250,000 population range. Table II shows the minimum education requirements, as reported in those ads.

Table II. Minimum Education Required

Population	25-50,000	100-250,000
Yes	6	3
No	1	0

Ninety percent of these cities require at least a bachelor's degree for employment, compared to the 68.75% of Texas cities who had similar requirements when these chiefs were hired. As noted above, it is likely that the actual number of Texas cities that require bachelor's degree is higher than reported due to a flaw in the question. Therefore, it is likely that Texas cities do, in fact substantially match those outside Texas.

CONCLUSIONS

There were two research questions. The first was: **What are the education levels of Texas chiefs of police in cities with a population of 25,000 or more?** The hypothesis that Texas chief of police education levels would be high was proven to be correct. Texas chiefs of police in cities of 25,000 population have a high level of education, with an average of over four years. This is roughly equivalent to the bachelor degree level.

It was further hypothesized that a significant number of these chiefs of police would hold graduate degrees, and this hypothesis was also proven to be true. Almost thirty percent of Texas chiefs of police held graduate degrees, with four of these chiefs holding two graduate degrees. Additionally, Arlington's and Houston's chiefs of police have earned doctorates.

It was further hypothesized that as population levels increased, the likelihood of a minimum education requirement being in place will also increase. This hypothesis was not proven, probably due to a flaw in the design of the survey. Still, 71.6% of the chiefs who responded reported their agency had a minimum education requirement for the chief of police position when they were hired. Therefore, research question one was essentially answered in all areas.

The second research question was: **How does this compare with other cities outside Texas?** It was hypothesized that comparing minimum education

requirements for Texas chiefs of police with requirements of outside agencies will be generally similar. Again, the results of the research did not completely support this hypothesis, most likely due to a flawed question, but minimum education requirements at the time the surveyed chiefs of police were appointed were generally high. Seventy percent of the cities surveyed had a minimum education requirement of at least a bachelor's degree for the position of chief of police. Additionally, Amarillo now has this requirement, and it is likely that other agencies do as well. This is particularly likely for agencies undertaking the accreditation process.

There are significant implications to the data obtained in this study. Since 1968, various federal commissions have recommended that a minimum education level for peace officers be established. Although education levels have increased during this time, this recommendation has not been implemented. Concerns regarding recruiting difficulties and the natural resistance of law enforcement to change have contributed to the slow progress in this area.

TCLEOSE officials spoke to various chief executives across the state about the possibility of establishing a minimum education level. As expected, many chiefs objected, particularly those from smaller agencies. These executives believe such a requirement would severely limit the applicant pool, resulting in inability to fill open positions (Trahan, 2001). While it is unknown how many of these chiefs had college educations, it would not be surprising to find many did not.

Perhaps a more effective approach might be to begin by establishing a minimum education level for Texas chiefs of police. This would have to be accomplished through legislation, but it would be a step in the right direction. Obviously, existing chiefs of police would have this requirement waived while in their current positions, but attrition would correct this

situation over time. This would also allow for an environment receptive to a minimum education requirement to be developed.

A second suggestion would be a revival of LEEP. While the theory of the Police Corps is not necessarily flawed, it would seem logical to also attempt to raise the minimum level of education for existing officers. This conversion might be slow, but with funding, it is logical that more officers lacking this education level would take advantage of such a program. In such a fashion, Chief Vollmer's ~~siren's~~ call for higher educated police officer could finally be realized.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Lt. Clarence E. Jones, Jr.
Amarillo Police Department
200 SE 3rd
Amarillo, TX 79101

January 31, 2001

«Title»
«Company»
«Address1»
«City»

Dear Chief,

I am attending the Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas' Leadership Command College, and one of the requirements for completion of this program is the Administrative Research Paper. I am conducting research regarding the education level of chiefs of police in Texas cities with a population of 25,000 or more in an attempt to determine if there is a relationship between education level and appointment to the position of chief of police.

May I ask you to take a moment and complete the enclosed survey and return it to me in the enclosed envelope? Thank you in advance for your assistance in completing my project. If you are interested in the results of my study, please indicate so on the survey.

Sincerely,

Lt. Ed Jones

APPENDIX 2

TEXAS POLICE CHIEFS AND EDUCATION LEVEL

City: _____ Number of full-time sworn officers: _____

Population: ____ 25,000 – 50,000 ____ 50,001 – 75,000 ____ 75,001 – 100,000
____ 100,001 – 250,000 ____ 250,001 – 500,000 ____ 500,001 – 750,000
____ 750,001 – 1,000,000 ____ over 1,000,000

Current education level:

____ High School College (years completed – circle one) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Degrees received (indicate all)

____ Associate's ____ Bachelor's ____ Master's ____ Ph.D, J.D.

Education level upon appointment to your current position:

____ High School ____ Some college ____ Associate's degree
____ Bachelor's degree ____ Master's degree ____ Ph.D, J.D.

Did your city have a minimum educational requirement for Chief of Police? Yes No

Minimum requirement? ____ Bachelor's ____ Master's ____ PhD, JD

Time in current position? ____ years, ____ months

You were appointed to Chief from: ____ within the department ____ outside the department.

Total time in law enforcement? ____ years, ____ months

Total number of chief of police positions you've held (including current)? ____

If this is not your first chief's position, education level upon first chief's appointment?

____ High School ____ Some college ____ Associate's degree
____ Bachelor's degree ____ Master's degree ____ Doctorate

Would you like a summary of the results of this survey? Yes No

Thank you for your assistance. Lt. Ed Jones