

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

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**Higher Education
in Law Enforcement Hiring Standards**

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**An Administrative Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College**

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FEBRUARY, 19, 2004**

ABSTRACT

Police agencies around the country are struggling to fill vacancies while at the same time trying to bring professionalism to law enforcement through higher education requirements for new recruits. This has forced many police administrators to question the need for educational requirements and what the impact of those requirements will be on the quality of their officers and available workforce. Several methods including a literary review, departmental survey, and data comparisons were used to gather the data necessary to answer the above questions. While there is not total agreement on the issue, research indicates that there are numerous benefits to having police officers who possess college degrees. However, unless pay, benefits, and work conditions increase proportionately to these higher standards, law enforcement will be unable to compete in the modern job market. . Therefore, it is concluded that Law Enforcement agencies wishing to have a college-educated work force will be forced to consider post-employment education programs such as time limits to obtain degrees after being hired, educational incentive pay and tuition reimbursement.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction.	1
Review of Literature	2
Methodology	7
Findings	8
Discussions/Conclusions	10
References	13

INTRODUCTION

“Help Wanted, Apply Within” is a statement that is commonly associated with signs that have been placed in the windows of gas stations, fast food restaurants, department stores and the like. However, it is increasingly becoming a common theme for American law enforcement agencies. With a shrinking applicant pool and growing competition for workers, many police departments are having trouble filling vacancies. This has caused many law enforcement administrators to reconsider their current hiring standards. Are they too high? What can be changed? What will the impact be on the quality of its officers?

This paper will address these questions and suggest some changes that departments may make to their hiring practices in order to broaden their applicant pool without sacrificing the long term quality of their officers. There are several questions addressed by this study. First, is there a need for college education requirements in law enforcement hiring standards? Second, what impact can agencies that require pre-employment college education expect to see in their available workforce? Last, if an agency is having trouble recruiting and / or retaining adequate numbers of college educated officers, what steps could it take to achieve its overall educational goals.

Several methods of inquiry will be used to gather the data necessary to answer the above questions. First, a literature review of related books, magazine articles, departmental hiring standards, and policies will be conducted. Second, surveys will be conducted with officers and administrators of various departments around the state of Texas. Last, data will be compiled and comparisons made of the current hiring standards of various departments throughout the state of Texas.

It is hypothesized that police departments will find it increasingly more difficult to compete for college-educated workers in the future. It is further hypothesized that in order to attract an adequate number of qualified applicants, law enforcement agencies who currently have higher education requirements will be forced to alter their entry level standards and consider utilizing post employment education programs to achieve their goals.

This research has great potential to aid law enforcement agencies that currently require college credit hours or degrees for entry-level applicants. By altering their entry level standards and promoting or requiring post employment education, a department might be able to broaden its applicant pool and increase retention all in one step without sacrificing the long term quality of its officers.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the early years of law enforcement in the United States there generally were no formal educational requirements. When an individual was hired as a police officer, he/she was given a badge and a gun and sent out to enforce the law. This led to very unprofessional and often corrupt police organizations.

In the 1930s there was a push by men such as J. Edgar Hoover and August Vollmer to bring professionalism to the police. They believed that this professionalism would only come through education. In 1931 the National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement (Wickersham Commission) reported that “the greatest promise for the future of policing is the college or university” (Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Standards and Education (TCLOSE), 2004, p.1). This started a movement toward standard educational requirements for police and the formation of many state regulatory agencies. In 1973 the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals (NAC) reported that the police still had

low educational requirements. They recommended a minimum educational level. The immediate standard was to be one year of college. This standard was to continue to increase to two years by 1975, three years by 1978, and a baccalaureate degree by 1982 (TCLEOSE, 2004). It appears that this recommendation by the NAC inspired much research in the area. Every study on law enforcement education that the author was able to locate was done in the 1970s. No current studies were located. Not surprisingly, many of these early studies suggested that there was a link between higher entry-level education and later job performance as a police officer.

A 1972 study by Cohen and Chaiken, as cited in Roper (1981) of the New York Police Department, indicated that education at the time of employment as well as after was significantly related to later career advancement and low disciplinary actions. Another study in 1975 of the Dade County Florida Public Safety Department concluded that officers with higher levels of formal education tended to have fewer incidents involving assaults, injuries and accidents (Casco, 1977). Finally, a study by Cunningham (1976) also found that college educated police officers tended to be superior performers. It was perhaps these studies or ones like them that caused many agencies to incorporate higher educational standards into their hiring guidelines. In a 1999 study conducted by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education (TCLEOSE) 10 percent of the 738 responding agencies now require some type of college education as part of their hiring standards. The study also showed that of the 65,203 officers licensed by the state 10,954 officers or 16.8 percent had a baccalaureate degree (TCLEOSE, 2004).

The push for college educated police officers continues today. In a February 2004 presentation for the Bill Blackwood Leadership Command College, Dr. Gene Stephens, one of the nation's leading criminal justice futurists, cited a Delphi study conducted by Dr. William

Tafoya. The study predicted that by the year 2025 formal education will become the standard for entry and advancement in more than 70 percent of all the nation's police agencies (Stephens, 2004). Further, organizations such as the Police Association for College Education (PACE) make it their mission to "advance the quality of police agencies and services through police officers by encouraging and facilitating a minimum education level of a four-year college degree for officers" (PACE, 2004).

While the goal of bringing professionalism to law enforcement through education is appealing, there are several major obstacles that must be considered. As entry-level requirements for police officers continue to increase, salaries and benefits in many departments have not. As a result, many potential applicants are now choosing private industry instead of law enforcement. This combined with the baby boom generation of law enforcement officers reaching or passing their 20 or 25 year retirement point is causing an unprecedented manpower shortage for much of American law enforcement agencies (Domash, 2002). Departments that years ago were overwhelmed with applicants now find it very hard to fill vacancies.

The newest generation entering the job market, born from 1978 to 1984 is commonly referred to as the Y Generation (Tulgan, 2001). This group of young men and women has greater expectations of employers than previous generations. They value diversity and flexibility in work environments. They do not automatically respect and/or follow established authority. They place a high value on leisure time and are constantly looking for new opportunities. The Y generation tends to look at a job not as a career, but as a temporary stepping-stone to something bigger and better.

The very nature and structure of police work is in direct contradiction to many of the Y generation values. Most law enforcement organizations operate under a militaristic rank

structure. Officers, especially rookies, are expected to follow orders without question. Shift work often interferes with leisure time. Patrol work can be routine and there is little room for creativity. All these factors combined with the high cost of college tuition and the higher entry level salaries available to college graduates in the private sector limits law enforcement's ability to compete for college-educated workers.

Those college graduates who do come into law enforcement often have unrealistic expectations of what the job will be. Turnover rates among college-educated recruits tend to be higher than other groups. In a longitudinal study in 1974 of 113 police recruits from four cities it was found that the college educated police officers as a group tended to have a higher turnover rate than those possessing only a high school diploma (Sterling, 1974).

Many departments are now starting to rethink their college education requirements and are seeing the value of prior work experience. In an effort to increase its applicant pool, the City of Chicago recently added a policy that would waive the department's 60 college hour education requirement if an applicant had at least four years of continuous military service (Domash, 2002). Similarly, in 2003 the Tyler Texas Police Department amended its hiring requirements to allow for 2 years prior law enforcement experience at an agency of 25 or more in the place of its 30 hour college credit requirement (City of Tyler Local Civil Service Guidelines, 2004). Many other agencies have made similar changes to their hiring standards.

Along with accepting work experience in the place of college education requirements, attracting lateral applicants from other agencies appears to be trend of the future. Agencies are beginning to realize the substantial savings in training time, money and turnover that they can enjoy by hiring officers who are already certified and have job experience. In hopes of attracting

laterals, some departments have begun offering signing bonuses, low cost housing loans, spotter's fees, and other commercial tactics (Tate, 2000).

While recruiting laterals may appear to be a practical fix for individual departments, to the profession as a whole it may prove to be a self-defeating and short-term fix. No one would argue that an individual officer should not attempt to improve his or her self by seeking better wages and/or working conditions. However, these laterals are often not held to, or expected to achieve, the same educational standards as new recruits and in the long term, the profession wide personnel void will remain. This "floating" workforce may actually take law enforcement backward in it's attempt to bring professionalism through education (Tate, 2000).

Many agencies around the country have already realized the difficulties associated with pre-employment higher education standards. However, they are nonetheless committed to having professional, educated officers. As a result, they have implemented programs to encourage post-employment education. The Tyler Texas Police Department currently offers additional pay to officers possessing various levels of college degrees. Further, the department offers a program to officers that reimburses them for up to 90 percent of tuition expenses should they decide to continue their college education once hired (Tyler Police Department General Orders, 2004). Many other departments have similar programs.

In order to achieve the level of professionalism that it appears will be demanded of law enforcement in the future, officers will need to possess college degrees. Given the difficulties of recruiting college graduates, this will not be an easy goal to achieve using traditional pre-employment educational hiring standards. Some agencies are already paying for officers to attend college after being hired and rewarding those who obtain degrees with extra pay. It would stand to reason that the next trend might be lower entry-level standards combined with

mandatory continued college education. In this way, departments could maintain an adequate number of applicants while at the same time ensure the long-term professionalism of their organization.

METHODOLOGY

There are several questions addressed by this study. First, is there a need for college education requirements in law enforcement hiring standards? Second, what impact can agencies that require pre-employment college education expect to see in their available workforce? Last, if an agency is having trouble recruiting and/or retaining adequate numbers of college educated officers, what steps could it take to achieve its overall educational goals.

It is hypothesized that in order to achieve the professional status that law enforcement strives for, it will be necessary for agencies to require their officers to obtain college degrees. However, these same agencies will find it increasingly more difficult to compete for college-educated workers in the future. It is further hypothesized that in order to attract an adequate number of qualified applicants, law enforcement agencies who currently have higher education requirements will be forced to alter their entry level standards and consider utilizing post employment education programs to achieve their goals.

A written survey was given to twenty law enforcement administrators participating in Module II, Class 56 of the Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute. A 100 percent response rate was obtained. The respondents represented seventeen different law enforcement agencies around the State of Texas, varying in size from 10 to 2800 officers.

The survey sought to determine current trends in Texas law enforcement education and hiring standards. Data gathered from the responses will be used to analyze the various educational

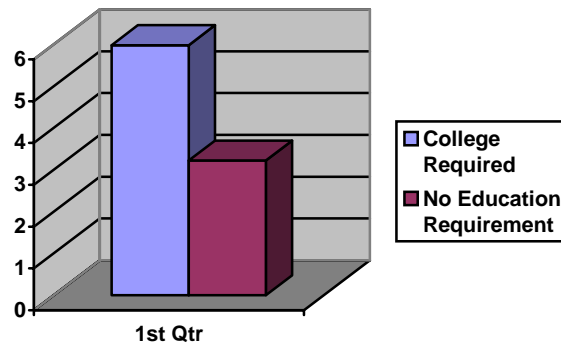
requirements being used in hiring standards around the State of Texas. It will further be used to identify possible future trends that can be expected.

FINDINGS

A written survey was given to twenty law enforcement administrators participating in Module II, Class 56 of the Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute. A 100 percent response rate was obtained. The respondents represented seventeen different law enforcement agencies around the State of Texas, varying in size from 10 to 2800 officers. Statistical data was calculated from the survey and compiled to make comparisons based on several variables including agency size, educational requirements, manpower shortages, etc. A strong link was found between agency size and college education requirements. Agencies having fewer than 100 officers were far less likely to have college education requirements in their hiring standards than larger agencies. Only 22 percent of the agencies having less than 100 officers required college education as opposed to 88 percent of the agencies having 100 or more officers.

A correlation was also found between manpower shortages and education requirements. On average, manpower shortages in departments having college education requirements were 86% higher than in departments with no requirements (Figure 1). This amounted to 5.98 vacancies per 100 officers as apposed to 3.22 vacancies per 100 in agencies with no education requirements. The following chart represents these findings.

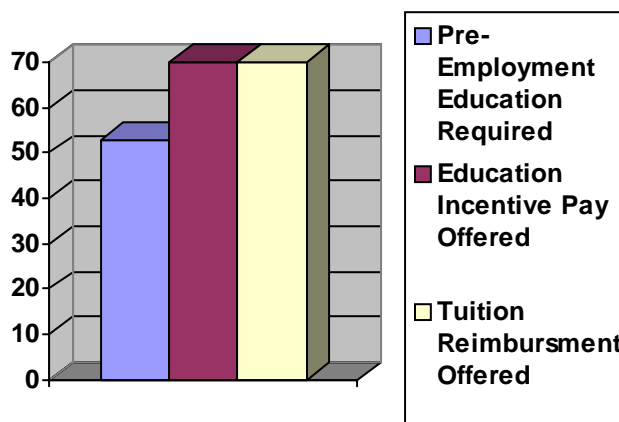
Figure 1 : Average Number of Vacancies Per 100 Officers



The trend toward recruiting laterals that was identified in the review of literature was supported by the survey. Perhaps in an attempt to fill their high number of vacancies, some departments have made exceptions to their education requirements. Of the agencies that reported having college education requirements in their hiring guidelines, 67 percent have provisions for accepting various amounts of prior military or law enforcement experience in the place of the education requirement.

While only 53 % of the agencies surveyed had a college education requirement, 70% offer post-employment educational incentive programs. These programs include extra pay for officers who have achieved various educational levels and reimbursing officers for tuition expenses should they choose to continue their education.

Figure 2: Percentage of Agencies Requiring Pre-Employment College Education Versus Percentage of Those Offering Post-Employment Educational Programs



DISCUSSION

With a shrinking applicant pool and growing competition for workers, many police departments are having trouble filling vacancies. This has caused many law enforcement administrators to reconsider their current hiring standards. This study addressed several questions related to this problem. First, is there a need for college education requirements in law enforcement hiring standards? Second, what impact can agencies that require pre-employment college education expect to see in their available workforce? Last, if an agency is having trouble recruiting and / or retaining adequate numbers of college educated officers, what steps could it take to achieve its overall educational goals?

It was hypothesized that police departments will find it increasingly more difficult to compete for college-educated workers in the future. It was further hypothesized that in order to attract an adequate number of qualified applicants, law enforcement agencies that currently have higher education requirements will be forced to alter their entry-level standards to consider using post employment education programs to achieve their goals.

While there was not total agreement on the issue, literature related to the subject indicated that there are numerous benefits to having a college educated law enforcement work force. College educated police officers tend to show better job performance and have fewer incidents requiring disciplinary action. In order for law enforcement to be accepted as a true profession, agencies will be forced to require their officers to obtain college degrees. However, unless pay, benefits, and work conditions increase proportionately to these higher standards, law enforcement will likely find it increasingly more difficult to recruit qualified applicants.

The survey conducted as part of this study showed that there is a greater manpower shortage in agencies currently requiring college education as part of their hiring standards. Many of these agencies have already amended their hiring standards to accept work experience in the place of education requirements. At the same time, they are heavily recruiting lateral transfer officers from other agencies. While this is a quick fix for some agencies, the career wide manpower shortage remains and the overall educational level of officers recruited by these agencies is declining. This leads to the next trend that appears to be on the horizon for law enforcement, post employment education.

A larger percentage of American law enforcement agencies now have programs that provide incentives to officers who seek to further their education after initial employment. Some agencies are offering extra pay for to officers who achieve various levels of college education. Others pay for officer's tuition if they chose to continue their college education. Some offer both. The next logical step may be for agencies to adopt post employment education requirements for their officers.

This research has great potential to aid law enforcement agencies that currently require college credit hours or degrees for entry-level applicants. By altering their entry level standards

and promoting or requiring post employment education, a department might be able to broaden its applicant pool and increase retention all in one step without sacrificing the long term quality of its officers.

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