

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

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**The Impact of Bicycle Patrol on a  
University or College Campus Setting**

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An Administrative Research Paper  
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by  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this research paper is to show the impact that a properly implemented bicycle patrol program can have on university police departments.

The research will show that campus police departments and their communities can benefit from a bicycle patrol program in many ways, such as; increased community contact, feeling of security on campus, increased arrests, increased traffic/parking enforcement, increased response time to calls for assistance, ease of mobility in areas of heavy pedestrian and vehicular traffic, economically more feasible than traditional patrol vehicles, and higher moral and better physical fitness of the officers that are assigned to bicycle patrol. Climate conditions and size of area to be patrolled were found to be the only limiting factors.

Various books, magazines, inter office memorandums, and personal interviews were used to draw the conclusions presented. This research paper will also provide information on types of bicycles to be selected, equipment, uniforms, types and sizes of areas to patrol, and suggestions for proper implementation.

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to show that many university police agencies and the communities they serve can benefit from a properly implemented bicycle patrol program. They have proven to be cost effective; a bicycle can be purchased for around \$1,200, equipped and a new patrol car for \$20,000, unequipped, training classes can last from 3-5 days and range from free to \$300 and uniform costs are an average of \$500. Although there is a substantial start up fee, the research will show that bicycle patrol more than pays for itself after the first year of operation as compared to patrol cars (Limbrick, 2001).

Bicycle patrol is a pro-active approach to law enforcement, leading to increased arrests, better response times, and identification of suspicious persons as police bikes are stealthy, fast, and strong (Grady, 1990). Bicycles are accessible to many areas that patrol cars are not such as: sidewalks, jogging paths, areas congested by both vehicular and pedestrian traffic, and are better suited for smaller patrol areas as those seen on campuses (Strandberg, 1997). They are also used for venues such as sporting events, fairs, concerts, and other areas where increased parking assistance and navigation through large crowds is needed.

Bicycle Patrol can benefit community relations; officers are out of the patrol cars, which the communities view as a barrier between them and the officer (Ent and Hendricks, 1991). Bicycles have proven to be community relations hit, they provide the community with a sense of greater security as bicycles can go places that cars cannot and seem to be more popular than horse mounted patrol (Powers, 1996). Many bicycle patrol officers give safety classes to children during theme events such as "Bike Rodeo's" (Mussey, 2001). Officer morale is improved as shown by better attendance, lower health care costs, and higher arrest rates (Miller, 1994). Bicycle officers consider bicycle patrol as "fun" and they enjoy the increased positive community contacts they make while on patrol. There is such a demand for officers to be

assigned to bike patrol; some departments even have "waiting lists" (Beesley, 2001). This paper will study bicycle patrol on college campuses and it's effect, if any, on budgeting issues, faculty, staff and students.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To begin with the basics, what is a mountain bicycle? A mountain bicycle is usually an 18 speed bicycle built on a frame constructed of chrome-moly steel or aluminum, and designed to take the punishment of riding in dirt, gravel, rough terrain, and city streets (Grady, 1990). On July 10<sup>th</sup>, 1987 the nations first urban uniformed mountain bicycle patrol began in Seattle Washington Police Department by Ofc. Paul Grady and Ofc. Mike Miller in response to heavy construction and traffic congestion in downtown Seattle making it almost impossible to get patrol cars anywhere in an efficient or timely manner (Grady 1990). Bicycles were chosen over dirt bikes or mopeds because they could operate in many different settings such as congested city streets, sidewalks, jogging paths, and other areas that were traditionally foot patrol areas only. They quickly found that bicycles were more cost effective than horse mounted patrols and were usually able to respond to calls quicker than patrol assist (Berg, 2000). Bicycles are already being used by many colleges and universities and other law enforcement agencies in roles one might not think of; county sheriff's department for court security, U.S. Capitol Police for the protection of House and Senate members, and by the United States Secret Service to secure the grounds of the Whitehouse (O'Brien, 1995).

Most of the literature reviewed shows that bicycle patrols have several impacts on the department and communities that they serve. The one of the impacts on departments is budgetary. While a new patrol car (unequipped) can cost an average of \$20,000. A new bicycle

(equipped) has an average cost of only \$1,200 with added uniform and training costs of about \$500. The average yearly operating cost of a patrol car is \$9,312 while the average annual cost of a bicycle is \$296, 96.8% less (Limbrick, 2001). Bicycles have better response time to calls during times of high traffic congestion due their ability to use unconventional routes such as: slipping through bumper to bumper traffic, using sidewalks, unpaved areas, and up and down stair ways (Lesce, 1997). Arrests have increased due the speed and stealth of bicycles.

According to an inter-office correspondence by the San Antonio Police Department, the average daily arrest record had doubled. Officer morale is high on bike units and many more officers would like be on bike patrol as is evidenced by a waiting list for this type of assignment (Vernon, 1991). Many departments are also concerned for the physical well being of their officers, while most departments have physical agility standards, they are not usually enforced and this gives some officers an excellent means of cardio vascular exercise (Mathis, 2000).

Communities are also effected by bicycle patrols. In 1995 the University of Miami, OH embarked on an initiative to increase the amount of security that the facility, staff, students, and visitors felt while on their campus. Though they did not hire any new officers, officers were placed on bicycle patrol. The response from the community was one of a feeling of greater security, just by the presence of police officers in areas that they are not accustomed to seeing them. The officers were more accessible without comprising response times (Powers 1996). Some felt that the worst thing that happened to community relations was when police officers went to cars (Adcox, 2001). At the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio (UTHSCSA) many of the international visitors, who are not accustomed to or worse, afraid of police officers, like the bike patrol and want have their pictures taken with them as the officers

are more approachable. They are also often stopped by passersby who are lost and in need of directions that may not even be associated with the UTHSCSA (Mussey, 2001). A few departments have begun having "Bicycle Rodeos", these serve a two-fold purpose: 1) To give the community a chance to interact with their police department and meet the officers; and, 2) To provide parents and children with safety information, injury statistics, proper use of bicycles on streets, and basic operating and repair tips (Neal 2001). With help from sponsors they can even give free helmets to children, because bicycle helmets can reduce the risk of head injury by 95% (Patton, 1994).

## METHODOLOGY

The impact of a bicycle patrol program in a university environment has several purposes in that it can 1) increase officer visibility, 2) quicker response times, 3) generating a feeling of a more secure environment for faculty, staff and students, and 4) save the save the department money. These major points were supported by reviews of numerous law enforcement articles, interoffice correspondences, interoffice memorandums, published books by known authors, and personal interviews. The book, *Policing By Mountain Bike*, was authored by Paul Grady whom many consider to be the father of modern bicycling police programs and includes the history of bicycling, practical application, and tips on equipment and uniforms (O'Brien, 1995). The various periodicals gave more insight into applications to a university setting and patrol techniques, the personal interviews from officers who supervise bike units, the officers that work the units, and the community that they serve.

## FINDINGS

I would like to start out this section with a quote that is used by bicycle officers, "If you run, you only go to jail tired" (Neal, 2001). Mountain bicycles should be constructed of chrome-moly steel or aluminum frames. Although there are other composites that the frame can be made out of, these two seem to be the strongest and most reasonable in reference to price. There are approximately 300 manufactures of mountain bicycles at this time. It should be at the least 18 speeds with "LX" or higher components (Patton, 1994). When one purchases a mountain bicycle, make sure to get a lifetime warranty on the frame, the first years maintenance or "tune up" is usually included by reputable bicycle shops. The total costs should in the neighborhood of approximately \$1,200.00 (Limbrick, 2001). The bicycle's weight is important, as officers have to pick the bicycles up from time to time and, when in a hurry, the added weight can make a difference. The general rule of thumb is, if you really don't need it, don't put it on your bike. Too much equipment leads too much weight and causes early fatigue on the officers (Patton, 1994). The equipment should be limited to a good re-chargeable night light, flashing taillight, and a rear mounted rack with bag which has reflective logo's, i.e.; SHERIFF, POLICE, etc. clearly marking the bicycle. Getting items for theses bicycles is easier now than in years past, most bicycle shops either have this equipment on hand or can easily order it (Neal, 2001).

When selecting officers for bicycle patrol, there is no shortage of volunteers, however those chosen should already be in good physical shape as the demands of the training are quite vigorous. Training usually last from 3-5 days and during that time frame officers are taught various subjects; nutrition, stretching, exercise, basic bicycle maintenance, and patrol techniques.



These classes are usually free, but can cost up to \$300.00 (Mussey, 2001). More uniform manufacturers are designing bicycle patrol uniforms. Most departments want the officers to use the department issued uniform shirts to ensure that the officers are more easily recognized. The shorts, for summer wear, and the pants, for winter wear can range in price from \$20 to \$90 per pair. (Grady 1990). Even with a start up cost of approximately \$2,000 per bike to include training and equipping a new officer for bike patrol, they will easily pay for themselves when compared to an average annual cost of a patrol car of \$9,312, while the yearly maintenance for a bicycle is around \$296.

Some departments have bicycles that have been in service for 5 or more years. (Limbrick, 2001). Officer morale is high on bike units, the officers enjoy interacting with the community and there is always the chance to catch someone in the act of committing a crime. Some departments have even reported that officers arrest rates have doubled while assigned to bicycle patrol. Officers must be placed in districts or areas that are not too large; it should usually be an area of 5 square miles (Lesce, 1997). Some departments have bicycle officers as "solo" units, most research shows that they should be in pairs for safety, an example given was, "when you go where cars can't how can you expect them to get to you for back up." (Miller, 1993). Most bicycle patrol contacts are spontaneous and the persons contacted are either committing a crime or their actions are suspicious in nature, it is good idea to have back up with you already.

Weather has also been found to a factor. Bicycle operations are not feasible when it is too cold or too wet. Most officers will patrol until the weather gets down in the 40's and when it is raining too hard and no longer safe (Neal, 2001). Almost all universities and college's benefit

from officers being able to enforce parking rules and regulations, assist with traffic and pedestrian control during special events, and the ease in which they can move in and between large crowds and parked vehicles. Officers must remember the 3 golden rules of cycling; 1. Be seen, 2. Be predictable, and 3. Be paranoid (Northfell, 1997).

The community is also a winner. Children like police officers on bicycles. Bicycle officers give the community a greater feeling of security because they can see the officer and speak to him or her, where as the patrol cars became barriers to the public, and sometimes horse patrol scares both adults and children due to their size (Ent and Hendricks, 1991). Universities have many members and visitors that are from foreign countries, they are surprised to find that the police in this country are more approachable and friendlier than that of their home country, and will even ask to have their pictures taken with the bicycle officers (Miller, 1993).

Many departments try to better their relations with the public, especially children, to reinforce that we are the good guys, we can be trusted, and are someone who will help. One way is to have a "Bike Rodeo." These are usually a half day long event, where parents and children are invited to attend. Since children are drawn to this simply by the title, it is an excellent opportunity to teach them safety issues, not only related to bicycles, but also gun and other hazardous items. With good sponsorship, perhaps the same place the bicycles were bought can ensure the children that signed up can receive a proper fitting helmet. Helmet wear is a must, because bicycle helmets can reduce the risk of head injury by 95% (Patton, 1994). Those who were interviewed responded helpfully to the questions that were asked. All of these brought together helped to develop sound findings that other universities will find helpful in either beginning a bicycle patrol or improving their existing one.

## DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

Many university and college campus can benefit from a bicycle program, not only monetarily, but also from a community relations stand point. Monetarily by the amount of money that a bicycle patrol can save their budget, in some cases thousands of dollars a year, but also from increased revenue from citations when enforcing parking rules and regulations. Higher moral of officers that are assigned to bike patrol, less sick time used, improved health of the officers, and increased arrests. The community benefit due of the increased sense of security they get by seeing the officers in new areas that they are not accustomed to and decreased response times, as bicycles use different avenues of approach, such as sidewalks, alleys, and stair ways. The community has a better perception of the police as being more friendly and approachable versus those in patrol cars.

At times there were difficulties in getting current information, which resulted in the use of personal interviews. Theses interviews were conducted in person and on the phone, I found the cooperation to be increased in the personal interviews rather by the phone.

All of the data complied which consisted of 1 book, 11 articles from periodicals, 2 inter office communications, instructed courses, 5 other research papers from prior graduates of the Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas, and 5 personal interviews.

Budgets do not seem to be growing and we are expected to do more with less. Combined with the greater expectations the community places on us from a service standpoint, even with the few limitations that were pointed out, bicycle patrol is still a good program to have in most departments.

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