

**THE BILL BLACKWOOD
LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE**

COLLEGE EDUCATION IN LAW ENFORCEMENT: THE CURRENT STATUS

**A Policy Research Project
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Professional Designation
Graduate, Management Institute**

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ABSTRACT

For the last thirty years law enforcement officials, and educators have pondered whether a college education should be a basic part of the police profession. Some have argued for the requirement and others have argued against it. However, the issue continues to be unsettled. Over the past few years, the public demand for police reform has once again brought the education issue to the forefront. Therefore, it is the top administrators (Chiefs of Police, Sheriffs, Etc.) who will be required to implement any standards requiring a college degree prior to entering the Law Enforcement profession.

The Chiefs of Police of thirty-five small agencies in Texas (20 - 50 officers) were mailed a brief four question survey in an attempt to determine the current attitudes toward requiring a college education prior to entering the police profession or at a particular rank within a law enforcement organization. The results of the survey (31 completed and returned surveys) indicated that 86 percent of the Chiefs did not require a college degree prior to employment. Further, 44 percent said that they believed a college degree would be required prior to entry into law enforcement within the next 10 years. It appears that requiring a college degree may or may not be realized. However, the complexity of police work will only multiply in the future and in order to keep up with the demand for better skilled and more disciplined law enforcement professionals, top managers and administrators may be forced to accept a college degree as a minimum hiring standard.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this project is to examine the issue of requiring a college education prior to entry into the law enforcement profession and to collect information about the current attitudes regarding this issue from Chiefs of Police of various cities in Texas. Essentially, the intent is to determine the current thoughts of law enforcement managers with regard to requiring a college degree before entering law enforcement.

Main Issue

For many years the law enforcement profession has wrestled with the issue of whether or not a college education is needed in police work . To this day, there is no consensus on the subject. It is this investigator's experience that many law enforcement administrators within law enforcement continue to try and implement some minimum level of college education for police personnel. This research will provide police administrators with empirical data regarding requiring a college education in law enforcement as an entry requirement or as prerequisite for supervisory or top management positions.

The primary method by which this project was conducted was in the traditional style by use of a survey questionnaire. The American Psychological Association (APA) style, using parenthetical references, will be used as a citation method.

Purpose and Relevancy of the Topic

Whether some amount of formal education or a college degree helps an officer adjust faster or make better decisions is still being debated and may never be proven one way or the another. What is at issue is the current thoughts of police administrators (particularly in smaller communities) regarding

the need for higher education within law enforcement. For it is they who will provide the greatest influence in the final decision.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Since the 1960s the issue of higher education in law enforcement has been heatedly debated by law enforcement theorists and practitioners. It appears that about every ten years the issue of whether or not to require a college degree or even a prescribed number of college hours surfaces. The opinions are as varied as the number of law enforcement organizations in Texas. In some organizations a college degree is required prior to employment while others require only a GED or high school diploma. One thing is certain, however, the technological advances over the past 30 years will seem insignificant when compared to the advances which will occur in the next five to ten years and it is imperative that the law enforcement community take full advantage of every opportunity. In order to take advantage of this, law enforcement agencies throughout the country must be prepared to process opportunities as well as information. This is particularly true of many of the smaller agencies who have fewer financial resources available.

Pilant (1995, p. 31) indicates that the computer has affected the law enforcement profession to a greater degree than other professions by allowing police officers to complete many of their daily tasks from patrol cars and without the aid of a telecommunications operator. While it is entirely possible that with adequate training almost any police officer is capable of learning any new technology, what poses a more pervasive problem is the ability to adapt to new technology, methods, ideas, and concepts. Police officers today are faced with many more options, considerations, and restraints than ever before and their ability to make proper decisions is critical.

Education and Ethics

The issue of ethics in today's society is certainly a topic of great debate. Ethics in law enforcement is a topic of great discussion and many law enforcement theorists and practitioners debate the correlation between ethics and the level of education. In fact, Tyre and Braunstein (1992, pp. 6-10) examine the correlation between education and ethics. It seems that many assessment centers are geared, at least in part, toward the inclusion of some type of ethical dilemma for participants seeking a top management position. Mintzberg (1989, p. 349), Brockman (1990), and Bryan (1990) also look at education as a prerequisite for police management.

Education and Professionalization

Many believe professionalization and ethical behavior should be a goal of the law enforcement community. This investigator believes one of the hallmarks of any professional should be ethical behavior. Especially, with much of the nation focused continuously on the Criminal Justice System and the police. This investigator agrees with Hymas (1991 p. 127) who states that the public and the courts hold law enforcement to a higher level of ethical behavior. This is perhaps in response to public trust placed on individuals who possess the authority to deprive individuals of life, liberty, and/or property.

CHAPTER III

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND PRACTICES

Several authors examined the level of education in law enforcement officers with varying conclusions. One example is a publication in which Carter and Sapp (1992, p. 8) note that in the 1960's the issue of higher education in law enforcement was being considered. I have spoken to many police managers whose ideas seem to mirror those early thoughts. Unfortunately, inconclusive studies like those of Carter and Sapp (1992, p. 10) tend to add to the controversy rather than resolve it. The recollection of parents continually reinforcing their children's efforts toward education can certainly attest to the social acceptance (respect) for higher education. Actually, it is well accepted even in law enforcement circles that law enforcement, although well on its way toward becoming a recognized profession, is still not universally recognized as such. Many researchers such as Sheehan and Cordner (1989, p. 221) see education as "a vehicle for professionalization". What is of interest is to see if current law enforcement practitioners concur with this view.

Several law enforcement practitioners have documented the status of formal education in law enforcement. Calvert (1990, p. 25), for example, studied the level of education within the San Antonio Police Department and indicates that the number of officers graduating from college or universities has increased consistently from 1964 to 1989. However, there is no college education requirement prior to joining the San Antonio Police Department. Bryan (1990, p. 6), looked at the selection criteria for Police Chiefs of several cities and found that specific levels of formal education are not always a requirement. In fact, one city placed more emphases on personal experiences rather than on formal education. While this seems to insinuate that the personal experiences provide a more desirable effect than a formal education, Biggerstaff (1992, p. 7), on the

other hand, indicates that police officers with a college education may possess a different outlook on issues. This may provide the officer different options not normally available to individuals without higher education.

While there may be many advantages to requiring a college education in law enforcement, there are several problems associated with requiring a college degree prior to employment. Corbett (1991, p. 30) and Carter and Sapp (1992, p. 11) point out that minority members do seem to have less access to higher education and therefore requiring a college education may be discriminatory. However, Carter and Sapp (1992, p. 11) also prescribe written policy and proactive minority recruitment as a remedy to ensure minority representation.

Current Practices and Policies

A questionnaire (see appendix B) was sent to the Chiefs of Police of 35 cities in Texas. The questionnaire was prepared and mailed, with a self-addressed and stamped envelope enclosed. Consent to participate in this study was implied by whether or not the questionnaire was completed and returned.

The questionnaire solicited information in the following areas:

1. Requiring a college degree or a minimum number of college hours prior to employment in their department
2. Requiring a college degree or a minimum number of college hours at or above any certain rank/position within their department
3. The Chief's opinion about whether a college degree will be required prior to entry into the law enforcement profession within the next 10 years
4. The Chief's opinion about whether a college education should be required only at or above certain ranks/positions

The first 35 municipal police departments in Texas listed in the 1993 issue of the FBI Uniform Crime Reports who's number of sworn personnel are between 10 and 50 were selected to participate in this investigation (see appendix A). In this way a random sample of participants were selected in order to control for variables which might influence the overall results of the study. Police departments smaller and larger than those cited above were excluded from this study primarily because of this investigator's interest in small to medium size departments.

Results

Thirty one questionnaires were completed and returned (88%). The overall responses indicated that at least some college education was needed prior to entering the police profession or for some positions within law enforcement, but as expected there was no agreement as to how much college education was needed or what positions required it. The results of this study with regard to the four main areas of inquiry are presented below under their proper headings.

College Degree Requirement

The first question in the survey asked each subject if a college degree or a minimum number of college hours were required by their department prior to employment. Only 13.7% of the respondents said that they did require a college degree or at least some college hours prior to employment. A majority, 86.2%, indicated that they did not require either a degree or a minimum number of college hours. Four agencies (12%) said they required a college degree. Although not a degree, one said a minimum of 30 college hours were required prior to employment. Finally, one said 30 college hours or 2 years of prior law enforcement experience were required prior to employment.

College Degree at Certain Rank

The second question in the survey asked each subject if a college degree or a minimum number of college hours was required for any designated rank within the agency. The results indicated that eight (24.1%) of the respondents did require a college degree or a minimum number of college hours at a particular rank. Twenty-three (75.8%) said they did not require a degree or a specific number of college hours. Four respondents said they required a college degree at the Chief's level, one said a bachelors degree was required (did not say at what rank), and two said they required progressively more education within ranks.

College Degree Within 10 Years

The third question inquired whether the respondent believed that a college degree will be required prior to entry into the law enforcement profession within the next 10 years. Fourteen (44.8%) respondents answered affirmatively with 17 (55.1%) responding negatively to this question. However, the comments included in the responses provided an interesting array of reasons supporting each position. Many cited the general lack of pay as the reason a college education will not be required. In addition, many respondents commented that interpersonal skills were more important than a college education. Those who said that a college education would be needed tended to cite the increasing complexity of police work as the major force which will eventually lead to requiring a college education.

College Education Required at Certain Rank

The fourth question asked if a college education should be required for officers at any particular rank or positions. Again the respondents were fairly split on this issue. Fifteen (48.2%) said yes and 16 (51.7%) said no. Of those who said yes, the comments mainly centered around requiring a college education at the rank of Sergeant and above while those saying no leaned toward believing that common sense was a more important requirement.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION OF RELEVANT ISSUES

College Degree Requirement

Although this investigation has looked at several topics about education in law enforcement, the issue of designating a college degree as a pre-requisite to entering the law enforcement profession is central. There can be little doubt that the next five to ten years will bring great changes to our society. These changes will certainly bring demands to the law enforcement community like no other changes have done in the past 30 years - that is another reform movement. The difference this time is that the general population is better educated and informed about governmental issues and practices and therefore less likely to be pacified with a promise and a show of force. Law enforcement must change and that change must begin with a police officer whose minimum level of education includes a college degree or some level of formal education.

It is obvious from the results of the research that not all Chiefs of Police are prepared to accept a college degree as a minimum requirement. Only 13.7% of the Chiefs surveyed currently require a college degree. Many, however, did recognize that higher education does or will play an important role in the future of law enforcement. Evidence of this can be found in the responses indicating that 24.1% of the agencies require a college degree or a minimum number of college hours at some rank within the respective police agency. Perhaps requiring a college degree is several years away, but law enforcement officials must understand that a drastic change is at hand. Police officers must be prepared to handle the technological and societal demands that are sure to come.

College Degree Within 10 Years

In reviewing the opinions of several other law enforcement practitioners regarding the need for a college degree within the next ten years, it was interesting to note that low salary was viewed as an obstacle standing in the way of a formal education requirement. The lack of appropriate pay, many said, would preclude the requirement of a college education. This belief is held by many law enforcement officers this investigator has spoken to over the years. The perception is that because of the low salaries of police officers, a college education cannot be required. I do not believe this is a valid argument for two primary reasons. First, there are many college educated individuals working for police agencies throughout the state. Many of these individuals had a college education prior to beginning a law enforcement career. Secondly, requiring a college degree could be the driving force behind raising the average salary of police officers.

Constraints

It is interesting to point out that of all the respondents and individuals who were asked to provide input into this project, no one pointed out any constraints other than money. It is also interesting to note that common sense is considered more important than education. The problems of possible discrimination, obtaining a sufficient hiring pool, and providing sufficient career goals within a police department were never mentioned. Carter and Sapp (1992, p. 11-12) do mention the discrimination issue but point out that it can be overcome through effective policy and recruiting practices. I also believe the discrimination issue can be overcome in this way. Obtaining a sufficient hiring pool should begin with a vigorous recruiting effort, especially on college and university campuses. However, traditional methods of advertisements such as newspaper advertisements should not be abandoned. In fact, advertising for police

applicants should be directed at those professions which typically employ individuals with college educations. Further, departments should search for applicants at colleges and universities throughout the state which offer Criminal Justice studies.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this project is to examine the issue of requiring a college education prior to entry into the law enforcement profession and to collect information about the current attitudes regarding this issue from Police Chiefs of various cities in Texas. The increasing complexity of police work has made it necessary to prepare police officers for a variety of different functions. The modern police officer must shift emphases from crime fighter to public relations manager within a matter of moments while at the same time maintaining a professional image. Hiring and maintaining a college educated police force is the next major policy consideration for police managers. The problems associated with such a policy (lack of pay, discrimination, small hiring pool, and general non-support of a college degree requirement) can be overcome with efficient management of recruiting and hiring practices (Carter & Sapp, 1992).

It appears the current practice of requiring a college degree prior to entering the police field is not widely supported in small to medium size agencies, and in fact only a small portion of the agencies surveyed do currently have such a policy. However, just under half (44.8%) of these same agencies do say that a college degree will be required within the next ten years. Because of the random sampling of agencies, a legitimate assumption can be made that almost half of the Police Chiefs in the state do support the notion that a college degree will be required prior to entry into the law enforcement profession within the next ten years.

The next five to ten years will bring great changes to our society and to policing. The advances in technology and demands by the public will require law enforcement to examine its practices and policies. Each election year brings promises of more police officers and programs aimed at reforming police

agencies. However, it is the changes in police officers and their ability to fulfill new directives that determine the pace of reform.

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APPENDIX A

LIST OF PARTICIPATING TEXAS CITIES

- | | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Addison | 2. Alamo | 3. Alamo Hights |
| 4. Alice | 5. Allen | 6. Alvin |
| 7. Andrews | 8. Angleton | 9. Aransas Pass |
| 10. Athens | 11. Atlanta | 12. Azle |
| 13. Balch Springs | 14. Balcones Hights | 15. Bastrop |
| 16. Bay City | 17. Beeville | 18. Bellaire |
| 19. Bellmead | 20. Belton | 21. Benbrook |
| 22. Big Spring | 23. Boerne | 24. Bonham |
| 25. Borger | 26. Bowie | 27. Brenham |
| 28. Bridge City | 29. Brownfield | 30. Brownwood |
| 31. Burkburnett | 32. Burleson | 33. Canyon |
| 34. Carthage | 35. Castle Hills | |

APPENDIX B

Chief,

My name is Joel C. Sanchez. I am the Chief of Police for the Uvalde Police Department in Uvalde, Texas. For the last several months I have been enrolled in the Law Enforcement Management Institute. Perhaps one or more of your personnel or even yourself are involved in the program.

One of the major requirements of the Law Enforcement Management Institute is the completion of a research project. I have elected to investigate the issue of whether to require a college education for police officers entering law enforcement. A very important aspect of my project is the enclosed brief questionnaire which solicits very basic information and ideas from current law enforcement administrators. I have provided a questionnaire to the Chiefs of Police of 35 municipal police departments in the State of Texas with 10 - 50 sworn police officers in the agency. You are among them.

Enclosed you will find a four question survey about your department's educational requirements. I understand that your time is limited and valuable, however, I ask that you please take a few minutes and complete the enclosed questionnaire and mail it back to me in the enclosed self-addressed envelope. Thank you,

Joel C. Sanchez

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Do you require a college degree or a minimum number of college hours for entry level employment in your department? (Yes/No)_____

If yes, then what are your requirements?

2. Do you require a college degree or a minimum number of college hours at or above any certain rank/position within your department? (Yes/No)_____

If yes, then what do you require and at what rank/position do you require them?

3. Do you believe that a college degree will be required prior to entry into the law enforcement profession within the next 10 years? (Yes/No)_____

Explain_____

4. Do you believe a college education should be required only at or above certain ranks/positions? (Yes/No)_____. If yes, then which ones?
