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Integrating POLICE ACADEMY Training

With Higher Education

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Articles in professional journals and discussion among law enforcement executives, educators, and trainers reveal a heightened interest in the relationship between higher education and entry-level law enforcement. This is certainly not a new concern, but the renewed impetus may be driven by several factors. First, there has been a slow but continuous movement toward increased higher-education requirements at entry level. Second is the current emphasis on the community-based policing philosophy and its inherent need for generalist problem solvers. Finally, there is the shift in the content of training to a more "academic" orientation. With this in mind, we set out to research the current relationship at entry level between academies and institutions of higher education.

In the early part of the 20th century, August Vollmer, O.W. Wilson, and others intensified the push for an increased role for higher education in law enforcement. Since then, there have been several commissions and legislative acts passed calling for higher-education requirements for entry-level police officers. Notable among these are the Wickersham Commission in 1931; the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice in 1967; the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals in 1973; the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies in 1987; the Omnibus Crime Control Act; and the Violent Crime Control Act. Although there have been several recommendations and efforts to raise educational requirements, the majority of law enforcement agencies today still require only a high school diploma at entry level. In 1989, the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) published a study that found only 9.1 percent of agencies required an associate's degree at entry level

and only 4 percent of the agencies required a bachelor's degree (54).

Whether or not college-educated officers are more likely to be successful in a community-based environment is difficult to assess, and efforts to make such an assessment have produced mixed results. Studies have been inconclusive, and the debate continues. Advocates of higher-education requirements contend that the role of the police officer in today's society is much more complex as police departments operate under the philosophy of community policing. Hewitt maintains that college education creates cultural awareness. "This exposure should reduce prejudice or bias," he believes. "More importantly, a formal education should teach individuals to check their judgments regarding prejudices in favor of a more tranquil analysis" (as quoted in Palmiotto, 72). The movement toward policing as a profession also requires advanced educational requirements. "Professions require a higher educational degree and, if the police hope to be recognized as a profession, they need to take notice of the professional criteria" (Palmiotto 72).

Opponents of the higher-education requirement contend that research has been inconclusive and that the call for a college requirement is vague. In a debate against higher-education requirements, Max L. Bromley refers to several studies that have found a college education has a negative impact on entry-level law enforcement positions. In 1974, Wilson found "college-educated officers to be resistant to authority and more likely to leave police service within the first few years" (quoted in Bromley, 78). Bromley also refers to a 1980 study by Griffin that found an inverse relationship between performance in the position of patrol officer and education level. "It was not until college education and years of practical experience were combined that patrol officers attained higher ratings," Bromley cites (78).

Opponents also contend that, if law enforcement is going to require a college degree, then the curriculum content needs to be specified.

The lack of specificity with regard to not only the level of degree, but also the curriculum content, does little to enhance policing as a profession. If college education is to be a requirement for entry-level police officers, questions regarding the nature of the curriculum and the preferred level of degree need to be raised, debated, and settled. (Bromley 79)

Regardless of the debate surrounding higher-education requirements for entry-level positions, some college credit has become a practical requirement of many agencies. Even where no formal college-education requirements have been established, many agencies rarely hire individuals meeting only the minimum high school requirement due to preference given to education and the number of applicants meeting the preference.

Although few departments require a college degree, many find that their best candidates are those who have one. In many ways a degree has become a *de facto* requirement in departmental hiring and promoting. (Sheehan and Cordner, 1995, quoted in Garner, 92)

Academies and universities can work together to assist in the effort to provide quality education and training for law enforcement officers of the 21st century. The community-policing philosophy requires officers to be proactive rather than reactive, community involvement in decision-making, partnering, and decentralization of organization and service delivery. Traditional policing under a bureaucratic model emphasized the development of specialized skills. The movement toward a problem-oriented, community-based model seems to place renewed emphasis on what may be

termed "generalist" skills. Effective community policing calls for officers to possess sound decision-making and problem-solving skills to meet the wide array of challenges present in any community. Colleges and universities may serve the generalist function and meet specific educational goals for students in the area of criminal justice through the development of knowledge, skills, and abilities in areas of criminal and procedural law, ethics, communication, and other related courses. Police academies and law enforcement agencies always play the predominant role in skill-specific areas like firearms training and arrest and control.

Agencies nationwide recognize the significance of postsecondary education through a myriad of programs that may include education incentive money, tuition assistance, and educational requirements for employment or promotion. What may be absent from the mix in many states is the ability to apply some areas of formal education in partial satisfaction of components of entry-level academy training.

Within the last 20 years, academic institutions across the country have expanded the process by which law enforcement officers may receive academic credit for some entry-level training. This articulation pro-

cess is driven largely by recognition that the academic content of some law enforcement training merits the award of college credit. The impetus to award credit for training may also be driven, in part, by an effort to "lure" officers into degree-seeking status. From the perspective of educators, this relationship between entry-level training and academic credit is often a one-way street in which academic institutions award credit for academy training while academies do not recognize the focus of some academic courses through a similar and reciprocal process. Of course, academic institutions are largely self-governed and may have more freedom to review academy

content and make decisions relative to the award of credit. Entry-level training in nearly every state is under the authority of a state oversight agency that establishes very specific performance objectives that may preclude accepting academic courses in partial fulfillment of training requirements.

Our research efforts were designed to examine the relationship between police academies and colleges and universities in satisfying the requirements of entry-level

training. In June 1999, we sent out a questionnaire to the executive directors of all state agencies responsible for law enforcement standards and training. The questionnaire solicited information about the location of training and the acceptance of academic credit by traditional academies for portions of entry-level training. We also provided room for written comments at the end of the survey. The response rate was 78 percent; 39 of 50 states returned the surveys. In addition to our primary sources of information, survey results, and a review of literature on entry-level training, we used the electronic resources of the International Association of Directors of Law Enforce-

ment Standards and Training (IADLEST) and the American Society of Law Enforcement Trainers (ASLET).

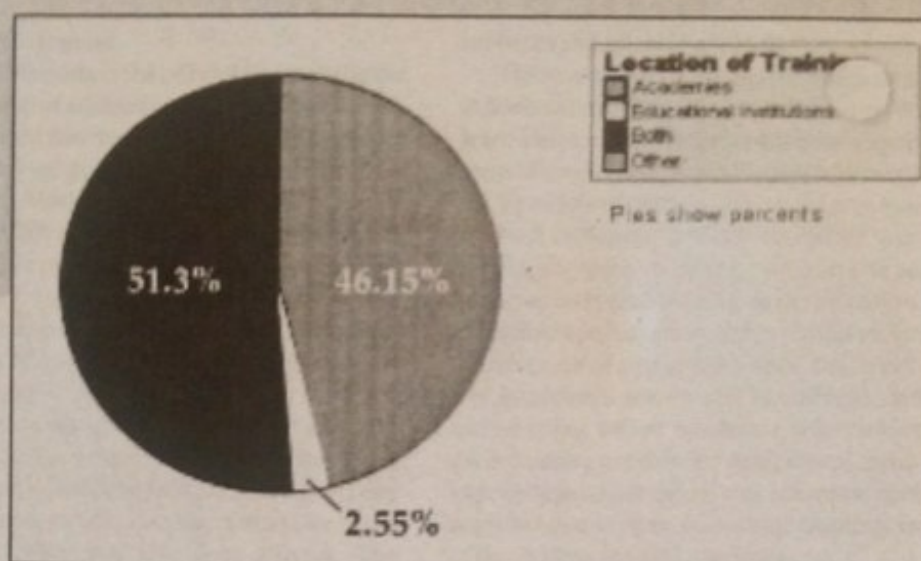
Entry-Level-Training Locations

Respondents reported 46.2 percent use of traditional academies for entry-level law enforcement training. The types of academies range from state academies to regional academies and academies conducted by individual agencies. Another 51.3 percent reported utilizing both academies and educational institutions for entry-level training. Interestingly, Minnesota, at 2.5 percent, reported training is only conducted at educational institutions.

Academic Credit Used to Satisfy Portions of Entry-Level Training

Although 51.3 percent of the respondents report the use of academies and educational institutions as the location of training, only 10 percent of the respondents accept academic credit toward portions of entry-level training. States reporting the use of academic credit to satisfy portions of entry-level law enforcement training include Alaska, Colorado, Mississippi, Texas, and Minnesota. The adjacent table illustrates the location of training of the states that accept academic credit as a substitute for portions of entry-level training and provides a brief profile of those states.

The Alaska Law Enforcement Training (ALET) is offered cooperatively by the University of Alaska Southeast (UAS) and the Alaska Department of Public Safety at the Public Safety Academy at Sitka. ALET offers program options for certification as a municipal police officer, federal or state park ranger, fire marshal, airport safety officer, and village public safety officer. The Municipal Police Officer Certificate



States accepting academic credit to satisfy portions of entry-level training.	Training conducted at state academy	Training conducted at regional academy	Training conducted in academies conducted by the individual agency	Training conducted at educational institutions
Alaska	X		X	X
Colorado			X	X
Minnesota				X
Mississippi	X		X	X
Texas	X	X	X	X

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requires a public-safety core of 12 credits. The UAS Law Enforcement Certificate requires 18 credits in ALET Communications and Public Safety Core. The ALET Communications program lasts six weeks and the Public Safety Core lasts 14 weeks.

The Colorado Peace Officer Standards and Training Commission requires applicants to pass a certification examination. In order to sit for the examination an individual must either complete an approved Colorado basic-training course, or hold an associate's degree in criminal justice from an approved college course of study and approved skills training in arrest, control, driving, and firearms. There are 15 POST-certified community colleges that offer certificates through "law enforcement academies." They also provide associate degrees in criminal justice in which students who attend the law enforcement academies may apply the learning as credit towards electives in the Criminal Justice Associate of Applied Science Degree. Colorado also provided written comments in the survey:

"If a person has a degree in criminal justice from an accredited college less than three years old, they would need to take a POST exam in driving, firearms training, and arrest-and-control techniques, but all other academics would be given credit through the degree. Classes themselves are not considered. A person must have a degree, whether it's an associate's or higher, to be considered for this option, which is known as course of study."

Mississippi reports the use of academies and universities as the location of entry-level training. The Harrison County Sheriff's Department and the University of Southern Mississippi Law Enforcement Training Academy have provided training to law enforcement officers throughout the state since 1987.

Texas also utilizes academies and universities as locations for entry-level law enforcement training. The Criminal Justice Center at Sam Houston State University was one of the first academic institutions to integrate a degree with academy training. Upon graduation, the student receives a degree and is certified for police service (Garner 92). Many community colleges offer licensing certificate programs for peace officers that may be applied toward an Applied Science in Law Enforcement degree. The credits may also be used to satisfy academic requirements specified by indi-

vidual agencies.

Minnesota is the only state reporting the sole use of educational institutions for entry-level law enforcement training. Most readers are probably familiar with the Minnesota Model, in which the Peace Officer Standards and Training Board licenses prospective officers prior to employment in an agency. In 1977 the Minnesota POST was created, and it established minimum standards of a two-year degree for entry-level officers.

Learning objectives must be met, but how they are met is at the discretion of the academic institutions. Candidates must pay for and complete the program before seeking employment as police officers. The process consists of academic and clinical-skills components. The academic component requires a two- or four-year degree from a POST-certified college or university before the clinical-skills component can be pursued. If students have a degree other than in criminal justice or law enforcement training, they can use the degree and just attend the certification program of 11 to 12 weeks. The clinical-skills component is similar to traditional police-academy training. After completing both components, candidates must pass the Minnesota Peace Officer Licensing Examination. In 1990, the state's Legislature passed a bill requiring new officers hired after January 1994 to have a bachelor's degree.

Progress in Integrating Academic Credit and Academy Training

Although 89 percent of the states responded that they do not accept academic credit in lieu of portions of academy training, 27 percent reported that they are considering integrating academic credit or have already implemented pilot programs. The following states provided written comments on the subject:

"Although academic credit is not accepted in lieu of police academy training," California replied, "there is a pilot program under way." Entry-level training is 664 hours. Upon further investigation, we learned that, after completion of 200 hours of entry-level training, students can use a waiver process to exempt them from other required training.

"We are currently investigating using community colleges to do precertification," Nebraska responded. "Currently, the state pays all direct training costs, such as room, board, and tuition. We are looking at a tuition-based system for the future, which

includes use of college credit."

There are various means for integrating academic credit and entry-level training. We were aware at the study's outset of a spectrum of models employed around the country. The various models, from least common to most common, include academic programs accepted to satisfy all entry-level requirements and leading to certification; academic courses accepted in partial or full satisfaction of certain subject areas; training academies conducted at colleges and universities where academic institutions award college credit for entry-level training; independent agency academies; and regional academies providing training to officers from several agencies.

There are models that seem to hold great promise for appropriate integration. One is to allow newly appointed officers attending academy training to be exempted from modules based on prior college course work and the demonstrated mastery of the subject matter. This would reduce the length of the academy for those students and result in cost savings for taxpayers and agencies. It would require some restructuring of academy presentation to allow those modules that may be exempted to be presented as a block of instruction, ideally at the beginning or end of the academy program.

Another promising model is one in which college students would be allowed to enroll in an academy, at their own expense, as part of their curriculum. The result would be a college or university graduate who would also have basic academy certification. If there existed a reasonable expectation that these college and academy graduates would be employed, the program would likely be very popular and competitive. Students could be selected for the program through a screening process that included representatives of potential employing agencies.

At the national level, the Police Corps was designed to increase the number of community-police officers with advanced education and training. The program is administered by the Office of Justice Programs, Office of the Police Corps, and law enforcement education (Police Corps) in the U.S. Department of Justice. The Police Corps currently operates in 23 states and integrates entry-level law enforcement training with degree programs. Scholarships are provided to students committed to completing a bachelor's degree and serving four years as a police officer.

There have also been programs and pilot projects implemented in various states that are very similar to the Police Corps where

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individuals sponsor themselves through academies prior to employment with an agency. In the Commonwealth of Virginia, Central Virginia/Criminal Justice Academy and Longwood College have created a law enforcement internship program. Students enrolled at Longwood may attend the academy during their final semester provided that they pass the appropriate background and preselection criteria. The greatest benefit of self-sponsorship may be the cost savings to law enforcement agencies. The cost is shifted to the training facilities and participants in the program. Standards are established by the state agency in charge of law enforcement standards and training, and instructors in specialized areas are law enforcement officers. Agencies, of course, still establish their own hiring standards.

Conclusion

The cost savings to taxpayers and the fact that there is a great deal of overlap in subject matter between academy training and college curricula indicate the need to continue integration between law enforcement training academies and universities. There is already articulation between many academies and universities. An expanded merger of education and training may require coordination of curricula between academies and universities. There is a need for academies and educational institutions to coordinate curriculum based on knowledge, skills, and abilities and job-task analysis. Various models exist to promote further integration of education and training. Decisions to move in that direction should be carefully analyzed in terms of the content of learning, application skills, and the cost-effectiveness of training. The best approach may be incremental, allowing agencies and states to slowly integrate the activities and carefully monitor the effectiveness of various models in meeting the ever-changing needs of entry-level preparation.

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