

Increasing Police Professionalism: An Exploration of Higher Education Requirements for  
Local Police Officers

## *Introduction*

Historically, brute strength and other measures of physical aptitude have shaped the impression of what constituted a qualified police officer. To some extent, these attributes are still viewed favorably among the public and even police officers. In reality, strong physical characteristics are still an important component of measuring candidate suitability. The profession still requires strength, agility, and speed. The public expects safety and security and hopes that the local police can accomplish that desire. Thus, *their* predominant requirement for police officers may still be brute strength. The nature of law enforcement has changed. The desire for professionalism is pronounced. Initiatives such as community policing have spurred new desires for police performance. Likewise, changing roles and responsibilities have shifted requirements. While officers must still demonstrate physical readiness, the drive for professionalism has led to the desire for increased educational requirements (Breci, 1994).

Policing is old, steeped in paramilitary tradition, and contains a legacy of developments and trends. Today, the police continue to operate under the guise of foregone traditions. Still, officers, detectives, and supervisors are addressed by their titles; rarely are first names used, particularly with supervisors. Officers, as they did in days gone by, are responsible for a specific geographic area, operate with little supervision, and are expected to seize those who violate established legal standards (Brandl & Barlow, 1996).

According to Brandl and Barlow (1996), police were originally products of specific communities – those best suited to patrol areas comprised of their ethnic group. Thus, black officers were relegated to pursue black criminals. Early police operated with

strong political connections, often chosen as supervisors due to financial contributions to their political parties. They made good police officers because of their firm understanding of and interrelationships with the criminal underworld. Police of the late 1800s and early 1900s received no formal training, were offered antiquated weaponry, and left to patrol a specific area unsupervised. In fact, the advent of call boxes was frowned upon by local police because they feared they would actually have to work. Often, criminal cases were heard by police officials with no legal training. Likewise, the criminals did not have the legal rights they enjoy today. When problems plagued neighborhoods, all known delinquents were rounded up and arrested. The justification was that one legitimate arrest was worth the other nine innocent people who were detained for no valid reason.

While strides have been made in the manner in which the police operate (Brandl & Barlow, 1996), the work remains the same. In that respect, nothing has changed. This may be a reason that the profession has been so resistant to change – the duties and the responsibilities are the same today as they were at the genesis of law enforcement. Now, the police patrol in vehicles. Yet, community policing has seen the value of early policing and utilizes foot patrol as the “next big thing” as though modern police executives created it. The police still resort to physical force and presence to deter or thwart crime as they have for centuries. Weapons, while now advanced, are still tools of intimidation and exert the ability to gain compliance. Police are still left to work largely free of direct supervision, allowing an enormous amount of discretionary power. Now, these traits, consistent with those that early police officers possessed, are accompanied by responsibility and accountability (Bayley, 1998). Advanced legal standards, public

expectations, and rights have shaped and molded the projected actions and behavior of the police.

The attempt to enhance professionalism by increasing training and education is not new. According to Carte and Carte (1975), August Vollmer, an early pioneer of police professionalism, sought to offer formal training for police officers as early as 1908 when no other agencies offered training. He worked to advance the belief that the police should be skilled practitioners, responsible for solving complex dilemmas. In 1931, Vollmer was appointed to the National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement which led to production of the Wickersham Report. According to LaFree, Bursik, Short, and Taylor (2000), the Report was largely aimed at addressing public disapproval of the police, mostly in response to dissatisfaction about corruption. The Report came at a time of increasing violence and societal unrest. Carte and Carte (1975) further contended that it also attempted to provide an analysis of police difficulties, propose improvements, and establish principles by which the police should operate. Among numerous recommendations, Vollmer suggested enhanced training. Not surprisingly, Vollmer recruited college students and graduates as police recruits when he was the chief of police in Berkeley, California. He sought to enhance a tarnished image of law enforcement by selecting qualified individuals to offer quality service and an improved image. His ultimate goal, which has yet to be realized nearly one hundred years later, was that all police officers would possess a baccalaureate degree.

Well after August Vollmer left his mark on attempts to professionalize police work, President Lyndon Johnson organized the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice in 1967. A recommendation that would

have made Vollmer proud suggested that all officers possess a baccalaureate degree (Roberg & Bonn, 2004). It came twelve years after his death. The President's Commission led to the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968.

The Act addressed a variety of law enforcement issues. Among them was education for police officers. As a result of the Act, the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) was created. The emphasis of the LEAA was to increase the effectiveness of police officers and decrease rates of crime. The LEAA also paved the way for the Law Enforcement Education Program (LEEP). The LEEP provided billions of dollars to raise educational standards among police officers (Roberg & Bonn, 2004). The funding led to a dramatic surge in criminal justice programs at colleges and universities across the country (Decker & Huckabee, 2002).

United States citizens demand their local law enforcement officers exhibit a high degree of professionalism. According to Pence (1998), professionalism is advancing proper conduct and providing an exemplary model of behavior. In order to fulfill that expectation, it is expected that the educated police will offer greater insight (Carter & Sapp, 1992) and provide superior problem-solving ability (Varricchio, 1998). They should utilize the authority and force that has been bestowed upon them in a responsible and appropriate manner. In this instance, society asks for too much. Most police officers, armed with a high school diploma or GED, are provided training that is typically relegated to the practical knowledge of the duties they will perform. They learn how to conduct traffic stops, apprehend suspects, and write effective reports, among other daily responsibilities. Professionalism is not an inherent characteristic that police officers possess when they begin work. It is not applied as easily as a piece of equipment or

obtained as quickly as the draw of a gun. Some component of college education as a minimum requirement is an effective and proverbial step in the right direction.

Higher education enables critical evaluation of material. It provides a theoretical framework by which practical application is derived. It grants a broad understanding of subject matter. Mandating college for police officers will instill these benefits and serve to raise the standard among law enforcement officers, facilitating professionalism. Professionalism strives to develop officers who understand the boundaries of their authority, act with high moral resolve, and apply these traits in police duties.

Support for higher education requirements for police officers is well-founded. Unfortunately, that backing is most often akin to the type frequently found for charitable causes – support until action is required. Educational requirements for local police officers have comprised political agendas, their benefits and consequences seldom studied, and their practice even more rarely existent.

According to a criminal justice attrition study conducted in Florida by that state's Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission (1999), attrition rates (termination, retirements, and voluntary separation) increased every year that was evaluated, from 1990 until 1999. Of the common reasons for attrition facing criminal justice organizations, the study cited surplus of demand, morale, monetary rewards, risk vs. reward, age and experience, and agency termination.

According to statistics from the U.S. Department of Labor (2005), employment for computer software engineers is expected to increase by over 40 percent between 2004 and 2014. Employment for health educators and those healthcare practitioners responsible for diagnosing and treating are each expected to increase by over 22 percent

in the same time period. Local police employment is only expected to increase by 15.5 percent by 2014. Of those positions, each requires at least a bachelor's degree except local police.

### ***Statement of the Problem***

The problem is not that police officers do not have college educations. There is no shame in the fact that many police officers have not ever set foot in a university classroom. Many qualified police officers and managers are serving citizens with professionalism and integrity with no degree hanging on their wall. The problem is that the police officer occupation continues to fail to attain the level of professionalism that it so desperately needs. The reputation of law enforcement continues to tarnish under the faulty actions of many police officers, the increased scrutiny of the public, and misunderstood or neglected responsibilities of today's law enforcement officers. The field of law enforcement has called for professionalism since its advent, a means to achieve it has been made clear and even pronounced by legal initiatives, and mankind continues to view college for police officers as the world's first inhabitants probably viewed stars. The answer is clear, people largely agree, yet no one truly embraces the notion that the arena of policing would stand to improve by mandating some component of higher education as an entry level requirement for police officers. Despite the work of August Vollmer, the 1967 President's Commission, the 1968 Omnibus Act, and countless other contributions and initiatives, society still views education for police officers in the same manner families often view exotic vacation destinations – "Boy, would that be nice; it's so beautiful there!" Despite the gains, the problem remains that the situation lacks action to propel the necessity to reality. As of 2003, only 18% of local police agencies

had some type of college requirement (U.S. Department of Justice, 2006). Along with the need to advance professionalism, there are a myriad of other issues tied to mandating educational requirements.

### *Image*

The police, their actions, behavior, attitudes and a host of other factors are under constant public scrutiny. Society and the media are quick to notice the faults of police officers and advance them as a lack of professionalism, integrity, and morality. While negative incidences will never be void in policing, there are ways to minimize their occurrences. College education has long been a standard of professional attainment. In most circles, those who hold degrees are viewed more favorably. Higher education represents expanded knowledge and understanding, determination, and endurance. It displays the culmination of numerous classes related to a specific field of study. It serves as a mark of professional and personal accomplishment. It would no doubt serve to increase a positive image of law enforcement if local police were required to obtain some component of higher education. It may also serve to thwart some of the reasons the police find themselves under such scrutiny. What provides the image of police training now? Is there any real understanding of the benefits that police academies provide; are there any real benefits of police academies beyond their ability to provide a foundation of the practical application of specific police skills? Does the public base their understanding on movies such as the *Police Academy* series? Should there be any wonder that the police are viewed in a negative light? Does college hold the same negative connotation or portrayal as those offered by police satires? People base a great deal of their understanding from what television and movies offer, observations that they

are individually exposed to (which are probably limited in most cases), and by what others tell them. Unfortunately, pop culture probably forms most impressions of modern law enforcement. Of course, the actions of law enforcement also lend a great deal of credibility to the old adage that the actions of law enforcement are their own worst enemy.

### *Internal Resistance*

The greatest obstacles to the implementation of requirements of college education are local police agencies themselves. Police agencies around the country have cited recruitment difficulties (Vest, 2001). Law enforcement administrators may argue that recruiting would even pose a greater challenge if a mandatory requirement of college education existed. It may be easy to proclaim, “We have a hard enough time attracting candidates now, I can’t imagine how hard it would be if they all had to have a college education!” Police administrators with this perspective are applying flawed logic, assuming that the situation presents a difficulty and that conventional recruiting circumstances will dictate the future methods of selection. No one would suggest an immediate transition. Doing so would provide obvious obstacles to successful implementation. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to assemble immediate qualified candidates. Instead, an anticipated date of mandatory compliance, preferably five to seven years in the future, would be ideal. In this manner, those desiring to seek the minimum education requirement would know well in advance what the future expectation would be and have ample time to achieve it. Additionally, agencies and their respective municipal leaders would have the opportunity to adjust pay. Raising standards comes at a price. Furthermore, the complaint of not being able to recruit would be

circumvented because there would be a new pool of potential applicants – those with college degrees. Moreover, police agencies could compete with organizations employing workers in healthcare and technology fields. If anything, there would be an abundance of suitable, qualified workers. Currently, there are only those who have been to high school and may have attended a police academy. It is highly suspect that any college graduate would want to be a local law enforcement officer with the current state of affairs (i.e. compensation and negative impression). As of now, one typically does not need a college degree thus, why would one want to achieve one to earn the meager average salary of \$28,200 per year (U.S. Department of Justice, 2006)? Yet, if the profession required some component of higher education and was subsequently able to offer greater monetary compensation, then the landscape of potential applicants would grow and change.

Another argument against raising standards is that local governments simply do not have the money to support such a lofty initiative. Do they have the money to continue to defend themselves in litigious situations involving inappropriate behavior of police officers? Can they afford to not embrace the increased professionalism in the coming years of increased public oversight? The cost will justify the benefit. Many police executives may argue that the “just another warm body” stance suffices current needs and expectations. They may contend that retention is not a goal because it costs too much. Retention should be the goal of law enforcement managers everywhere. Police agencies should strive to retain qualified, motivated police professionals. Public service is not always quantifiable. Some may argue that government should be run like a private business. Government is not a private business. Calls for police service

involving domestic violence do not generate a profit. While a focus on the “bottom line” may be relevant, it can not serve as the sole determinant for the judge of the value and quality of police service. The police mission is not something to be evaluated by dollars and cents. It should be analyzed on the basis of worth and ethical execution. Police authority is not a characteristic that should be judged on a basis of financial soundness; neither should its use and application.

Collective bargaining, the ability that local police officers often have to negotiate for many employment benefits and standards, is prevalent. Local police officers have been permitted to unionize and bargain collectively since 1968 (Pynes & Corley, 2006). As of 2003, 39 states offered a form of collective bargaining rights for police officers (Clark & Powers, 2003). Unions, responsible for facilitating collective bargaining among local police officers, may serve as catalysts for new initiatives or blockades for successful implementation. For instance, the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), an organization often responsible for representing and organizing collective bargaining units boasts 324,000 members (Fraternal Order of Police, 2007). The substantial number of members provides a formidable presence in policy debates that affect local law enforcement officers.

#### *The Chasm Between Practical Application and Theoretical Framework*

An additional barrier to implementation is that seldom do practitioners see the value of a college education. This may be the predominant mindset because many may fail to possess components of higher education. Police academies offer the hands-on training necessary to conduct the duties of a police officer. They rarely, if ever, provide a theoretical framework of law enforcement, the responsibility of discretion and authority, or the ability to critically evaluate information and make sound decisions. Many police

executives do not see the benefit of a college education in order to conduct traffic stops, respond to domestic disturbances, or seize drugs. They often fail to understand the value of higher education because they only apply it to the routine duties of police work. Executives often do not relate its use to the larger social responsibility of today's law enforcement officers as ethical, professional problem-solvers.

College graduates are also more able to conduct research. The proliferation of computer use in law enforcement agencies has led to an increased dependence on data storage and use. The ability to comprehend and explore the vast amount of information often collected by police departments should be of interest to any local law enforcement agency. In particular, the analysis of crime trends and patterns aids agencies in responding to areas of concern, properly aligning patrol districts, and addressing specific problems. While civilian analysts typically perform these functions, the insight that a college educated police officers can provide (Carter & Sapp, 1992) may prove to impart an advantage that civilian employees are unable to present. Local police practitioners may be able to offer first-hand knowledge of specific topics of concern coupled with an ability to analyze and utilize data.

#### *Lack of Available Literature*

The benefits of higher education are well pronounced. College graduates earn more money, enjoy greater prestige, and generally have access to greater employment opportunities. Yet, the research regarding mandating college education for police officers is scant, if not altogether nonexistent. Research reveals limited information, provides general support, but fails to demonstrate conclusive evidence to support a higher education requirement. Such a dramatic change would require a significant

demonstration of value, of which does not exist. Obviously, it is hard to argue for something when there is no evident and conclusive benefit; summations, inferences, and opinions fail to rise to the level of a demonstrated need. Clearly, the lack of available research on the matter demonstrates the need for careful analysis and examination.

### *Literature Review*

#### *Monetary Compensation*

Arguably the largest observable factor associated with college educations is monetary compensation. Police officers seem to be notoriously underpaid, or so they say. As of 2003, U.S. Department of Justice (2006) statistics revealed that the average entry-level salary for a police officer was \$28,200. As the old adage goes, “You get what you pay for.” Eighty-two percent of departments maintain no requirement for higher education for entry-level police officers. Thus, \$28,200 is perfectly appropriate considering most of those officers hired at or around this rate only have a high school diploma or GED and job-specific training, the police academy. Can police officers really expect any more? Many advocates for higher pay argue that the aspect of danger deserves greater compensation. While this may be true, the argument has been largely, if not completely, ineffective. Police officers continue to earn meager salaries. It is difficult to quantify danger. It is easier to quantify a college education. Those positions, both in the private and public sector, law enforcement and non-law enforcement, that require college education offer greater compensation. For instance, the starting pay for a law enforcement officer at the Tallahassee Police Department (Florida), an agency that requires an Associate of Arts degree or its equivalent and will not substitute years of service, is \$39,282.42 (City of Tallahassee, 2006). The Leon County Sheriff’s Office, the

county in which Tallahassee is located, does not mandate a college degree and offers \$35,342 as the starting pay for law enforcement officers (Leon County Sheriff's Office, 2007). A college degree is a tangible achievement. For decades, employers have utilized it as a standard and accordingly offered higher compensation for its attainment. The potential for danger has never been a significant factor for any component of compensation. If that was a factor, soldiers would all reside in mansions. Taxi cab drivers and pizza delivery drivers, known for their high propensity to be victims of robbery, would all drive exotic cars. Moreover, police officers would be able to retire happily after only a few years of service. This is not the case. Society rewards excellence and achievement. They desire to compensate that which they quantify and are able to easily conceptualize. Danger is not one of those traits. Thus, pay will never adequately reflect the potential for such. Many officers are told, and repeat throughout their career, "You don't do this for the money." Hopefully, that will always be the case. Yet, pay for officers should reflect how hard they've worked to attain a position. As of now, the requirements are low, officers often offer lackluster performance, and the pay is representative of that. It should be. Require more and allow the compensation to reflect that.

#### *Unified Front*

As previously mentioned, a college education often assumes an inherent benefit in most circles even with little consideration of empirical support. Most people would argue that higher education equates to increased employment opportunities and greater monetary compensation. For these reasons, few people, if any, would argue that there

seems to be a general consensus that the attainment of a college degree is a positive attribute. This accord forms a unified front of which research abounds.

Many argue that social unrest of the 1960s changed the landscape of law enforcement and paved the way for a more complex set of police responsibilities. One answer to that call was increased training and education (Breci, 1994; Carter & Sapp, 1992; Roberg & Bonn, 2004; Varricchio, 1998). The advent of community policing, an initiative aimed at problem solving and unique solutions to problems, has also called for revised police qualifications. Higher education is believed to impart numerous beneficial traits. It has been argued that enhanced research abilities, the ability to critically evaluate information, solve problems, and the ability to communicate effectively are some advantages (Breci, 1994; Varricchio, 1998). Additionally, agency mission statements reflect an increased desire for skills above that which basic patrol responsibilities demand (Varricchio, 1998). Breci (1994) also believed that higher education made possible the comprehension of inner-workings of groups and communities. Others argue that college enables maturity and sound judgment (Mayo, 2006a). Research has also demonstrated positive correlations of police performance to higher education (Fischer, Golden, & Heininger, 1985).

Police officers also see the benefit. For instance, Minnesota law enforcement officers, subjected to a mandatory higher education requirement, reported in 1990 that college creates well-rounded police officers, aids officers in comprehending the public and enables more effective communication with its members, and prepares officers for positions of leadership. The same sample of police officers believed that higher education subsequently led to increased monetary compensation (Breci, 1994).

According to Kakar (1998), college educated police officers believed that they performed with more proficiency than their non-college educated counterparts. In particular, they believed that they performed better under stress, were more easily able to adapt to change and extra work, and could more adequately deal with angry citizens. College educated officers also believed that they had greater leadership ability, were able to communicate more effectively, and had a more expansive understanding of law. They also support the belief that college educated officers are superior problem solvers.

#### *Measure of Validity*

No example more adequately demonstrates the tangible benefit of college educated police officers than LaGrange's (2003) work related to the role of higher education in the handling of cases involving mental disorders. Her work offered a practical example of the manner in which college education offers its benefit in the routine duties, responsibilities, and discretion of police officers. Utilizing interviews with police officers, LaGrange found that officers with only a high school education made psychiatric referrals in 54% of the cases they dispose of. Those officers with a bachelor's degree made psychiatric referrals in over 80% of their respective cases. Officers with a high school education reported that they informally disposed of cases 37% of the time as opposed to officers with a bachelor's degree, who reported that they only handled cases in the same manner 16% of the time. Officers with a university education reported that they only made arrests in 2% of their cases, compared to 9% in cases handled by high school educated officers. The results are indicative of the college educated officer's ability to problem solve by involving and utilizing community resources such as referrals

to mental health officials. It also demonstrates their capability to critically evaluate situations and arrive at solutions other than those that are conventional such as an arrest.

According to Roberg and Bonn (2004), research regarding performance and attitude indicators reflects that college educated police officers are less authoritarian, more flexible, and exhibit a more significant favorable reception of minorities. They also contend that there is empirical support that those police officers with higher education are more accepting of human conduct, display greater sensitivity to community relationships, and maintain an advanced measure of service.

Roberg and Bonn (2004) also discovered support that officers with college education experience fewer complaints from citizens. They also contended that research revealed that college educated police officers are not subject to the same rate of disciplinary action by their agencies, are not absent as much, find themselves injured less often in the line of duty, and are involved in less vehicular crashes. Additionally, they revealed that research has even revealed that police officers with higher education use deadly force less often than those without components of higher education. Roberg and Bonn (2006) also claim that other data suggests that college educated police officers are not subject to the same degree of individual liability as those who had not obtained higher education.

Although the findings revealed limited support, the research of Truxillo, Bennett, and Collins (1998) showed some support that education factors led to dependability. The researchers offered that they found an insignificant relationship between criminal justice education and job performance. Yet, they admittedly utilized a small sample from a

single agency. They also acknowledged that a larger sample may reveal stronger correlations between police performance and requirements of higher education.

### *Access and Support*

The attainment of higher education is often related to its availability and support. While a college education usually conveys a positive impression, such may not be the case in every landscape. The access and support of higher education requirements often spurs a discussion about discrimination and feasibility.

One of the earliest attempts to increase the access of educational opportunities for police was a cooperative initiative by the Port Authority of New York, the New Jersey Public Safety Department, the New Jersey State Police, and Seton Hall University in 1977. The program aimed to provide graduate degrees and specialization certificates in fields of administration and social sciences to police officers by making available numerous satellite campuses to lessen hardships often caused by extensive travel. Additionally, the demand by local law enforcement officers paved the way for financial initiatives that made the attainment of higher education more affordable (Varricchio, 1998).

That same year also saw the creation of the Peace Officers Standards and Training (POST) Board in Minnesota, an entity that created a minimum requirement of a two year degree in order for persons to be licensed as police officers in that state (Breci, 1994). The requirement did not deter those interested in police employment. In fact, Breci (1994) reported that larger departments in Minnesota averaged between 400 and 500 applications for one open position. Even smaller departments reported approximately 100 applications for every open position. Between 1982 and 1990 over 1,000 qualified

applicants were unable to secure employment as a police officer. Thus, it may be probable that other jurisdictions would not suffer from recruiting difficulties.

A similar arrangement in Utah made it possible for police officers from numerous agencies to more easily obtain higher education. Salt Lake Community College offered criminal justice related education at police agencies and even allowed officers to register and acquire textbooks at their respective agencies. Moreover, classes were scheduled to accommodate a variety of shifts (Slama, 1997).

Concern has been expressed about potential discrimination caused by raising education standards. Some people hold the perspective that minority groups do not enjoy an adequate access to educational opportunities (Roberg & Bonn, 2004). Historically, blacks were often underrepresented in local police agencies (Kaminski, 1993). Research has revealed that raising education standards would glean fewer applicants (Decker & Huckabee, 2002). However, the validity of this research is questionable because it fails to consider that more applicants with college education may be attracted to police work. In reality, many agencies recruit college graduates (Roberg & Bonn, 2004). The recruiting landscape would change significantly if minimum education requirements were imposed.

The most compelling evidence that minimum education requirements are not discriminatory comes in the form of legal precedent. In *Davis v. City of Dallas* (1985, 777 F.2d 205), the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit held that a minimum education requirement was warranted due to the multifaceted nature of policing responsibilities. While it was not contested that higher education requirements for local police were discriminatory, the Court, tasked with finding a balance, found that the

benefits of a higher education circumvented the disadvantages of the discriminatory standard (Roberg & Bonn, 2004). Furthermore, research has revealed that minority officers generally hold the same attainment of higher education as white officers (Carter & Sapp, 1992).

Clearly, agencies and government entities have often displayed a willingness to enable officers to attain higher education. Courts have even ruled that such a requirement is a valid standard. While single efforts may not play a significant role in mandating minimum education requirements, the totality of occurrences related to educational requirements may lead to significant progression in advancing new standards. An expression of the desire to mandate higher education requirements for local police officers was expressed in 2003. At the conclusion of the 110<sup>th</sup> International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), more than 100 law enforcement administrators requested assistance from the Police Association for College Education (PACE) to develop requirements for bachelor's degrees at their respective police agencies (Mayo, 2006b).

A call for support requires an analysis of the factors that are most likely to defend the benefits of mandating a higher education requirement for local police officers. Thus, the frequency in which officers use force, although at times unavoidable, may be directly related to their ability to exercise critical insight, apply discretion, and problem-solve. Individual occurrences of excessive force or a culture that physical force is always an accepted action may be indicative of an agency or officers that are unable or unwilling to exercise other measures. The ability to recognize that there are situations that do not warrant the use of physical force is necessary in today's climate of public accountability (Bayley, 1998). Additionally, disciplinary action is directly related to police

professionalism. Actions and behavior that require official documentation and corrective consultations demonstrate a lack of professional behavior. It may be one of the most significant measures of ethical conduct and professional bearing. The ability to determine a disparity in disciplinary rates of agencies with and without higher education requirements would be significant.

### *Methodology*

There exists a litany of criteria that could be evaluated when considering the validity of mandating requirements for higher education. Of paramount concern is the amount of authority, control, and discretion that local police have the ability to exercise. These fundamental characteristics are related to all aspects of the actions at the disposal of a police officer. In particular, instances of the use of physical force and disciplinary action taken against officers are especially worth investigating as a means of establishing correlations between the benefits of higher education and police performance. Moreover, they are of concern, or should be, to every local police agency. These characteristics are connected to problem-solving capability, interpersonal communication, and the aptitude to critically evaluate situations in an attempt to arrive at the best solution. A concise web-based questionnaire (Appendix A) will be distributed to local police departments via electronic mail as a means to determine the relationship between higher education and the performance of local police officers. The questionnaire contains three sections that include 13 open-ended questions: (1) general information related to the education standards of the local police agency, (2) instances of documented uses of physical force, and (3) occurrences of official documented disciplinary action.

It is vital that agencies and not individual police officers be studied. The focal issue is whether there exists validity to support a broad mandate. While it may be of interest to determine the effects on specific police officers, as in the study performed by Truxillo, et al (1998), it is more meaningful to evaluate the data in the manner that it would be implemented, by agency. Moreover, a much larger sample could be obtained.

The sampling frame is based on statistics compiled by the U.S. Department of Justice (2006). According to their research, local police agencies which comprised between 50 and 99 officers constituted 845 departments, or roughly five percent of all local law enforcement agencies. Moreover, that category of sworn personnel fell roughly at the median of the groupings of the number of officers based on their consideration for an analysis of local police agencies. In order to offer a greater perspective, there were 105 agencies that employed between 250 and 499 officers. The 845 local police agencies that had 50-99 officers present the most manageable and sufficient potential survey sample. Based on their criteria, the number of officers coupled with the number of agencies would glean enough data to analyze while not proving to be overly labor intensive. Additionally, of 845 agencies, it is expected that an ample number maintain voluntary education requirements above a high school diploma or GED, necessary for potential comparisons of those agencies that do not and correlations of the data obtained.

E-mail addresses of police chiefs will be obtained by conducting Internet searches of agency websites. Subsequently, an e-mail containing a cover letter and a hyperlink to the survey will be distributed. The cover letter will include the purpose of the study and the importance of responding. E-mail reminders will be distributed four weeks later, six weeks later, and a final reminder will be sent eight weeks later. The reminder would

include instructions about cutting and pasting the survey link if the respondents had been previously unable to access it.

There are inherent limitations with attempting to gather such data. First, there is no common manner in which this data is collected or stored, if one exists at all. The data may be tucked away in individual personnel files and not gathered in a manner in which the totality of information could be analyzed. The amount of labor involved with finding the data may serve as enough motivation for agencies not to respond. The cover letter may need to stress the importance of obtaining the data despite the amount of effort required. Due to the public's right to access certain employee information, the researcher(s) may be able to offer assistance with gathering the data from various agencies by physically searching personnel files. Second, agencies may be slow to provide data which may appear to cast them in a negative light. It would be essential to assure the respondents that the data they provide would not be specifically linked to their respective agencies. Additionally, it is unrealistic to gather this data from all 15,766 local police departments (U. S. Department of Justice, 2006). Thus, an accurate sample representative of all police agencies may be difficult, if not impossible, to obtain. A chosen sample may in fact be representative of the lowest percentage of agencies with an educational requirement above a high school diploma or GED. Furthermore, concern about differing crime rates from a variety of jurisdictions may give rise to concern. In particular, uses of force may be thought to vary widely in various jurisdictions. One could anticipate that agencies employing relatively the same number of officers serve jurisdictions of roughly the same population. Subsequently, the crime rates and general behavior and actions of officers would be as consistent as it is possible to observe.

Lastly, the desired data would be relegated to documented information and would fail to include acts that remain concealed to law enforcement executives and agencies. The results may give rise to the need to compare statistics from departments in various locales or develop other sampling frames that combine an analysis of departments of various sizes.

The questionnaire would attempt to determine minimum education requirements and obtain data representative of the use of authority and discretion. Obviously, the return rate of such a questionnaire may be less than desired. There are numerous ways to combat obstacles of low return rates (Hagan, 2006). It would be vital to assure police executives that the data obtained would not serve as a means of personal attack against their agency, policies, or procedures. It may also be vital to convey that the results would be kept confidential, only viewed and analyzed in their totality, and that individual agencies would not be subject to a targeted, specific evaluation.

The general skepticism of academia by law enforcement practitioners will necessitate that a policing entity be responsible for the request and collection of the data. Sponsorship or endorsements are valid means of arriving at a desirable return rate (Hagan, 2006). Specifically, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) or the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) will serve as ideal candidates to advance the desire for such research endeavors and solicit responses from police chiefs. Among a variety of goals, both organizations aim to increase police professionalism (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2007; Police Executive Research Forum, 2007). In all, a thorough explanation of the intended research coupled with a concise questionnaire

would serve the intended purpose. Lastly, the results will be made available online to police agencies and institutions of higher learning.

### ***Expected Findings***

The research is expected to reveal that local police agencies which maintain a higher education requirement (that which exists above high school) contain police officers who are disciplined less frequently and engage in fewer uses of physical force, justified or not, than those agencies who do not maintain such requirements. Fewer uses of physical force and disciplinary actions are indicative of officers who act professionally, within the policies and guidelines set forth by the respective agencies. Furthermore, the expected data would reveal an ability of police officers to appropriately solve problems, exercise discretion, and critically evaluate situations in a calculated attempt to arrive at the best solution after conducting an appropriate analysis.

In no way are the findings to demonstrate that justified uses of force are representative of a lack of professionalism. Undoubtedly, uses of force are inherent. Yet, justified does not equate to essential or absolutely necessary. Thus, one of the central issues of the findings arises – the ability to determine whether or not higher education leads to increased restraint and the consideration and utilization of methods other than conventional police responses. In essence, college educated officers are expected to be more apt to explore and employ solutions other than those which are authoritarian and control driven. They are expected to behave in a manner which exhibits their ability to consider a variety of factors which play into the decision to use force or not.

It is also expected that agencies with higher education standards execute disciplinary action less frequently than those agencies which do not maintain such

requirements as a result of officers behaving within accepted parameters. A lack of disciplinary action would be indicative of officers who make wise decisions, understand and respect the rights of others, respect appropriate methods of behavior, and act with responsibility and maturity. Officers who are disciplined often demonstrate a lack of these traits, do not consider consequences, or may display apathy regarding appropriate behavior.

### ***Policy Implications***

Mandating higher education requirements for police officers would prove to be labor intensive, present armies of opposition, and would be slow to show tangible results. However, the eventual benefits would be extensive, far reaching, and worth the amount of effort necessary for implementation. Specifically, while law enforcement agencies would improve, society stands to benefit as well. The evidence supports the needs and advantages of requiring higher education; all that remains to overcome is resistance to change.

Clearly, this could not be achieved overnight. The recruiting struggles that people fear by mandating an initiative this lofty would actually materialize and create havoc and chaos among local law enforcement agencies. No one has suggested that this ever occur without forethought and planning. Clearly, the increase of standards would need to be implemented over time and not affect those who were currently employed. Thus, prospective applicants would be aware of impending changes and recruitment strategies would shift to adapt to a revised requirement. Subsequently, the shortage of applicants would not come to fruition and prove to be a product of flawed logic. While 18% of local police agencies have mandated higher education requirements (U. S. Department of

Justice, 2006), most have been slow to act, if at all. Even when states suggest or create mandates, there exists no guarantee that all local law enforcement agencies will embrace the validity and follow suit. Clearly, this must come in the form of a federal mandate and appropriately follow the guidance of the President's Commission of 1967, a proposal that has clearly lost its luster with the passage of time.

Opposition is likely, if not completely guaranteed, to come from lawmakers, police executives, potential police officers, citizens, and citizen action groups, as well as a host of other entities too numerous to name. While many would support the notion of police with greater levels of education, compensation would likely be a central issue of contention among many, particularly if a higher education requirement was imposed by the federal government. The benefit of a federal mandate is that while resistance may be expressed, compliance would be required. One can not be certain that there is a simple solution that is adequately able to address this concern. Yet, an opportunity for an anticipated implementation as opposed to an immediate one would allow jurisdictions to secure the funding for the implementation. While it is not possible to award degrees overnight and change the landscape of law enforcement, neither is it possible to immediately secure funds necessary to appropriately compensate every police officer that is required to obtain some component of higher education. If the benefit of mandating education is embraced, then adequate compensation must follow, realizing that the cost would prove to be a worthy expense.

The inability to demonstrate immediate tangible results may dissuade many would be supporters. The ability to embrace a long-term focus may be difficult to achieve. Moreover, quantitative results are difficult to analyze in a service related field such as

law enforcement. It is nearly impossible to assign a numerical value to increased police performance. While these results may be possible to achieve, they may be difficult to convey to entities that demand concrete and substantial results.

One of the greatest arguments for implementation may be that the lack of doing so has no merit and there exists no reason not to mandate higher education requirements. If the benefits can truly be embraced and realized, it may be hard to argue against implementation even when the costs and obstacles are considered. In the age of public accountability (Bayley, 1998), it seems counterproductive not to engage in an effort to increase the value of public service offered by local police departments. Returning to a profession that is valued, respected, and has the ability to accomplish its function without significant problems and opposition from the public would be an extensive and meaningful benefit. Placing the police in a capacity of trust, cooperation with the public, and the belief that the police are capable of executing their duties in an ethical and competent manner would have momentous rewards. Enabling the true emphasis and intentions of *community* policing carries with it the possibility of significant crime reduction. Finally, the public's intolerance of negative community elements and a desire to thwart crime may be realized by their engagement in the policing process and offer of genuine and support and assistance.

## Appendix A

### *Questionnaire*

1. What is the minimum entry level education requirement for police officers at your agency? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is the minimum level of education required for promotion to positions of supervision? \_\_\_\_\_
3. If a minimum entry level education requirement above high school or its equivalent is in place, how long has this been in place? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What percentage of sworn officers at your agency possesses higher education? \_\_\_\_\_
5. In the past 12 months, how many documented uses of force have police officers at your agency engaged in? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Of those, how many, if any, were deemed excessive or unjustified? \_\_\_\_\_
7. In the past 12 months, how many documented instances of official disciplinary action have occurred? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Of the total number of disciplinary actions in that time period, how many, if any, resulted from excessive or unjustified uses of force? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Of the total number of disciplinary actions in that time period, how many, if any, resulted from improper or unethical contact with a citizen? \_\_\_\_\_
10. Of the total number of disciplinary actions in that time period, how many, if any, resulted from an improper disposition of a policing duty or responsibility? \_\_\_\_\_
11. Of any unjustified or excessive uses of force, do you believe that any of them could have been avoided by requirements of higher education? \_\_\_\_\_

12. Of any legitimate, justified uses of force, do you believe that any of them could have been avoided by requirements of higher education? \_\_\_\_\_
13. Of any instances of disciplinary action, do you believe that any of them could have been avoided by requirements of higher education? \_\_\_\_\_

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