Kristie Thacker

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Salt Lake Community College

Should Police Officers Be More Educated?

In today’s world, education is what separates people from both, the pay scale they achieve or jobs they are certified to acquire. Police officers are no different in the position of getting jobs that they are certified to obtain. In an Article in the Orlando Sentinel Anthony Colarossi states**, “**Many midcareer law-enforcement officials realize that advancement and better pay may come only one way with a college degree.” (Colarossi, 2010). Alan Contreas an Administrator with the Oregon Office of Degree Authorization, continues on by saying “… these are among the relatively few professions today that can enter and succeed in without a degree.” (Colarossi, 2010).

This career has been proven time and time again at being successful with only a high school diploma. This profession can also have a significant amount of on the job-training. However, police officers need to be trained in very broad skill sets to be able to be more effective as an officer who can up hold the law in any situation that may come across their paths.

In a study in Chicago, certain areas or certain districts were regulated by a CAPS program. The Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy, which initially is a training of police officers to involve themselves with the community and how to approach certain situations throughout the districts. The findings indicate that people living in the CAPS prototype districts had significantly higher levels of satisfaction with the police fighting crime than people living in the matched comparison areas who were not subject to the CAPS program (Lombardo, Olson &Staton, 2010).

While reading about CAPS, one of the largest community policing programs in the Unites States, I learned that this community has had a lot of success. This shows me that any little extra programs and education for police officers, no matter what city or state they come from, can be beneficial in the community and to have a better quality of police officers available to this unique career choice.

Being a police officer is not a career choice you would want to choose if you were expecting not to train at all. The kind of service and skills that are needed to perform this specific job can’t be taken lightly. In Minnesota the education for a police officer has been on a higher education line of requirements then most states. They are required to have at least a 2 year degree and some are even trying to raise that to a 4 year degree. I personally believe that police officers should have at least a 2 year degree. Several decades of research concerning the relationship between higher- education and policing has led to little agreement concerning the appropriate extent of education for the entry-level law enforcement officers. The movement from traditional policing to community-oriented problem solving requires skill sets, such as critical and analytical reasoning, enhanced understanding of socioeconomic causes of crime, and advanced interpersonal and intercultural communication that are best developed in higher education programs. (Hilal & Erickson, 2010).

There are some persuasive arguments for both sides, whether or not police officers should be more educated. Some pros and cons were found in a journal article written by Michael D White and Gipsy Escobar. One of the major arguments against requiring a college degree is this requirement unnecessarily limits an already thin applicant pool by excluding otherwise qualified applicants. (White & Escobar, 2008) However the arguments in favor of a college degree requirement out way the cons almost by half. This includes the occupation is a complex profession, where the skills and knowledge necessary to do the job successfully can be learned in a classroom setting. Another argument is, our society has become increasingly educated and it is necessary for police to keep pace with the larger population, also as departments have moved toward problem-oriented styles of policing, critical thinking and analytical skills have become centrally important, and both of these skills are often developed and improved in the college classrooms (White & Escobar, 2008).

As of 2003, only 9 percent of police departments nationally required a 2 year college degree and 1 percent a 4-year degree (Hilal & Erickson, 2010).In this study using census data from the year 2000 as a comparison, Minnesota officers appeared more educated than the general population in the state (Hilal & Erickson, 2010). In seeing this there were fewer officers in the 2008 survey that believed a 4 year degree should be the requirement to be licensed to be an officer. Minnesota’s model has successfully increased the education level of all officers and the support for higher education is favorable among Minnesota officers. However, whether increasing entry-level requirements beyond the relatively universal standard of the high school diploma is necessary or even of value continues to be widely discussed and debated (White & Escobar, 2008).

This debate could really bring in a whole different angle, with why the universities are pushing so hard to raise the bar of education in the policing field. Whether they are looking after themselves for the money and growth or really trying to make a difference in the quality of police officers today. In the article written by Dominic A. Wood and Stephen Tong it suggests “that the qualities needed to police offices required a kind of learning that is more commonly associated with university education as opposed to a traditional police training school.” (Wood & Tong, 2008)

The university involvement in the struggles of helping with the police effort can greatly affect the quality of police officers. In certain skills needed for the job, police officers can be well prepared for what they will encounter on the streets or in the office of police work. Ronnie Flanagan expresses two arguments with what universities can affect. “… a more confident police service- one which emphasizes individual professionalism and which is founded upon strong standards and team values… Means we need to move away from training towards education.” (Wood & Tong, 2008)

Just alone the confidence in police officers already is a huge beneficial power over the crime they will have to put up with. If officers were well trained, and well educated; how much more success would they have fighting an on-going battle of crime? He also went on by saying the individual takes responsibly for their pre-employment training completing relevant degree programs at their own expense before being eligible for employment.” Both of these arguments point out that a university can play an important role in delivering the kind of learning required of police officers. (Wood & Tong, 2008)

I believe that police officers should have at least a 2 year degree; also if this becomes the standard police officers should be paid more. This is one reason why I do not think that having an education will become mandatory for police officers because this would mean raising taxes and that general public does not like when taxes are raised. Clearly the primary mission of police work is to protect and to serve the communities they are working in. With an environment always changing around them, what would be the down fall of more education and more training for these police officers? Only to have more prepared officers to better protect and serve.

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