

Should we require the police to have a college degree?

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ABSTRACT

This paper probes whether a formal college education is linked to the quality of policing. Citizens desire a higher level of professionalism with ever-increasing demands placed on their police departments. Annual on-the-job training for police is common with proposed reform initiatives, however, the difference between police training and requiring a college degree is in debate. Other professions require higher education, however, those who work in policing often do not agree there should be a requirement of a higher education degree for employment. Can police obtain all the necessary skills from the police academy and in-house training? Or in the pursuit of professionalizing the profession should police agencies require college degrees? Further, would a college degree enhance the quality of interactions between the police and the community? This inquiry adds some pieces to the puzzle of examining the value of requiring a college education for police officers and the relationship of experiential learning in training police academies within a college curriculum. Over a three-year period, criminal justice students (N=75) enrolled in an online bachelor's program were asked "do you think police departments should require a bachelor's degree?" The respondents included traditional and non-traditional male and female adult learners many current law enforcement officers. The assumption was since they were currently enrolled in a criminal justice degree program, they would see the value in a degree and indicate a college degree should be mandated.

Keywords: higher education, law enforcement training, experiential learning, police professionalism

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INTRODUCTION

In 1978 Lawrence W. Sherman from the National Advisory Commission on Higher Education for Police Officers wrote in the preface of his book *The Quality of Police Education: Critical Review with Recommendation for Improving Programs in Higher Education* the American police were in trouble. Rather than minimizing the role of police solely as crime fighters, many police agencies embraced the belief their role was multifaceted; maintain order, develop programs and policies to reduce violent crime, be a visible and accessible component of the community in efforts to improve relationships, and build partnerships with community members (Siegel, 2017). Ironically, years later the same problems persist; criticism of the police for failing to control crime, use of force complaints, accusations of systemic racism, and a failure to provide due process. Protests around the country have resulted in a movement to defund the police and express a lack of trust in the police to do the job of enforcing laws in a just manner. Therefore, the media and leaders wrestle with the question of how to improve the performance of the police. Some of the conversations propose that additional education/training might prove beneficial. This is not a new approach.

In the late sixties, the idea of a college-educated police officer was the answer and gained wide support followed up by the implementation of a forty-million-dollar federal program to support the education of police. However, Sherman states by the late 1970's police education was in trouble, and the decade of rapid expansion came to an abrupt halt. Most urban police departments seem to have adopted the hiring requirement of some education as a way of improving their department's public image. Ideally, police departments should look at education as a resource for change. "A study conducted in 2017 by "California State University Fullerton and the Police Foundation found that more than half (51.8 percent) of sworn officers in the United States have at least a two-year degree, 30.2 percent have at least a four-year degree and 5.4 percent have a graduate degree" (Law Enforcement Education: Career Boosting Options, 2022, p. para 16).

The intent of this paper is to probe whether a formal college education is linked to the quality of policing. Citizens desire a higher level of professionalism with ever-increasing demands placed on their police departments. Annual on-the-job training for police is common with proposed reform initiatives, however, the difference between police training and requiring a college degree is in debate. Other professions require higher education, however, those who work in policing often do not agree there should be a requirement of a higher education degree for employment. Can police obtain all the necessary skills from the police academy and in-house training? Or in the pursuit of professionalizing the profession should police agencies require college degrees? Further, would a college degree enhance the quality of interactions between the police and the community? If so, important questions need to be considered such as; "What subjects should be taught and where should they be taught, who should teach them, who should study them and how should police department personnel policies take account of them" (Sherman, 1978, p. x).

CAREERS IN LAW ENFORCEMENT

There are numerous career opportunities for persons interested in the field of criminal justice, ranging from local and state police agencies to federal law enforcement careers. If a person is considering a career in law enforcement, they must understand the distinction between

sworn and non-sworn officers and state vs. federal agencies. Sworn officers have a badge, carry a firearm, and have the authority to make an arrest. They are patrol officers, detectives/ investigators, sheriffs, and state troopers and include federal agencies such as the FBI, DEA, and ATF. They are all sworn to uphold the law. Federal agencies require a college degree. Non-sworn positions within the law enforcement profession can include correctional officers, probation and parole officers, dispatchers, crime scene technicians, and lab personnel. Some non-sworn personnel are allowed to carry a firearm; however, it is not necessarily required. Sheriff's departments often will require their new hires to be correctional officers prior to transferring to the patrol division. The minimum requirement for most sworn and non-sworn local, county, and state agencies is a "high school diploma with some requiring college course work or an associate degree" (Law Enforcement Education: Career Boosting Options, 2022, p. para 10). While a degree is not required those who do have an undergraduate or graduate degree understand the importance a degree has for pursuing promotional opportunities. During the hiring process, law enforcement agencies are seeking desired skills and character traits which include the ability to communicate well verbally and in the written format. To demonstrate empathy, leadership, perceptiveness, problem-solving, and critical thinking, and possess good physical and mental health.

Law enforcement officers provide essential protection to ensure a civil society. The relationship between citizens and the police is an important element to ensure protection is provided. By working together, the community and police can help foster a safe environment. Unfortunately, there have been instances, especially over the last few years where some officers have misused their authority causing a loss of trust among the American people in all police. Resulting in calls for reform and to defund the police (President Trump Executive order on Policing, 2020). In 2020 President Trump signed an executive order on policing. Section 2 of the Order addresses certifications and credentialing; "a) State and local law enforcement agencies must constantly assess and improve their practices and policies to ensure transparent, safe, and accountable delivery of law enforcement services to their communities. Independent credentialing bodies can accelerate these assessments, enhance citizen confidence in law enforcement practices, and allow for the identification and correction of internal deficiencies before those deficiencies result in injury to the public or law enforcement officers" (Policing, 2020, p. para 4). The Order specifically highlights the challenges law enforcement has when encountering individuals with mental illness, homelessness, and addiction. Law enforcement responsibilities have expanded due to the reduction of mental health treatment facilities; however, this does not negate the need to promote appropriate social services for individuals suffering from mental illness, homelessness, and or addiction. Section 4 states law enforcement officers need to be properly trained for these encounters and to increase direct working partnerships with social workers and law enforcement so they can handle situations together. Also cited in the Order is the importance of retaining and recruiting high-performing law enforcement officers. The Order doesn't mention the need for police to get a college education, even though higher education was identified in the 2015 President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing as one of the effective ways to reduce crime and build better relations between police and the community (President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015). Police officers' education requirements are set by state-level Peace Officer Standards and Training Councils and by local police departments (How to Become a Police Officer, 2021).

COLLEGE EDUCATION

The idea of having an educated police force is not a new idea. In 1829 Sir Robert Peel (Father of policing; aka Bobbies, 1788-1850) noted to improve policing and the reduction of crime a better-trained police officer is required. In 1921 August Vollmer (Father of American policing, 1876-1955) promoted the idea further by stating every officer should have a bachelor's degree (Schanlaub, 2005). Research has shown *five* prevailing reasons why college should be a requirement for police officers; less likely to use violence, better at implementing problem-oriented policing strategies, more likely to have prior experience with interactions with community members through internships and ride-along programs, better able to identify quality information and scientific evidence which allows for adjustments to department policies and builds better leaders. Those with college degrees tend to focus on promotions and are expected to retire at a higher rank compared to those who don't have a college degree (Bouffard, L. & Armstrong G., 2020). Studies consistently show that educated officers obtain a higher number of commendations, have fewer traffic collisions, less sick time usage, have fewer disciplinary actions, are more likely to use technology, accept organizational change and new methods of policing, and are able to solve problems more readily than those without a college degree (The Importance of a College Degree for Police Officers, 2020). Officers with only high school education were the subjects of 75 percent of all disciplinary actions. Whereas, officers with four-year degrees accounted for 11 percent of such actions" (Hill, 2020, para 2). Several other similar studies demonstrate officers with a college education correlate with better behavior. The most common degree for police tends to be criminal justice or criminology. The two fields are related; criminal justice is the study of the system of US law enforcement, including courts and corrections, while criminology is the theoretical study of crime, which includes causes and consequences (Police Officer Education, 2022). A study conducted at the University of San Diego found there is a shortage of officers in leadership positions, so pursuing a college degree to become a police officer has never made more sense (University of San Diego, 2020). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, jobs for police are expected to grow by 7 percent between 2016-2026 (Law Enforcement Education: Career Boosting Options, 2022). Dr. Christina Gardiner (2017) from the University of California, Fullerton conducted a study examining the impact of higher-educated officers to those without a college degree. She surveyed 958 law enforcement agencies in all 50 states and found the most critical area of improved policing was in report writing. Gardiner told VICE News, "This is important because if college-educated officers are truly better report writers that can translate to better investigations, higher court case filings, fewer evidentiary constitutional challenges, fewer false confessions or wrongful convictions, or more successful prosecutions" (Dowd, 2020, para 8).

The controversy over whether law enforcement officers should be required to have a 4-year degree continues. Those who oppose a college requirement say it can be discriminatory. Dr. Gardiner stated, if California requires a 4-year degree for law enforcement officers this may impact the hiring of those individuals from "disadvantaged and underrepresented communities who may not have the opportunity to obtain a bachelor's degree" (Dowd, 2020, para 14). Some may also oppose requiring a degree since traditionally new hire police officers have a low starting salary which can impact the recruitment of high-performing hires. Many scholars and practitioners believe the necessary skills to be a police officer ", particularly when working in the field, requires abilities and proficiencies that cannot be learned in a classroom and are best obtained with experience" (The Importance of a College Degree for Police Officers, 2020, para

12). Therefore, some may argue requiring a degree might be completely irrelevant to police work. However, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) calls for increasing educational standards for hiring new officers, and those working on police reform should include education in their reform agenda as a requirement. The IACP is calling for a minimum of two years of college in a related field. With Black Lives Matter and other advocates calling for reform, serious consideration needs to be made in regard to whether modern democracy and policing can survive without better-prepared law enforcement officers (Hill, 2020). Exceptional demands are placed on police leaders because of their duty and role as the first line of defense in a complex society. Police need to engage in strategies that exceed competencies as reactionary. Leaders need to understand technology, what type to acquire, how to finance it, and how best to utilize technology to inform them of the social strains on their community and be proactive toward addressing innovative strategies (Napier, 2005). The question remains...."Does education make a good officer? No, some of the best-educated people in the world would never last a day on the street" (Molden, 1999 para 13). Not all criminal justice students are interested in becoming police officers. Those who do want to become sworn law enforcement officers often seek federal agency jobs after graduating with their degrees. Federal career opportunities are not as readily accessible as local, or state law enforcement jobs based on the number and probability of available positions. Students in college may have character disorders, physical deficiencies, felony arrest records, or no innate ability or true desire to perform police work. In addition, the dramatization of TV doesn't accurately depict the true nature of police work (Molden, 1999). A degree in criminal justice need not only limit a student to a profession in policing. The field of criminal justice is wide and varied, offering numerous career opportunities outside of police work. The fact remains that a college degree is worthwhile because it widens one social and global perspective. In college, you are exposed to a variety of people from various backgrounds, and different experiences and these experiences are what "color the lenses with which we view the world" (Sanborn, 2015 para 8) and allow an individual an opportunity to seek a career which might not otherwise be available without a degree. College exposes students to views from different disciplines, psychology, ethics, history, religion, political science, and languages. Their worldviews and emotional intelligence begin to change and grow to a greater appreciation and compassion for others. A degree is an investment and employers consider an employee an investment and embodiment of the organization.

POLICE TRAINING

Education and training are fundamentally different. Training systematically builds skills for a particular job. The concept often heard in policing is "that they fell back on their training," especially in high-stress situations. One may think training is more physical while education is more mental, however, both must be achieved through the police academy curricula. Academy training covers many of the same topics as a college criminal justice degree program with a lesser broad approach. The goal is to have a complementary approach; physical and mental acumen (Buerger, *Educating and Training the Future Police Officer*, 2004). College social scientists who teach how to validate data or research do not have the skills to teach a student to deal with distraught, intoxicated, scared, aggressive, or deceitful individuals, therefore police academies seek experts in the field as their instructors. Nurses or social workers can teach students how to recognize behavioral patterns of mental illness or emotional distress. They can conduct role-playing exercises, and record and provide feedback on the spot. These hands-on

learning experiences can be tapped into during a stress-induced situation. Also, police academies are less politically charged allowing for a more exploratory learning experience without dire consequences.

The US Census report (2021) shows a sharp decline in the number of Americans who go to college. The number is about a million since the start of the pandemic and three million over the last decade. The reasons for the drop in enrollment have been widely discussed — declining birth rates, the widespread immediate availability of jobs, and greater public skepticism of the need for higher education (Marcus, 2022). This is a concern for many careers and high-paying jobs; however, policing is a career path where most agencies don't require a college degree. A smaller resource of people with degrees will force employers to consider hiring practices based on job skills, character traits, and life experience. Police hiring practices traditionally focus on what skills an individual has versus what piece of paper they possess. With a decline in college degree-seeking people, it will force universities to reevaluate their barriers to earning a degree and develop progressive learning strategies within their degree programs. Formal education may not necessarily be a requirement for an officer to begin their career, however, "additional education is important for anyone interested in pursuing a supervisory role or someone interested in teaching at a police academy" (Law Enforcement Education: Career Boosting Options, 2022 para 10). The academy is only a portion of the police candidate's training. Following graduation from the academy, they start their period of field training with a certified training officer typically for three months. The recruit is evaluated daily on performance and knowledge by their training officer. If they don't receive high ratings, they may be placed on a performance improvement plan followed by termination. It is common practice that once a candidate has completed their academy training, passed a state certification exam, and successfully completed their field training phase they remain on probation for at least a year. Some agencies have extended the probation phase to two years to ensure the individual has the skills, character, and professionalism they want for a police officer in their community. Anytime during the field training and probation phase, a candidate can be fired for just cause. Some states have civil service protection after the probation phase is complete.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE DEGREE PROGRAMS

Experiential learning is a pedagogical theory explained by Kolb that reflects on how students' knowledge can be transformed through experience, observation, and reflection (Kolb 1984; George, Lim, Lucas & Meadows, 2015). Criminal justice educators face many challenges in preparing their students for the numerous career opportunities associated with the criminal justice system. College criminal justice curricula are designed to expose students to a variety of related areas; criminal law, forensic science techniques, criminology, juvenile justice, corrections, social diversity, and research methodology to ensure the student understands the complexities of the profession. College educators traditionally have used lectures as their primary method of transferring learning to students. This type of approach in criminal justice programs does not provide real-world scenarios and challenges that are gained solely through experience (Cromwell & Birzer, 2012; Sim, 2006; Stichman & Farkas, 2005; George, Lim, et al. 2015). Police officers deal with people who need help. A lecture can provide information on a specific topic but rarely will be of little use for an officer dealing with a person under duress. To remedy this shortcoming, numerous criminal justice programs have implemented experience-based activities into their programs. These include internships (Fichter, 1987; Stone & McLaren

1999, George, Lim et al, 2015), the ride-along (Cromwell & Birzer, 2012), service (experiential) learning (Sims, 2006; George, Lim, et al.), field trips & research projects (George, Lim, et al. 2015) (Tovar & Mischia, 2019). Educators in numerous disciplines have adopted this student-centered 'hands-on' approach to replace or supplement the traditional lecture-centered formats in the classroom. These disciplines include nursing education (Warnke & Thirwell, 2014), medical education (Gugliucci, & Weiner, 2013) engineering. (Durkin & Verma, 2016) business (Winsett, Foster & Dearing, 2016) and criminal justice programs (George 2015; Cromwell & Birzer, 2012; Sims, 2006; Stichman & Farkas 2005; Sgroi & Ryniker 2002.) (Tovar & Mischia, 2019).

"A police officer brought into a classroom a concern about a myriad of urban problems to which he wanted answers or at least some alternative solutions. The academician, on the other hand, was too frequently ill-prepared or not inclined to deviate or modify traditional lecture material, even in those courses which possessed the potential for addressing community problems. But part of it also stemmed from a complete lack of any real knowledge about the types of problems his law enforcement students encounter and the kinds of knowledge that they needed to function most effectively in their work" (Territo, 1976 p. 28) (Jamieson, 1978).

Today's students grapple with complex social trends and current issues in American society and their implications for criminal justice (Gibson & Blake, 1975). For today's law enforcement professionals, it is essential to have the ability to read people, data, technology, and forensics. A formal understanding of social and psychological aspects is needed to be an expert in policing. Higher education better prepares individuals for what they are asked to do (Dudley, 2020).

Studies indicate experiential learning has a high rate of knowledge retention; therefore, consideration should be made to incorporating more skill-based exercises, role play, and interactive requirements into criminal justice curricula. The difference between education and training and the future of policing needs to create a stronger link to improve police service (Buerger, M. 2004). Higher education's desire is to expand their students' perceptions and ability to think critically, however most criminal justice programs tend to examine the theory and practice through the lens of social science research which may not transfer to skills and knowledge required for the expectations and demands of a police professional (Buerger, Michael, 2004). "Education and training are fundamentally different tasks, though in an ideal world they should complement each other" (Buerger, M., 2004 para 12).

Criminal Law is a course taught both in a police academy and in college degree programs. Training academies and college courses may look at Criminal Law from different perspectives; criminal elements of each category vs. broader approach examining the philosophy of law and the nature of legal reasoning, however, what is most important is the law enforcement agency's needs (Buerger, M. 2004). They need someone who can write a thorough report which supports an affidavit of a crime and be well-prepared to testify in court from their original report two years later. Thus, creating a complementary approach to improving police service may be the blending of teaching content and style. Society would like to have police officers, correctional officers, and police administrators who have mastered the skills and technology of their profession and be able to apply this expertise to their communities and the citizens they serve. They need to learn how to build trust in the community in a manner consistent with theoretical wisdom in the behavioral sciences and a progressive understanding of the environment and agency objectives from a practical perspective (Jamieson, 1978). A properly developed curriculum would serve to meet the objectives of producing criminal justice personnel with integrated knowledge and progressive proactive ethical real-world conditions. The graduate

will be a marketable asset as a police officer due to their ability to apply theoretical wisdom with cognitive knowledge and skills.

METHOD

This inquiry adds some pieces to the puzzle of examining the value of requiring a college education for police officers and the relationship of experiential learning in training police academies within a college curriculum. Do all police need a degree? According to (Carlan, 2006) "most officers argue that a bachelor's degree is not essential for the performance of policing duties" (p.60). However, there are two reasons why this debate continues; college-educated police administrators are in favor of hiring and promoting college-educated officers because they tend to be less rigid and more ethically inclined, and citizens support a degree requirement. Several studies indicate citizens rated college graduates higher on problem-solving and judgment skills and were surprised to learn that college degrees were not a mandate for hiring purposes (Carlan, 2006). Carlan's study found nearly three-fourths of the officers (72%) from 16 municipalities in Alabama purported that the criminal justice degree taught them valuable policing skills not offered in the police academy and only 9% disagreed. Also, "officers greatly believed that the educational journey promoted skills related to communication, human relations, administration, and critical thinking, as well as a wealth of knowledge regarding the criminal justice system, law, and procedures" (Carlan, 2006, p.62)

Over a three-year period, criminal justice students (N=75) enrolled in an online bachelor's program were asked "do you think police departments should require a bachelor's degree?" The respondents included traditional and non-traditional male and female adult learners ranging from ages 18-45. Occupations ranged from a full-time student, various service occupations, current and retired military, patrol officers, detective, and police supervisors. The assumption was since they were currently enrolled in a criminal justice degree program, they would see the value in a degree and indicate a college degree should be mandated.

RESULTS

The opinion of the respondents was mixed on whether a degree should be required for police officers, however, they all agreed a college degree is beneficial and worth seeking. Following are sample responses.

"I agree that we need to understand the mindset of criminals and furthering your education can show the importance of work ethics and knowledge. I believe that experience is just as necessary, if not more important, than just being educated through a degree in a specific job field in law enforcement. Having experienced help, educators build a better educational institution and improve officers' tactics and techniques to face daily issues. Unfortunately, if law agencies lack the experience or knowledge, the system can fail. Both experience and education work hand to hand, and you cannot have one without another. I believe a person can also start an occupation regardless of having a college degree and can always continue their education as they grow within their career field. Suppose a person can experience a job through an internship, ride-a-long, or any other program or just by being hired through a probation period. They are most likely to gain the right mindset to see if that career field is for them or not, allowing them not to have to waste money on a degree they no longer enjoy. I also believe as leaders, when we receive new employees, we should mentor them and help build their skills. Training employees is the

most crucial thing in any job, and if we fail to train our employers, we are only failing ourselves and the place we thrive to improve within that workplace." (male)

"I have served in the military for over 11 years. I learned many things within my first year that require me to have a high-security clearance level to learn how to use advanced technology and understand my responsibilities. These include controlling crowds, conducting progressive profiling, direct air traffic, direct ground traffic, leading a team, identifying bombs from a distance, using multiple weapon systems, etc. However, this did not require a degree but a person's dedication, time, effort, integrity, and many other traits. People must trust one another and have the will to learn and train daily, whether on the job, at training events, or during our off time. I believe having a degree can further a person understanding of how policies work. Still, without the proper experience through internship, training, or on the job, a person can never fully understand their career to the full extent, including the social and psychological aspects. Understanding a community is one thing but understanding how to build rapport and maintain it is key to advancing in a community. I believe that in the new era of technology, people are sucked into the old mindset that a degree matters in every aspect, but experience does not as much. I believe our law enforcement needs more training and leaders to become involved to encourage the community to trust them once again." (male)

"I don't think having a degree should be a requirement for a position in law enforcement, I do think you should have some type of schooling. However, as long as you have the basic curriculum like critical thinking, fast learner, ethics, culture, sensitivity, de-escalation strategies, and some kind of investigative skills a person should be fine. The training the police have to take; should give them basic law enforcement skills". (female)

"A law enforcement officer will not be better equipped if they have more education because a police job isn't about education unless you're trying to move up the ranks of the department. The only things the law enforcement officer needs to be ready and equipped to do this job are a good amount of compassion, and empathy, also be able to protect the community, the willingness to serve and protect without being biased, willing to put your life on the line every day you go to work. Those are things to be a law enforcement officer would need to be equipped." (female)

"I think that law enforcement should require a college degree for all law enforcement officers. It was not long ago that you did not need a degree and all you needed to become a police officer was to know someone inside. As a result, that created an environment that was ripe with nepotism, corruption, and lawlessness, which would eventually need to be addressed. The fact that police officers are now being required to have a degree coincides with the changes and reforms recently implemented as a result of community outcry and interest groups. Don't get me wrong, there are great people out there that have what it takes to be a law enforcement officer, but having a degree certainly helps." (male)

"I believe having a degree will result in the law enforcement officer being more problem-orientated and less likely to use violence. A degree allows the law enforcement officer to learn the laws, the evolution of the justice system, and current challenges and incoming reforms. Without a degree, they would only receive the education and training that their particular agency provides, which will certainly have its limitations and possibly create pitfalls for the law enforcement officers." (female)

"When it comes to having a college degree in order to be a part of law enforcement, I do believe that it is important. I believe that like most jobs having experience in learning the history, and basics, and knowing as much as possible will help you to become a better law enforcement

officer. Now where I disagree a little is that the more educated you are the better you are at your job. A lot of LEO training comes from on-the-job training. Also, people who are in the military and transfer over may not have the educational part, but they have the skill and experience to be a great LEO. My final opinion is that if you have the opportunity to further your education it will not hurt you in the long run with your career, but I am sure there are thousands of law enforcement officers that are above and beyond that do not have the same educational opportunities or have those degrees." (male)

CONCLUSION

Societies in the future will be distinguished by human, ethical and cultural diversity which can lead to a large degree of conflict, tension, and social friction which creates great challenges for future police agencies. What is needed to confront these challenges is cognition, specialization, and technical skills (Abdelmottlep, 2021). "The solution to gaps in college classes, is to examine the real-world needs of today's police officers working in an incredibly complex milieu of demands and expectations and forging a regimen of knowledge, skills, and aptitudes to equip them" (Dudley, 2020, para. 6). Criminal justice curricula need to be flexible and fluid to meet the contemporary needs of the community and the agency. No knowledge should be wasted in law enforcement; therefore, any mode of learning and experience has great value. According to Shults (2020), he believes the value of a college degree lies less in academics and more in a variety of other life skills that could be absorbed in more comprehensive police academies. Presently, there are more college-educated police officers in history, and it hasn't solved the problems of the use of force and allegations of systemic racism. Until members of society consider what they really want from the police; requiring a college education may not resolve the problems. Today's cops are more educated, and most agencies do require college degrees for promotion which assist them with social, communication, and writing skills necessary to deal with so many segments of society. Obtaining a college degree is a worthwhile endeavor and is recommended to those wanting to make a difference to fully understand and meet the needs of a complex society. Creating new programs representing a visionary approach is possible for institutions that are seeking to create a criminal justice program or adapt existing programs. Academia is slow to change, however, focus groups with police administrators offer insight into the true needs of the modern police officer. The professional field of criminal justice provides the signal and motivates institutional adaptation, which may develop a criminal justice major that is multidimensional (Buerger, 2004). "A dialogue that explores the needs of the law enforcement profession and the capacities and possibilities of the academic field is needed to fuel change. The challenge of the future should create the spark" (Buerger, 2004 para 27).

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