



# Police Officer Higher Education: An Omnibus Review of the Literature Identifying Factors Relevant to Police Officer Effectiveness

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**Abstract:** Pundits in the realm of criminal justice administration tell us that a college degree is unnecessary for police officer applicants and beyond the practical reach of police agencies. Many studies have shown that a college degree has no application to policing and should not be a requirement for employment. Police chiefs and sheriffs have proclaimed that a college degree requirement shrinks the pool of potential candidates and thus makes recruiting even more difficult at a time when policing has been demeaned and vilified in the public's eye by the media. Contrary to the theme above, this article is among many that attempt to show that there are tangible benefits to hiring college graduates with an associate's degree but even more so for applicants with a bachelor's degree or higher.

## Introduction

The authors want to give you, the reader, a scenario. Let's consider the reality in the vast majority of today's police agencies. The education level is a high school diploma or GED, and the minimum age is 21 years. Now let's look at this profile: A 21-year-old male or female with a gun, a high school diploma, and academy training that may, at best, be 6 months but most likely will be less. A significant portion of the training will be on the proper and legal use of firearms where the trainee will draw and shoot at a target which may be simulated or live on a range. Now, let's consider that as recently as 2020 just 37% of 12th-graders reached or exceeded the academic preparedness benchmarks for both math and reading that would qualify them for

entry-level college courses – a figure unchanged since 2015 (Carmera, 2020, para 2). If this is the national standard for police officers, there is no wonder that policing is so out-of-touch with its own constituents and the U.S. society in general. Ostensibly, this profile cannot be sustained in our high-tech, advanced society in the year 2024 and going forward.

## Study Limitations

There have been hundreds of articles written about police higher education since the report by the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice in 1967 titled, "The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society" in which the Commission recommended the requirement of a baccalaureate degree for entry-level police officers by 1982. So, it was impossible for the authors to include even a small percentage of these articles for this study. Therefore, we carefully chose articles in six applicable categories that the authors believe represent the movement toward professionalization, and the reduction of the most ubiquitous criticisms of untoward police conduct since the Challenge of Crime in a Free Society Report. These six categories (dependent variables) are (1) citizen complaints, (2) communication skills-report writing efficiency, (3) ethical behavior, (4) police officer production efficiency, (5) supervisor evaluations, and (6) use of force. These six dependent variables are matched with the single independent variable of higher education. In our articles selected, the authors identify higher education as possession of "some college credits," an AA degree or higher. It should be noted that these six dependent variables are the ones most often appearing in the selected articles. The authors also sought to find a mix of articles that found higher education was both a positive as well as a negative or neutral factor on all six variables so as to not show obvious biased toward higher education. However, the vast majority of the articles do conclude that higher education is positively correlated with all six dependent variables.

Another possible limitation to our study is most of the pertinent and better designed studies fall into the period 1970-2000 because this was the period in which policing and criminal justice reform was a focus of the federal government (noteworthy are The President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice—1967 and Clinton's Violent Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1994). By 2000, the federal government's push to reform policing and its failed goal to implement the promised goal of 1982 as the year during which all new police hires would be college graduates, had all but been abandoned. The elimination of the Law Enforcement Education Program (LEEP) in 1984 ended the millions of dollars in grants to colleges and universities for police officers' higher education and also signaled the end of the federal government's emphasis on police officer higher education.

## Literature Review

There has been a plethora of studies that argue both sides of this issue—degree or no degree for police officers. The studies that purport to show no ostensible benefit of a degree generally argue two points: (1) college-educated police officers do not produce the “enforcement numbers” of their fellow non-degreed officers, and (2) they are not as “dedicated” to the job as non-degreed officers as shown by their greater turnover. The retort to (2) is that business, and all other occupations, also experience turnover. An interesting discussion on Lexipol’s Police 1 (2022) asked the question, “State your case: Should prospective cops be required to have college degrees?” The responses from the police officers and executives were about even. The disturbing theme, however, from the respondents who rejected the idea of having college educated police officers was that college educated cops have no “common sense,” so it is much better to have experienced military persons who have “been there and done this” and who have made decisions in life and death situations. Of course, the response to this is that the vast majority of military personnel, like police officers, have never had to make a decision whether to take a person’s life or not.

## Officer Attitudes Toward a College Education

The data show that officers throughout the U.S. see education as important even though it adds to their time commitments with regard to balancing job, family, and leisure. Hilal and Densley (2013) surveyed officers in Minnesota and Arizona to determine the extent of police officer dedication to obtain a college degree. They surveyed a total of 964 officers in both states.

When asked about educational levels, 849 or 88 percent reported having at least a 2-year degree (Minnesota requires a 2-year degree for hire). Forty-eight percent of the officers stated that they had a 4-year degree or greater. This is 20 percent higher than the 27.9 percent of the U.S. population who reported in the 2010 census that they had a bachelor’s degree or higher (para 4).

This article shows on a micro-level that police officers do value a college degree, and once they acquire one, the more likely they are to continue their educations to the next degree level. The data clearly indicates that most officers value one or more college degrees. In most cases this is the case because a promotion is dependent on acquiring the degree, or the rank of police officer is incentivized by a percentage increase of between 1-5 percent. A growing number of departments also offer tuition reimbursement plans that return all or a portion of the tuition costs based on the grade received.

## What is the Nation-wide Requirement for Education for the Almost 18,000 Police Agencies?

Only 8 percent of the police and sheriff's agencies in the U.S. require some education above a high school diploma as a requirement for application (Hudgins, 2014). Most of these agencies require an AA degree; however, many have an alternative to the degree such 2-3 years of active military duty with an honorable discharge or 2-3 years of police experience with another agency. Almost non-existent is a requirement for a bachelor's degree. In this study, the authors found only two U.S. police departments and two U.S. sheriff's departments that require a bachelor's degree, and these are the Arlington, Texas and the Tulsa, Oklahoma PDs and the Multnomah County, Oregon and the Clarke County, Washington Sheriff's Offices. Most of the federal police agencies require a four-year degree. These include the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF), Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), US Customs and Border Patrol, U.S. Secret Service, and the U.S. Marshals. It can be argued that the job duties and expectations of a city police officer or county sheriff are more complex and require better interpersonal skills than what should be expected of the federal law enforcement agencies identified above.

## Historical Timeline of the Requirement of a Bachelor's Degree

The impetus for requiring a bachelor's degree for U.S. law enforcement officers began with the publication of the 1967 report, *The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society*. This publication emanated from President Lyndon Johnson's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice. This commission was formed after the turbulent 1960s that saw rioting in many of the largest cities and the forceful response by police agencies and the calling-up of the National Guard in many states and in particular Michigan by then Governor George W. Romney. The stated goal was to have a national requirement that all local and state law enforcement officers have a bachelor's degree as a requirement for employment by 1982.

Johnson's administration got legislation passed to provide funding for this goal. It established the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) as a part of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968. LEAA was tasked with providing "block grants" to all 50 states that would be used to reduce crime. The LEAA block grant program was launched in 1968. Another funded program in LEAA was the Law Enforcement Education Program (LEEP) which sought to begin the process of achieving the bachelor's degree requirement by awarding grants to universities with criminal justice and criminology programs. The universities were given the authority to award grants to students up to a limited amount, and the student accepting the grant was required to "repay" the grant by being hired by a law enforcement agency and working as a law

enforcement officer for four years. The lead author, Dr. Guffey, received his master's degree from Sam Houston State University with a LEEP grant that would not have been possible without the grant and repaid the grant with a career in law enforcement.

This program was successful in increasing the number of law enforcement officers with bachelor's degrees, but it was clear by 1982 that it was not going to achieve the *Challenge of Crime in a Free Society's* goal of the 50 states requiring a bachelor's degree. LEAA and its subsidiary, LEEP, were disbanded in 1982.

### **The Decrease in Requirements for Police Officer Selection**

Some police agencies regress their entry-level requirements from time-to-time and a higher education requirement is generally the first to be jettisoned. In an attempt to increase the pool of applicants for police officer positions, some police agencies have resorted to reducing their existing entry qualifications or making some criminal offenses and questionable behaviors acceptable for consideration for hire which heretofore would have been automatic rejection of an applicant. The most recent example of a police agency reducing its educational requirement occurred in Pennsylvania. Governor Josh Shapiro announced on August 23, 2023 that the requirement for college credits to be eligible for consideration for hire as a Pennsylvania State Police Officer would be dropped to possessing a high school diploma or GED. This requirement had stood for 30 years. The reason given by Shapiro was, "to open up police careers to a wider pool of applicants" (Hoopes, 2023, para 1). Reducing the requirements for police officer entry to increase the pool of applicants has generally been fraught with an increase in police officer malfeasance. "I cannot recall any instance in which the lowering police hiring standards led to a positive result — this idea always ends badly" (Wyllie, 2016, para 8). The authors have tried to make this as visible as possible with the tables below that are taken from the Law Enforcement Management and Administrative System (LEMAS).

### **Percentage of state and local law enforcement agencies which considered applicants with selected negative prior events, by size and type of agency, Table 15-2008**

This is "old" data from 2008. The authors cannot confirm whether these tables and their data are applicable to agencies recently. It appears that LEMAS statisticians stopped gathering this data after the 2008 census. Nevertheless, one can assume that some of these hiring practices may still be applicable today because law enforcement agencies are seeing unprecedented resignations and retirements because of the Defund the Police Movement. It is during these periods of police renunciation that make policing less attractive as an occupation and departments look to "reduce their standards" and accept less qualified applicants.

**Table 1: Considered Credit Related Problems in Percentages**

	<i>All Agencies</i>	<i>Local</i>	<i>Sheriff</i>	<i>Primary State</i>
All Sizes	66	66	66	87
500+ officers	94	91	100	94
100-499	86	86	87	71
25-99	72	73	68	—
10-24	66	68	60	—
<10	61	61	61	—

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics Law Enforcement Management and Administrative System Survey, 2008. <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/hrslleo08st.pdf>.

This table shows the percentage of reporting law enforcement agencies by size that considered applicants with credit related problems. A dash indicates this data was not available.

**Table 2: Considered Misdemeanor Convictions in Percentages**

	<i>All Agencies</i>	<i>Local</i>	<i>Sheriff</i>	<i>Primary State</i>
All Sizes	60	59	66	85
500+	86	84	94	85
100-499	81	80	82	86
25-99	66	65	68	—
10-24	59	58	63	—
<10	56	55	60	—

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics Law Enforcement Management and Administrative System Survey, 2008. <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/hrslleo08st.pdf>.

This table shows the percentage of reporting law enforcement agencies by size that **considered** applicants with certain non-violent misdemeanor convictions. A dash indicates this data was not available.

**Table 3: Considered Job Related Problems in Percentages**

	<i>All Agencies</i>	<i>Local</i>	<i>Sheriff</i>	<i>Primary State</i>
All Sizes	50	49	51	79
500+	85	83	94	82
100-499	72	73	70	71
25-99	71	76	59	—
10-24	50	54	39	—
<10	30	31	25	—

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics Law Enforcement Management and Administrative System Survey, 2008. <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/hrslleo08st.pdf>.

This table shows the percentage of reporting law enforcement agencies by size that **considered** applicants with certain job-related problems. The LEMAS data did not specify what a job-related problem is; however, it can be surmised that it is a firing or poor performance at a previous job which can include a firing from a previous law enforcement agency. A dash indicates this data was not available.

**Table 4: Considered Marijuana Use in Percentage**

	<i>All Agencies</i>	<i>Local</i>	<i>Sheriff</i>	<i>Primary State</i>
All Sizes	47	48	46	91
500+	87	86	88	91
100-499	84	87	80	93
25-29	71	76	59	—
10-24	50	54	39	—
<10	30	31	25	—

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics Law Enforcement Management and Administrative System Survey, 2008. <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/hrslleo08st.pdf>.

This table shows the percentage of reporting law enforcement agencies by size that **considered** applicants who have used marijuana. Most agencies set a period in the past as a cut-off for use which is around 3-6 months. Marijuana use is still a federal Schedule-1 drug, so, by considering an applicant, the department is considering an applicant with an admitted federal felony drug crime. A dash indicates this data was not available.

**Table 5: Considered a Suspended Driver's License in Percentage**

	<i>All Agencies</i>	<i>Local</i>	<i>Sheriff</i>	<i>Primary State</i>
All Sizes	47	48	46	91
500+	87	86	88	91
100-499	77	78	76	79
25-99	59	61	52	—
10-24	35	33	39	—
<10	33	33	28	—

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics Law Enforcement Management and Administrative System Survey, 2008. <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/hrslleo08st.pdf>.

This table shows the percentage of reporting law enforcement agencies by size that **considered** applicants who have had a license suspension for any reason. A dash indicates this data was not available.

**Table 6: Considered a DUI Conviction in Percentage**

	<i>All Agencies</i>	<i>Local</i>	<i>Sheriff</i>	<i>Primary State</i>
All Sizes	34	32	42	81
500+	78	70	89	85
100-499	65	63	68	71
25-99	48	50	45	—
10-24	35	33	39	—
<10	24	23	32	—

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics Law Enforcement Management and Administrative System Survey, 2008. <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/hrslleo08st.pdf>.

This table shows the percentage of reporting law enforcement agencies by size that **considered** applicants who have a DUI conviction. A dash indicates this data was not available.

**Table 7: Considered Gang Affiliation in Percentage**

	<i>All Agencies</i>	<i>Local</i>	<i>Sheriff</i>	<i>Primary State</i>
All Sizes	7	7	7	21
500+	27	31	23	21
100-499	19	20	19	21
25-99	10	11	8	—
10-24	6	7	5	—
<10	4	4	4	—

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics Law Enforcement Management and Administrative System Survey, 2008. <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/hrslleo08st.pdf>.

This table shows the percentage of reporting law enforcement agencies by size that **considered** applicants who have a confirmed previous gang affiliation. A dash indicates this data was not available.

It should be nothing less than “shocking” that agencies were even **considering** applicants with these handicaps in 2008 and possibly even after 2008. When considering police professionalism and reform, the most important factor should be recruiting and hiring the best and most qualified applicants, but this is not accomplished when these recruiting exceptions are employed. Moreover, professionalization and reform are not achieved when an educational requirement of a high school diploma is the baseline for hiring police officers.



**Example:** The McFarland, California Police Department disgraced itself by hiring police officers that had many of the above unconscionable behaviors. A *San Jose Mercury News* story found that, “One of every five officers who worked at the McFarland Police Department in the past decade had been previously fired, sued for misconduct or convicted of a crime” (Rusch and Du Sault, 2019, para 1). The McFarland, California Police Department’s reckless and unprofessional hiring was uncovered, but it makes one wonder how many other agencies are employing the same reckless hiring but have not been exposed.

### Omnibus Review of Police Officer Higher Education’s Correlation to Six Dependent Variables

The following Tables 8-13 display a synopsis of the articles selected for the six variables described earlier (use of force, supervisor evaluations, communication skills/report writing efficiency, ethical behavior/abuse of authority, production efficiency, and citizen/administrative complaints) and a brief description of the study population and method used. The last two columns indicate whether the study showed a positive correlation with the variable or no correlation or an unconfirmed correlation. An “x” in both columns indicates that a portion of the study showed a positive correlation and a portion showed no or unconfirmed correlation. Some of the studies can be considered to be “weak” in that they employed a small sample size, whereas others were clearly “strong” in that they had large, diverse sample sizes. The authors chose not to indicate which were weak and which were strong because this would be opinion at best. Readers who are interested in learning more about each article should find the affiliated reference in the Reference Section.

**Table 8: Police Officer Higher Education’s Correlation with Use of Force**

<i>Study</i>	<i>Synopsis</i>	<i>Study Subjects/Population</i>	<i>Positive Correlation between Higher Ed and Less Use of Force</i>	<i>No or Unconfirmed Correlation between Higher Ed and Use of Force</i>
Rydberg & Terrill (2010)	College education does significantly reduce the likelihood of force occurring. Results may be due to the amount of discretion officer’s exercise in pursuing these behaviors	Observational data from two medium-sized cities	x	

<i>Study</i>	<i>Synopsis</i>	<i>Study Subjects/Population</i>	<i>Positive Correlation between Higher Ed and Less Use of Force</i>	<i>No or Unconfirmed Correlation between Higher Ed and Use of Force</i>
Terrill & Mastroski (2002)	In encounters involving officers with a high school education, there was a 44% and 20% chance of verbal and physical force being applied, compared to 42% and 15%, respectively, for those involving officers with a bachelor's degree	Data collected as part of an observational study of the police in Indianapolis, Indiana, and St. Petersburg, Florida	x	
Morabito & Doerner (1997)	Male, college-educated, and veteran police officers were more likely to choose OC spray over other permissible hand-to-hand techniques.	Tallahassee Florida PD--A total of 633 police officer-civilian OC spray encounters took place. Male, college-educated, and veteran police officers were more likely to choose OC spray over other permissible hand-to-hand techniques		x
Paoline & Terrill (2007)	The findings indicate that varying levels of education and experience are related to differences in the use of coercion in encounters with citizens. Encounters involving officers with any college education result in significantly less verbal force compared to those with a high school education. However, only those encounters involving officers with a 4-year degree result in significantly less physical force.	This study uses two data sets (i.e., systematic social observation [SSO] of patrol officers and in-person interviews of those officers from the Project on Policing Neighborhoods(POPn), which examined policing in Indianapolis, Indiana, and St. Petersburg, Florida, during the summers of 1996 and 1997, respectively	x	

<i>Study</i>	<i>Synopsis</i>	<i>Study Subjects/Population</i>	<i>Positive Correlation between Higher Ed and Less Use of Force</i>	<i>No or Unconfirmed Correlation between Higher Ed and Use of Force</i>
Sherman and Blumberg (1981)	Until more and older college graduates are available for study it is probably not possible to conclude what impact college, and different kinds of college education, have upon police use of deadly force.	This study compares the educational levels of officers who did and did not shoot their weapons, who shot following different types of citizen behavior, and who shot with and without justification over a seven-year period in the Kansas City, Missouri police department		x
McElvain & Kposowa, (2008)	College-educated officers were less likely to be involved in shootings than officers with no college education	Data were collected from the Riverside County Sheriff's Department (RCSD), the 44th-largest law enforcement department in the United States based on the Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics	x	
Telep, (2011)	The study finds that officers with a pre-service bachelor's degree hold attitudes that are less supportive of abuse of authority, although the effect is fairly small in magnitude. These effects remain regardless of when officers receive their degree and across varying levels of higher education (i.e., associate's degree, attending some college).	Random sample of 1,112 policed officers from 121 US police agencies.	x	

<i>Study</i>	<i>Synopsis</i>	<i>Study Subjects/Population</i>	<i>Positive Correlation between Higher Ed and Less Use of Force</i>	<i>No or Unconfirmed Correlation between Higher Ed and Use of Force</i>
Aamodt, (2004)	Better-educated officers use force less often	Aamodt (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of several studies considering the effects of officer education on a variety of police-related circumstances, including use of force.	x	
Vespucci, (2019)	Level of force was measured at multiple levels: verbalization, soft techniques, hard techniques, blunt impact, chemical, controlled energy device, and lethal force. Officers with graduate degrees used force a slightly more than non-degreed officers; officers with undergraduate degrees used force slightly more than non-degreed officers, but the difference was barely significant.	This study collected self-reported survey data from 425 sworn law enforcement officers throughout six states.		x
Shjarback & White, (2015)	The robustness of the college education finding across both indicators of police-citizen violence, from different sources of data, provides strong support for the requirement that police officers should have at least some college education (e.g., an associate's degree) prior to employment.	Data were gathered from a sampling frame of local law enforcement agencies with over 100 sworn full-time officers, resulting in a sample of 526 departments. These departments constitute 56% of all sworn full-time municipal officers in the country, serving about 32% of the population	x	

Of the ten selected articles, seven resulted in the finding that college educated officers generally used less force than their non-college educated counter-part officers. Three studies indicated no significant difference or that officers used slightly less force.

**Table 9: Police Officer Higher Education and Supervisor Evaluation**

<i>Study</i>	<i>Synopsis</i>	<i>Study Subjects/Population</i>	<i>Positive Correlation between Higher Ed and Less Use of Force</i>	<i>No or Unconfirmed Correlation between Higher Ed and Use of Force</i>
Rogers (2003)	Officers with a college degree, either AA or BA/BS, received overall superior supervisor evaluations	61 police officer personnel files from a North Dakota PD	x	
Dailey (2002)	A significant relationship was found between the composite set of independent variables of age, educational level, prior military experience and prior law enforcement experience and the dependent variable of police commendations.	The officers (N=489) were employed in a city with a population of 260,000 and a jurisdictional area of 280 square miles.	x	
Engel, R.S & Worden, R.E. (2006)	The results also show that officers' performance in police-citizen encounters, measured in terms of citizens' evaluations, is largely unrelated to officers' educational backgrounds.	24 PDs in 3 metropolitan areas (Rochester, NY; St. Louis, MO; and Tampa-St. Petersburg, FL.		x
Finnigan (1976)	A comparison of evaluation reports on non-college educated police officers and college educated agents indicated that the latter consistently received higher evaluations, regardless of type of degree	97 officers and 113 agents in the Baltimore Police Department	x	
Cascio (1977)	None of the behaviorally anchored performance ratings were related to formal education.	Data are reported for 825 White, 60 Black, and 55 Spanish-surnamed officers		x
Smith and Aamodt (1997)	Significant correlations were found between education and most measures of performance. Most importantly, the results show a significant correlation between overall performance and education ( $r=24$ , $p.<001$ )	299 police officers from 12 municipal police departments across the state of Virginia to determine the relationship between education and police performance	x	

<i>Study</i>	<i>Synopsis</i>	<i>Study Subjects/Population</i>	<i>Positive Correlation between Higher Ed and Less Use of Force</i>	<i>No or Unconfirmed Correlation between Higher Ed and Use of Force</i>
Hayeslip (1989)	Meta-analysis of 10 studies on police higher education and performance	It has been shown in this study that by cumulating across studies we can find consistent agreement that education and police performance are moderately related.	x	
Roberg (1978)	As a group, the men with at least one year of college education were more likely to be promoted and significantly less likely to receive civilian complaints than less educated officers	118 non-supervisory patrol officers of the Lincoln, Nebraska P.D.	x	
Truxillo et al. (1998)	College education variables showed a statistically significant relationship with promotions (average $r = .31$ ), and supervisory ratings of job knowledge (average $r = .25$ )	Study investigated the relationship between measures of college education and work performance for a cohort of 84 police officers over a 10-year period	x	

Of the nine selected studies, seven indicated superior evaluations of college educated officers versus non-college educated officers.

**Table 10: Higher Police Education and Police Officer Production/Efficiency**

<i>Study</i>	<i>Synopsis</i>	<i>Study Subjects/Population</i>	<i>Positive Correlation between Higher Ed and Police Officer Production</i>	<i>No or Unconfirmed Correlation between Higher Ed and Police Officer Production</i>
Cascio (1977)	Formal education associated with fewer injuries, fewer assaults, fewer disciplinary actions from accidents, fewer sick times per year, and fewer physical force allegations	Statistical analysis of 940 active-duty Miami-Dade police officers	x	

<i>Study</i>	<i>Synopsis</i>	<i>Study Subjects/ Population</i>	<i>Positive Correlation between Higher Ed and Police Officer Production</i>	<i>No or Unconfirmed Correlation between Higher Ed and Police Officer Production</i>
Finnigan (1975)	The Baltimore Police Agents were consistently rated higher than the non-degreed officers on four performance criteria: duty performance, character traits, overall value, and performance under pressure.	113 police agents (4-year degree) compared to 97 non-degreed police officers	x	
Sanderson (1977)	Educational levels were compared to the following performance variables: (1) police academy performance, (2) disciplinary history, (3) absenteeism, (4) terminations, and (5) career advancement. In each of the five performance variables tested in the study, college education showed a positive effect.	10-year longitudinal study of 117 LAPD officers.	x	
Hooper (1988)	The current study's findings show no appreciable differences across educational levels in the performance of police duties. However, a 4-year degree in criminal justice administration did show a significant difference.	The study was comprised of 129 LAPD officers		x

Of the four studies examined, three indicated a positive correlation between higher education and police performance. Only one study showed no appreciable difference. It is important to define what these studies showed as positive performance measures. In the selected studies, performance was **not** measured by arrests, tickets issued, street light outages reported, etc. The measures used were commendations, probationary and semi-annual performance evaluations, police academy standing, and career sick leave taken, and error rate on police reports.

**Table 11: Higher Education and Ethical Behavior/Abuse of Authority**

<i>Study</i>	<i>Synopsis</i>	<i>Study Subjects/Population</i>	<i>Positive Correlation between Higher Ed and Ethical Behavior</i>	<i>No or Unconfirmed Correlation between Higher Ed and Ethical Behavior</i>
Tyre and Braunstein (1992) Study 1: Forced Choice Scenarios	Experimental Group: Police officers with at least 2-year degree. Control Group: Non-Sworn Citizens. Police officer responses to ethical dilemmas were correct 12 times greater than control	50 active police officers from 2 Florida PDs and 60 non-sworn citizens	x	
Tyre and Braunstein (1992) Study 2: Examination of Decertifications	Examination of police officer decertifications by the Florida Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission (FCJSTC) years 1987 and 1988 1987—Officers who did not possess a 2-year degree were roughly 4 times more likely to be decertified. 1988—35% of Florida officers had at least 2-year degree, but only 15% were brought before the FDLE	All Florida officers brought before the FCJSTC in 1987 and 1988.	x	
Shernock, 1992	Educational level was found to be related to placing greater emphasis on ethical conduct	177 patrol officers in 11 police departments in the New England states and New York state.	x	
Delattre, 2002	Officers with less than two years of college were four times likely than officers with two or more years of college to face discipline by commissions for moral character or violations	Undefined	x	
Carter and Sapp, 1990	“Although not conclusive, the research suggests that higher education provided a number of benefits for law enforcement.” Carter and Sapp identified 18 bulleted points, most of which can be construed to show a positive correlation between higher education and ethical behavior. (pp. 62-63)	455 municipal police departments included in the study; 347 (76.3%) responded. Total of 502 responses.	x	



<i>Study</i>	<i>Synopsis</i>	<i>Study Subjects/Population</i>	<i>Positive Correlation between Higher Ed and Ethical Behavior</i>	<i>No or Unconfirmed Correlation between Higher Ed and Ethical Behavior</i>
Telep, 2010	The study found that officers with a pre-service bachelor's degree hold attitudes that are less supportive of abuse of authority, although the effect is fairly small in magnitude.	A total of 113 departments (93.4%) agreed to participate in the study. The participating agency sample consisted of eight certainty departments (89%), 78 midsize departments (93%), and 27 small departments (96.5%). Random sampling generated a sample of 1,112 potential respondents.	x	
White & Kane, 2013	Found that "officers with Associate or Bachelor's degrees were less likely to be separated for misconduct (i.e., criminal and drug failures) as compared with less educated officers"	This research is a comparison of the personal and career histories of all 1,543 officers who were involuntarily separated from the New York City Police Department (NYPD) for cause during 1975–1996 with a randomly selected sample of their police academy classmates who served honorably.	x	

All seven studies showed that higher educated officers were more ethical and understood the importance of not abusing their authority.

**Table 12: Communication Skills/Report Writing Efficiency**

<i>Study</i>	<i>Synopsis</i>	<i>Study Subjects/Population</i>	<i>Positive Correlation between Higher Ed and Communication/Report Writing Efficiency</i>	<i>No or Unconfirmed Correlation between Higher Ed and Communication/Report Writing Efficiency</i>
Edwards, B.D. 2019	Officers mentioned the need for improved focus on writing communication skills, interpersonal communication skills and problem solving. "many applicants do not possess basic writing skills to excel."	A total of 533 sworn officers were employed by the five police departments. Of these, 216 respondents completed the survey, for a response rate of 40.53%. Officers who completed the survey were, on average, 40 years old and had been employed as a police officer for an average of 14 years.	x	
Smith and Aamodt, 1997	According to this study, police officers who possess college degrees are better performers than those with only high school degrees. In addition, possessed increased communication skills, public relations skills, report writing skills.	This study used data from 299 police officers from 12 municipal police departments across the state of Virginia to determine the relationship between education and police performance.	x	
Bruns and Magnan, 2014	College educated officers are better communicators	qualitative data from 61 police officers of all ranks and educational backgrounds from the Midwest examine attitudes pertaining to the necessity of a college-educated force.	x	
Breci, 1997	Survey response to question, "How college classes had or would improve their careers," 37% responded that courses had/would improve communication with the public.	Survey response by 915 Minnesota police officers	x	

<i>Study</i>	<i>Synopsis</i>	<i>Study Subjects/Population</i>	<i>Positive Correlation between Higher Ed and Communication/Report Writing Efficiency</i>	<i>No or Unconfirmed Correlation between Higher Ed and Communication/Report Writing Efficiency</i>
Carlan and Byzbe, 2000	College educated officers are better communicators	Students from three southern colleges read vignettes and sentenced a murder defendant and an automobile theft defendant to a term of imprisonment.	x	
Carter and Sapp, 1990	College educated officers are better communicators	All state police agencies, all municipal agencies serving populations greater than 50,000 (N=455), the 49 states with state police/highway patrol, all consolidated county-wide police departments with 100 or more sworn employees, and all sheriff's departments with more than 100 sworn officers were surveyed to obtain data on the level of higher education in the departments, policies in support of college education, and the effect of higher education on policing.	x	
Worden, 1990	College educated officer respondents tended to believe they communicate better with the citizenry	Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) study cited above	x	

All six selected studies showed that higher educated officers were better communicators and wrote superior reports that led to more cases charged.

**Table 13: Citizen/Administrative Complaints**

<i>Study</i>	<i>Synopsis</i>	<i>Study Subjects/Population</i>	<i>Positive Correlation between Higher Ed and Fewer Complaints</i>	<i>Negative or Unconfirmed Correlation between Higher Education and Complaints</i>
Kappeler, Sapp, & Carter (1992)	found “that college educated officers had significantly few founded citizen-initiated complaints” (p. 44)	The study population included 120 full-time officers during a 5-year period by a medium-sized municipal agency in the Midwest	x	
Cohen & Chaiken (1972)	reported that officers who were more educated received fewer complaints.	This was a 12-year longitudinal study of 1,608 NYPD officers	x	
Cascio (1977)	found that officers with higher levels of education were the subjects of fewer allegations of excessive force	an examination of 940 police officers in the Dade County, Florida Police Department	x	
Terrill & Ingram (2015)	found that for officers with a 2- or 4-year degree there was a correlation between degree and fewer sustained citizen complaints	more than 5,500 citizen complaint allegations are examined across eight cities	x	
Carter, Sapp, & Stephens (1988)	Officers that possessed a 2- or 4-year degree had few sustained citizen complaints	data collected from 699 state and local police agencies across the United States	x	
Lersch & Kunzman (2001)	officers with 2 or more years of college education generated fewer complaints than those with less education.	analysis of 233 Sheriff Deputies from a large Southeastern agency over a five plus year period.	x	
Manis, Archibold, & Hassell (2008)	found that officers without a 4-year degree generated a higher number of formal complaints, but when education was considered collectively with experience levels, the effect dissipated.	examined 3 years of citizen complaint data from an unidentified Midwestern municipal agency involving 105 officers looking at the role of education (in terms of level and major) in relation to complaint frequency, complaint type, disposition, and sanction	x	

<i>Study</i>	<i>Synopsis</i>	<i>Study Subjects/Population</i>	<i>Positive Correlation between Higher Ed and Fewer Complaints</i>	<i>Negative or Unconfirmed Correlation between Higher Education and Complaints</i>
Boss (2019)	agencies requiring the levels of education increase, the number of sustained citizen complaints decreased	Existing LEMAS data on police higher education and citizen complaints	x	
Villone (2010)	Villone found that the hypothesis that "...higher education related to less criminal liability, was not supported through the statistical analysis"	Data collected from a township police department in Mahoning County, Ohio between 2005-2009.		x
Brandl, Stroshine, & Frank	education is not significantly correlated with assignment, patrol area, arrests made, or complaints received.	The data for this study were collected from a large mid-western municipal police department. The population that the police department served was approximately 45 percent White and 40 percent African-American		x
Worden (1995)	found that officers with bachelor's degrees were actually more likely to use reasonable force and just as likely to use improper force as officers without bachelor's degrees.	This article digests previous research and describes those belief systems which directly affect officers' behavior. There was no survey of police agencies.		x

Of the eleven selected studies, eight showed officers with higher education had fewer citizen and internal complaints. Three studies showed no discernible difference.

### Summary and Conclusions

Summarizing the Tables 8-13, the selected studies clearly indicate that a higher education requirement for police officers results in officers who excel in the six identified variables. Arguably, these six variables are the most important when considering the overall effectiveness of policing. Use of force, alone, may be the most important of the six variables, and the selected studies provided ample evidence that higher educated officers understand the magnitude of the use of force and use it less often than non-higher

educated officers. The authors emphasize that one limitation to this study is the selected articles for examination were taken at random. Nevertheless, to use a jurisprudence term, “the preponderance of the evidence points to a clear and convincing correlation between having at least some college credits and out-performing high school graduates in the key identified variables.” Do these articles accurately represent the findings of hundreds of articles which have studied the correlation of higher education when juxtaposed against the six identified dependent variables? We are confident that they do.

## Recommendations

First, the authors want to reiterate that we are not recommending that all law enforcement agencies make an AA/AS or BA/BS degree a requirement for entry-level police officer positions. Based on the findings of our study, we believe that at least an AA/AS degree is the wise choice, but we also understand the reality of this choice would result in fewer officers than is needed to make cities and counties safe. Our concern is, if the majority of new hires have only a high school diploma or GED, jurisdictions are taking additional risks. Our study revealed that officers with college credits or degrees use force less often than high school graduates. When officers use excessive force, cities and counties are subject to civil lawsuits that can cost jurisdictions millions of dollars every year. Los Angeles, for example, over a five-and-a-half-year period, paid over **\$245 million** to settle legal claims involving the LAPD (Reyes & Rector, 2021). Moreover, it may be the case that potential applicants with college units or even a degree may not want to take a job that devalues their education.

### Recommendation 1

Therefore, our first recommendation is that the approximately 18,000 U.S. law enforcement agencies implement a tuition reimbursement program. Agencies should negotiate with online colleges and universities to have a law enforcement scholarship/tuition reduction program of at least 25%. The authors’ university, National University—headquartered in San Diego—offers this law enforcement scholarship.

Why do we recommend online universities? Rotating shift work is not conducive to traditional, in-person, “brick and mortar” campuses. This would result in officers having to skip semesters or quarters when working the day and evening shifts. Another reason for officers to seek out online universities and colleges is that in today’s hostile climate toward policing and police officers, they may not feel comfortable being engaged in on-campus seminars. A worst case scenario would be a requirement to take a course toward graduation such as the University of California, Berkeley’s Sociology of Policing (Sociology 149). Three of the lectures are titled, (1) our enemy in blue, (2) cops and Klan, hand-in-hand, and (3) making police obsolete. We believe this UC Berkeley

course is an outlier in its acerbic intention; nevertheless, this is the prevailing attitude among many of the public and private educational institutions today.

### **Recommendation 2**

Our second recommendation is to make a BS/BA degree a requirement for promotion to first-line supervisor (usually the rank of sergeant). This gives officers the incentive to take advantage of the tuition reimbursement program and will significantly increase the number of officers with a BS/BA degree.

### **Recommendation 3**

Our third recommendation is to recruit more aggressively on college and university campuses and specifically on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Critics of requiring an AA/AS or BA/BS degree is that under-served communities will be policed predominately by Caucasian officers. Policing today is comprised of a majority of Caucasian officers, and this imbalance must be rectified and must include more representation by Hispanic officers as well.

Often overlooked with the emphasis on a BS/BA degree for police officers is that society is doing officers a favor by requiring the degree. Why is this the case? A policing career is one of the shortest as is the case with most first responder occupations. In California, the Public Employees Retirement System—Public Safety (PERS-public safety) allows a police officer to retire at age 50 at 2% of the officers salary per year. So, an officer who is hired at age 25 and retires at 50, will receive 50% of his or her average of the last three years' salary. Since the Defund the Police Movement and other protest aimed at policing, many more officers are opting to retire at age 50 or perhaps even sooner with accrued unused sick and vacation time. With no BA/BS degree, the options for a second career other than security guard are negligible and 50% of an officer's final salary may be just enough to survive at best. This can lead to depression, alcohol abuse, and perhaps even suicide. Police officers have one of the highest suicide rates in the U.S. (Dvorak, 2021). Possessing a BS/BA degree at retirement makes the officer much more marketable in both the public and private sectors. Corporations and the public sector need corporate security officers and retail companies need supervisors for their theft reduction officers. Most community colleges will hire adjunct instructors who possess a BS/BA and have experience in law enforcement. In summary, the options for retired law enforcement personnel increase substantially for officers with a BS/BA degree.

### **Recommendation 4**

Our fourth recommendation is for agencies to end the bonuses offered to experienced officers from other agencies to “jump ship” and laterally transfer to the bonus offering agency. Police departments are not professional sport teams offering “free agency”

contracts to superior athletes. Recent examples of bonuses for large metropolitan police departments are as follows:

San Diego PD--\$15,000

Seattle PD--\$15,000

Washington Metropolitan PD--\$5,000

Portland PD--\$10,000

San Antonio--\$7,500

And the largest bonus among all major police departments in the US is the Alameda, California PD which is offering a \$75,000 transfer bonus.

Assuming that the Alameda, California PD, for example, needs 10 lateral transfers, this would result in a payout of \$750,000. If Alameda PD recruited 10 graduates from one or more of the California POST's 38 police academies of police academy graduates who had paid their own academy tuition, the only cost would be the expenses of the background investigation and the psychological evaluation. The \$750,000 for the Alameda PD's lateral recruitment could be better spent on tuition reimbursement, and this is the case for all other agencies offering bonuses.

### **Recommendation 5**

When considering an associate or bachelor's degree, law enforcement officers should choose to major in a criminal justice curriculum (Carter & Sapp, 1990). We recommend this option because these majors offer specific courses that are applicable to a police officer's job duties. Examples of courses that enhance a police officer's job knowledge are (1) criminal investigation, (2) ethics, (3) forensics, (4) community policing, and (5) constitutional law for policing, which may not be obtained in other majors. Criminal justice students should choose electives in basic psychology, sociology, political science, and biology because these are the foundational courses to understand all the nuances of being an effective police officer in the U.S.

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