

EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS IN CALIFORNIA

A Thesis

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by

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Abstract  
of  
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Today, in an increasingly competitive job market, a growing number of employers require applicants to possess a bachelor's degree as a minimum education standard of employment eligibility. This suggests that an individual with a higher education background is better equipped with the skills, training and competency above other applicants to be successful in his or her profession. Law enforcement, however, has remained one of the career professions that does not require any higher education requirement for employment eligibility. Yet there is reason to think greater education requirements may benefit in the professionalization of law enforcement, and may help officers in their line of duty.

Currently no state in the U.S. has established that law enforcement officers should have higher education degree as a minimum requirement for enrollment. In California, the minimum education requirement for law enforcement officers is a high school diploma or GED. However, because agencies have the ability to set their own hiring standards, a small percentage of law enforcement agencies have actually required more stringent education backgrounds in higher education, from completing some college, to an associate's degree, to even a bachelor's degree.

This thesis was aimed at furthering the discussion on whether increasing the hiring education standards for law enforcement agencies within California would have a notable impact. In this study, 42 law enforcement officers from across the state were surveyed about their agency's requirements, and their thoughts on the feasibility, costs, and benefits of increasing the minimum education standards. The results of this survey were in line with several of the reports found in the literature. They show that officers perceive several benefits to the having a higher education background that can improve their performance on the job. However, it is unclear whether there is political feasibility to make such a significant change happen across all agencies in California. Law enforcement agencies and associations, such as the ones represented in my survey, are more likely to be hesitant or reluctant to change. These findings can help guide further research as to how to adequately define and measure "better policing," and whether education has an impact on that. Finally, I would recommend that California find better opportunities to collect data among law enforcement agencies, which can be anything from mandatory surveying to greater oversight at a head agency.

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## Chapter One

### INTRODUCTION

Today, in an increasingly competitive job market, a growing number of employers require applicants to possess a bachelor's degree as a minimum education standard of employment eligibility. This suggests that an individual with a higher education background is better equipped with the skills, training and competency above other applicants to be successful in his or her profession. Law enforcement, however, has remained one of the career professions that does not require any higher education requirement for employment eligibility. It is important to note that all law enforcement agencies operate independently, and have the ability to create their own hiring standards. Despite the fact that law enforcement officers are put in high positions of authority and power, as "enforcers of the law," the profession's lack of education requirements has not been altered or subject to any new broader education standards.

Law enforcement and the use of force has been a huge topic of interest in today's media. In 2014 alone, several incidents involving officers' use of force leading to civilian deaths were brought to light, and have caused rioting and social outcry. For example, much controversy surrounded the shooting and death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Tamir Rice in Cleveland, and the fatal chokehold of Eric Garner in New York. This is just three, of several officer-involved incidents, all of which were high-profile cases, involving the death of African-Americans by white police officers. These cases sparked not only racial debates, but consideration of issues surrounding police brutality,

militarization of police, and the lack of public trust in police. It also empowered civil rights groups, like Black Lives Matters, to speak up about these injustices on behalf of the larger community, and has generated a lot of support across the nation.

As a result of these incidents and many others, there has been some discussion of possible policy opportunities surrounding law enforcement, at the local, state and federal levels of government. Most recently, President Barack Obama called together a Task Force on 21st Century Policing, bringing together Department of Justice leaders from across the nation. One of the ultimate recommendations that the Task Force made was to review training and education standards. The State of California has also passed new legislation, such as new methods for combatting racial profiling and strengthening the state's data collecting methods on police use-of-force. At the local level, some agencies, have even discussed mandating the use of body cameras for police officers. The public should be able to trust in the uniformed officers who are supposed to serve and protect them, yet various incidents have instilled distrust, fear and anger.

Although it has not yet become a focused topic of interest in policy discussions, various studies have suggested that education *does* influence the quality of policing. Many years ago, law enforcement was actually one of the few careers that was viewed as having a relatively high standard in its education requirements. In the 1950s, law enforcement officers were required to have a minimum of a high school diploma or General Educational Development Tests or GED, at a time when other professions had no such requirement. Decades later, these standards have not been adjusted at all, and law enforcement has fallen behind many professions that now require, at a minimum, a four-

year degree to establish eligibility. Although local agencies have the discretion to increase these minimum standards, according to an inventory conducted by the California Research Bureau, only one percent of agencies have increased their standards (CRB, 2014). This leads one to question whether the standards are sufficient, or whether agencies have just failed to keep up with the professionalization of the career.

California maintains the reputation of being one of the most liberal and progressive states in the nation and is one of the first states to incorporate professionalism in law enforcement. Because of this, I have opted to conduct my research and focus specifically on the state of California and its law enforcement agencies. Additionally, California's diverse and large population makes it an ideal location to study. Furthermore, as you will read throughout this paper, there is a great history of the professionalism of law enforcement begins in California. These are important justifications to focusing and limiting the scope of this research on California agencies.

### **Law Enforcement Background**

Although there are rules, regulations, and laws in place, we rely heavily on law enforcement officers, who are sworn into their position, to protect us from those who choose to break the law. In this profession, officers often patrol communities, issue citations and reports, make arrests, and use their authority, when necessary. To be successful in this profession, officers should have a variety of skills and qualities.

### ***Basic Minimum Requirements***

Each state has its own overseeing agency, which establishes minimum requirements and standards for officer eligibility. In California this agency is known as

the Peace Officer Standard and Training (POST) Commission. Minimum peace officer guidelines are set forth by California Government Code Section 1031 and 1031.3 (California Government Code Section 1031 and 1031.5). Following are minimum requirements that all law enforcement agencies must adhere to:

- *California Citizenship Requirement:* California, like many other states, requires that peace officers must either be a United States Citizen, or a permanent resident that has applied for citizenship. An applicant is deemed disqualified if citizenship is denied.
- *Age Requirement:* Candidates must be at least 18 years old to be eligible to apply for a peace officer position.
- *Background Check:* Officers must not have any felony convictions and must pass a fingerprint and criminal history check prior to determining their eligibility. Additionally, a background investigation is conducted to ensure that the individual is of good moral character. Here “good moral character” is vaguely defined, but I will attempt to elaborate what it entails later in this paper.
- *Minimum Fitness Requirement:* Although California POST does not require that individuals complete a physical fitness test prior to their eligibility, many agencies administer their own physical testing.
- *Education Requirement:* All California agencies, and most agencies nationwide, require that law enforcement officers have a high school diploma or GED at a minimum. A small percentage of agencies in California have also established that

officers complete some number of college semester units (typically equivalent to an Associate degree), and an even smaller percentage of agencies may actually require a bachelor's degree. However, several agencies will offer salary and promotional incentives based on educational attainment. Additionally, POST also requires that peace officers pass reading and writing tests, all administered through the POST Entry-Level Law Enforcement Test Battery (PELLETB).

- *Successful completion of police training academy.*

In addition to meeting the minimum qualifications of policing, agencies generally look for individuals that possess specific skills and qualities that would make them fit for a career in law enforcement. According to the United States Department of Justice, one of the key competencies of policing includes the ability to make sound decisions ([http://discoverpolicing.org/what\\_does\\_take/?fa=skills\\_abilities](http://discoverpolicing.org/what_does_take/?fa=skills_abilities)). It is vital that officers have the know how to exercise good judgment and have the ability to problem solve. Officers also serve as detectives and investigators, and their analytic skills are crucial to the job.

Officers should also possess appropriate communication skills and attitude, and have the ability to analyze various situations and react quickly. Some believe that these qualities can be learned through education, or obtained by experience in the workforce, and others argue that on-the-job training and experience is the only way to learn these skills. They have the difficult challenge of serving as the authoritative figure, enforcers of

the law, and public servants. In this capacity, it is important that the public respect and trust law enforcement officers.

### **Purpose of Thesis**

In a time where policing has required more advanced skillsets, and public distrust among law enforcement officers continues, I am interested in engaging the conversation as to why California has yet to develop any further conversation on the issue. This thesis will further the discussion regarding whether law enforcement agencies in California should consider increasing the minimum education requirements, and what the impact might be in doing so. The research will be focused on gathering opinions from current law enforcement officers, on whether adding such a requirement would be worthwhile and feasible.

The thesis is organized as follows: Chapter 2 will highlight important literature surrounding this topic. I will include a brief history on the professionalism movement in law enforcement and evolving discussions surrounding the need and importance of new education and training standards. Next, the methodology chapter will discuss the data collection used for this research, describing the surveys and variables. Chapter four will provide an analysis on the data collected. Finally, my concluding chapter will highlight the overall takeaway from this research, and possible opportunities to discuss these policy alternatives and implications in the future.

## Chapter Two

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Today, a vast majority of law enforcement agencies have no formal policy on higher education requirements, nor any clearly established incentives linked with higher education, such as a pathway for promotion. With the surge of news media and trust issues surrounding law enforcement today, there have been ongoing debates about whether law enforcement as a profession has changed— so much, that its initial education requirements for a high school diploma or GED should be reconsidered to better adapt to today’s changing workforce and societal challenges. Although this may be interpreted differently depending on who is asked or even who is asking, the reality is that policing has changed significantly over the last fifty years, and that there may be a greater need for newer training programs and higher minimum standards for recruitment.

Today, officers are using different, newer technologies, such as TASERS and body cameras, which arguably require training that is more specialized. Additionally, Community Oriented Policing (COPS) is a much more common practice within agencies. This requires that law enforcement officers are better able to interact with individuals and communicate effectively in order to better resolve altercations and analyze evidence. These new developments and new technology have fundamentally changed and transformed the profession over the years, which is not surprising. A vast majority of professional careers require incoming employees to be computer literate, and have

proficiency in word processing programs, e-mails, etc. In addition, despite the belief that policing is a trade profession, officers are even more likely to be exposed to technological advancements and are required to make sound, analytical on-the-job decisions. All that being said, it is quite interesting that there have not been more recent discussions on increasing the minimum requirements of law enforcement officers, even though they have not been improved or revised since they were first adopted in the 1950s.

In this section, I will use the literature available to provide the reader with important background information on this topic. Through my review of the literature, I identified a variety of studies that have focused specifically on higher education and training programs for law enforcement officers and how they affect the profession. This chapter will be divided into the following three sections: past, present, and future. First, I will present important historical information regarding the professionalism of law enforcement and how the history has played a role in the discussion surrounding higher education requirements. Next, I will offer information about how that history has affected what is presently available in higher education policing coursework and curriculum, as well as how education has benefited the professionalism of policing. Finally, I conclude this chapter by providing a discussion on what is still missing from the literature, what questions remain unanswered, and how that influences my research.

### **I. Past: The Professionalization of Law Enforcement**

The professionalization of law enforcement began in the early 1900s under the leadership of August Vollmer, remembered by many today as the “father of modern day

law enforcement” (Dinkelspiel, 2010). Vollmer, Police Chief and Professor at the University of California Berkeley, believed that law enforcement officers required much more formal training than they were currently receiving. Vollmer was elected as the Marshal for the City of Berkeley in 1905 and was appointed as the city’s first Chief of Police soon after. He came into the role of Chief of Police at a time when officers did not have the best reputation. In fact, police officers were widely “known for their brutality and corruption, [not] their crime-solving skills” (Dinkelspiel, 2010).

Vollmer’s leadership was not only influential in Berkeley, but was later felt and influential to programs nationwide. In 1908, Vollmer established the “first police academy” within the city of Berkeley law enforcement agency (Foster et. al, 2007). As a strong advocate of educated law enforcement officers, he made historical strides by soon thereafter establishing the first School of Criminology at UC Berkeley, a higher education institution, in 1916. This movement in Berkeley encouraged many other universities to establish police education programs and pursue the same professional development that Vollmer so strongly advocated for. Students who attended the school were already serving as police officers (Foster 2007). The school focused on providing officers with further education on the laws of evidence, and included subjects on law and evidence procedures. Courses offered included criminology, law, and social science (ibid). Because it was the first of its kind, the program also suffered and experienced its own internal struggles. It ultimately closed in the 1970s (ibid).

Also of note within the history in the professionalism of law enforcement includes the “war on crime” era in the late 1960s. During this time in history, there were both

increasing levels of crime, and increasing stories of police corruption and brutality. This actually led to a growing emphasis on the need for better training and education in law enforcement, a call for action from the White House, and ultimately appropriations of “massive federal funding” (Foster et al. 2007, p. 123). Many began to believe in the idea that greater professionalism and training could result in greater public safety. In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson established a Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice. The Commission “called for higher education to help America respond to the need for a higher level of knowledge, expertise, imitative, and integrity” and recommended that “all personnel with general enforcement powers have baccalaureate degrees” (President’s Commission 1967, p. 109).

Congress responded to Commission’s recommendation by passing the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968, creating the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA), and with it, the Law Enforcement Education Program (LEEP) (Foster et al. 2007). The LEAA program created an incentive for current law enforcement officers to further their education by providing financial assistance, and aimed at promoting officers and training from within. LEEP “was designed to provide grants to in-service students and loans to pre-service students to encourage them to enter the field of criminal justice” (ibid, p. 125).

In the 1960s and 1970s, the LEAA program offered millions of federal dollars to universities and colleges in order to create new police science programs, since at the time, there were not very many options available (Baro and Burlingame 1999). In fact, in its very first year of funding, Congress provided \$6.5 million (Foster et al. 2007). In a short

timeframe, several universities began creating new law enforcement programs. From 1950-1968, 64 new college programs for law enforcement were created across the country (ibid). Universities and colleges immediately took interest in establishing these programs in order to avail of the funding.

Given the newly supported financial incentives for officers to pursue educational opportunities, there was a sudden increase in demand for police education courses in universities and community colleges. As such, many universities and community colleges began offering new courses and programs to provide additional training and educational opportunities for officers. However, because of their need to act quickly, some of the programs that were funded through LEAA were poorly designed and did not coordinate well with the agencies that were already offering training to law enforcement, such as current short-term training academies. So, although there were more programs readily available to officers, many still could not understand or see the need or benefit to pursue a four-year degree.

Officers also began to feel threatened by the sudden change in their programs. Another reason why officers were not as quick to jump on the wagon and support the four-year degree requirement was because so many senior officers immediately felt threatened by the idea that other less-experienced men and women were coming into the profession with an upper hand (Baro and Barlingame 1999).

In 1973, a newly established National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals (1973) created a timetable for all current in-service officers to complete a four-year degree in less than 10 years. The timetable suggested that by 1975,

officers complete at least 60 semester units (equivalent of two years), 90 semester units by 1978 (equivalent of three years), and finally, a baccalaureate degree by 1972) (Foster et al 2007). The momentum proved to be too much too soon, and as setbacks occurred, it became too difficult for any significant progress. Universities were inadequately prepared to offer police education courses, and were instead offering courses that seemed to many as simply as extension to current academy training (Garner 1999).

To combat these challenges, in 1979, the national Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) was formed to help provide more training, career development, and standardize recruitment practices” (Baro and Burlingame 1999, p.60). However, this was not enough to conquer the ongoing disagreement on what level of “professionalism” was really necessary in order for police officers to “possess technical expertise, hold common objectives, demonstrate high levels of competence and serve the public, then a high school education and specialized training were probably sufficient” (Baro and Burlingame 1999, p.60). Because of the lack in perceived value of police baccalaureate programs, in addition to changes in Congressional and Executive Administration priorities, funding for LEAA was finally abolished in 1982.

## **II. Present: Current Policing Programs Available and the Impact of Education in Policing**

In the “College Curriculum for Law Enforcement Personnel,” Marsh and Stickler (1972) focus on the prospect of professionalizing law enforcement through core, uniform curriculum at four-year institutions of higher education. The entry notes Sacramento

State's late Dr. Allen Z. Gammage's observation about the challenges of creating curriculum for law enforcement, "If [...] university programs [...] are to have an appreciable impact [...] college programs must be professional by nature, standards must be high, and courses, degrees, and curriculum must have a high degree of uniformity." He continues, "[...] all of the respected professions (Law, Medicine, Teaching, etc.) have experienced these same problems during their formative years (Marsh and Stickler 1972, p.300)."

The researchers of this journal entry contacted administrators from each of the 47 four-year institutions of higher education across the county, that offered law enforcement bachelor degrees and that existed at the time of the study with two requests: 1) to supply curriculum content information about their programs and 2) to provide up to three persons considered as outstanding law enforcement educators for a panel of experts that they would later put together. They had a 96% response rate (45 out of the 47 universities responded).

From the responses, Marsh and Stickler were able to compile 17 "core" courses through revision, editing, combining similar courses, and removing courses offered by no more than a couple of institutions. For the second part of their request, they had 30 panel experts participate on examining 3 areas of the "core" courses they identified: 1) to rate the program as essential, desirable but not essential, or unimportant; 2) to provide a rationale for rating a course as "essential;" and 3) allocating a semester credit amount for each course.

Of the various course offerings, they identified the following six courses as being essential:

1. Legal aspects of law enforcement: criminal law, constitutional limitations, trial, evidence etc.
2. Human relations skills: police role in community tension/conflict among racial, religious, socio-economic classes.
3. Philosophy and history of law enforcement
4. Principles of administration
5. Psychology: developmental theories of personality, socio-psychological factors in criminal and delinquent behavior.
6. Juvenile delinquency: theories of causation, prevention

In addition to requiring the above listed coursework, researchers also issued recommendations in order to further the efficacy of such curriculum. For example, new programs should be incorporated into undergraduate law enforcement programs and should be regularly updated as policies and technologies advance over time (Marsh and Stickler, 1972). Additionally, the researchers contended it is important to: 1) further research these core programs to see if they indeed meet student need and basic law enforcement preparation, regardless of later specialization; 2) conduct more studies to establish core curriculum for junior college law enforcement curriculum that can adequately prepare students to transfer to four-year universities in pursuit of a professional degree in law enforcement; and 3) establish a permanent commission on law

enforcement to be tasked with developing/evaluating law enforcement curriculum in higher education.

In a relevant journal entry, MacArthur (1966) focused on a Southern California Survey and Northern Sacramento conference on developing/evaluating two-year college police curriculum. The Law Enforcement Section of the Southern California Junior College Association conducted a curriculum survey of existing junior college programs to determine the possibility of standardizing pre-service “police science” courses. They found that there was the following basic core of pre-service police courses taught at junior colleges: Criminal law, Criminal evidence, Criminal procedures, Patrol practices, Criminal investigation, Traffic control and Physical evidence (MacArthur 1966). As you can see from the list, these classes do not appear to distinguish themselves very much from basic training courses that are also offered by lead agencies such as CalPOST, who administer officer entry training courses. There were approximately 16 other courses they identified as non-core curricula, simply because no more than three institutions offered any one of them. This again was one of the main set-backs surrounding law enforcement as a four-year degree program— colleges simply did not have the tools, nor very much interest early on, in creating new curricula that moved beyond simply additional technical and practical “on-the-job-type” training, to advanced college-level core curriculum. This paper further goes on to explain the creation of the California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training and what their purpose is and what voluntary participation in their programs mean for local law enforcement agencies.

**Effectiveness of programs and curriculum currently available**

The difficulty in establishing requirements beyond high school and already mandated training programs, is the lack in differentiation among the programs. Despite the various programs, whether it is college degree programs or certificate programs, there has yet to be enough success that has allowed any program to gain very much traction. The programs that are currently available have not been fully integrated with the training programs that officers are required to participate in via POST (Baro and Burlingame, 1999). That being said, they different college-level programs are either duplicative of what is already offered and rather than being complementary to each other, there really seems to be no need for any individual to go through both programs, other than the additional exposure and experience that one may be able to get if enrolled in a four-year college or two-year certificate program.

**Benefits of Higher Education**

Many assume that the possession of a bachelor's degree significantly sets his or her level of professionalism far beyond one with just a high school degree or less (Baro and Burlingame 1999). This assumption is generally made because several of the higher paying, full-time professional careers require a bachelor's degree as a minimum qualification. Some professions, require shorter term, specialized certificate and training programs, which also sets a standard above other careers and professions that do not require any advanced education. Although law enforcement officers participate in a training program once they are selected into a position, they are one of the careers that do

not require any sort of education background, beyond a high school diploma. Many of the jobs that do not require a bachelor's degree are more likely to be in the blue-collar, trade skill professions.

In order to answer the question of whether higher education really does have any impact (positive or negative) on police officers' performance, it is important to distinguish what exactly is being measured to determine "better policing." In the profession of policing, performance measures can include "number of arrests and citations, response times, and crime clearance rates" which is different than what other professions may use to evaluate performance, such as the ability to think critically, "problem sol[ve], and an ability to exercise discretion" (Baro and Burlingame 1999, p. 61). According to data available, performance measures have also been inconsistent and difficult to effectively measure. Those that believe in and support the idea of a college education benefitting law enforcement officer believe that the additional requirement allows for a more well-rounded work force. Proponents also argue that officers can able to make better decisions, better understand the communities they serve and communicate effectively. This is often linked to the idea of professionalism.

Throughout the literature, various studies have conclusively determined that officers with some level of college experience, whether it is a bachelor's degree, post-bachelor's degree, or even just come completion of courses, are linked and associated to provide better skills and job-related performance (Rydberg & Terrill 2010; Paynich 2009; Middlebrooks 2015). Additionally, officers with a college education are more likely to hold higher positions within agencies, demonstrating their ability to hold

positions of higher authority, manage others, and be given more responsibilities than their peers. These benefits will be discussed in further detail below.

Regardless of what profession one chooses, those who complete a bachelor's degree are said to have better writing skills, communication skills, and analytical skills. Although some may not necessarily put the two together, policing does require these skills extensively.

Job-performance is measured differently in every profession, however, as it relates to law enforcement, use of force is one indication of poor performance. According to the literature that higher education leads to less citizen complaints (Paynich 2009). As with any profession, but especially among public agencies, it is only natural and expected for customers and constituents to express their concerns and complaints. Studies have conclusively determined that the more education an officer obtains, the less likely he or she is to have complaints filed against them, when compared to officers with only high-school education (Manis et. al 2007). Furthermore, according to various studies, use-of-force incidents by officers is dramatically decreased among officers have obtained and completed more education, compared to their less educated colleagues (Paynich 2009).

Another question discussed within the literature is whether education affects the general attitudes with which police officers approach their daily work. There has been a significant amount of research aimed at specifically noting the impact that a college education can have on authoritative attitude of law enforcement, but results are varied. Telep (2010) conducted a survey among over 5,000 officers asking a series of situational questions, directed at code of silence, police brutality, abuse of authority, etc.

Officers were to respond using a Likert scale. Controlling for various factors, including gender and years of experience, he found that those with a bachelor's degree were statistically less likely to exhibit authoritative attitudes than those without a bachelor's degree, but the magnitude of significance was minimal. Telep also identified that attitudes were more likely to be affected by those who obtained their bachelor's degree, versus an associate's degree, and that pre-service was most effective.

Rydberg and Terrill (2010) conducted similar studies and found that both verbal abuse and use of force in particular decreased as higher education is achieved. Their study specifically looked at arrest, search, and use of force and relied upon observational data to measure results. Other studies indicated that higher education levels seemed to decrease the number of arrests (Glasgow et al., 1973).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, law enforcement officers are not categorized as professionals, but are instead currently listed under the category of service workers, alongside There have been a number of historical recommendations that have advised in favor of professionalizing policing through the establishment of a higher education standard. For example, the Wickersham Commission in the early 1930s recommended that all civil service positions, including law enforcement, have a minimum standard of professionalism that was measured by one's possession of a bachelor's degree. Since then, many other government agency positions have abided by these standards. Despite the arguments in favor of professionalizing the career, there were also those who were more concerned about officers' abilities to protect and defend

the safety of other citizens, and were less likely to care about an officers' ability to think critically and analyze given situations.

### **III. Future: What is missing?**

Despite all of the research and associated data that has been conducted on this subject matter, there has been little movement among agencies to enforce higher minimum education standards. Across the nation, currently no state has established that law enforcement officers should be required to have a bachelor's degree (Hilal et al, 2013). Additionally, Minnesota is the only state that has a two-year, associate's degree requirement for all incoming law enforcement officers (ibid). Although there may be and surely are a small subset of law enforcement agencies who have additional minimum education standards, no state has made the decision or felt the need to challenge their statewide standards. This had me curious as to what the setbacks were and why change has been so slow to occur, let alone, reach the level of discussion among policy makers. This is why it is important to understand political feasibility of implementing greater hiring standards.

California has been an interesting state to observe in this matter for several reasons. First, it is highly regarded as one of the more progressive states across the nation, and therefore likely to make significant strides among "left-leaning" policies before other states. In this case, I consider increasing education standards, "left-leaning" because it asks local agencies to give up some of their local control over their hiring practices. Furthermore, California has begun *some* discussions on the need for reforming

law enforcement. For those reasons, I chose to focus my area of research on California, specifically.

In addition, there are still many to claim that there is simply no need to require higher education, and that doing so only resorts to burn out and disinterest in the workplace. However, it is unclear where this sentiment originates, whether it comes from the officers themselves, the agencies, or elsewhere. For these reasons, I think it is equally important to ask officers directly how such a requirement affects him or her in their profession, what values they see from higher education, and in contrast, what drawbacks they would consider.

In the next section, I will discuss the methodology I have chosen to adapt in order to further this research and specify toward California local law enforcement agencies.

## Chapter Three

### METHODOLOGY

Currently, no law enforcement agency in California explicitly requires that a bachelor's degree must be obtained before an individual is eligible for a position as a sworn officer. There are, however, some agencies that have expanded beyond minimum guidelines, and require either an associate's degree or some college credit to be completed. Through this study, I will primarily try to address whether there are benefits to changing the minimum education standards for hiring law enforcement officers. To answer this question, I am conducting a survey and seeking current officers' opinions to understand what the perceived benefits, if any, exist.

Ideally, one plausible option to answering this research question would be to analyze a secondary set of data, or any database available consisting of all law enforcement agencies, their hiring criteria and education requirements, their demographics. However, there is no dataset available that captures all California law enforcement agencies and their hiring practices and standards. This presents one of the greatest challenges to conducting research on law enforcement hiring practices. The lack of available data can, in part, be contributed to the fact that law enforcement agencies operate as individual agencies and can make autonomous decisions about such matters as their hiring criteria. In California, as long as agencies meet minimum criteria established by the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST), they have the ability to set any additional criteria for hiring and promotional practices. With unlimited time and financial resources, I would have sought to collect data from all agencies in the

state of California, and use that to compare the agencies to one another and identify whether there are any correlations between higher education and better policing. However, this is not feasible with my budget and time constraints. Because of the lack of data available, analyzing secondary data is not a feasible option for continuing this research.

Other research methods, including experimental and observational, would not be appropriate in this research. Experimental research is one of the costliest and lengthiest processes, and those limitations alone are enough to rule out the plausibility of conducting an experiment. Experiments would also require that I use independent variables to test whether education has any significant causal factors to better policing, and would be difficult to test for. Furthermore, observational research, although commonly used in social sciences, also requires a great deal of time and financial commitment to pursue. Observational research would likely allow me to develop my own conclusions on how officers who have obtained a higher education demonstrate better policing habits. This would require consent from current law enforcement officers to be studied and observed, which would be extremely difficult given the nature and scope of the profession.

Given the limitations discussed above, I have selected to continue this research by using opinion based research methods through conducting surveys on current law enforcement officers. The surveys will gather information regarding officers' opinions on whether higher education as a new requirement would be seen as negatively or positively. I opted to conduct surveys because it was the most feasible way of gathering officers'

information. Due to privacy and confidentiality concerns, it was unrealistic to attempt to interview police officers, especially given the heightened concerns in response to the controversies in law enforcement.

There were various limitations to conducting this research that have restricted the methodology for completing this research. For example, because of the time and funding limitations, I opted to use a survey, which allows researchers to collect a large amount of data in a short time frame. It is also a cheap method, since there are various survey mechanisms now available online, for free or for a low-cost. I also decided against conducting interviews given the sensitivity of soliciting opinions from current law enforcement officers. I thought that the officers might be concerned about participating in an in-person interview, and would feel that their identity would be better protected through participation in a completely anonymous survey process.

Using the information I gathered from the literature review, I developed a simple set of open-ended questions that would allow me to consider how current law enforcement officers perceived the question of whether a higher education was important in their field. The information in the literature alone is enough to presume that officers are less likely to be in favor of additional hiring standards and are more likely to have the equivalent of a high-school education. I make this assumption given the lack of current incentives for pursuing additional education as an employed officer, and the lack of assistance available to pursuing college courses and a college degree.

## **Sampling**

Given the difficulty in soliciting participation for this research, I designed a non-probability, convenience sampling strategy. Although a less desirable approach, this allowed me to reach a larger group of participants. In an effort to mimic a more diverse group of participants, I solicited participation from all law enforcement officers who were current members of a law enforcement organization in California. Members of these organizations have a greater tendency to advocate for their positions and the positions of the groups that they represent, and are thus more likely to be willing to provide their input.

## **Data Collection**

This research required the approval of the California State University's Institutional Review Board. After providing a general research outline along with sample survey questions, such approval was granted. Then, I collected a list of all registered police and law enforcement agencies in California. There were 65 organizations that I identified through an extensive online search. I then identified key individuals from the organization's executive board. For organizations that did not have specific contact information available, I used the generic e-mail option that was provided. From the 65 organizations, a total of 100 emails were identified. I then created an email message, requesting participation in the survey. The email message included a consent form, informing the participants that their response was voluntary, anonymous, and that there were no incentives to participating, aside from contributing to my completing my thesis.

The survey was open for a total of three weeks. Of the 100 emails that were sent, 42 completed the survey. This was a 42% response rate, which seemed adequate to continue with data analysis. As with any survey, non-response bias is likely to occur and I anticipate a level of bias in the participants' responses to reflect in this research. Individuals who feel strongly about the topic of higher education requirements may have a stronger will and interest to completing the survey. This may also be true for individuals on the opposite side of the spectrum, as participants who are apathetic about the topic may have been less likely to respond. This should be carefully considered when interpreting the responses.

#### *Survey Questions*

- 1. Within your agency, what are the minimum education requirements to become an officer?*
- 2. Are there any incentives to pursuing an education outside of the minimal requirements?*
- 3. To your knowledge, what is the most common college degree for police officers?*
- 4. In your experience, has anyone proposed changing the requirements to a Bachelor's degree?*
- 5. If any, what would be the pitfalls from increasing the minimum requirements to an Associate's degree? Bachelor's degree?*
- 6. If any, what are the benefits to requiring an associate's degree? Bachelor's degree?*

7. *Would it be politically feasible to require all California law enforcement groups to require an associate's degree? A bachelor's degree? Why or why not?*
8. *What is your highest level of education?*
9. *If you were required to obtain further education, would you have still decided to pursue a career in law enforcement?*
10. *Any other additional comments or concerns regarding this topic?*

### **Analysis Method**

To analyze the survey responses, I will be relying on qualitative methods. The survey was designed with a set of open-ended questions. I will look for various themes throughout the responses to look for various trends. I have also developed a code for analyzing the various responses given the particular themes that appear. This is explained in greater detail in the next chapter.

### **Limitations**

There are notable limitations to this study that should be considered. This survey is limited in its ability to capture all of the factors that may affect an officer's response. To minimize the risk for the respondents, the survey does not ask specific questions regarding an officer's position, location, or associated agency. Additionally, respondents were not asked to identify their financial circumstances, which, as we know may affect one's decision to pursue higher education, and may play a factor as to one's career trajectory.

Using a survey to collect data also presents limitations in this research that may include response and nonresponse bias, as well as sampling errors. As already noted earlier in this chapter, the methodology used to collect data was the convenience method. In other words, I simply sought to seek the most number of responses in a short amount of time. Additionally, because I personally sought out individual's information and chose among law enforcement associations, there is also likely selection bias that occurred. Nonresponse bias may occur as individuals who choose not to participate may simply do so by ignoring the request. Unfortunately their information will not be collected. Response bias is also likely to occur, as individuals who are present, meaning respondents who have any personal investment or interest in the topic may have an opportunity to make their responses heard over others. The survey also relies on self-reported data, in which case responses are not being vetted for accuracy, and respondents may or may not respond accurately or true to their situation. Furthermore, sampling errors may also occur given the smaller sample size and the survey methods used.

Given the various limitations, the findings of this research should be taken as tentative and exploratory in nature. The survey instead is designed to collect a set of responses from a group of individuals that may normally be difficult to reach, given their profession. Also, it should be noted that this research is simply to explore opinions on a topic that has not been further discussed, to my knowledge, at the larger public policy level and is meant to simply test the waters for future opportunities. That being said, the results of this survey absolutely has important implications for future and continued

research, and could provide lawmakers about possible policy opportunities in this field. Again, although limited, the research and findings are designed to offer clues as to how higher education affects officers and whether increasing educational requirements should be considered for policing solutions.

## Chapter Four

### ANALYSIS

This chapter will provide a report on the results of my survey of peace officers, looking for themes within the 42 collected responses. I first report on the characteristics and background of participants to provide an idea of who the responders are and what they represent. Next, I summarize how officers responded to questions regarding possible education changes. Lastly, I identify the overwhelming themes associated with the responses from the survey.

One of my primary objectives of the survey was to get a better understanding of how open officers were to the notion of effecting any change on the education requirements. I provided respondents with open-ended questions about their experiences so that I could identify common themes, and to try to get a better sense of officer's reactions to the questions.

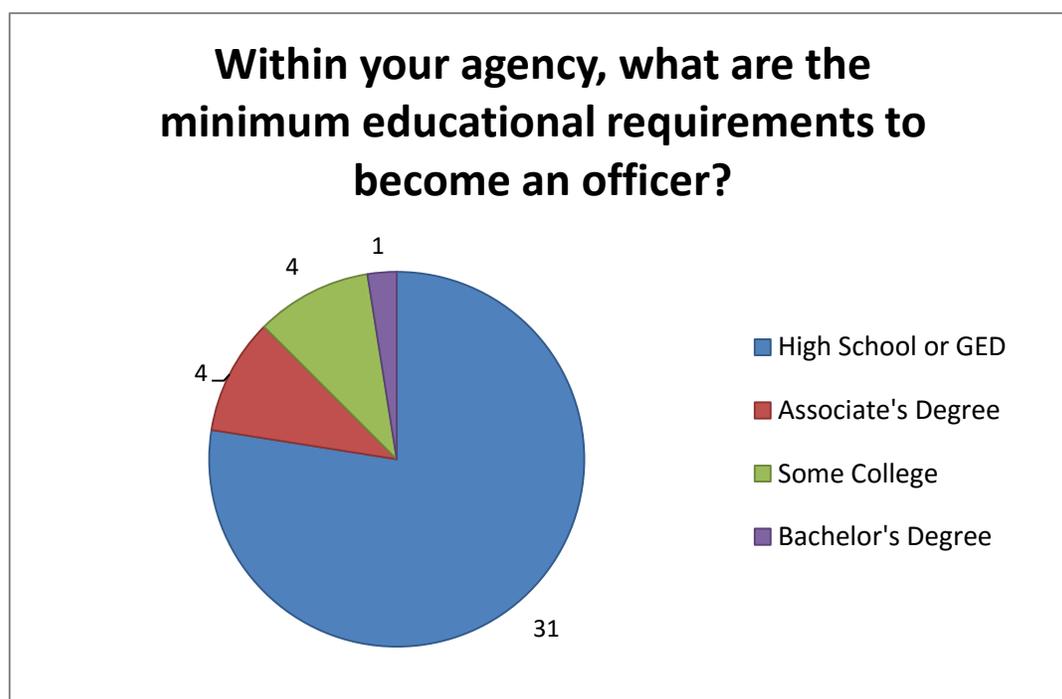
#### **Survey Overview**

I initially sought to gather information about what the respondents' agency educational requirements are, to see if the participating pool is reflective of the law enforcement community in California. I expected it to be unlikely that participants would indicate that a college degree was required to be a law enforcement officer, based on prior research. According to Gardiner's recent survey of California law enforcement agencies, 82% of law enforcement agencies in California require incoming officers to have a high school diploma or GED, nearly 15% require some college credits, and 2.5%

require an associate's degree (Gardiner 2015). While it is possible for some agencies to require recruits to have a bachelor's degree, it is extremely rare.

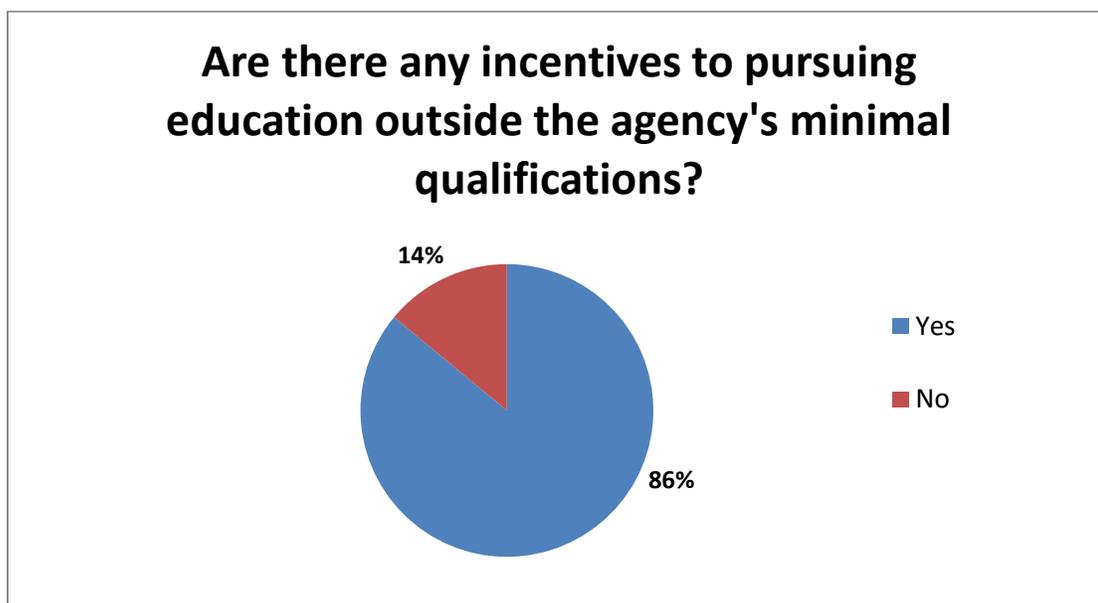
The educational requirements for survey participants were consistent with my expectations. The first question asked participants to respond on their department's education requirements for employment. The responses are captured below in Figure 4.1. Of the 42 responses, 31 or 67%, were required to have a high school or GED. 33% had other requirements. Within the 33%, the notable responses included one participant who indicated having a bachelor's degree required. Four were required to have an Associate's Degree. Four were required to have completed at least 60 college units in general education (semester). Two were required to have some college experience, although there was no indication of how many and what type of courses were required.

*Figure 4.1- Agency educational requirements*



The next question asked respondents whether there were any notable incentives offered to officers who, within their agency, either entered with a higher education, or pursued one during his or her employment there. This question was aimed at understanding why officers would choose to pursue a higher level of education, beyond a high school diploma or GED. The responses are provided in Figure 4.2. 14 % of respondents indicated that their agency offered no incentives for those who had either an Associate's Degree or a Bachelor's degree. Of that 14%, one respondent specifically indicated that the agency previously had incentives to officers who pursued a higher degree, but that officers who had greater education experience were more likely to leave law enforcement and pursue another career. Of those who indicated that there were other incentives, most noted that there were promotional opportunities and/or salary increases.

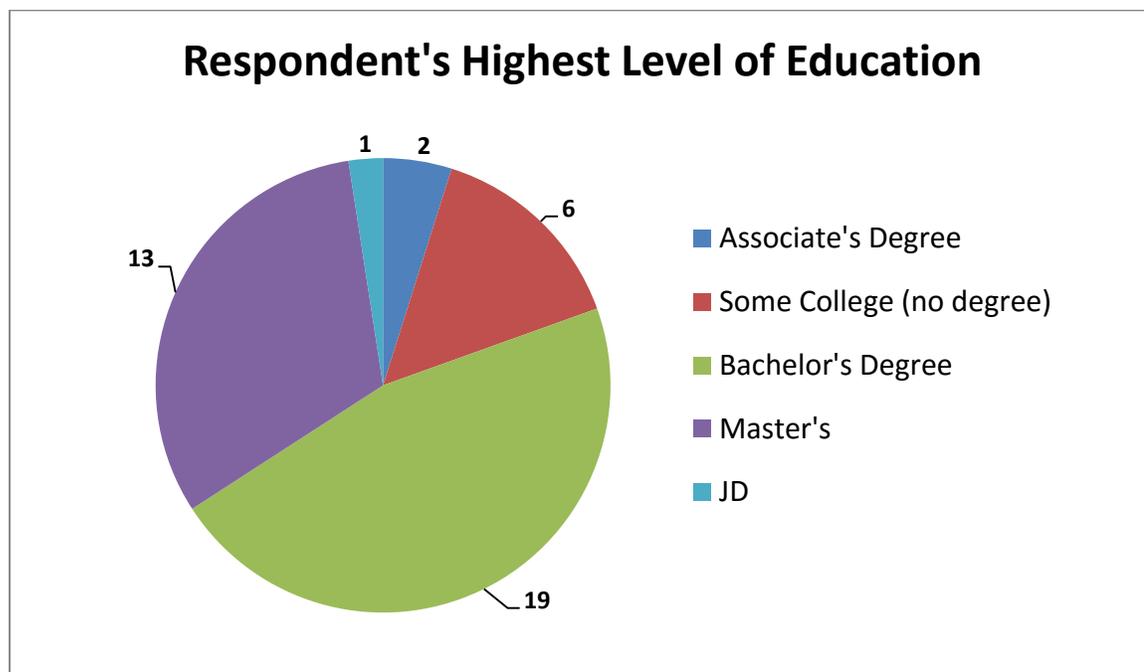
*Figure 4.2- Agency Incentives to Higher Education*



To elaborate on the question of what respondents' agencies required, I also wanted to identify what the participant's highest level of education was, regardless of what the participant's department required. Responses to this question showed that, perhaps surprisingly, many officers decided to pursue higher levels of education, despite what their agency required. There was not a single respondent who only identified high school or GED as their highest level of education. A summary of the responses are provided in Figure 4.3 below. 30 of 42 respondents, a striking majority, had completed, at a minimum, Bachelor's degree. Also surprising was the number of participants who had received a post baccalaureate degree. 12 of 42 respondents indicated they had completed a Master's program. Two went above and beyond that and had their Juris Doctorate. Six respondents had completed some college units, but did not graduate with their bachelor's degree. Finally, two of the respondents indicated receiving their Associate's degree from a community college. Given the survey data, it appears that law enforcement officers are inclined to pursue their degrees prior to or while in service, for personal goals of achieving higher salaries or to achieve promotions, which are likely to come with a monetary incentive.

Within the limitations of this survey, I was unable to identify whether respondents chose to complete their education prior to serving as an officer, or if they did so during. Based on the question regarding agency's incentives, I can infer that most of the respondents who chose to pursue higher levels of education, beyond a bachelor's, did so during their time of service, and are likely to have been promoted to higher positions within the agency.

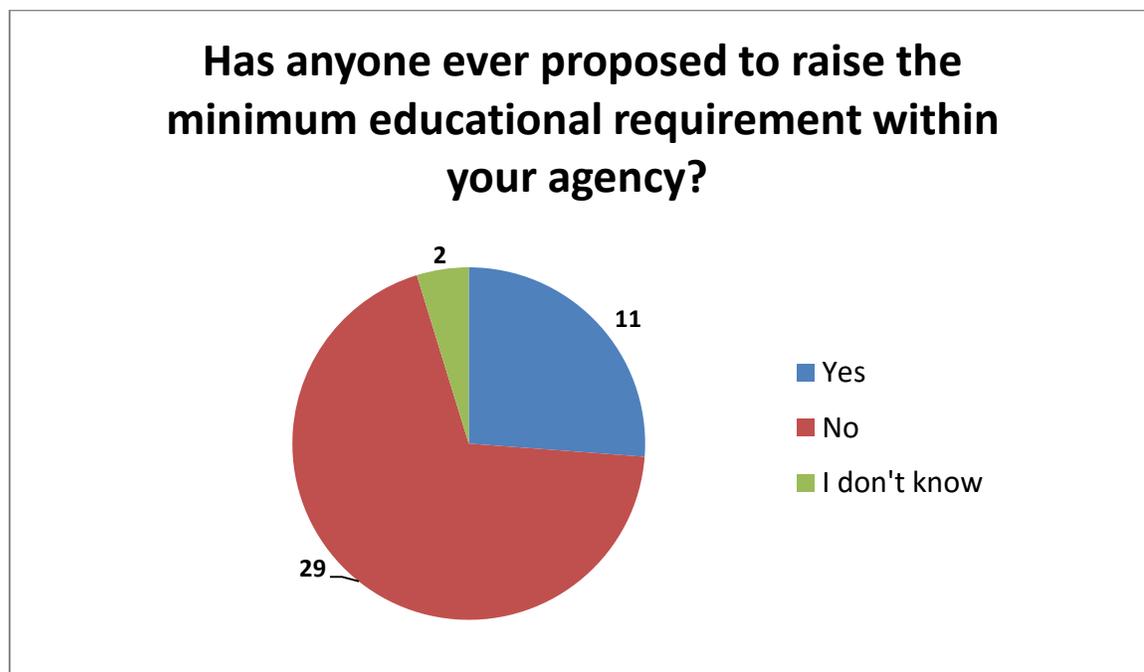
Figure 4.3- Highest Level of Education



Another question within the survey was aimed at identifying the common degree routes for those who indeed pursue any type of degree. 28 of 42 respondents noted that a criminal justice or administration of justice degree were the most common. Participants also indicated that other common degrees indicated included business administration, sociology, psychology, and history. Five responses indicated that their agency accepted any type of degree. This was in line with the literature review which indicated the most common courses that law enforcement officers pursued.

Eleven participants indicated their agency either had mentioned or already had required some sort of degree. Remaining responses indicated that their agencies had never discussed increasing the higher education requirements, but that there were such requirements in order to qualify for promotions or higher salary requests.

Figure 4.4 – Proposed changes in higher education requirements

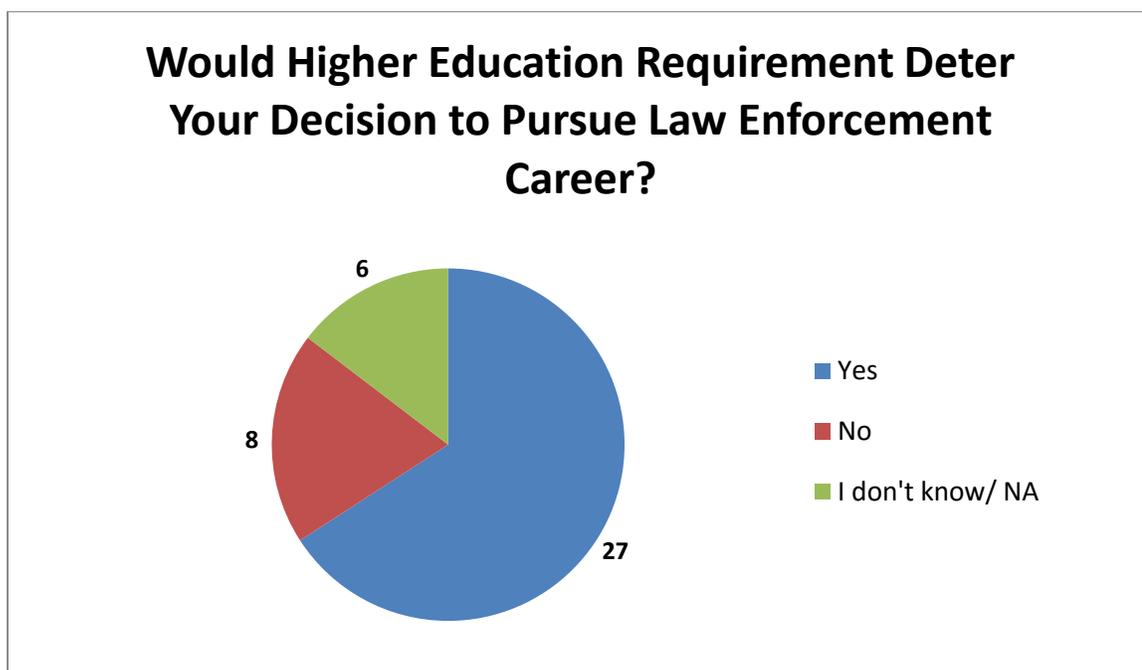


The question that asked respondents to consider the potential pitfalls from raising the education standards seemed to trigger strong emotional responses. I was prepared for this from the outset, and thus purposefully made the question open-ended. In doing so I was able to solicit lengthier responses and capture strong opinions, some of which are shared in the themes later in this chapter. 86% percent of responses indicated they expected some sort of negative effect, or pitfall, from having to increase the minimum education standards. Only six, or 14%, indicated that there is no downside to requiring a higher standard.

Another question asked whether higher education requirements would have deterred the respondent from choosing to pursue a career in law enforcement. Answers to this question surprised me the most. 66% (27 respondents) indicated that, if they

would've been required to have a bachelor's degree up front, they would not have pursued a career in law enforcement. Only 20% (8 respondents) said that they would have pursued a law enforcement career regardless of an increased requirement. 14 % (6 respondents) said that they could not answer that questions, either because their agency either already had a higher requirement, or they felt it was difficult to answer based off of their experience.

*Figure 4.5 – Whether education requirements would impact career path?*



### Themes

Upon completing my review of all of the survey responses, I was able to identify five key take away themes that are relevant to the purpose of this study: Mixed Readiness, Recruitment Concerns, Relevancy, Incentives, and Professionalism.

### Theme 1- Mixed Readiness

Despite various research suggesting benefits to officers obtaining an associate's degree or bachelor's degree (Middlebrooks (2015); Rydberg, J. & Terrill, W. (2010)), survey responses remained mixed. One thing became clear after reading through all of the responses from the survey-- that there were mixed feelings about implementing new education requirements across the board. I found that these responses fell into the category or theme of "mixed readiness," meaning there was no clear cut opinion on whether or not law enforcement agencies as a whole would agree to one "best" answer.

This was clear in many of the responses:

Con

- *Politically (feasible), yes. Smart idea, no.*
- *It might provide good long term results but I don't think it would be politically feasible.*
- *I think this would be very difficult for large agencies given the current political climate and public perception of law enforcement. With the many changes to the role of a law enforcement officer, I think we may be seeing less people with higher educations with an incentive to apply for law enforcement jobs. We are expected to be expert in so many facets now beyond the traditional duties of a law enforcement officer.*

Pro

- *I personally think it is feasible and should be a requirement.*

- *It would be feasible for an associate's degree since it is not much more than 60 college units.*
- *I believe it would be politically feasible to make that type of requirement because society would support that.*
- *The department that I work for requires 60 units of general education college credit, which is equivalent to an associate's degree; I think that is a good compromise; a bachelor's degree is nice to have, but not necessary to effectively do the job as a peace officer.*

### **Theme 2- Recruitment Concerns**

It is no surprise that one of the number one concerns about raising the education requirements was the fear of minimizing an already small pool of eligible applicants. In fact, this was strongly identified in multiple responses. Following is a response from a survey respondent that captures this view well.

- *Probably not. I had an AA when I applied and I did so because the timing was right for me then. If I had been required to have a BA, I would not have qualified and would have sought other employment.*

### **Theme 3- Relevancy**

There were many opinionated remarks for those who argued the relevancy of requiring a degree. Many felt that education requirements were in no way substitution or experience on the job. Some notable responses include the following:

- *A degree does not give you life experience, you learn it from the job. Your upbringing experience, family values those matter.*

- *I find police officers who do not have anything more than a high school education do not do well on the job and have more complaints.*
- *The best officers don't always have a degree. They have integrity, the gift of common sense, compassion, effective communication skills and a desire to serve the public.*
- *Absolutely not, as previously mentioned, this job requires common sense. Common sense is not something that can be taught. A police officer is the last resort and the job requires decision-making and judgment, without common sense it makes it difficult to have answers when you are the last resort. A degree is great for administrative tasks and academic achievement in the academy, but on the streets, the degree is, with all due respect, a piece of paper. In addition, a degree does not contain morals, values and ethics. Rearing and life experience are the teachers of those lessons.*
- *Education doesn't necessarily give you the skills to be a good officer. The skills you learn in life, in the military, and on the job are far more valuable than what I learned in school...Doesn't help dealing with armed subjects, child molesters, or gang members.*

#### **Theme 4- Incentives**

We know that for the nation as a whole, earning a bachelor's degree can typically increase one's ability to earn higher wages. In fact, according to a U.S. News report on the issue, individuals "holding bachelor's degrees earn about \$2.27 million over their lifetime, while those with master's, doctoral, and professional degrees earn \$2.67 million,

\$3.25 million, and \$3.65 million” (Burnsed 2011). This is quite an incentive for any individual to pursue a degree. Based on the responses of this survey, I think it is safe to say that law enforcement officers are no exception.

Throughout all parts of the survey, even when not directly asked, respondents chose to respond by indicating some effect or incentives for pursuing an associate’s or bachelor’s degree. Some responses include the following:

- *Better chance of being hired. Better chance of promoting.*
- *Bonus pay for higher education. Highly desirable in promotions (especially as you promote to management).*
- *If you elevate the education level required for entrance, there is likely to be an increased demand for higher salaries. Given budget situations, there might not be the funding to do this.*

### **Theme 5- Professionalism**

Last but not least, one of the important takeaway themes from this survey is an overwhelming consensus that higher education leads to professionalism. When respondents were asked about the benefits to requiring a higher education background as a prerequisite for law enforcement officers, there were clear indications of ways that enhanced the professionalism of the career. For example, some notable responses include the following:

- *College develops better writing skills and critical thinking, which would both be applicable to law enforcement.*

- *You could improve the professionalism of the organization or hire people that at least set a goal and accomplish it.*
- *The benefit I have seen is that we generally receive excellent feedback from the district attorney's office regarding the quality of our reports (content and grammatical). Obtaining an associate's degree or bachelor's generally shows dedication and perseverance in this academic achievement.*
- *The benefits would include the hiring agency knowing the recruit has some level of discipline and can follow instructions. These are critical skills for law enforcement.*
- *Better educated force makes for a better agency. Education is problem solving and that is what we do in the public safety arena.*

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this survey show that law enforcement agencies are not prepared to adjust higher education standards for incoming law enforcement officers, for fear of recruitment concerns and an overall disagreement as to whether a degree is relevant or necessary for officers to obtain prior to beginning their service career. When asked about the pitfalls for increasing education requirements to either an Associate's Degree or Bachelor's Degree, many respondents indicated that there would be a diminishing pool of applicants. Additionally, overall, several respondents pointed to the challenges of obtaining a four year degree, either for financial reasons, or personal reasons. Some fear that having to go back to school could put, them or their families into debt. Furthermore, others were concerned about agencies' budgetary concerns. If all entry level officers were

required to have a degree up-front, agencies would have to start their employees at a higher salary and there were some concerns about the agencies' ability to do so without more funding.

Nevertheless, my survey responses suggested that officers decided to pursue their education during their careers. I could not definitively determine what led them to do so. However, based on a number of the open-ended responses I can only infer that it was due to an interest in either achieving a promotion or a raise. Despite that, respondents did not necessarily feel that having achieved their degree did not contribute or benefit their work.

My survey findings have important implications about the possibility and readiness, or lack thereof, for improving higher education requirements at law enforcement agencies. I discuss these implications in further detail in Chapter 5. I also discuss the limitations of my study and the type of further research that is desirable.

## Chapter Five

### DISCUSSION

Throughout this thesis, I have focused on the question regarding whether law enforcement agencies should or could consider increasing their minimum education standards for recruitment. The literature revealed that there is fact some value or perceived value from obtaining a higher education career; I wanted to determine whether those perceptions were shared among law enforcement agencies within the state of California. As one of the most progressive states in the nation, California has often taken the lead on implementing “radical” or “forward-thinking” policy decisions. California was also the first state to have any sort of college program developed for law enforcement officers. As reviewed in the literature, no state currently requires law enforcement officers to have a bachelor’s degree and Minnesota is the only state to require law enforcement officers to have an associate’s degree. For those reasons, I aimed my research at understanding how California law enforcement officers responded to the idea of increasing minimum education standards for all incoming law enforcement officers from high school or GED, to an associate’s degree or even a bachelor’s degree.

I structured my research to respond to prior research findings and data already in existence. Several of the reports indicate some benefit to increasing the higher education standards; however, the reactions from policy makers and those in the practice remain mixed. My analysis supports these reactions, but it is clear that more research is needed to understanding whether increasing the education standards is feasible. While my study

largely supports prior findings there were a few anomalous findings that warrant do further research.

In the body of this chapter I will begin by reviewing my key findings related to a discussion on how my survey results were in line with current findings available. Next, I outline some of the key limitations to this research, to ensure that the reader understands how best to interpret the data. I follow that by providing limited policy recommendations. Furthermore, I will also provide a discussion on how additional research can improve upon my methods and findings. I conclude with my final takeaways.

### **Summary of Findings**

Reforms surrounding policing and law enforcement have been discussed for several years, since August Vollmer first established the Berkeley School of Policing in the early 1900s. As history and other research findings have taught us already, there have been some recommendations suggesting the benefits of requiring a higher education. This thesis was helpful in furthering the discussion regarding whether higher education within the law enforcement career is seen as valuable, and whether it may be something for law enforcement agencies to consider changing over time. My approach focused on reaching out to experts in the field, i.e. current law enforcement professionals.

Overall law enforcement officers seem to find some benefit to pursuing a higher education, whether it be for personal gain in salary or promotional opportunities. A majority of the respondents indicated that their agencies offered incentives to officers who had their degree. Only 14% indicated that their agencies have no rewards to officers who have achieved a higher level of education, beyond what is required. On the other

hand, 86% said that their agencies provided incentives to entice employees to pursue a higher degree- a promotion being the most common incentive. It is also safe to assume that a salary incentive goes hand-in-hand with a promotion, although this may not necessarily be the case for all agencies.

### **Limitations**

As I have noted throughout this paper, readers should interpret the results of the survey with caution given its various limitations. The survey created could not capture or measure many factors that may affect an officer's response or opinion, including age, gender, background, history with law enforcement, etc. Additionally, the sample size was fairly small in comparison to the overall number of law enforcement agencies throughout the state of California. I only had 42 respondents for my survey and the respondents were not necessarily representative of the entire population of officers across the state. As a result, random sampling errors and response bias are likely present. Finally, the survey relies on officers' self-reported perceptions about what how their education standards have influenced their policing. These perceptions may not be entirely accurate.

### **Policy Recommendations**

Given the limited scope of this research, I will refrain from suggesting drastic policy recommendations, but rather advocate toward further action that can inform additional research moving forward. First, I would recommend that California find better opportunities to collect data among law enforcement agencies, which can be anything from mandatory surveying to greater oversight at the head agency level. Without concrete data, it will be extremely difficult to make recommendations moving forward, and to

really understand the potential benefits to increasing the education requirements. As I mentioned throughout this thesis, all agencies currently operate independently and collect hiring and employment data independently. This can create some challenges when considering policy changes at the statewide level. As helpful as interviewing and surveying may be, I am aware that policy makers rely on statistical data to inform them on their decision. Because of that, I do think that at the very least, one of my recommendations would be to have more data keeping across all agencies.

Interestingly enough, there have been some discussions about how law enforcement can gain more public trust within the California state legislature. For example, reactions to police wrongdoings and use-of-force have led legislators to propose new legislation. For instance, there has been some movement on legislation to require the use of body cameras on officers. There has also been legislation introduced which is aimed at preventing racial profiling. However, more relevant to this thesis, is the proposed legislation by Senator Mark Leno of San Francisco, SB 1286. SB 1286, the Records of Misconduct bill for Peace Officers, is intended to increase transparency in law enforcement records. The bill would give the public greater access to agencies' records of misconduct. It was introduced in February 2016 and is making its way through legislative committees. It still has to be approved by both the Senate and Assembly houses before the end of the legislative session in August 2016. If that happens, it can be presented to Governor Brown for consideration and could possibly be signed into law. Although a separate issue, this bill brings to light the lack of record keeping, or lack

of transparency of record keeping within law enforcement. It will be interesting to see how it progresses.

### **Questions for Further Research**

This thesis only skims the surface of the discussion surrounding law enforcement hiring standards, as it pertains to education qualifications. Further research needs to be conducted to determine whether it is plausible to conclude that officers who have higher education backgrounds are in fact better officers.

There is clearly a lack of definitive research that points to higher education having an effect on policing. First, it needs to be established how to define and measure “better policing.” Some studies have decided to do this by establishing that better policing can be measured by use of force (Manis et al, 2007). If this is true, it is important to note the challenges in obtaining use of force information. Others say that it is best defined by measuring the number of officer complaints. This is also difficult because it is difficult to compare formal and informal complaints, and determine whether or not it should be considered against an officer’s performance. Both issues could be touched on if the Records of Misconduct Bill, SB 1286 passes this year.

Another important question to consider is whether education should be in-service or pre-service. In other words, would education be of greater value after officers have already been accepted into the program, or would they benefit more from having the requirement implemented before they would even apply? This might be a more feasible approach to considering recruitment challenges. Basically, an officer might be hired on a

temporary or on a probational basis, contingent on completing their bachelor's degree within a set timeframe.

Another option that was brought up in the literature, but not so much throughout my research, was whether there should be clearly established minimum education requirements based on positions. For example, agencies could implement requirements that employees in clerical positions have at least a high school degree or GED. Any armed officers could be required to have higher education requirement beyond that, and so forth. This would allow for officers to move up within their agency, if desired, and set apart clerical and administrative positions from armed officer positions, based on education requirements alone.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis was aimed at furthering the discussion surrounding policy changes to improve the hiring education standards for law enforcement agencies. Overall, my research was in line with several of the reports in my literature review that are in favor of increasing the education standards. However, it is unclear whether there is political feasibility to make such a significant change happen across all agencies in California. Law enforcement agencies and associations, such as the ones represented in my survey, are more likely to be hesitant or reluctant to change. This is evidenced by the overwhelming number of respondents who disapproved of increasing education requirements. However, if there is one big takeaway from my survey it is that police officers see value in college, and this reinforces the need to further study ways to

encourage education beyond high school.

## Appendix A

## SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Within your agency, what are the minimum education requirements to become an officer?
2. Are there any incentives to pursuing an education outside of the minimal requirements?
3. To your knowledge, what is the most common college degree for police officers?
4. In your experience, has anyone proposed changing the requirements to a Bachelor's degree?
5. If any, what would be the pitfalls from increasing the minimum requirements to an Associate's degree? Bachelor's degree?
6. If any, what are the benefits to requiring an associate's degree? Bachelor's degree?
7. Would it be politically feasible to require all California law enforcement groups to require an associate's degree? A bachelor's degree? Why or why not?
8. What is your highest level of education?
9. If you were required to obtain further education, would you have still decided to pursue a career in law enforcement?
10. Any other additional comments or concerns regarding this topic?

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