

Salt Lake Community College

College Education:

An Officer's Essential Tool for Success

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A degree from a College or University conferred upon an individual seeking employment as a police officer demonstrates that individual's commitment to bettering themselves and becoming their best. The experiences and knowledge gained in a classroom setting and in the world of education are substantially different but just as necessary to the daily duties of an officer. Chief among these are the ability to effectively and professionally communicate with an educated populous.

In an officer's daily execution of his or her duties they will without doubt come into contact with many members of the public. The manner in which they conduct themselves during and throughout those interactions is representative not only of the officer and the department to which they belong but also of law enforcement everywhere. These communication skills not only help improve the image of law enforcement but may actually aid the officer in deescalating certain situations or asking more effective questions of witnesses and suspects.

A close second in importance of the lessons learned from an institute of higher learning is that of ethics. Ethics can be applied in many aspects of an officer's work. The officer's decision of when to or not to use force, deadly or otherwise, is among the most important ethical decisions. Discretion, the ability to enforce the law or choose to "look the other way," and professional courtesy are two more areas of an officer's decision making paradigm that also involve ethics.

Ultimately I believe that an officer who has received a college education is better prepared to make and live with the consequences of the hard decisions that they will face on the job. As rank of the officer increases, I do not believe that an increase of education would be inherently essential.

My fear is if the educational requirement did increase with the rank of the officer, that at each level of the chain of command, we would have an increased academic level and less of a tangible experience leadership. The academic leader with less experience in the field may not receive the level of respect needed to effectively lead. Therefore I believe that once a degree has been achieved, be it an Associates, Bachelors, Masters or PhD, a combination of education and experience should be required. Leaving open the opportunity for some of our most experienced but perhaps not most educated officers to advance to positions where they may do even greater good by applying their passion, education and experience in a leadership role.

In thinking of the officer's own wellbeing, it is in the best interest of officers to obtain a college education. In the event that they were injured in the line of duty and found unfit to return to duty, or perhaps their POST status becomes revoked, a college education would provide some background for which the officer could rely on to continue supporting their family and maintain themselves as a productive member of society.

An educated police officer in the field has experiences, provided through that education, that change the way he or she acts and thinks while on duty. The addition of an educational achievement above that of a high school diploma to the requirements necessary to become a law enforcement officer would be beneficial to police departments, the individual officer and to the general public. For these reasons, better public image, increased ability to communicate effectively, better decision making ability and a higher sense of ethical responsibility, all coupled with the self-assurance that should the unthinkable happen not all would be lost, a college education is essential and should be a requirement for each and every law enforcement officer.