Evidence-Based Police Education & Training in the U.S.

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3 Parts

1. Snapshot of U.S. system for delivering police education & training (E&T)
2. Observations on strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and trends
3. Discussion of the evidence-based perspective and its implications for police E&T
U.S. Training System

- 18,000 separate & distinct policing agencies
- About 1 million police employees
- Almost 700 police academies that provide basic police training
- About 40% of academies are single-agency, 60% are regional or state
- Average academy length = 21 weeks
U.S. Education System

• Over 800 colleges and universities offer 4-year (baccalaureate) criminal justice degrees
• Over 1,000 colleges offer 2-year degrees in criminal justice or law enforcement
• High school (secondary school) programs exist but are less common
Key E&T Features

• Education & training mostly separate, even though nearly 50% of police academies are located on college campuses (mainly at 2-year colleges)
• Higher education controlled by colleges & universities
• Training standards set by state governments (all 50)
  – Curriculum
  – Minimum length
  – Instructors
Traditional Process

• Students complete secondary education at age 18
• Police hire at age 21+
• So secondary school graduates go on to college, go into the military, or get a job for 3+ years
• After hiring, police send new recruits to the police academy for basic training, followed by field training
End Result

• No national standards in police E&T
• No national curriculum
• No national control
• Typical American mixed system
  – Federalism (national, state & local roles)
  – Public/private mix (some private mainly on the education side)
Therefore

- Some police academies are high-stress, some low-stress
- Some are residential, some are commuter
- Some put significant emphasis on community policing, some do not
- Some use traditional FTO field training, others the more progressive PTO model
But It Is Less Chaotic Than It Seems

- Nearly all police have some college, many have degrees
- State-level training standards have gradually converged over the last 40 years
- National associations of training directors and training instructors facilitate information sharing
- Lawsuits and national government carrots & sticks have led to more training
- Current crises have focused attention on curricula and the role of the academy in shaping police values & culture
Recent Survey
(89 agencies/10,600 respondents)

**Education**
- Overall, 56% of police had 4-year college/university degrees
- 59% of police supervisors had 4-year degrees
- 75% of police managers (lieutenant & above) had 4-year degrees

**Training**
- 89% were satisfied or very satisfied that they had the knowledge & skills needed to do their jobs
- 51% rated continuing training (received in the last 3 years) good or excellent
Trends & Issues

Education
- Criminal justice remains a very popular program of study
- But traditional universities are slow to change
- Big increase in on-line programs offered by traditional and virtual universities

Training
- Basic police training increasingly obtained pre-employment
- Increase in scenario-based and problem-based training methods
- Continuing debate over stress vs. non-stress
- Shift in emphasis from warrior to guardian ethos
Current Crises

- Use of force – more emphasis on de-escalation training
- Persons with mental illness – more focus on crisis intervention
- Discrimination – emphasis on implicit/unconscious bias
President’s Task Force (2015)

- 13 E&T recommendations
- Create “training innovation hubs”
- Encourage more academic partnerships
- Establish national leadership development institute
- Maintain technical sophistication but put more emphasis on community policing, de-escalation, etc.
So Is It Evidence-Based?

- Evidence-based refers to scientific evidence
- Doing what works, what’s effective
- Not doing what doesn’t work
- Increasingly, policing is expected to be evidence-based
Evidence-Based E&T

• At least two dimensions of evidence-based E&T
  – The substance of what is taught should be as scientifically valid as possible (based on crime science & police science)
  – The methods by which education & training are carried out should be as evidence-based as possible (based on learning science)

• This might apply to several components of police E&T:
  – Pre-career education
  – Basic police training
  – Specialized police training
  – Supervision & management training
  – Executive/leadership education & training
# Evidence-Based E&T Report Card

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Conjecture vs. Evidence

- **ROI**: Were the business results *worth the effort*
- **Results**: Did the training lead to an *increased Business Result*
- **Behavior**: Did the Trainees *use the new Knowledge or Skill* as a result of the training
- **Learning**: Did the Trainees *learn* the Material
- **Reaction**: Did the Trainees *enjoy* the training, Were the Trainees *engaged* in the Training
Some Positive Signs

- Research-based Fair and Impartial Policing (FIP) training
- Research-based interrogations training
- NIJ responsible to the President’s Task Force for evaluating the impact of training on use-of-force, de-escalation, crisis intervention & also developing a research agenda around police academy curricula
3 Propositions

• We have been negligent in not systematically gathering and using evidence to improve police E&T effectiveness

• Making police E&T more evidence-based is well within our reach

• Making E&T more evidence-based should be far easier than making policing more evidence-based
Main Obstacles

• University resistance to change
• Extreme fragmentation of E&T system
• Emotional attachment to boot-camp style police academies
• Political & legal interference in curricula and mandated topics
• Tendency to confuse training time with effectiveness
Overarching Dilemma – Nature of Policing

- Policing as more craft than science
- Value of experience & judgment vs. scientific knowledge & principles
- “the dictates of an intuitive grasp of situational exigencies” – police discretion
Questions?