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Perceived Value of Higher Education Among Police Officers

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A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

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by

Bradley D. Edwards

August 2017

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Dr. Jennifer Pealer

Dr. Jasmine Renner

Keywords: Curriculum, Policing Education, Police Officer, Value of Higher Education

## ABSTRACT

### Perceived Value of Higher Education Among Police Officers

by

Bradley D. Edwards

The purpose of this study was to examine whether police officers perceive higher education to be important in improving their job performance and promotional opportunities, whether the perception of higher education varied by several independent variables, and the types of suggestions that officers might have for improving the college curriculum. Independent variables included gender, age, level of education, type of police agency, academic major, years of service as a police officer, and job duty. The dependent variable was scores on 3 dimensions: general attitude toward higher education, perceived utility of a criminal justice related degree, and career-related competencies.

A 34- item survey was administered to police officers from five departments in Spring 2017. There was a 40.53% response rate with a total of 216 completed surveys. Descriptive statistics, independent-samples *t* tests, one way analysis of variance tests, and Pearson *r* coefficients revealed a mixed view of the perceived value of higher education. Officers who had completed bachelor's degrees and those officers employed by municipal agencies had a significantly more positive perception of higher education. No significant differences were found between the independent variables and the perceived value of a criminal justice related degree or the importance of career-related competencies. This study also found several common suggestions for improvement to the higher education curriculum, including more hands-on experience, instructors with experience as law enforcement officers, and improved writing and interpersonal communication skills.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The academic debate regarding the value of and proper curriculum for higher education has a long history (Webb, 2006). Higher education in America has generally served two purposes: 1) a liberal education which focuses on providing students a breadth of information to aid in development of a socially responsible citizen and 2) a specialization of training for students to concentrate on a particular subject in depth (Axelrod, 2002). The relative importance of these dual goals has shifted over time and modern American society appears to be increasingly emphasizing the economic benefits that students will receive upon graduation (Filippakou & Williams, 2015). However, viewing higher education as simply a workforce development tool may threaten the relevance of certain social science and humanities programs.

The economic benefits of a college education have been well documented. In 2013, young adults with only a high school diploma earned approximately 62% of what their college-educated peers earn and are more likely to be unemployed (Taylor, Fry, & Oates, 2014). Taylor et al. point out that this economic disparity is particularly prevalent among millennials, who have the largest earnings disparity of any generation in the modern era. These economic benefits also appear to lead to an overall better life, as college graduates are consistently found to have more stable family environments, to be healthier, and contribute to society more than those with less education (Hout, 2012).

As the cost of college tuition has continued to rise faster than the rate of inflation and financial aid (The College Board, 2015), some scholars have questioned whether the benefits of a college education is worth the investment. For example, former U.S. Secretary of Education

William Bennett recommended that only three types of students should go to college: students who are academically motivated to attend college, those who are accepted into an elite institution, and those who plan on majoring in a specialized field which requires higher education (Bennett & Wilezol, 2013). Bennett and Wilezol pointed out that much of what is taught in the social sciences and humanities holds little value in today's economic marketplace and much of the lifetime earnings disparity is limited to graduates of the top 150 colleges and universities. These assertions seem to have some merit. For example, Carnevale, Strohl, and Melton (2011) found that students' earnings vary dramatically dependent upon their choice of academic majors. Likewise, attending a selective institution has been shown to impact the economic return on investment (Oreopoulos & Petronijevic, 2013; Schneider, 2010).

Criminal justice is one of the most popular and fastest growing majors in colleges and universities nationwide (Stockwell, 2014; Wrede & Featherstone, 2012). More than 55,000 criminal justice bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees were awarded in 2013 alone (Snyder & Dillow, 2015). Previous research has shown that the vast majority of criminal justice students desire careers in law enforcement (Courtright & Mackey, 2004; Dretsch, Moore, Campbell, & Dretsch, 2014; Krimmel & Tartaro, 1999). However, most police departments do not require a college degree (Reaves, 2015) and evidence is mixed regarding whether college-educated police officers outperform non-college educated peers (e.g., Manis, Arcbold, & Hassell, 2008; Rydberg & Terrill, 2010). Further, anecdotal evidence suggests that some police officers often may not see the value in higher education (Hilal, Densley, & Zhao, 2013).

It is important for the criminal justice academic field to provide a curriculum which has both real and perceived benefits for students. The first known study directly measuring the perceptions of curriculum among police professionals is Barry's 1978 survey of police officers

and agencies which specifically asked about the perceived usefulness of the college curriculum and any suggestions for improving the curriculum to better prepare students for a policing career. Barry found that college-educated officers generally viewed their degree as a valuable asset to increase their performance and cited a variety of courses, including those which required writing and public speaking skills, as worthwhile. However, the law enforcement employers saw less value in the coursework and suggested an increase in internships and fieldwork (Barry, 1978). Unfortunately, a gap in the research existed until two recent studies (Baker, Holcomb, & Baker, 2017; Jones & Bonner, 2016) surveyed police officers to determine the most important learning objectives for prospective officers attending college.

Given the ongoing debate regarding the proper criminal justice curriculum (e.g. Bostaph, Brady, & Giacomazzi, 2014; Gibbs, 2016), it is important to determine the opinions of police officers on the perceived value of higher education and the curriculum which would be most beneficial to prospective or current police officers. If the professionals who work in the field do not perceive higher education as being valuable to their career or see the curriculum as out of touch with their job, this would question the necessity of police officers obtaining a college education and challenge the academic field to create a curriculum which is more helpful to their careers.

### Statement of the Problem

Criminal justice education has evolved over the last 20 years, experiencing significant growth in popularity while transitioning from a specialization within the sociology field to an independent academic area (Wrede & Featherstone, 2012). As the field of criminal justice continues to mature as an academic discipline (Nolasco, Carmen, Steinmetz, Vaughn, & Spaic,

2015), it is appropriate to assess how criminal justice-related employers view higher education in general, and the criminal justice major in particular. There has been some, albeit limited, research focused on whether college educated police officers perform better (Rydberg & Terrill, 2010) or have different occupational attitudes (Paoline, Terrill, & Rossler, 2015) compared to those without a higher education experience. However, little attention has been given to the perceptions of police officers regarding the value of higher education.

Previous research (e.g., Brecci, 1997; Hilal et al., 2013) found that police officers' age, gender, current level of education, and years of professional experience influence their perceived value of higher education. However, these studies were both conducted in Minnesota, which requires a minimum two years of completed college education for entry-level police officers. Given the rarity of this educational requirement (Reaves, 2015), analysis of the perceived value of higher education for officers employed in a state which does not require higher educational attainment for entry-level positions will add to the existing knowledge. Further, virtually no research has examined the views of officers employed in municipal police departments compared to county sheriff's departments, despite the distinct differences between the two jobs (Falcone & Wells, 1995; Liederbach & Frank, 2006).

The purpose of this study is to examine whether police officers perceive higher education to be important in improving their job performance and promotional opportunities. The dependent variable is the perceived level of higher education, measured in three dimensions: the perceived value of a higher education, the perceived value of a criminal justice or criminology degree, and the perceived importance of certain career-related competencies. Several independent variables include the officers' gender, age, years of service, job duty, type of police agency, and the current level of education. Among those officers who have completed a

bachelor's degree or higher, the study examined the differences between the dependent variable and an additional independent variable: the officers' academic major. Generally, these variables were selected due to their importance in the previous research involving the importance of police officer education. As most attention has been given to police officers employed in municipal police departments, the type of police agency is also important to determine if any differences exist between municipal and county police departments. Finally, the study asked respondents to suggest improvements to the curriculum which might better prepare the students for a policing career.

### Research Questions

Research Question 1: Is there a significant difference in the perceived value of higher education between male and female police officers?

Research Question 2: Is there a significant relationship between the perceived value of higher education and the age of respondent?

Research Question 3: Is there a significant difference in the perceived value of higher education among the police officers' level of education?

Research Question 4: Is there a significant difference in the perceived value of higher education among the types of police agencies?

Research Question 5: Is there a significant difference in the perceived value of higher education between police officers who attained a college degree with a major in criminal justice and police officers who attained a college degree with a major in some other discipline?

Research Question 6: Is there a significant relationship between the perceived value of higher education based on the years of service as a police officer?

Research Question 7: Is there a significant difference in the perceived value of higher education based on the officer's job duty?

Research Question 8: What changes to the higher education curriculum are perceived by police officers to improve the preparedness of students who wish to enter the law enforcement field?

### Significance of the Study

Several governors have openly criticized liberal arts programs and have advocated for state funding of colleges to be based upon post-graduate employment instead of the traditional enrollment-based funding (Kiley, 2013). The push for public colleges and universities to be more accountable for the government appropriations which they receive is not new. Beginning in the early 1990s, states began to evaluate institutions of higher education through performance-based funding models (Alexendar, 2000). These performance-based models vary widely by individual state. Generally, these models allocate funds to institutions based on their progress on preset goals, such as the number of students who complete a college degree, persist to obtain a certain number of credit hours, job placement of alumni, or a reduction in achievement gaps (Miao, 2012). As the purpose of higher education is increasingly being viewed through a workforce development lens, it is possible that post-graduate employment will increasingly be viewed as a way to measure the success of academic institutions.

It is important to note the significant differences in the perceived purposes of higher education among politicians, businesses, and the academic field. Not surprisingly, business leaders place more value on higher education as a way to contribute to economic and workforce development than academic leaders (Bogue & Hall, 2012). They also found that academic leaders place higher value on purposes such as aiding in the students' discovery of talents,

interest or values, serving as a forum for debate of public policy, etc. than do business leaders. Therefore, it is important to not only focus on academic success as defined by politicians (e.g., performance-based models) or academic professionals (e.g., accreditation), but also through the perception of professionals who are employed in each academic field. Results from this study could help criminal justice programs evaluate the law enforcement community's perceived importance of higher education and the curriculum and to encourage closer collaboration with the professional agencies to increase the perceived benefits of obtaining a college education.

### Limitations and Delimitations

Several cautions must be used when interpreting the results from this study. The police officers selected to participate as well as the time period used are both delimitations. The sample was delimited to county and city police officers in Northeast Tennessee who has sworn-officer status during the Spring 2017 semester. This study is specific to the police departments included and may not be generalizable to other populations or settings.

The study is limited by how well the participants in the study represent the population. Although attempts were made to accurately represent the population, the nonrandom sampling method employed by this study may severely limit this assumption. A low response rate would also be a limitation, as there may be important differences between those police agencies and/or officers who chose to participate and those who did not. Additionally, the study is limited by the use of a Likert-type scale. The items included in the questionnaire were selected after examination of the literature.

Other limitations might include the veracity of answers given by respondents. The study assumes that the participant answers all questions honestly and to the best of their ability. Any manipulation of responses by the participants could undermine the results. Further, the statistical



procedures used in this study assume that the data be normally distributed. Any skewness apparent in the data lessened the ability to detect significant relationships if they exist in the population.

### Definitions of Terms

To ensure clarity, several terms related to this study need to be clearly defined. Important terms are described below:

*County police department:* law enforcement agencies that are under the control of a county government and led by a sheriff.

*Education level of officers:* Consistent with prior research (e.g., Paoline et al., 2015; Rydberg & Terrill, 2010), educational level of officers was operationalized among three levels: no college experience, some college experience, and completed a bachelor's degree or higher.

*Municipal police department:* law enforcement agencies under the control of local city or town governments.

*Police Academy:* Police academies in the United States are institutions that offer basic law enforcement training to individuals recruited or seeking to become law enforcement officers (Hickman, 2005).

*Police Officer Job Duty:* Police officer's job duty is classified in one of four categories: patrol, investigations, administration/support, or other (Kyle & White, 2017).

### Overview of the Study

Chapter 1 included a description of the study, statement of the problem, and significance of the study. Specific research questions, definitions of key terms, and the limitations of the study were outlined. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature including topics such as the

theoretical importance of higher education, history of criminal justice education, evolution of the criminal justice curriculum, and various studies which have compared the outcomes of police officers who have a college education compared with those who have not. Chapter 3 includes a description of the research methodology including the population, sample, research procedures, research questions, and procedures for data analysis. Chapter 4 offers an analysis of the data for each research question. Chapter 5 provides a study summary, conclusions, and recommendations for police departments and criminal justice academic departments. Finally, recommendations for future research will be provided.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There has been a longstanding debate in America over the necessity and desirability of higher education for police officers (Brown, 1974; Bruns & Magnan, 2014; Roberg & Bonn, 2004). Scholars have often argued that the college-educated police officer is better prepared than their high school graduate counterparts due to their increased exposure to new surroundings and cultures, which should increase their ability to be better problem-solvers and decrease their prejudice and bias (Palmiotto, 1999; Rainford, 2016). Some evidence also exists that exposure to higher education can encourage more mature and humanistic police professionalism and can help officers develop better overall communication skills (Carlan & Byxbe, 2000; Carter & Sapp, 1990).

It has been suggested that these skills are particularly important as the job of policing has transitioned to a community policing model (Sereni-Massinger & Wood, 2016). Community policing, which gained popularity in the late 1980s, emphasizes improving police-community relations and actively seeks partnerships with the community to solve the problems which the community identifies as priorities (Fisher-Stewart, 2007). There is no uniform model of community policing. Rather, the approach taken by police can vary by community or even by individual neighborhood, as each area has a unique set of needs. While this style of policing can be more responsive than traditional policing, it also requires officers to possess more problem-solving and critical thinking skills than in the past (Paterson, 2011). Police officers typically enjoy great discretion in deciding how and when to enforce the law (Walker & Katz, 2013). Thus, it is very important that officers use this discretion wisely and professionally. The

increased media attention of police officer involved shootings and tensions among the police and citizens in many communities demonstrate the importance of developing a professional, humanistic police force.

The calls for increased police education have been slow to translate into increased educational requirements for entry level jobs (Hawley, 1998; Reaves, 2015). Critics have expressed concern that raising the minimum educational level would have significant effects on job satisfaction as college-educated officers might not be satisfied with various aspects of police work (Paoline et al., 2015). Additionally, the educational requirement might decrease the applicant pool, potentially excluding many otherwise qualified applicants (Bruns, 2010). Finally, scholars have failed to find conclusive evidence that an educated police officer performs their job better than those with less education. For example, Albarano (2015) pointed out that a college education does not necessarily counteract problematic attitudes about certain demographic groups or specific crimes, nor does it necessarily counteract potential personality issues which would negatively impact performance.

#### Development of Police Education

The push for increased education among police officers began with August Vollmer, who served as the police chief of Berkeley, California in the early 1900s. According to Carte (1973), Vollmer advocated for improved professionalism among police officers, including an increased use of technical and intellectual skills. He partnered with the University of California at Berkeley to develop a police school at a time when most officers did not receive any type of formal police training. Although these courses originally were focused on technical training for police officers, he also believed that established educational institutions should train police

students in the arts and sciences alongside close coordination of on-the-job experience (Carte, 1972). Following the success of the courses taught at Berkeley, other police-related baccalaureate programs were developed at a few major universities in the 1930s (Crockett & Stinchcomb, 1968).

### Expansion of Policing Education

Despite the development of these early police-related courses, the number of colleges offering criminal justice education remained relatively stagnant until a federal government's commission report in response to the turbulent 1960s. The 1960s was a time of dramatic increases in the crime rate as well as the public awareness of crime (Beckett, 1994). Property crimes rose 47% from 1960-1965, while violent crimes rose 35% during the same time period (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1965). In response to this increase in crime, the President of the United States established the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice to examine the scope of the problem as well as the causes and possible solutions to the crime increase. This commission held hundreds of meetings and interviewed tens of thousands of people, including police officers, court officials, crime victims, and offenders. The commission's report, *The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society*, contained more than 200 specific recommendations encompassing the entire criminal justice system, the reporting of crimes, and the need for improved research to better understand the nature and causes of crime. One of these recommendations was that "the ultimate aim of all police departments should be that all personnel with general enforcement powers have baccalaureate degrees" (The President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, 1967, p. 109).

The subsequent passing of the Omnibus Crime Control and Street Act created the Law Enforcement Education Program (LEAA), which provided federal grant assistance to educational institutions for the establishment of higher education programs in criminal justice (Foster, Magers, & Mullikin, 2007). These funds caused a substantial increase in the number of crime-related academic programs. From 1960-1969, the number of institutions offering law enforcement educational programs grew from 26 to 395 (Tenney, 1971). Much of this expansion occurred in community colleges, which were uniquely positioned to attract students interested in police studies (Hoover, 1995). Unfortunately, many of these new academic programs were put in place hastily due to the availability of federal money and were viewed primarily as a revenue generator for the colleges (Sherman, 1978). Many of these institutions failed to provide long-term resources to the new police education programs and failed to hire full-time instructors to teach the courses, resulting in a high access but low quality education (Sherman, 1978).

The LEAA program was phased out at the beginning of the 1980s (Durham, 1992). The loss of federal assistance had a detrimental impact on criminal justice education. Enrollment in community college criminal justice degree programs, which relied primarily on part-time, in-service students, declined 71% between 1979 and 1981 (Weirman & Archambeault, 1983). During the same time period, baccalaureate programs which attracted full-time students with no previous law enforcement experience experienced stable enrollment or growth (Weirman & Archambeault, 1983).

The academic field of criminal justice has experienced resurgence over the past few decades (Wrede & Featherstone, 2012). In 2014, *USA Today* ranked criminal justice and corrections as the 6<sup>th</sup> most popular academic major in the United States (Stockwell, 2014). The reasons for this increase are largely unknown but are likely due, at least in part, to the increased

media attention to criminal justice-related jobs such as police officers and forensic scientists in television dramas and news programs (McCay, 2014; Pollock, 2015). Despite the initial struggles, criminal justice has emerged as an increasingly independent and robust academic area (Wrede & Featherstone, 2012).

### Policing Curriculum

The academic curriculum within the field of criminal justice has evolved over time. Criminal justice programs which existed prior to 1967 were primarily “police science” programs (Flanagan, 2000). Initially, criminal justice education was virtually indistinguishable from the police academy training (Finckenauer, 2005). In fact, Berlin (2014) pointed out that nearly half of the police academies in the United States are currently operated by academic institutions. As Eskridge (2003) pointed out, however, important distinctions have developed between police officer training and education. Training is job-specific instruction designed to address the day-to-day challenges facing patrol officers. Traditional topics covered in police academy training include domestic violence, defensive driving, firearms training, criminal law, and basic forensics (Buerger, 2004). Additionally, the training academy serves to introduce and reinforce lessons regarding discipline, the chain of command, performing under stress, and solidarity to fellow officers (Chappell & Lanza-Kaduce, 2010). Education, on the other hand, is focused on developing a general spirit of inquiry, developing the academic tools (e.g., writing, reading) necessary to facilitate that spirit of inquiry, an introduction to research methods and statistics, and developing an introductory knowledge of theory, structure, process, cause, and consequence of how the justice system works (Buerger, 2004; Eskridge, 2003).

Criminal justice academic programs that emerged since the 1960s often had vastly different approaches to the academic curriculum. Some criminal justice programs developed with an interdisciplinary liberal arts approach which stressed the explanation of crime (Sherman, 1978). These programs relied heavily on sociology, psychology, and political science (Southerland, 2002). The multidisciplinary nature of criminal justice has been identified one of the field's greatest strengths (Flanagan, 2000). However, this also led to a critique of the field as having nothing new to offer, attracting low-quality students who are taught by below-average instructors (Clear, 2001; Finckenauer, 2005). Other criminal justice programs developed a professional education curriculum, stressing the description of the issues and operations of the entire criminal justice system. Finally, some programs were vocational in nature, focusing on teaching students how to perform basic police tasks (Sherman, 1978).

Much debate has occurred regarding the proper curriculum among criminal justice programs. For example, Dantzker (2005) promoted a more vocational-oriented program which would directly prepare students to enter the workforce. Conversely, Birzer and Palmiotto (2002) argued that inclusion of technical courses might lower the academic standards and the general perception of the criminal justice degree. Finally, Verrill (2007) pointed out that this debate is largely inconsequential because the vast majority of law enforcement agencies do not require a degree in any particular field to obtain entry-level jobs.

Seeking an increased quality and standardization of curriculum, the Academy of Criminal Justice (ACJS) adopted a set of certification standards for criminal justice programs. The first set of standards was published by the ACJS in 1998 (Finckenauer, 2005) and these standards have been updated periodically. The most recent version of the ACJS standards, updated in 2016, describes the purpose of undergraduate programs in criminal justice as being:



To educate students to be critical thinkers who can communicate their thoughts effectively in oral and written form. Programs should familiarize students with facts and concepts and teach students to apply this knowledge to related problems and changing situations. Primary objectives of all criminal justice/criminology programs include the development of critical thinking, communication, technology, and computing skills, quantitative reasoning, ethical decision-making, and an understanding of diversity. (p. 10)

While the successful implementation of these objectives should help develop a more rounded and humanistic police officer, this description is more descriptive of a professional or liberal arts approach to the criminal justice curriculum rather than a vocational-oriented approach. In addition, the ACJS suggests that course content cover a variety of areas in addition to policing, including criminological theory, corrections, research methods, and criminal law (ACJS, 2016). As the ACJS is responsible for evaluating criminal justice departments for its program certification, these standards should be influential in the continued development of criminal justice curricula. Even with the ACJS standards in place, much debate continues regarding the specific courses and competencies which should be required by criminal justice programs (Bostaph et al., 2014; Gibbs, 2016; Nolasco et al., 2015).

### Policing as a Career Aspiration

As criminal justice programs continue to be popular in colleges and universities across the country (Stockwell, 2014), it is important to determine the factors which are driving this growth in criminal justice as a field of study. Students generally report that criminal justice is an interesting field of study which they can obtain a job helping others (Tontodonato, 2006, Walters & Kremser, 2016). Krimmel and Tartaro (1999) conducted the first survey of criminal justice

undergraduate students' career aspirations by surveying undergraduate students from 12 four-year colleges and universities. Forty-five percent of respondents reported that they wanted to work in local, state, or federal law enforcement, while 14% indicated a desire to become a lawyer, 10% desired a job in corrections, academics, juvenile justice, or other, and 31% of the students were undecided about their future career plans (p. 281). Among those criminal justice students who had decided on a preferred career, law enforcement was clearly the most popular career choice.

Courtright and Mackey (2004) extended Krimmel and Tartaro's 1999 research by distinguishing between the different types of law enforcement agencies and several demographic variables which related to one's perceived attractiveness of a particular career. Courtright and Mackey administered a survey to a diverse group of students enrolled in five schools located within four different states. Among criminal justice majors, federal law enforcement was the most attractive job classification, followed by state law enforcement and local law enforcement. Corrections and security-related jobs were ranked as the least desirable job occupations. Interestingly, the attractiveness of each category of law enforcement career declined as grade level increased, suggesting that students became less interested in law enforcement as they progressed through their academic career. More recently, Walters and Kremser (2016) also found that while law enforcement was among the most popular career choices for junior and senior criminal justice students, the students became less interested in law enforcement as their class standing increased.

Not all research has found law enforcement to be the most desirable career among criminal justice students. Gabbidon, Penn and Richards (2003) attempted to replicate Krimmel and Tartaro's 1999 research by using the identical data collection instrument and methods to

survey criminal justice students at five historically black colleges. In most respects, the results from the two studies were similar. For example, students at historically black colleges seemed to be motivated to major in criminal justice for similar reasons than students as noted by Krimmel and Tartaro. One striking difference, however, was the percentage of students interested in a law enforcement career. While Krimmel and Tartaro found that 45% of students desired a law enforcement career, only 26% of students at historically black colleges were interested in such a career and instead were more likely to desire a career in the legal profession. Gabbidon et al. (2003) suggested that the history of discriminatory police practices against racial minorities might discourage African Americans from entering the policing field.

Dretsch et al., (2014) extended this line of research by surveying criminal justice students at three different institution types: predominately white, historically black, and mixed-race to consider whether the institution type had any impact on the desire to enter law enforcement. The results found no significant relationship between students' institution type and a desire to enter law enforcement. Contrary to Gabbidon et al. (2003), Dretsch et al. found that non-whites were more likely to desire a career in law enforcement than whites. Finally, Dretsch et al. found an interactive effect between institution type and gender. While 65% of males at primarily white colleges desired a career in law enforcement, only 18% of females had such a desire. Conversely, 71% of females at mixed-race colleges desired to enter a career in law enforcement while only 40% of males indicated such a desire. The percentage of males (60%) and females (64%) who expressed an interest in law enforcement was not significantly different (Dretsch et al., 2014). However, the percentage of students at historically black colleges who were interested in law enforcement was much higher than that reported by Gabbidon et al., suggesting a possible shift in desirability of African Americans to enter the law enforcement field.

### Police Officer Educational Requirement

Although law enforcement is one of the most desired careers for students majoring in criminal justice, only about one-third of local police departments in the United States have a college education requirement for entry-level police officers, and only about 1% of local police departments require a four-year degree (Reaves, 2015). In fact, the percentage of local police officers who were employed by a department requiring any amount of college declined slightly from 2003 to 2013 (Reaves, 2015). College degrees are much more often required to obtain state and federal-level law enforcement jobs (Walker, Burns, Bumgarner, & Bratina, 2008). However, these more prestigious positions often require career-related experience in addition to higher education (Sheridan & Rainville, 2016).

Bruns (2010) identified and surveyed the police chiefs in each local law enforcement agency that had a mandatory four-year degree requirement to determine their perceived utility of the college degree requirement. Over 90% of the police chiefs held a very favorable attitude toward the education requirement. The explanations given for the requirement include increased professionalism, level of expertise and perseverance of officers with a college degree, a desire for the educational level of police officer to mirror that of the community that they serve, and an observation that educated officers are more mature and have stronger goal-reaching abilities.

When asked why so few police departments require a four-year degree, police chiefs indicated that not all police departments see value in higher education, a perceived lower job satisfaction among officers who have high levels of education, and a decreased applicant pool (Bruns, 2010). One of the predominant reasons that a decreased applicant pool was viewed as important is the recruiting of minority candidates. As one chief replied “it’s ‘politically correct’ to lower education standards to avoid the wrath of the special interest-minority groups who wish

to lower educational standards to increase the minority population in the applicant pool” (Bruns, 2010, p. 97).

Of the 37 local police departments identified by Bruns (2010) as requiring a bachelor’s degree, 36 were municipal police departments. It is possible that Bruns’ online search excluded many county police agencies simply for lack of a working website. Additionally, the lack of sheriff’s offices in Bruns’ study might be due to the prevalence of city police departments compared to sheriff’s offices. The latest census of law enforcement agencies counted 12,501 local police departments compared to just over 3,000 sheriff’s offices (Reaves, 2011). Unfortunately, there is no available research that directly compares the educational levels of officers employed by municipal police departments and sheriff’s departments.

The lack of research comparing municipal and county officers is quite surprising given the distinct differences between jurisdictional power and leadership selection among the two groups. Specifically, the county sheriff is generally an elected position as opposed to a police chief who is most often appointed by a municipal executive. Additionally, the county sheriff’s department typically has a broader range of responsibilities as well as a larger geographic jurisdiction, which often overlaps with those of city police departments (Falcone & Wells, 1995; Liederbach & Frank, 2006; Weisheit, Falcone, & Wells, 2006).

No recent research could be found that compared the jobs of officers employed by these two distinct types of agencies. The most recent study was Liederbach and Frank’s 2006 comparison of the activities of a sheriff’s department and five small-town, rural municipal police departments in Ohio. After observing over 1,300 hours of work routines and citizen interactions, Liederbach and Frank found that sheriff’s deputies spent twice as much time directly dealing with crime related problems compared to the municipal officers. Additionally, the municipal

officers tended to interact with the citizens on an informal basis much more frequently compared to sheriff's deputies. Despite these potentially important distinctions, the studies included in this literature review generally examine data gathered from medium to large-sized municipal police departments. Given the increased trend and evaluations into the impact of municipalities contracting with sheriff's departments for policing services (e.g., Nelligan & Bourns, 2011), it is important to explore the differences between these two police organizational structures.

Unfortunately, the most recent nationally representative data showing education levels of police officers was conducted in 1988 (Carter & Sapp, 1990). At that time, 23% of police officers had obtained a four-year degree or higher, and another 43% of officers had some college experience. This was a significant increase from 1960, when 3% of police officers had a four-year degree or higher and 17% had some college experience. More recent studies, while not generalizable nationwide, have reported higher levels of officer education than was apparent in 1988. For example, Gardiner (2015) found that nearly 35% of California police officers had a bachelor's degree. She found that larger, urban police departments and those with higher starting salaries reported the highest levels of officers with a four-year degree. Similarly, Hilal and Densley (2013) examined police officer educational levels by administering a mailed survey to over 2,000 randomly selected officers in two states. When asked about their education levels, 88% of the officers reported having at least a two-year degree while 48% indicated that they had a four-year degree or higher. Further, 54% of officers reported having achieved some college credits since beginning a law enforcement career. When asked about their motivation to take college classes, nearly half (48%) of these officers cited career advancement as the main motivation.

Officers who have earned a 4-year degree have been shown to have greater expectations for promotion than less-educated officers (Gau, Terrill, & Paoline, 2013). The limited available research suggests that higher education might enhance police officers' probability of obtaining promotions into supervisory positions, regardless of whether their employer has an educational requirement for entry-level employees. In a study of Texas police officers, Polk & Armstrong (2001) found that the police officers who had completed a 4-year or graduate degree held more supervisory positions and were promoted quicker into these positions than their less-educated counterparts. Whetstone (2000) conducted an exit survey for officers who took a written exam which was required for all officers interested in being promoted at one metropolitan police department. College education was a clear significant factor in the recruits' success on this exam. Those with only a high school diploma scored an average of 70.50 on the exam, compared with scores of 78.20 for officers with some college and 84.40 for officers who were college graduates. However, regression analysis showed that those who prepare well using a variety of test preparation strategies can be just as competitive as officers with formal higher education experience.

#### Impact of Higher Education on Police Performance

Research evaluating the impact of higher education on police performance has most commonly examined higher education as it relates to police officers' performance at the police academy, use of force, and frequency of citizen complaints. These measures have emerged as the evaluation of higher education's effectiveness has been impacted by the difficulty in determining exactly what constitutes good or bad police performance (Davis, Ortiz, Euler, & Kuyendall, 2015; Sonnichsen, 2009). Traditional police performance measures (e.g., arrest rates,

response times) do not adequately measure qualities which are often viewed as the benefits of higher education, such as increased critical thinking and problem solving skills (Baro & Burlingame, 1999). Although the research described below is inconclusive regarding the impact of education on performance at the academy and frequency of citizen complaints, educational level does seem to impact an officer's reliance on use of force. Additionally, several officer-specific characteristics, such as age, gender and years of experience, have been found to influence police performance.

### Academy Performance

One of the few ways in which a police department can quantitatively measure the impact of higher education is the officer's performance at the police academy. White (2008) studied officers who attended a large police academy class (n = 1,556) of a metropolitan police department to investigate whether any predictors of recruits' performance could be determined. Using a multivariate analysis, White found that the recruits' reading level, age, sex, and race were significantly associated with academy success. Specifically, recruits with a higher reading level, older recruits, males, and White or Asian recruits were more likely than their counterparts to be top performers at the academy. Additionally, the 7% of recruits who were enrolled in the department's Cadet Corps program outperformed those who were not in the program. However, recruits' military experience and college credits were not associated with academy performance.

Henson, Reynolds, Klahm, and Frank (2010) also investigated predictors of academy performance among 486 officers in one Midwestern police department. Bivariate analyses showed that an officer's race (being White), gender (being male), previous college experience, prior military experience and performance on the civil service test were all correlated to higher



academy scores. Multivariate analysis, however, eliminated the presence of a relationship between many of these factors. Specifically, White officers performed significantly better than non-White officers, as did officers with previous law enforcement experience and those who had performed well on the civil service exam. The impacts of higher education, prior military experience and gender were not significant in the multivariate analysis (Henson et al., 2010)

Some jurisdictions have replaced the traditional police academy curriculum to one that is more focused on community policing (Chappell & Lanza-Kaduce, 2010). This curriculum is more focused on problem-solving skills and includes topics related to diversity and community relations. This curriculum is more interactive than the traditional curriculum, using scenarios and self-reflection to help officers incorporate the material (Chappell & Lanza-Kaduce, 2010). Chappell (2008) had previously found that college-educated police recruits performed better in police academies that have a community policing curriculum compared to the more traditional police curriculum. Taken together, these results suggest that while higher educated officers might not outperform less-educated officers in traditional police academy formats, the higher educated officer might have an advantage in academies with a community policing curriculum.

### Use of Force

A main decision of any police officer is when to use force and, when appropriate, how much force is necessary to enforce the law. Chapman (2012) surveyed police officers in three cities and found a complex relationship between use of force and officers' education level. When all police officers, regardless of job title, were included in the analysis, use of force was not impacted by the police officers' education levels. However, a significant relationship between education level and use of force did emerge when specific job duties were examined.

Specifically, higher educated patrol officers were significantly less likely to use force and, when required, used a lower amount of force compared to lower educated officers. Education level was not a predictor of force among detectives or police officers assigned to other duties. This finding should not be entirely unexpected, as the patrol officers are much more likely to be faced with the use of force decision than officers assigned to other duties.

Rydberg and Terrill (2010) analyzed data gathered from participant-observations and interviews with police officers in St. Petersburg, Florida and Indianapolis, Indiana to determine the impact education has on police conduct. Over 3,000 interactions among police and suspects were recorded by researchers who were riding with the officers. After controlling for factors such as the suspect characteristics and setting of the encounter, the officer's education was not a significant predictor of the decision to make an arrest or to search the suspect. However, officers with some college experience or a 4-year degree were significantly less likely to use force during these encounters compared to non-college educated officers.

Paoline and Terrill (2007) made the important distinction between verbal and physical force. Verbal force includes any command or threat made by an officer to gain compliance from a suspect, and is generally considered preferable to physical force as a way to handle conflicts. Even so, verbal force can be abused and is not always warranted in an encounter with suspects. They found that officers with any amount of college experience have less reliance on verbal coercion in their encounters with suspects. However, only officers who completed a four-year degree were significantly less likely to use physical force when engaging suspects.

McElvain and Kposowa (2008) examined the impact of college-educated officers by focusing on the officers' use of deadly force. They reviewed one department's police shooting files from 1990 through 2004 as well as the demographic information from the officers'

personnel files. The officers who were involved in a job-related shooting (n = 314) were compared with a control group compiled by a stratified sample of officers from the same department. White officers, male officers, younger officers, those officers with a previous history of shootings, and less educated officers (those with less than an associate's degree) were all more likely to be involved in shootings. With the recent increased media attention on police-involved shootings (McLaughlin, 2015), it is important for departments to decrease the frequency of unnecessary use of force against citizens. Additional research is needed to determine if increasing the education levels of officers could be one way to reduce the number of force incidents between officers and suspects.

### Citizen Complaints

Another tool available to police administrators for the evaluation of police performance is the frequency of citizen complaints against particular officers. The limited available research provides mixed evidence regarding the effectiveness of higher education in regards to lowering the frequency of citizen complaints. Lersch and Kunzman (2001) analyzed official officer complaint data of a large sheriff's department, making the distinction among serious and less-serious complaints. They found no significant relationship between officer's education levels and the more serious policy complaints. However, officers who lacked a college degree were more likely to receive less serious complaints and have these complaints sustained than those with either a two or four-year college education. No significant differences existed among officers with a two year degree compared to those with a four year degree.

Manis et al. (2008) found clear benefits to police education as it relates to citizen complaints. Utilizing the internal personnel files records of officers from a police agency, Manis

et al. found that officers with four-year degrees have less formal citizen complaints than those without four-year degrees and that the complaints which are filed against these officers are less likely to be sustained after an internal investigation. The officers' academic major did not impact the frequency or outcome of formal complaints, suggesting that the presence of a four-year degree is more important than the discipline studied.

Recent research has questioned the impact of education on officer complaints. Terrill and Ingram (2016) examined complaint data for eight medium to large size police departments across the country for approximately two years. Results showed that officer education did not have a significant effect on allegations of misconduct by citizens or the percentage of these allegations which were found by the police departments to have merit. However, a number of officer-based demographic factors were related to citizen complaints. Specifically, male officers and officers with prior military experience were more likely to have allegations of misconduct brought against them. Further, a curvilinear relationship between officer experience and complaint allegations was found. Complaint allegations increased for approximately the first 10 years of an officer's career, followed by a decrease in allegations as the officer continued to gain experience. Bruns and Bruns' 2015 analysis of data from medium-sized police departments in three different states also found that education level had no impact on officers' frequency of citizen complaints. It should be noted that Bruns and Bruns used officers' self-reported complaint data, which may be less accurate than evaluation of official records. Taken together, the available research regarding the impact of police officer education on officer complaints is mixed.

### Impact of Higher Education on Police Occupational Attitudes

Distinct from the research directly measuring performance of police officers, some scholars have evaluated the impact that college education might have on certain occupational attitudes. Early research (e.g. Guller, 1972) suggested that college seniors who were near the end of their coursework were less dogmatic than a group of freshman students, suggesting that students experience positive change through their college careers. Roberg (1978) also found that police officers with a college degree were less dogmatic and were more open-minded than officers without a college degree. More recently, Telep (2011) found officers with bachelor's degrees were less supportive of abuse of authority than those who had not completed a college degree. This relationship held both for officers who had obtained their college degree before becoming employed at a police department as well as those who had returned to school after initial employment as an officer.

Not all research has found higher education to have a positive impact on police officers. For example, Paoline et al., (2015) examined the role of education on police officers' occupational outlooks. The data, which included surveys of over 2,000 officers in eight police departments, measured the officers' educational level, college major, job satisfaction, view toward administration, and role orientation. Paoline et al. found that officers with a four-year degree had a lower level of job satisfaction and less favorable views toward administration compared to lower-educated officers. This reinforces earlier findings (Paoline, Myers, & Worden, 2000; Paoline, 2001) that college education may have a modest but negative effect on police occupational attitudes. Finally, officers' college major generally had little or no impact on police officers' attitudes. However, the multivariate analysis showed that experienced officers were less satisfied with their job and of their top management, regardless of their

educational level. Taken together, the available research calls for skepticism when assuming that the college graduate will hold more favorable occupational attitudes compared to officers without a college degree.

### Police Officer Perceptions of Higher Education

Compared to the amount of research conducted on the impacts of higher education on officers' performance and attitudes in a police setting, research focused on police officers' overall view of higher education is more limited. The current study focuses on the perceptions of higher education among those who are currently employed as a law enforcement officer. This section will describe the existing research regarding police officers' perceived value of higher education.

Barry (1978) was the first known researcher to directly examine police officers' views of higher education. He surveyed over 600 alumni from 25 criminal justice programs in Illinois who had obtained full-time employment as a police officer. Twenty-four of these officers were randomly selected to participate in a follow-up interview. Additionally, 46 law enforcement agencies were contacted to provide their viewpoints regarding the value of college education for their officers. The police officers did not perceive that their educational attainment had impacted their salary or promotion chances. However, they did perceive their education as positively impacting their job performance. The in-depth interviews asked officers if their non-degree holding peers had any negative feelings toward officers who held a degree. It was found that the officers' peers generally supported officers who held a college degree. The officers indicated that coursework involving law enforcement, sociology, psychology, and those which required

writing and public speaking skills were particularly useful. Conversely, the officers perceived their “required courses” (e.g.: history, foreign language, natural sciences) to be of least value.

When representatives from the police agencies were asked about their preferred academic major for potential employees, the most common response was law enforcement (43%), followed by general criminal justice or corrections (17%), and social sciences (15%), with 11% indicating that the academic major did not make a difference (Barry, 1978). Although not specifically distinguished by the author, presumably (based on the age of the article) the “law enforcement” majors identified by the police chiefs could represent the prevalent of the early police science programs in existence in the 1960’s and 1970’s (Flanagan, 2000), while the “general criminal justice or corrections” majors identified could represent the more multidisciplinary liberal arts approach described by Sherman (1978). Contradicting the views of the officers, the agency representatives did not indicate that a college educated officer performed significantly better than a non-college educated officer. When asked for suggestions regarding improvements to the curricula, the agencies most often indicated a desire for more internships and fieldwork.

Two recent studies have revived the scholarly attention given to the perception of criminal justice practitioners regarding the relative importance of certain learning objectives. Jones and Bonner (2016) surveyed law enforcement professionals to measure the perceived importance of certain skills and knowledge. Overall, these professionals ranked practical skills (e.g., verbal communication, problem solving) and professional skills (e.g., work ethic, professional demeanor) as being more important than knowledge content of the criminal justice field. Similarly, Baker et al., (2017) asked criminal justice professionals to rank a number of hypothetical job applicants which differed on a number of characteristics. These characteristics included grade point average (GPA), and the candidate’s skills pertaining to writing, oral

communication, critical thinking, ethical decision-making, technology, and understanding of diversity issues. Generally, the professionals favored applicants with average or above average ethical decision skills more than candidates that might have strengths in other areas but a weakness in ethical decision making.

The above research has provided a useful foundation for the police agencies and the colleges which design coursework for police education. The renewed scholarly interest in appropriate higher education learning objectives guides the current study's examination of various career-related competencies. The remaining literature pertaining to the value of higher education generally examines the officers' general perceived value of increased higher education attainment, as well as the utility of a criminal justice degree to the exclusion of other academic majors.

### Value of Increased Education

Research conducted since the mid-1990s regarding police officers' perceived importance of higher education appears to be mixed. Only three studies have examined the general question of whether increased education is seen to be beneficial. Two of these studies have explored this issue by surveying officers in Minnesota. Minnesota is unique because it is the only state in the United States to require a two-year degree as a condition of employment as a police officer. In the first study involving Minnesota police officers, Brecht (1997) found that approximately half of the 915 officers surveyed indicated that they had taken college classes after they entered law enforcement. Interestingly, officers who had the least education were also least likely to have future plans of taking college classes, whereas those with a bachelor's degree or higher were most likely to aspire to take additional classes. These results would suggest that officers do



perceive a value in increasing their education levels and that those who had previously attended college had a favorable experience. Officers with the least experience and female officers also indicated an increased desire to enroll in future college courses. The impact that an officer's current level of education, gender, and job experience might have on their views toward higher education is further examined in the current study.

More recently, Hilal et al., (2013) asked officers in Minnesota whether they would support increasing the minimum requirement for initial hires to a bachelor's degree. Approximately one-third of respondents indicated support for this proposal. Not surprisingly, the support was greatest among those who had already earned a bachelor's degree. Interestingly, patrol officers or front-line supervisors were more likely to support an increased educational requirement than administrators. Officers under the age of 40 were more likely support increasing the minimum requirement than older officers. Overall, 70% of officers indicated that they would have still entered the law enforcement career if a bachelor's degree was required.

Not all research has found officers to be receptive to an increased educational requirement. Bruns and Magnan (2014) found through qualitative interviews of 61 police officers that nearly two-thirds (62.3%) of respondents viewed a college degree as unnecessary. Approximately 46% of these officers viewed a high school diploma as the most appropriate educational requirement for their department. Interestingly, over half of these officers had completed a bachelor's degree and only 23% had only obtained a high school diploma. A number of these officers apparently had a higher level of education than they felt was necessary for the job of a police officer.

## Area of Study

A separate dimension of the perceived utility of higher education is the appropriate course of study for aspiring police officers or police officers who are already employed but wish to further their education. Intuitively, criminal justice seems like the most appropriate course of study for those who are interested in a policing field. Carmen, Butler, and Odo (2006) surveyed police officers in one of the few American police departments with a minimum four-year degree requirement to specifically evaluate the value of a criminal justice degree. Half of the officers surveyed had a degree in criminal justice, while the other half had a degree in another area of study or did not hold a bachelor's degree (officers who were currently employed at the implementation of the four-year degree requirement had been grandfathered in). Officers who held a bachelor's degree in criminal justice were more likely to have a positive image of criminal justice as an academic field than those who majored in other academic areas. Officers with criminal justice degrees also made a clearer distinction between the academic study of criminal justice and police-related training. It seems that officers who had majored in other areas did not clearly understand the nature of a criminal justice curriculum. Unfortunately, Carmen et al. (2006) did not focus on whether officers holding degrees from different academic majors varied regarding their perceived value of higher education attainment in general.

Criminal justice is obviously a popular choice of majors for students interested in policing. However, other areas of study are perhaps of equal value for current or aspiring police officers. As mentioned above, Breci (1997) found numerous officers who aspired to take additional college courses in the future. When asked which college classes they thought would be most helpful to them as law enforcement officers, the most common responses were management, criminal justice, human relations, computer science, sociology/psychology, and

English/speech. Similarly, Bruns and Magnan's 2014 qualitative analysis uncovered a theme that the importance of college may not be what is learned from textbooks and lectures, but rather the overall college experience. As one respondent indicated:

Being able to demonstrate your ability to meet obligations, whether it is homework assignments or social activities, college gives you a chance to be involved. If you are involved with your community while you are in college, that gives you more experience with things you need when you become a police officer. (p. 38)

These results show that law enforcement officers perceive that higher education can be valuable beyond what is taught in criminal justice specific courses. This underscores the importance of future research to distinguish between a general perceived importance of higher education and the perceived importance of criminal justice specific learning objectives.

### Chapter Summary

Policing education is a relatively young academic field which has evolved from technical education of police skills to a broader curriculum examining the entire criminal justice system (ACJS, 2016; Flanagan, 2000). The expansion of the criminal justice academic field has resulted in an increase in the numbers of police officers who have obtained a higher education (Carter & Sapp, 1990; Gardiner, 2015; Hilal & Densley, 2013). In fact, many police officers have chosen to obtain a college degree even in the absence of specific requirements from their prospective or current employer (Gardiner, 2015). Despite the increased levels of police officer education, past studies have not been able to conclusively demonstrate whether this increased education has a positive impact on police officers. Evidence does seem to consistently show that higher educated officers rely on use of force to a lesser degree than less educated police officers

(Chapman, 2012; McElvain & Kposowa, 2008; Rydberg & Terrill, 2010). However, the impact of college on officers' misconduct complaints, performance in the police academy, and occupational attitudes is inconclusive.

The available (yet limited) research regarding the perceived value of higher education has shown several officer-specific characteristics to impact support for increasing their department's educational requirement (Hilal et al., 2013). Additionally, certain skills and competencies have been found to be more important than others (Baker et al., 2017; Bruns & Magnan, 2014; Jones & Bonner, 2016). The current study seeks to further develop this research by addressing gaps in the current knowledge. Specifically, research pertaining to the perceived importance of education and the appropriate curriculum is needed among police departments which do not require a college education. There is also no available research specifically comparing the perceived utility of higher education based on the officers' academic major. Additionally, research is needed to determine whether several officer-specific characteristics impact the perceived value of higher education.

Finally, little attention has been given to the potentially important differences between municipal and county-level police departments. Despite anecdotal evidence that the work experiences of municipal police departments differ from county sheriff's departments (Liederbach & Frank, 2006), most research comparing police attitudes and performance based on educational outcomes has been conducted in municipal police departments. The current study seeks to fill this void by examining the difference between officers' perceived value of higher education based on their age, current level of education, gender, work experience, and academic major, as well as their suggestions for improvements to the higher education curriculum, among a sample of city and county police departments.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to examine whether police officers perceive higher education to be important in improving their job performance and promotional opportunities. Additionally, the study sought to identify any suggestions that law enforcement officers might have to make the course curriculum more relevant. This study used a basic, nonexperimental quantitative method to determine whether any relationships exist between the perceived value of higher education among a number of demographic variables. This chapter presents the research questions, research design, population, sampling procedures, instrumentation, data analysis strategy, and summary.

#### Research Questions

The following set of research questions and null hypotheses were used to guide the study:

Research Question 1: Is there a significant difference in the perceived value of higher education between male and female police officers?

H<sub>01</sub><sub>1</sub>: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the general attitude toward higher education dimension on the value of higher education survey between male and female officers.

H<sub>01</sub><sub>2</sub>: There is no significant difference in mean scores of the perceived utility of a criminal justice or criminology degree dimension on the value of higher education survey between male and female officers.

H<sub>01</sub><sub>3</sub>: There is no significant difference in mean scores of the career-related competencies dimension on the value of higher education survey between male and female officers.

Research Question 2: Is there a significant difference in the perceived value of higher education based on the age of respondent?

H<sub>0</sub>2<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of the general attitude toward higher education dimension on the value of higher education survey and age of respondent.

H<sup>o</sup>2<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of the perceived utility of a criminal justice or criminology degree dimension on the value of higher education survey and age of respondent.

H<sub>0</sub>2<sub>3</sub>: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of the career-related competencies dimension on the value of higher education survey and age of respondent.

Research Question 3: Is there a significant difference in the perceived value of higher education among the police officers' level of education?

H<sub>0</sub>3<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the general attitude toward higher education dimension on the value of higher education survey among the levels of education of officers.

H<sub>0</sub>3<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the perceived utility of a criminal justice or criminology degree dimension on the value of higher education survey among the levels of education of officers.

H<sub>0</sub>3<sub>3</sub>: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the career-related competencies dimension on the value of higher education survey among the levels of education of officers.

Research Question 4: Is there a significant difference in the perceived value of higher education among the types of police agencies?

H<sub>0</sub>4<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the general attitude toward higher education dimension on the value of higher education survey among the types of police agencies.

H<sub>042</sub>: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the perceived utility of a criminal justice or criminology degree dimension on the value of higher education survey among the types of police agencies.

H<sub>043</sub>: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the career-related competencies dimension on the value of higher education survey among the types of police agencies.

Research Question 5: Is there a significant difference in the perceived value of higher education between police officers who attained a college degree with a major in criminal justice and police officers who attained a college degree with a major in some other discipline?

H<sub>051</sub>: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the general attitude toward higher education dimension on the value of higher education survey between police officers who attained a college degree with a major in criminal justice and police officers who attained a college degree with a major in some other discipline.

H<sub>052</sub>: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the perceived utility of a criminal justice or criminology degree on the value of higher education survey between police officers who attained a college degree with a major in criminal justice and police officers who attained a college degree with a major in some other discipline.

H<sub>053</sub>: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the career-related competencies dimension on the value of higher education survey between police officers who attained a college degree with a major in criminal justice and police officers who attained a college degree with a major in some other discipline.

Research Question 6: Is there a significant relationship in the perceived value of higher education based on the years of service as a police officer?

H<sub>061</sub>: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of the general attitude toward higher education dimension on the value of higher education survey and years of service as a police officer.

H<sub>062</sub>: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of the perceived utility of a criminal justice or criminology degree dimension on the value of higher education survey and years of service as a police officer.

H<sub>063</sub>: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of the career-related competencies dimension on the value of higher education survey and years of service as a police officer.

Research Question 7: Is there a significant difference in the perceived value of higher education based on the officer's job duty?

H<sub>071</sub>: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of the general attitude toward higher education dimension on the value of higher education survey and the officer's job duty.

H<sub>072</sub>: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of the perceived utility of a criminal justice/criminology degree dimension on the value of higher education survey and the officer's job duty.

H<sub>073</sub>: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of the career-related competencies dimension of the value of higher education survey and the officer's job duty.

Research Question 8: What changes to the higher education curriculum are perceived by police officers to improve the preparedness of students who wish to enter the law enforcement field?

### Instrumentation

Data was collected by the use of a questionnaire divided into three distinct sections. First, the questionnaire contained seven demographic items formatted in several levels of



measurement. The demographic variables included as independent variables in this study include: academic major, age, gender, level of education, type of police agency, primary job duty and years of service. The questionnaire also asked respondents what level of formal education should be required to be hired into their current positions. The answer to this question provided a preliminary view of the level of support for higher education.

The next part of the data collection instrument contained the three Likert-type scales used to measure the dependent variable. The dependent variable consisted of three dimensions: general attitudes toward higher education, attitudes towards the perceived utility of a criminal justice or criminology degree, and a set of career-related competencies. Finally, an open-ended question was included for officers who have obtained a four-year college degree. This question asked what improvements to the higher education curriculum would improve the preparedness of students who wish to enter the law enforcement field.

The demographic variables measured in this study include: academic major, age, gender, level of education, officers' primary job duty, type of police agency, and years of service. An important demographic variable for this study was the participants' current level of education. An examination of the existing literature shows several ways that police officer education has been measured. Essentially all of the existing studies have measured officer educational level at the ordinal level. Measuring educational level by the number of completed years or number of college credits earned has been criticized on theoretical and reliability grounds (Worden, 1980). McElvain and Kposowa (2008) measured higher education dichotomously as either having a two year degree or higher as opposed to having less than a two year degree. Some studies (e.g., Hilal et al., 2013; Manis et al., 2008; Terrill & Ingram, 2015) have conceptualized higher education as the existence or absence of a bachelor's degree.

The most common measurement of police officer education seems to be a three-level ordinal variable including the categories of: high school diploma, some college, or the attainment of a four-year degree (e.g., Brecci, 1997; LaGrange, 2003; Paoline & Terrill, 2007; Paoline et al., 2015; Rydberg & Terrill, 2010). The current study measured educational attainment as a categorical variable with choices of less than high school diploma, *high school diploma or equivalent*, *some college but no degree*, *completed associates degree*, *completed bachelor's degree* and *completed master's degree or higher*. Due to the number of responses in each category, the number of categories was collapsed into three categories: *high school/GED*, *some college*, and *four-year degree or higher* to be consistent with the previous literature.

Several additional demographic variables were included in this study. Respondents' age was measured at the ratio level by simply asking officers to write in the appropriate number at the given location on the questionnaire. Age was defined as the respondent's age at last birthday. As such, an exact day of birth is not needed. Likewise, respondent's years of service was measured at the ratio level rounded to the nearest complete year. Officers' gender was measured at the nominal level by asking respondents to check the box that best describes them. Categories for gender included *male* and *female* only. Type of police agency was measured categorically with three choices: *municipal*, *county*, or *state*. Among those officers who indicate a completed associates, bachelor's, or master's degree, a line was provided asking the officers to indicate their academic major for each of these degrees. Finally, the measurement of police officers' primary job duty adopts the categories used by Kyle and White (2017), which uses the classification of *patrol*, *investigation*, *administration/support*, and *other*.

Despite the lack of a standard method to operationalize the value of higher education, an effort was made to use prior research as a model for this study. Carmen et al. (2006) specifically

examined the utility of a criminal justice degree among a police department which had a four-year degree requirement. Carmen et al. focused on three dimensions of the criminal justice degree: the increased knowledge base of crime-related topics, general attitudes toward the criminal justice discipline, and the perceived utility of a criminal justice degree. The questions pertaining to the perceived utility of a criminal justice degree (4 questions) were adopted for use in this study. These questions include:

- I would recommend, to anyone interested in becoming a police officer, to seek a Bachelor's degree in criminal justice rather than a degree in any other discipline,
- Having a Bachelor's degree in criminal justice, as opposed to a Bachelor's degree in another discipline, would allow a police officer to perform his/her job in a more effective manner,
- I feel that most criminal justice classes, at an undergraduate level, will teach me what I already know about police work, and
- Having a Bachelor's degree in criminal justice, when compared to a Bachelor's degree in any other discipline, will not be as advantageous in understanding/implementing problem-solving skills

These questions were measured using a six-choice Likert scale (see Appendix).

The current study used the above questions as a template to develop the general perceived value of a higher education scale used in this study (5 questions). These questions were self-developed and include:

- I would recommend, to anyone interested in becoming employed in my position, to seek a college degree,
- A college degree will assist a police recruit in obtaining a job in my department,

- I feel that higher education provides skills needed for an officers to perform his/her job in a more effective way,
- I feel that a college degree will assist police officers in receiving promotions within the department, and
- Having a bachelor's degree, when compared to those with less education, would be advantageous in understanding /implementing problem-solving skills.

These questions were measured using a six-choice Likert scale (see Appendix).

The career-related competency scale (17 questions) is modified from Jones and Bonner's (2016) survey of criminal justice professionals measuring the perceived value of certain skills and knowledge of areas which roughly correspond to the ACJS certification standards (Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, 2016). Jones and Bonner's survey included six questions related to practical skills, six questions related to professional skills, 16 questions pertaining to content knowledge, and five questions pertaining to knowledge of current issues. The items included on the survey instrument for this study are modified slightly to take into consideration the scope of this study. Specifically, five questions were selected to measure practical skills, 10 questions were used to measure content knowledge, and two questions were selected to measure current issues knowledge (see Appendix). The survey asked respondents to rank each competency by how important these skills are to their job. Responses for the career-related competency scale range from 1 (not important) to 6 (very important). The responses from each item were combined to create a score ranging from 17-102 reflecting the respondent's perceived utility of the career-related competencies.

### Population and Sample

The population for this study was police officers in Northeast Tennessee. For the purposes of this study, Northeast Tennessee is defined by the Tennessee Highway Patrol's District 5. This district includes the counties of Johnson, Carter, Unicoi, Washington, Sullivan, Greene, Cocke, Jefferson, Hamblen, Hawkins, Hancock, Grainger and Claiborne (District Five Headquarters, 2016). Using a convenience method, the sample included clusters of police officers employed by the city and county agencies that agreed to participate in the study. An effort was made to include participants from different sized police departments across the Northeast Tennessee region in an attempt to match, as closely as possible, the characteristics of the population.

This study included the participation of police officers from two city and three county police departments in the Northeast Tennessee area. This allowed an adequate number of respondents and diversity of responses to compare differences between the remaining subgroups (e.g., gender, job duty, academic major). For example, independent samples *t*-tests and One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests require a sample size of at least 15 cases per group (Green & Salkind, 2011). The sample for this study gathered a minimum of 23 cases per group for each variable included within the research questions.

### Data Collection

Data was collected by a questionnaire administered in person during the course of a two month timeframe during the Spring 2017 semester. Police departments were invited to participate via phone recruitment, face to face recruitment, or via email. Departments were asked to distribute the questionnaires during roll calls or, in one case, a training session. Each officer was informed of the voluntary nature of the study via an informed consent document and

given the contact information of the researcher. To protect confidentiality, passive informed consent was requested so that the names of respondents are not identified. The officers were given the option of completing and returning the survey at the police department or, alternatively, to complete and return the questionnaire to the researcher via a self-addressed, stamped envelope. 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%

### Data Analysis

The null hypotheses were analyzed using independent samples *t*-tests, One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests, Pearson *r* correlations, and content analysis. A .05 level of significance was used to analyze all data. Independent samples *t*-tests are appropriate for a continuous dependent variable and a dichotomous independent variable. Accordingly, these tests were used to analyze the relationship between perceived value of higher education and gender (Research Question 1), the type of police agency (Research Question 4), and academic major (Research Question 5). ANOVA tests are appropriate with a continuous dependent variable and an independent variable with two or more levels (Green & Salkind, 2011). Accordingly, this test was used to analyze the relationship between the perceived value of higher education and educational level (Research Question 3), and job duty (Research Question 7). The research questions examining the relationships between the perceived value of higher education and age (Research Question 2) and years of service (Research Question 6) were analyzed using a Pearson *r* correlation. Pearson *r* correlation tests are appropriate for evaluating the relationships between two interval or ratio level variables. Finally, Research Question 8 was analyzed using a content analysis to classify themes which emerged from the answers to the open-ended question: Given

your experience as a law enforcement officer, what changes to the higher education curriculum would improve the preparedness of students who wish to enter the law enforcement field?

### Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 reported the research methodology used in this study. The chapter included information on the research design, instrumentation, sample selection, data collection, data analysis, and the research questions and corresponding null hypotheses which guided the study. Chapter 4 will present the findings of the study. Chapter 5 will conclude with a summary of these findings and recommendations derived from the study.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS OF DATA

The perceptions of sworn police officers in Northeast Tennessee were examined in this quantitative study to determine the importance of higher education to their job performance and promotional opportunities, as well as gain a greater understanding of possible improvement to higher education which could improve the preparedness of future law enforcement officers. This chapter presents the data analysis related to the study's research questions. A hard copy questionnaire (Appendix) was used to collect the data. The questionnaire used a 6 point Likert scale to measure the officers' perceived importance of various career-related competencies, general attitude toward higher education, and the utility of a criminal justice degree. The questionnaire also measured demographic variables which comprise the independent variables. Table 1 shows a distribution of several key demographic variables. Finally, the data collection instrument included an open-ended question related to perceived improvements to the higher education curriculum.

The respondents in this study were sworn police officers employed in Northeast Tennessee during the Spring 2017 semester from five police departments. 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%.



Table 1

*Key Demographic Variables*

Variable	Frequency	Percent
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	192	89.3
Female	23	10.7
Total	215	100
<b>Agency Type</b>		
County	74	34.3
Municipal	142	65.7
Total	216	100
<b>Job Duty</b>		
Administration/Support	34	15.8
Investigations	38	17.7
Patrol	125	58.1
Other	18	8.4
Total	215	100
<b>Highest Degree Obtained</b>		
High School or Equivalent	26	12
Some College but no Degree	70	32.4
Completed Associate Degree	19	8.8
Completed Bachelor's Degree	90	41.7
Completed Graduate Degree	11	5.1
Total	216	100
<b>Bachelor's Degree Field</b>		
Criminal Justice	55	60.4
Non-Criminal Justice	36	39.6
Total	91	100

A preliminary measurement of perceived value of higher education included the level of formal education that respondents felt should be required to be hired into their current position. The majority of respondents (66.2%) viewed a high school diploma or GED to be the most appropriate required level of education. A completed associate's degree (21.4%) received the next highest level of support followed by bachelor's degree (11.2%). Requiring a graduate degree or no educational requirement received virtually no support (.05%). The response to this survey item varied depending on the respondent's job classification. For example, 73.4% of patrol officers viewed a high school diploma or GED to be the most appropriate required level of education for their current position, while only 4.7% preferred a bachelor's degree as a minimum qualification. In contrast, 50% of those in administration/support perceived a high school diploma to be the proper qualification for their position, while 38.2% preferred a minimum requirement of a bachelor's degree.

The dependent variable was measured through the use of three scales focused on respondents' views regarding the importance of career-related competencies, the value of a college degree, and the value of a criminal justice major. The career-related competencies scale included 17 items that respondents ranked using a 6 item Likert scale where 1 means not important at all and 6 means very important. Thus, the minimum possible score on this scale was 17, with a possible maximum of 102. Actual responses ranged from a minimum of 56 to a maximum of 102, with a mean of 82.62. Respondents ranked the career-related competencies to be important to the job of a police officer. The career-related competencies which police officers rated as most important included verbal communication skills, understanding ethical practices, understanding basic concepts of criminal law, knowledge of law enforcement practice, and problem-solving skills. Conversely, the career-related competencies which police officers rated

as least important included knowledge of institutional corrections, knowledge of forensic science, understanding theories of criminal behavior and knowledge of community corrections.

Descriptive statistics for each item in this scale are provided in Table 2.

Table 2

*Perceived Importance of Career-Related Competencies (in descending order)*

Variable	Mean	Mode	SD
Verbal communication skills	5.69	6	.520
Understanding ethical practices	5.62	6	.623
Understanding basic concepts of criminal law	5.58	6	.628
Knowledge of law enforcement practice	5.57	6	.614
Problem solving skills	5.57	6	.583
Writing skills	5.35	6	.734
Knowledge of basic investigation techniques	5.11	5	.795
Using computer technology	4.97	5	.856
Time management skills	4.91	5	.786
Understanding racial issues as they pertain to the criminal justice system	4.73	5	1.085
Knowledge of the juvenile justice system	4.57	4	.997
Understanding gender issues	4.20	4	1.230
Knowledge of basic research methods	4.18	4	1.072
Knowledge of community corrections	4.17	4	1.100
Understanding theories that attempt to explain criminal behavior	4.13	4	1.138

Table 2 (continued)

Variable	Mean	Mode	SD
Knowledge of forensic science	4.08	4	1.058
Knowledge of institutional corrections	4.06	4	1.105

The second scale included in this study measured the respondents' general attitude toward higher education. This scale included five items and included possible scores ranging from 5 to 30. The sample mean for general attitude toward higher education was 21.05, with a standard deviation of 5.33. Figure 1 shows that the distribution was fairly normal with scores in the mid-range of the scale.

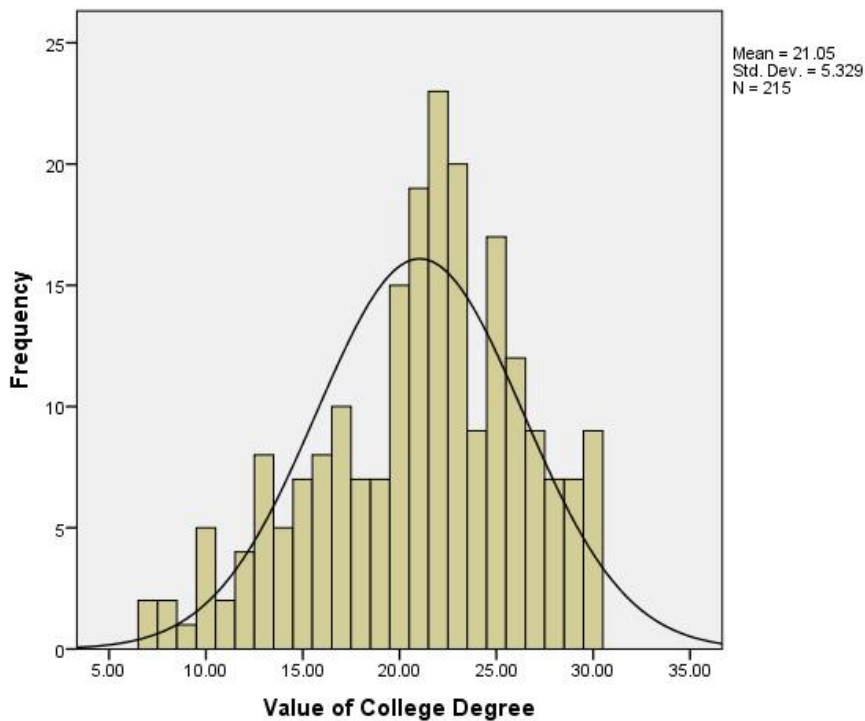


Figure 1. Value of higher education scale

The final scale represented the respondents' perceived value of a criminal justice major compared to other academic majors. This scale included four items which, when combined, had possible scores ranging from 4-24. The actual sample scores ranged from a minimum of 5 to a maximum of 21, with a mean of 13.41 and a standard deviation of 2.85. This indicates a normal distribution with scores in the mid-range of the scale (Figure 2).

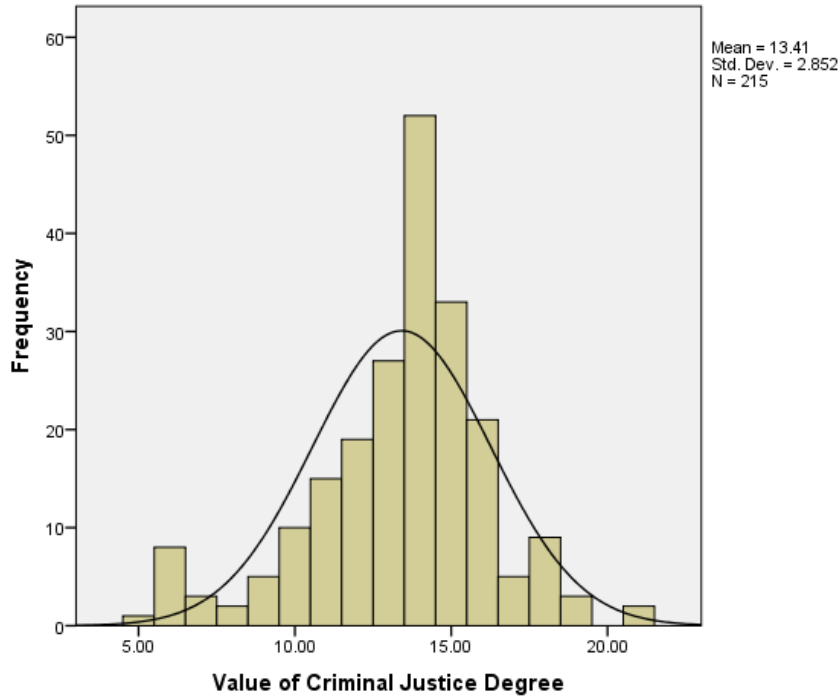


Figure 2. Value of criminal justice degree

### Research Question 1

Research Question 1: Is there a significant difference in the perceived value of higher education between male and female police officers? Three null hypotheses were associated with this research question:

$H_{01}$ : There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the general attitude toward higher education dimension on the value of higher education survey between male and female officers.

H<sub>012</sub>: There is no significant difference in mean scores of the perceived utility of a criminal justice or criminology degree dimension on the value of higher education survey between male and female officers.

H<sub>013</sub>: There is no significant difference in mean scores of the career-related competencies dimension on the value of higher education survey between male and female officers.

A series of independent samples *t*-tests were used to determine if differences in the mean scores of the above value of higher education dimensions could be attributed to the officers' gender. There was not a significant difference in the general attitude toward higher education for male officers ( $M=21.09$ ,  $SD = 5.33$ ) and female officers ( $M = 21.17$ ,  $SD = 5.02$ );  $t(212) = .073$ ,  $p = .942$ , 95% CI [-2.39, 2.22]. Therefore, null hypothesis H<sub>011</sub> was retained. In summary, there is no evidence that the general attitude toward higher education is significantly different between male and female officers. Figure 3 shows the distribution for the two groups.

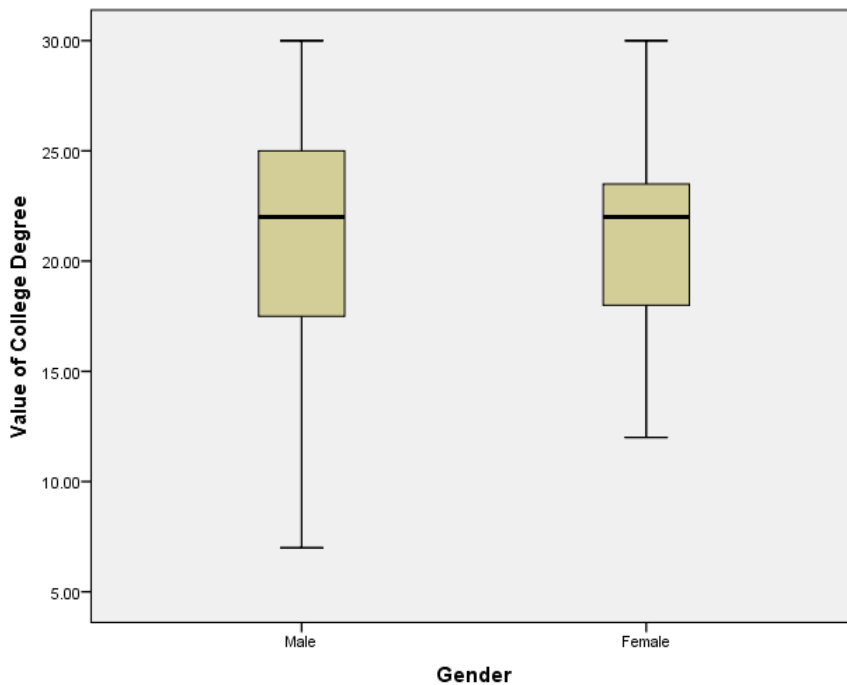


Figure 3. Value of higher education for male and female officers

There was not a significant difference in the perceived utility of a criminal justice degree between male officers ( $M = 13.32$ ,  $SD = 2.83$ ) and female officers ( $M = 14.43$ ,  $SD = 2.54$ );  $t(212) = 1.789$ ,  $p = .075$ , 95% CI = [-2.32, 0.11]. Therefore, null hypothesis  $H_{012}$  was retained. There is no evidence that the perceived utility of a criminal justice degree is significantly different among male and female officers. Figure 4 shows the distribution for the two groups.

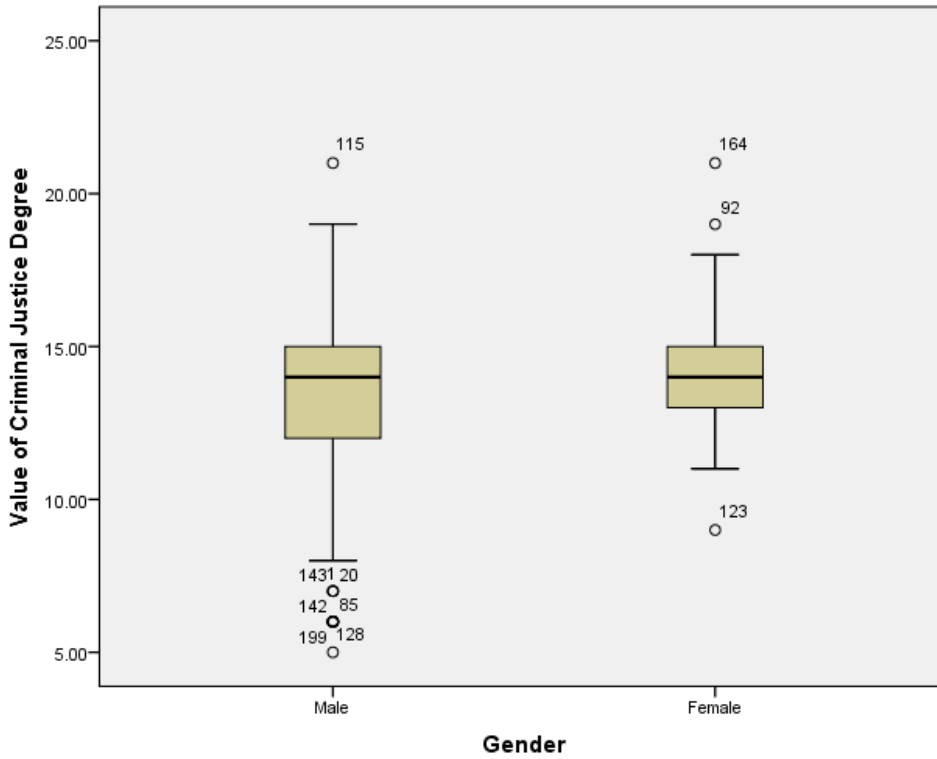


Figure 4. Value of criminal justice degree for male and female officers

Finally, there was not a significant difference in importance of career-related competencies between male officers ( $M = 82.23$ ,  $SD = 9.84$ ) and female officers ( $M = 85.36$ ,  $SD = 8.84$ );  $t(204) = 1.43$ ,  $p = .155$ , 95% CI = [-7.47, 1.20]. Therefore, null hypothesis  $H_{013}$  was retained. In summary, there is no evidence that there is a significant difference among perceived importance of career-related competencies for males and females. Figure 5 shows the distribution of the two groups.

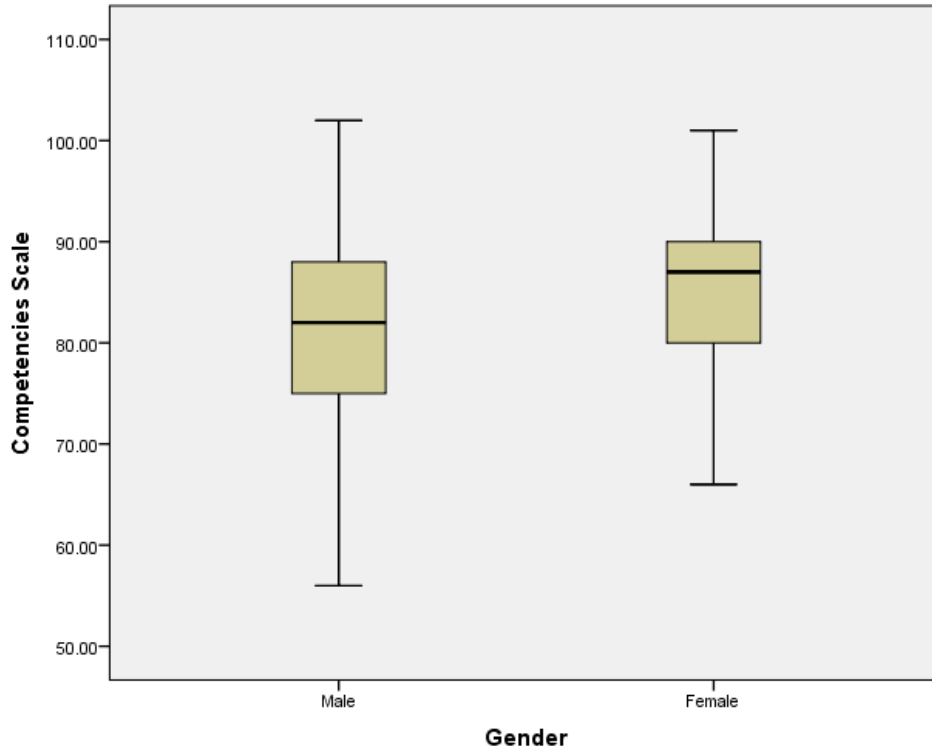


Figure 5. Importance of career-related competencies for male and female officers

### Research Question 2

Research Question 2: Is there a significant relationship between the perceived value of higher education and the age of respondent? Three null hypotheses were associated with this research question:

$H_{01}$ : There is no significant relationship between the mean scores of the general attitude toward higher education dimension on the value of higher education survey and age of respondent.

$H_{02}$ : There is no significant relationship between the mean scores of the perceived utility of a criminal justice or criminology degree dimension on the value of higher education survey and age of respondent.



H<sub>023</sub>: There is no significant relationship between the mean scores of the career-related competencies dimension on the value of higher education survey and age of respondent.

A Pearson *r* correlation was conducted on each of these null hypotheses to evaluate the relationship between the respondents' age and their perceived value of higher education across these three dimensions. The Pearson coefficient between age and general attitude toward higher education revealed a positive correlation that was not significant  $r(208) = .073, p = .298$ .

Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. In summary, there is no evidence based off this data that the respondents' age impacted their general perceived value of higher education. Figure 6 shows a scatterplot of the two variables.

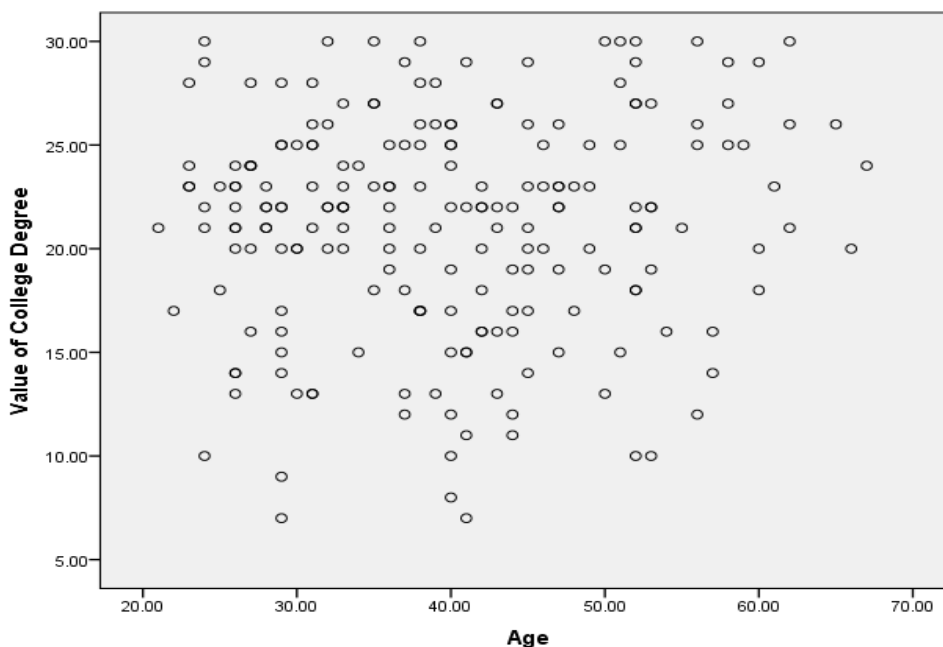


Figure 6. Value of higher education vs. age

The Pearson coefficient between age and a criminal justice degree revealed a positive correlation that was not significant  $p(208) = .011, p = .876$ . Thus, the null hypothesis was retained. In summary, there is no evidence based off this data that the respondents' age impacted

their perceived value of a criminal justice degree. A scatterplot summarizes the results (Figure 7).

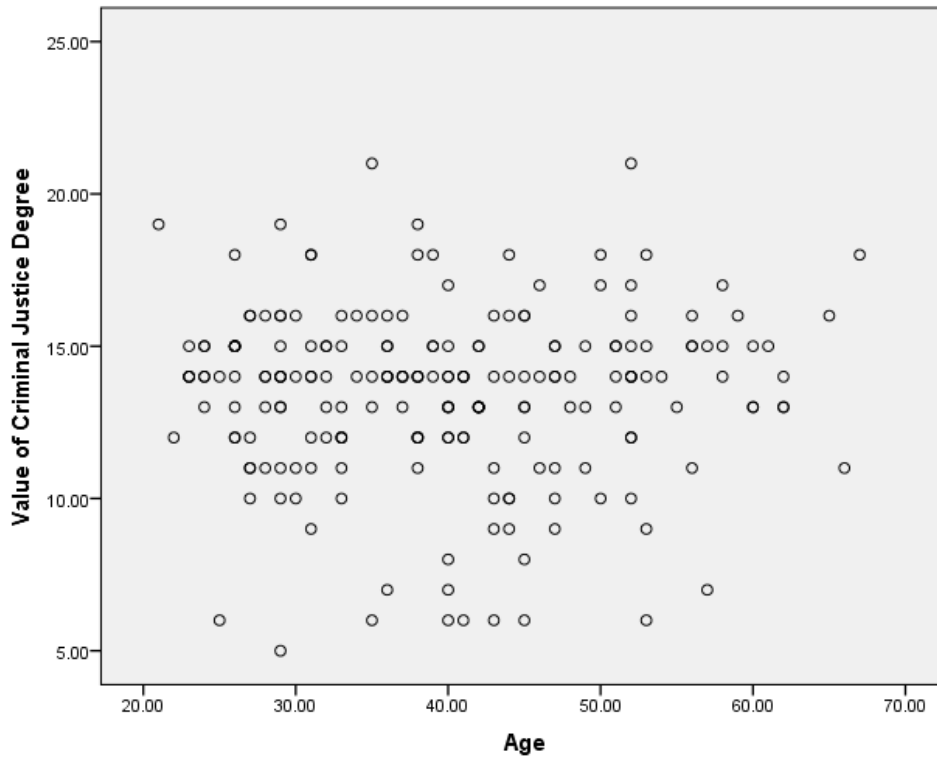


Figure 7. Value of criminal justice degree vs. age

Finally, the Pearson coefficient between age and career-related competencies revealed a positive correlation that was not significant  $r(208) = .091, p = .200$ . Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. Based off this data, there is no evidence that the respondents' age impacted their perceived value of career-related competencies. Figure 8 summarizes the results.

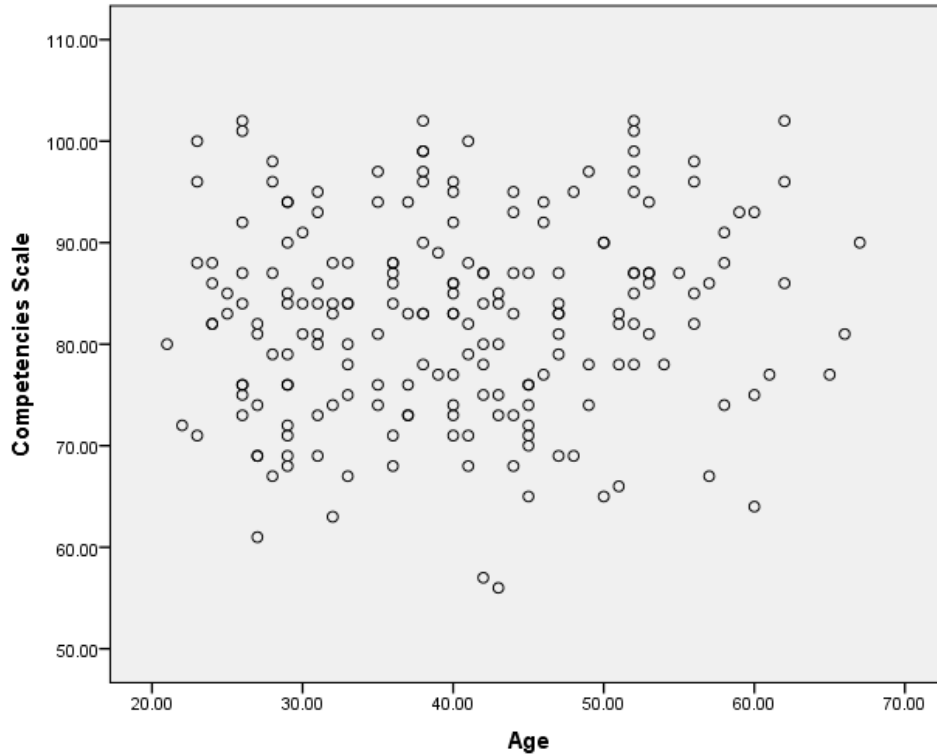


Figure 8. Importance of career-related competencies vs. age

### Research Question 3

Research Question 3: Is there a significant difference in the perceived value of higher education among the police officers' level of education? Three null hypotheses were associated with this research question:

H<sub>031</sub>: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the general attitude toward higher education dimension on the value of higher education survey among the levels of education of officers.

H<sub>032</sub>: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the perceived utility of a criminal justice or criminology degree dimension on the value of higher education survey among the levels of education of officers.

H<sub>03</sub>: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the career-related competencies dimension on the value of higher education survey among the levels of education of officers.

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the relationship between the general attitude toward higher education and the officers' level of education. The officers' level of education had three levels: high school diploma, some college, or completed bachelor's degree or higher. The ANOVA was significant,  $F(2, 212) = 14.35, p < .001$ . Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. The strength of the relationship between the general attitude toward higher education and officers' level of education, as assessed by  $\eta^2$ , was moderate (.12).

Because the overall  $F$  test was significant, post hoc multiple comparisons were conducted to evaluate pairwise difference among the means of the three groups. A Tukey procedure was selected for multiple comparisons because equal variances were assumed. There was a significant difference in the means between officers who had a completed bachelor's degree and those with a high school diploma ( $p < .001$ ) as well as those officers with some college but no completed bachelor's degree ( $p < .001$ ). However, there was not a significant difference ( $p = .653$ ) between the officers who had a high school diploma and those who had completed some college but not a bachelor's degree. Officers with a completed bachelor's degree have more positive perceived general attitudes toward higher education compared to officers with a high school diploma or some college but not a completed bachelor's degree. The 95% confidence intervals for the pairwise differences, as well as, the means and standard deviations for the three education groups, are reported in Table 3.

Table 3

*Value of Higher Education among Three Education Groups*

Education Groups	N	M	SD	High school diploma	Some college
High school diploma	25	18.56	5.79		
Some college	89	19.56	4.89	-3.69 to 1.68	
Bachelor's degree	101	22.97	4.95	-7.06 to -1.76	-5.13 to -1.68

A one-way analysis of variance was also conducted to evaluate the relationship between perceived value of a criminal justice degree and the officers' level of education. The officers' level of education had three levels: high school diploma, some college, or completed bachelor's degree or higher. The ANOVA was not significant,  $F(2, 212) = 2.55, p = .081$ . Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. The strength of the relationship between officers' level of education and the perceived value of a criminal justice degree, as assessed by  $\eta^2$ , was small (.02). The results indicate that the officers' perceived value of a criminal justice degree was not affected by their level of education. The means and standard deviations for the three groups are reported in Table 4.

Table 4

*Value of Criminal Justice Degree among Three Education Groups*

Education Groups	N	M	SD
High school	25	14.12	1.76
Some college	89	12.92	2.98
Bachelor's degree	101	13.67	2.85

Finally, a one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the relationship between the perceived value of career-related competencies and the officers' level of education. The officers' level of education had three levels: high school diploma, some college, or completed bachelor's degree or higher. The ANOVA was not significant,  $F(2, 204) = .030, p = .971$ . Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. The strength of the relationship between officers' level of education and the perceived value of career related competencies, as assessed by  $\eta^2$ , was small ( $<.001$ ). The results indicate that the officers' perceived value of career-related competencies was not affected by their education levels. The means and standard deviations for the three groups are reported in Table 5.

Table 5

*Value of Career-Related Competencies among Three Education Groups*

Education Groups	N	M	SD
High school	24	83.04	12.93
Some college	85	82.64	9.85
Bachelor's degree	98	82.50	8.90

#### Research Question 4

Research Question 4: Is there a significant difference in the perceived value of higher education among the types of police agencies? Three null hypotheses were associated with this research question:

$H_{04_1}$ : There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the general attitude toward higher education dimension on the value of higher education survey among the types of police agencies.

H<sub>042</sub>: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the perceived utility of a criminal justice or criminology degree dimension on the value of higher education survey among the types of police agencies.

H<sub>043</sub>: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the career-related competencies dimension on the value of higher education survey among the types of police agencies.

A series of independent samples *t*-tests were used to determine if differences in the mean scores of the above dimensions could be attributed to the type of agency which the officer was employed. There was a significant difference in the general attitude toward higher education for officers employed in county agencies ( $M = 19.21, SD = 5.33$ ) and officers employed in municipal agencies ( $M = 21.99, SD = 5.10$ );  $t(213) = 3.74, p < .001, 95\% CI [-4.26, -1.32]$ . Therefore, null hypothesis H<sub>041</sub> was rejected. Officers employed in municipal agencies have a significantly higher mean perceived value of higher education compared to officers employed in county agencies (Figure 9).

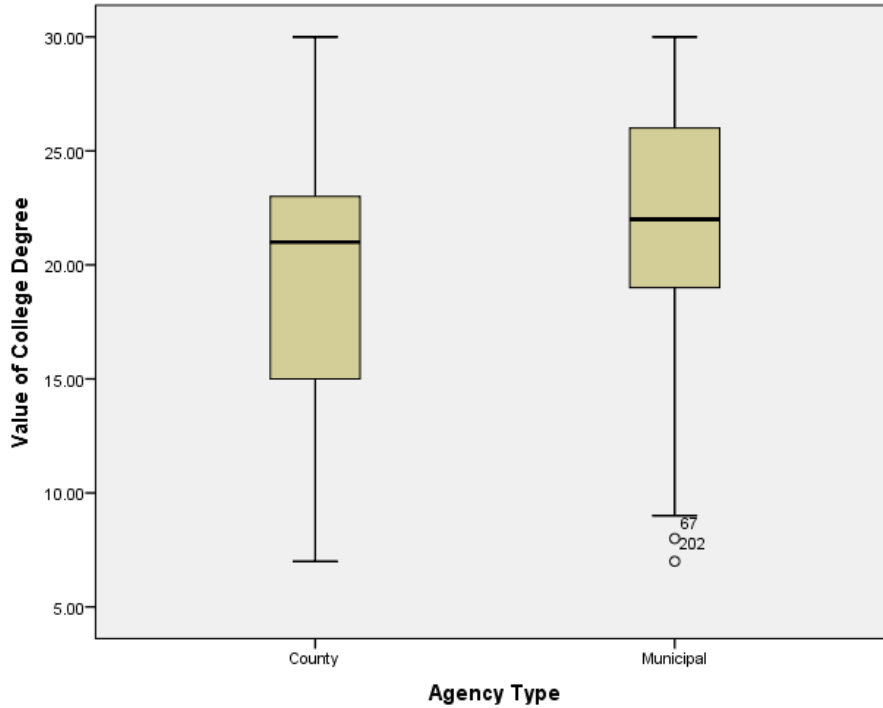


Figure 9. Value of higher education for municipal and county officers

There was not a significant difference in the perceived value of a criminal justice degree for officers employed in county agencies ( $M = 13.77$ ,  $SD = 2.88$ ) and officers employed in municipal agencies ( $M = 13.23$ ,  $SD = 2.83$ );  $t(213) = 1.304$ ,  $p = .194$ , 95% CI = [-0.27, 1.34]. Therefore, null hypothesis  $H_{04_2}$  was retained. The results indicated that the perceived value in a criminal justice degree is not affected by the type of agency in which the officer is employed. Figure 10 shows the distribution for the two groups.



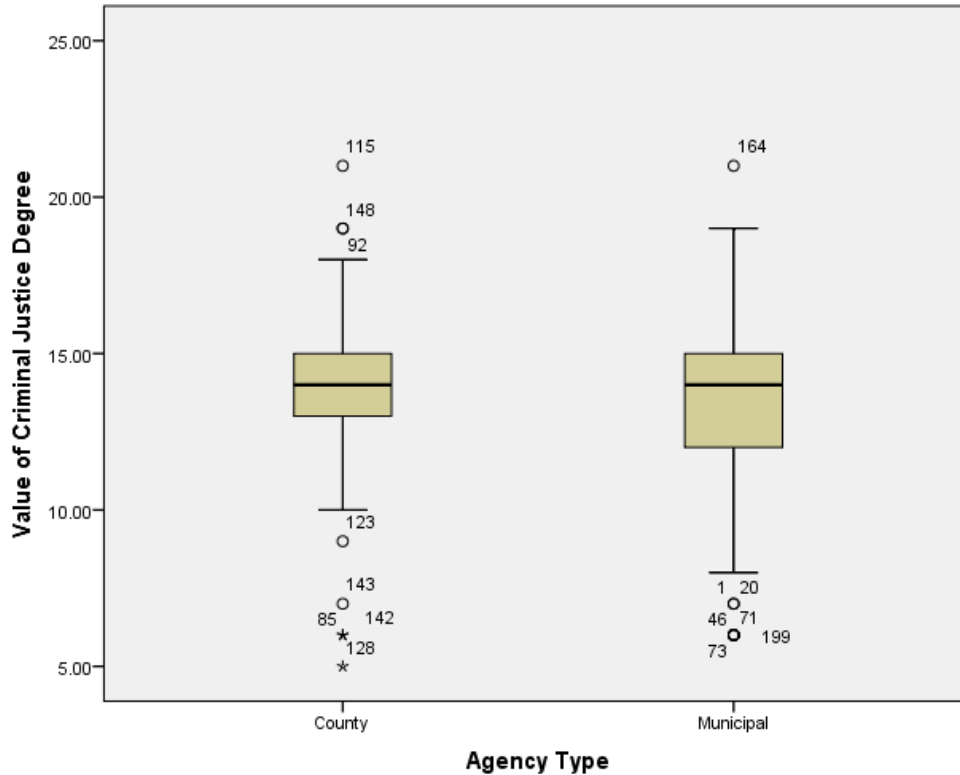


Figure 10. Value of criminal justice degree for municipal and county officers

Finally, there were not a significant difference between perceived value of career-related competencies for officers employed in county agencies ( $M = 83.07$ ,  $SD = 9.69$ ) and officers employed in municipal agencies ( $M = 82.39$ ,  $SD = 9.85$ );  $t(205) = .472$ ,  $p = .638$ , 95% CI = [-2.17, 3.53]. Therefore, null hypothesis  $H_{043}$  was retained. Officers employed in county and municipal agencies tended to have the same perceived value of career-related competencies. Figure 11 shows the distribution between the two groups.

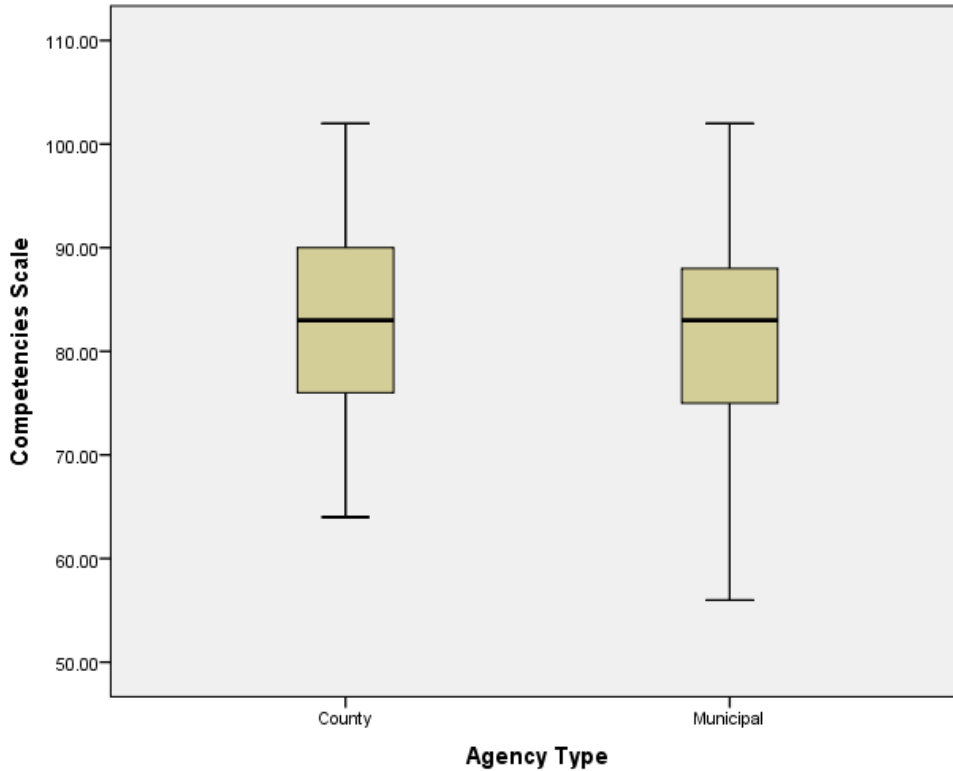


Figure 11. Value of career-related competencies for municipal and county officers

### Research Question 5

Research Question 5: Is there a significant difference in the perceived value of higher education between police officers who attained a college degree with a major in criminal justice and police officers who attained a college degree with a major in some other discipline? Three null hypotheses were associated with this research question:

$H_{05_1}$ : There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the general attitude toward higher education dimension on the value of higher education survey between police officers who attained a college degree with a major in criminal justice and police officers who attained a college degree with a major in some other discipline.

H<sub>052</sub>: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the perceived utility of a criminal justice or criminology degree on the value of higher education survey between police officers who attained a college degree with a major in criminal justice and police officers who attained a college degree with a major in some other discipline.

H<sub>053</sub>: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the career-related competencies dimension on the value of higher education survey between police officers who attained a college degree with a major in criminal justice and police officers who attained a college degree with a major in some other discipline.

A series of independent-samples *t* tests were used to determine if differences in the mean scores of the above dimensions could be attributed to the officers' academic major. There was not a significant difference in the general attitude toward higher education for officers who received a criminal justice related degree ( $M = 22.53, SD = 4.80$ ) and officers who received a bachelor's degree in a different discipline ( $M = 23.58, SD = 4.81$ );  $t(89) = 1.03, p = .308, 95\% CI [-3.10, 0.99]$ . Therefore, null hypothesis H<sub>051</sub> was retained. There is no evidence that the general attitude toward higher education was impacted by the officer's academic major. Figure 12 shows the distribution for the two groups.

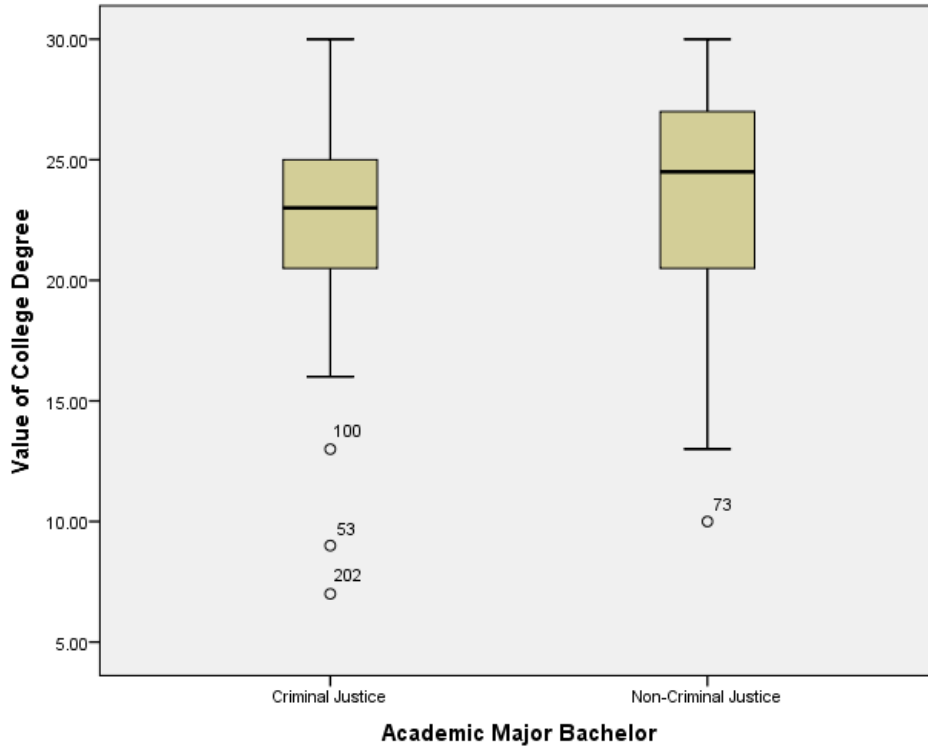


Figure 12. Value of higher education by academic major

Likewise, there was not a significant difference in the perceived utility of a criminal justice related degree for officers who received a criminal justice related degree ( $M=13.98$ ,  $SD=2.70$ ) and officers who received a bachelor's degree in a different discipline ( $M= 13.19$ ,  $SD= 2.85$ );  $t(89) = 1.33$ ,  $p = .186$ , 95% CI [-3.87, 1.96]. Therefore null hypothesis  $H_{05_2}$  was retained. There is no evidence that the respondents' perceived value of a criminal justice degree was impacted by the officer's academic major. Figure 13 shows the distribution for the two groups.

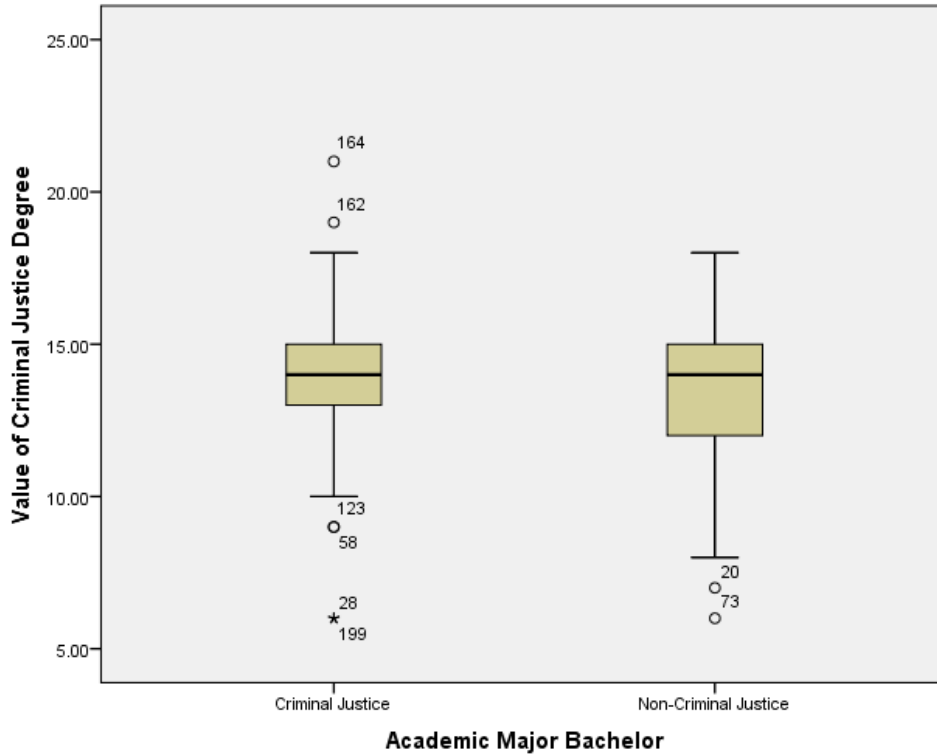


Figure 13. Value of criminal justice degree by academic major

Finally, there was not a significant difference in the importance of career-related competencies between officers who received a bachelor's degree in criminal justice ( $M=83.28$ ,  $SD = 7.86$ ) and officers who received a bachelor's degree in another discipline ( $M=83.51$ ,  $SD = 8.97$ );  $t(86) = .128$ ,  $p = .899$ , 95% CI [-3.83, 3.37]. Therefore, null hypothesis  $H_{05_3}$  was retained. There is no evidence that the respondents' perceived value of career-related competencies was impacted by the officers' academic major. Figure 14 shows the distribution for the two groups.

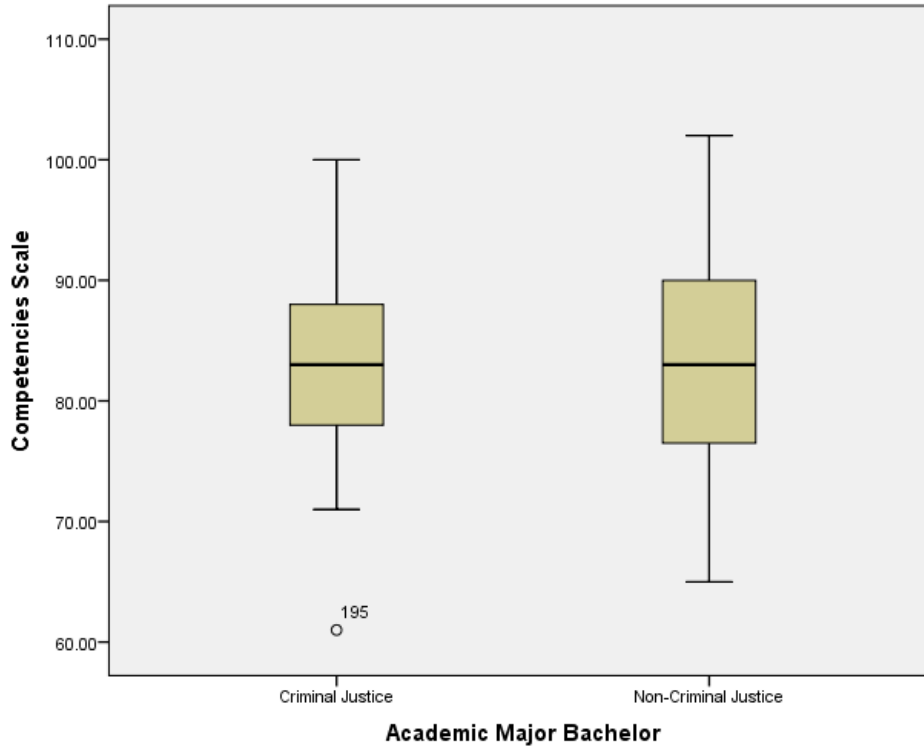


Figure 14. Value of career-related competencies by academic major

### Research Question 6

Research Question 6: Is there a significant relationship in the perceived value of higher education based on the years of service as a police officer? Three null hypotheses were associated with this research question:

Ho6<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between the mean scores of the general attitude toward higher education dimension on the value of higher education survey and years of service as a police officer.

Ho6<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant relationship between the mean scores of the perceived utility of a criminal justice or criminology degree dimension on the value of higher education survey and years of service as a police officer.

Ho<sub>63</sub>: There is no significant relationship between the mean scores of the career-related competencies dimension on the value of higher education survey and years of service as a police officer.

A Pearson  $r$  coefficient was conducted on each of these null hypotheses to evaluate the relationship between the respondents' years of service and their perceived value of higher education across these three dimensions. The Pearson  $r$  coefficient between years of service and general attitude toward higher education revealed a positive correlation which was not significant  $r(215) = .022, p = .754$ . As a result, the null hypothesis was retained. The results suggest that number of years of service does not affect the general perceived value of higher education.

Figure 15 shows a scatterplot of the two variables.

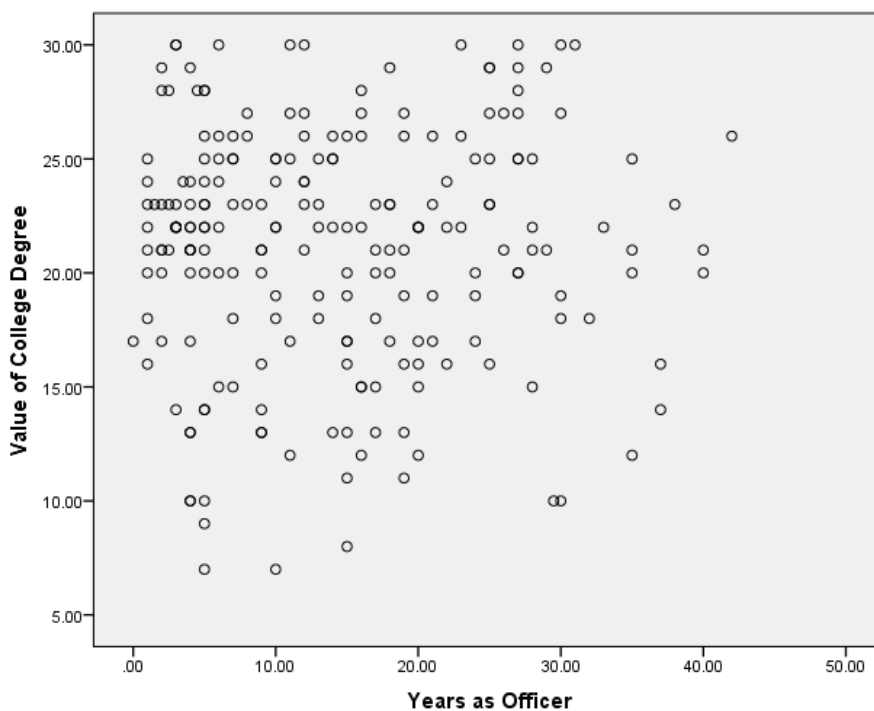


Figure 15. Value of higher education vs. years of service

The Pearson  $r$  coefficient between years of service and the perceived value of a criminal justice degree revealed a negative correlation which was not significant  $r(215) = -.024, p = .725$ .

As a result, the null hypothesis was retained. The results suggest that the number of years of service does not affect the perceived value of a criminal justice degree. Figure 16 shows a scatterplot of the two variables.

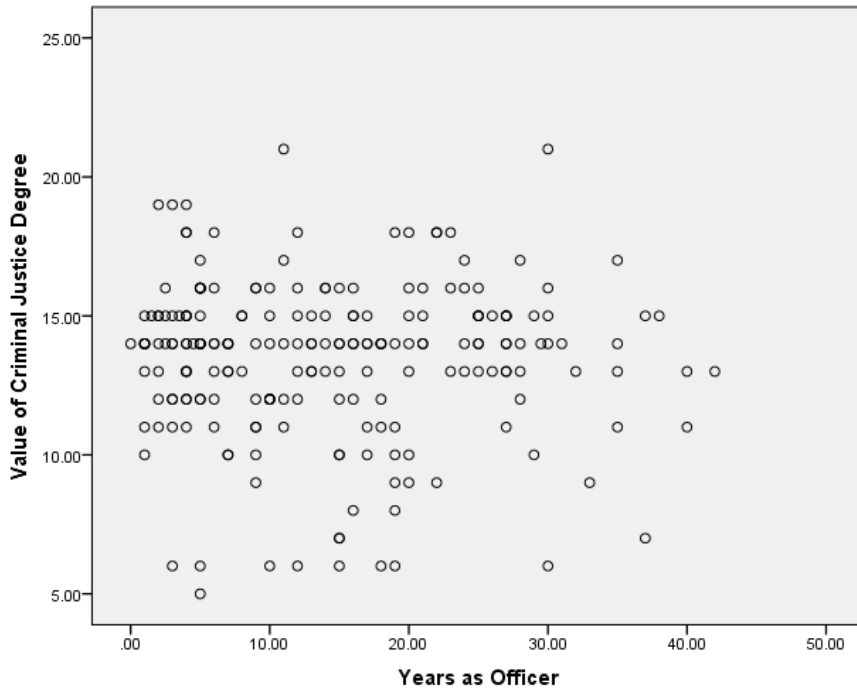


Figure 16. Value of criminal justice degree vs. years of service

Finally, the Pearson  $r$  coefficient between years of service and career-related competencies revealed a positive correlation which was not significant  $r(215) = .062, p = .376$ . As a result, the null hypothesis was retained. The results suggest that the perceived value of career-related competencies is not affected by the number of years of service. Figure 17 shows a scatterplot of the two variables.



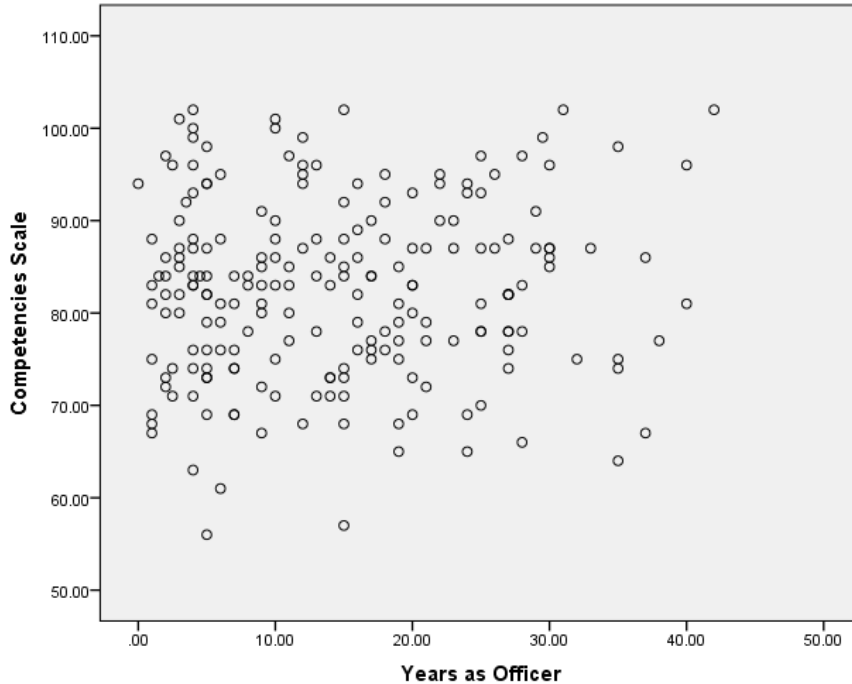


Figure 17. Value of career-related competencies vs. years of service

### Research Question 7

Research question 7: Is there a significant difference in the perceived value of higher education based on the officer's job duty? Three null hypotheses were associated with this research question:

H<sub>071</sub>: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of the general attitude toward higher education dimension on the value of higher education survey and the officer's job duty.

H<sub>072</sub>: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of the perceived utility of a criminal justice/criminology degree dimension on the value of higher education survey and the officer's job duty.

Ho7<sub>3</sub>: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of the career-related competencies dimension of the value of higher education survey and the officer's job duty.

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the relationship between the general attitude toward higher education and the officers' job duty. The officers' job duty had three levels: administration/support, investigations, and patrol. The ANOVA was not significant,  $F(2, 193) = .910, p = .40$ . Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. The strength of the relationship between officers' job duty and the general perceived value of higher education, as assessed by  $\eta^2$ , was small (.01). The results indicate that the officers' general attitude toward higher education was not affected by their job duty. The means and standard deviations for the three job duties are reported in Table 6.

Table 6

*Value of Higher Education among Three Job Duties*

Job Duties	N	M	SD
Administration/support	34	22.29	5.04
Investigations	38	21.29	5.57
Patrol	124	20.94	5.09

A one-way analysis of variance was also conducted to evaluate the relationship between the perceived value of a criminal justice degree and the officers' job duty. The officers' job duty had three levels: administration/support, investigations, and patrol. The ANOVA was not significant,  $F(2, 193) = 0.76, p = .469$ . Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. The strength of the relationship between officers' job duty and the perceived value of a criminal justice

degree, as assessed by  $\eta^2$ , was small (.01). The results indicate that the officers' perceived value of a criminal justice degree was not affected by their job duty. The means and standard deviations for the three job duties are reported in Table 7.

Table 7

*Value of Criminal Justice Degree among Three Job Duties*

Job Duties	N	M	SD
Administration/support	34	13.82	2.85
Investigations	38	13.00	2.78
Patrol	124	13.41	2.83

Finally, a one-way analysis of variance was also conducted to evaluate the relationship between the perceived value of career-related competencies and the officers' job duty. The officers' job duty had three levels: administration/support, investigations, and patrol. The ANOVA was not significant,  $F(2, 186) = 1.32, p = .269$ . Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. The strength of the relationship between officers' job duty and the general perceived value of higher education, as assessed by  $\eta^2$ , was small (.01). The results indicate that the officers' perceived value of career-related competencies was not affected by their job duty. The means and standard deviations for the three job duties are reported in Table 8.

Table 8

*Value of Career-Related Competencies among Three Job Duties*

Job Duties	N	M	SD
Administration/support	34	83.76	8.63
Investigations	36	80.47	10.34
Patrol	119	83.12	9.45

Research Question 8

Research Question 8: What changes to the higher education curriculum are perceived by police officers to improve the preparedness of students who wish to enter the law enforcement field? This research question was measured via an open-ended question on the data collection instrument. A total of 117 respondents answered this question. Responses were coded to determine the themes present in the responses. Several responses included more than one suggestion. In these instances, each suggested was coded individually. As a result, a total of 141 responses were coded.

Two of these respondents simply wrote that no changes were needed. Additionally, 19 respondents used this question to discuss the perceived shortcomings of college without directly providing suggestions for improvement. An example of this type of response was: “the only advantage to having a degree, of any type, in law enforcement, is a few extra points on a promotion exam. There is no other advantage to obtaining a degree. No extra money or benefits.” Others who responded with no suggested improvements wrote that experience was more important than a college degree. For example, one respondent made the following statement:

A good officer is motivated, ethical, and thinks critically. Everything to learn is available on duty and experience is usually a better teacher than prior instruction. Application is normally far more complex than classroom instruction can prepare one for. Even what is taught at the academy must be re-learned in the environment where one works...

There was a clear perception by these respondents that a classroom experience cannot prepare students for the job of a police officer.

The remaining responses to this question described a wide range of possible improvements to the curriculum. Table 9 provides a description of these responses. By far, the most common specific improvement provided by respondents was the need for increased hands on experience or internships. A total of 46 respondents, (41% of those who answered), specifically mentioned this as a desired improvement to the college curriculum. Many of these respondents wrote that field experience and/or ride-alongs with police officers should be required. An example of this response was:

More field work, internships. Often times class work does not depict what an officer actually goes through. Media and sometimes classwork gives false ideas of what the job of a police officer actually entails. It's not NCIS, which is what many people think when getting into this line of work.

Table 9

*Suggested Curriculum Improvements*

Suggested Improvement	Number of Responses
Hands-on experience/internships	46
Instructors with experience as officers	11
Improved writing communication	10
Interpersonal communication	9
Less focus on criminological theory	8
Increased problem-solving	5
More technology	4
More emphasis on law	3
Online availability	3
Common sense	3
Officer safety instruction	2
Psychology coursework	2
Racial/cultural diversity	2
Miscellaneous	12

The next most common theme related to the importance of colleges hiring instructors with prior experience as law enforcement officers. An example of this response was “faculty with experience as a law enforcement officer would be better equipped to relate course materials to real life experiences that law enforcement officers face on a daily basis.” Another respondent wrote “when I got my degree, the two professors I learned the most from were a retired police

officer and an ex-convict. I would recommend hiring instructors/professors with prior experience that can relate the material to practical law enforcement situations.”

Improved writing and interpersonal communication skills were also cited as possible improvements. Regarding writing skills, one police administrator wrote “many applicants for the position of police officer do not possess the writing skills necessary to excel in the profession. College graduates are not an exception to this shortcoming. Higher education should include classes focused on improving writing skills.” Regarding interpersonal skills, one officer wrote “we desperately need officers that can talk to members of the public, their supervisors, etc.”

One current curriculum area which was most often specifically mentioned in a negative manner was criminological theories. One police officer’s comment that “a bachelors degree should focus on practical methods that can be used for an entry level job in the field. Leave the theoretical and research stuff for graduate students” seemed to be reflective of this theme. Another officer wrote “the degree programs are lots of theory with little practical application”. Yet another wrote “more hands on techniques rather than theories need to be taught. This theme seems to relate to the previous suggestion by several officers to provide a more hands on experience during college.

Several other themes were mentioned by more than one of the respondents. These include: increased problem-solving, more technology, more emphasis on law, suggestions for online course offerings, the need to teach “common sense”, increased attention to psychology concepts, racial/cultural diversity, and officer safety instruction. It is important to mention that the suggestions for online course offerings represented two competing viewpoints. Specifically, two of the respondents advocated for increased online offerings. One officer pointed out that many officers wish to continue their education “but cannot commit to being available to attend

classes scheduled. There are several individuals who are attending private colleges (much more expensive) due to the convenience rather than attend ETSU. I would really like to see that change.” However, another officer wrote that she would like to see less online work. As she put it, “the professor is part of the education.” Finally, 12 suggested improvements were mentioned only once or otherwise did not fit one of the previous categories. Examples of these responses include: more discussions related to emotional integrity, the difference between real life police work and the media portrayals of the job, and the effects that the policing job can have on your family. A complete list of the miscellaneous suggested improvements is provided in Table 10.

Table 10

*Miscellaneous Curriculum Improvements*

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Suggested Improvement
Generational differences
Emotional integrity
Basic operations classes
More two year options rather than four year programs
More physics courses
More science scenarios in hands on
Ability to evolve to current events
Search/seizure class
Impact that profession can have on family
Focus on distinguishing between real life outcomes and television depiction
Increased focus on community policing
Stress management

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### Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 presented analysis for the 8 research questions contained in this study. Initial results showed that respondents ranked several career-related competencies to be important to the successful career of a police officer. The general perceived value of higher education and the perceived value of a criminal justice degree were both fairly normally distributed. Findings included significant differences in the perceived value of higher education among college graduates and those who were employed by municipal police departments. Respondents also provided valuable insight to the possible improvements to the college curriculum which might make a college education more valuable. Chapter 5 will contain a summary of the findings, implications regarding these results, and recommendations for further study.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of higher education among sworn police officers in Northeast Tennessee. The study focused on examining officers' perceptions of the general value of higher education, the specific value of a criminal justice-related degree, and the importance of several career-related competencies. Additionally, the study examined whether these perceptions varied based on the officers' gender, age, level of education, academic major, years of service, job duty, and the type of police department for which they were employed. Finally, this study asked officers to provide suggestions for changes in the higher education curriculum which they would perceive as improving the preparedness of students wishing to enter the law enforcement field. Summary, conclusions, and recommendations for future research are detailed in the following sections.

#### Summary

Approximately 1% of local police departments in the United States require their entry-level officers to have a four-year degree (Reaves, 2015). Despite this lack of educational requirement, many police officers attend college classes or obtain a degree either before they enter the workforce or at some point during their career (Gardiner, 2015). The research questions related to this study aimed to fill several voids in the existing research related to whether certain officer-specific characteristics might impact support for higher education.

Research Question 1 sought to examine whether there was a significant difference in the perceived value of higher education between male and female officers. The sample was overwhelmingly male (88.9%) compared to female (10.6%). This distribution was somewhat

expected. Nationwide, approximately 12.2% of sworn officers are female (Reaves, 2015). However, the percentage of female officers is related to the size of the police department. The greatest proportions of female police officers are employed in the largest police departments. For example, females represent 16.7% of police officers in police departments which serve populations of over 250,000 persons. Conversely, females represent only 10.8% of police officers in departments serving a population size of between 50,000 and 250,000 (Reaves, 2015). The police departments represented in this study are generally smaller departments serving populations between 50,000-150,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Results did not indicate a significant difference in any of the three null hypotheses associated with this research question. Based on these results, it does not appear that males and females differ in their levels perceived value of higher education.

Research Question 2 examined whether any significant relationship exists in the perceived value of higher education based on the officers' age. The mean age of respondents in this study was 39.87 years, with officers ranging from 21-67 years old. Results did not indicate a significant difference in any of the null hypotheses associated with this research question. In other words, it does not appear that age significantly impacts an officer's perceived value of higher education. This contradicts Hilal et al.'s (2013) finding that younger officers were more likely to support increasing the minimum educational requirement.

Research Question 3 sought to determine whether any significant differences exist in the perceived value of higher education based on the officers' level of education. Three levels of education were examined: high school diploma, some college, or a completed bachelor's degree or higher. Results indicated a significant difference between officer level of education and general attitude toward higher education. Officers with a completed bachelor's degree was

found to have a more positive perceived general attitude of higher education compared to officers with a high school diploma or who had completed some college but not a completed bachelor's degree. This result supports previous findings that have found officers with a Bachelor's degree were more likely to aspire to enroll in future higher education coursework and support increasing the level of education required to be a police officer (Breci, 2997; Hilal et al., 2013). However, results from this study indicated that an officer's level of education was not significantly associated with the value of a criminal justice-related degree or the perceived value of career-related competencies.

Research Question 4 examined whether the type of agency that a police officer was employed influenced the officers' perceived value of higher education. Results indicated a significant difference in the general attitude toward higher education. Specifically, officers employed in municipal agencies had a significantly higher mean score on the general perceived value of higher education scale compared to officers employed in county agencies. Results also indicated there is no significant difference in the type of police agency and the perceived value of a criminal justice degree or the importance of career-related competencies.

Research Question 5 examined whether any significant differences in the perceived value of higher education exist based on an officer's academic major. Specifically, officers with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice were compared to officers with a bachelor's degree in any other field. Results indicated there is no significant difference between officers' academic major and their perceived value of higher education on any of the three dimensions. This contradicts Carmen et al. (2006) which found that officers who held a degree in criminal justice held a more positive image of the criminal justice field when compared to officers with degrees in other academic fields.

Research Question 6 examined whether any significant relationships exist in the perceived value of higher education based on the officers' years of service as a police officer. Results failed to find a significant relationship in any of the null hypotheses associated with this research question. In other words, years of service does not appear to significantly impact an officer's perceived value of higher education. This contradicts Brecki's (1997) finding that officers with the least experience are more likely to aspire to enroll in higher education courses.

Research Question 7 asked whether any significant differences exist in the perceived value of higher education based on the officers' job duty. The job duties examined were: administration/support, investigations, and patrol. Results indicated there are no significant differences between the officers' job duty and the general perceived value of higher education. Likewise, results also indicated there is no significant difference between the officers' job duty and the perceived value of a criminal justice degree. Finally, results indicated there is no significant difference between the officers' job duty and the importance of career-related competencies. The police officers' job duty did not significantly impact their perceived value of higher education. This contradicts the finding by Hilal et al., (2013) that patrol officers and front line supervisors were more likely to support an initiative to increase the minimum education requirement for police officers.

Research Question 8 asked respondents for suggestions to the higher education curriculum that would improve the preparedness of students who wish to enter the law enforcement field. Of those respondents who provided a suggestion for improvement, the most common response was to increase students' opportunity for hands on experience and/or internships. Interestingly, increased field experience and internships were also the most common curriculum suggestions given by law enforcement officers in Barry's (1978) classic study. The

next most common suggestions were instructors with experience as law enforcement officers, improved writing and interpersonal communication, and less focus on theoretical material. Finally, many respondents used this question as an opportunity to express the perception that higher education is inadequate for preparing individuals for a career in law enforcement.

### Conclusions

A major finding of this study was the mixed evidence regarding the perceived value of higher education. Officers indicated an overall positive perception of the career related competencies included on the questionnaire. In fact, the mean score of each career-related competency was above the midpoint of the scale. These questions roughly correspond to the certification standards of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (2016). Accordingly, one would reasonably expect the mean values on the general value of higher education and the value of a criminal justice degree scales to be more positively skewed than the results from this study showed. Respondents saw value in the career-related competencies (e.g., understanding ethical practices, problem solving skills) but many did not seem to see the higher education setting as a sufficient setting to learn these competencies.

This study found that officers with a completed bachelor's degree had significantly more positive perceptions regarding the general value of higher education compared to officers with either a high school diploma or who had completed some college but had not completed a bachelor's degree. This result provides some evidence that those officers who have obtained a bachelor's degree perceive there to be a benefit to their education. However, the finding that officers with some college experience did not significantly differ on their perceived value of higher education compared to those who had earned a high school diploma but no college

experience suggests that the college degree must be completed in order for officers to perceive this education to be valuable. Importantly, it should be pointed out that neither the perceived value of a criminal justice degree or the importance of career-related competencies was significantly related to the officers' level of education. In fact, no significant findings were observed in this study regarding the impact of any independent variable being significantly related to the perceived value of a criminal justice degree or the importance of career-related competencies.

Another major finding of this study was the significant difference in the general perceived value of higher education between officers employed by municipal agencies compared to their county agency counterparts. Officers employed by municipal departments were more likely to recommend someone interested in law enforcement to obtain a degree, perceived the degree as being important to obtaining a job and receive promotions, and be more optimistic that the degree would provide skills needed for an officer to perform their job better. Given the scarcity of research involving county police departments and the important differences between the agency's responsibilities (Liederbach & Frank, 2006; Weisheit et al., 2006), this finding is an important contribution to the existing literature.

## Recommendations

### Recommendations for Practice

Based on the results of this study, two recommendations for practice are suggested:

1. Require internships as part of the criminal justice curriculum. When participants were asked for suggestions to the higher education curriculum, the prominent theme was to increase hands-on experience and internships. Requiring an internship would provide an

opportunity for the institution to address the perceived need for hands-on experience while also providing this benefit to the students interested in other career paths.

2. Recruit current police officers to continue their education. Nearly one-third of the officers included in this study reported having attained some college but had not completed either an associate's or bachelor's degree. Unfortunately, the current study could not determine whether respondents dropped out of college to begin their career, or alternately, have taken college courses since becoming employed in their current positions. Thus, it is likely that at least some of the respondents in this survey are interested in continuing their education. As such, this is an important potential recruiting pool for colleges, who should make an attempt to increase the accessibility of their courses for those with full-time jobs. This could be done by increasing the availability of online courses and/or evening courses. As shown in this study, the completion of a degree might improve the perception of a college education.

### Recommendations for Future Research

The current study was focused on the perceived value of higher education among five small to medium sized police departments in Northeast Tennessee. Therefore, the results are not generalizable to larger departments, or departments outside of the Northeast Tennessee region. However, additional research into this topic is important to improve the educational system's responsiveness to the needs of the police workforce. Specific recommendations include:

1. Replicate this study using a larger sample size from a more diverse population. It is likely that expanding this study to a broader geographical region would improve the generalizability of the findings.



2. Study populations of professionals from a variety of criminal justice-related careers. As a criminal justice academic major attracts students interested in many career paths, a comparison of perceptions between professionals employed in the law enforcement, corrections, and courts would better gauge the perceived value of a criminal justice degree. For example, Garland and Matz (2017) recently examined the perceived importance of certain competencies among a sample of community corrections practitioners. This line of research should continue and ultimately be expanded to other careers in the institutional corrections and legal fields.
3. Further explore the important differences between officers employed by municipal agencies compared to county agencies. Additionally, it would be useful to expand this examination to state police, highway patrol, and/or federal law enforcement agencies. Each of these agencies has a unique role in the criminal justice system and may have different perceptions of a college degree.
4. Conduct more in-depth qualitative studies involving the perceived value of higher education among law enforcement officers. Unfortunately, there is a scarcity of qualitative studies in this line of research. The increased availability of qualitative data could help provide better insight into the perceptions of higher education and/or the possible improvements to the curriculum.

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## APPENDIX Instrument

Thank you in advance for your help and participation in this research. As a police officer, you are in a unique position to evaluate the value of higher education among police officers as well as the proper curriculum to be taught at institutions of higher education. This information may be used to strengthen curriculum for future students interested in a policing career.

Please answer each question accurately and to the best of your ability. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are under no obligation whatsoever to participate in this study. Do not complete this questionnaire if you feel coerced or unduly pressured to do so. After you have completed the questionnaire, you can mail the completed survey to me in the self-addressed, stamped envelope provided.

It should take approximately 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Do not put your name or any other identifying marks on this questionnaire. All of the data will be kept confidential and anonymous. In other words, there will be no way to connect your name with the responses.

The results of this study will be used for my dissertation to fulfill the requirements for a Doctor of Education degree at East Tennessee State University. The results of this study may be published or presented at professional conferences. If this were to occur, no individual officers or police departments will be mentioned by name.

If you have any questions regarding the study, please feel free to contact me via email at [edwardsb@etsu.edu](mailto:edwardsb@etsu.edu) or call me at (423) 946-5454. I am also available in my office at 201G Rogers Stout Hall on the campus of East Tennessee State University. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and would like to talk to someone independent of the research team or can't reach the study staff, you may call an IRB coordinator at (423) 439-6055 or (423) 439-6002.

<p>1. What is your age?  _____ years</p>
<p>2. What is your gender?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Male                      <input type="checkbox"/> Female</p>
<p>3. Approximately how long have you been employed as a law enforcement officer?</p> <p>_____ years</p>
<p>4. Which of the following best describes the type of police department which you are currently employed?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> County</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Municipal</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> State Patrol</p>
<p>5. What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Less than high school diploma</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> High school diploma or equivalent (e.g., GED)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Some college but no degree</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Completed Associate degree  Academic major_____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Completed Bachelor degree  Academic major_____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Completed Graduate degree  Academic major_____</p>
<p>6. Which of the following best describes your primary job duty?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Patrol</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Investigations</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Administration/Support</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other</p>

7. What level of formal education do you feel should be required to be hired into your current position?

- No educational requirement
- Some high school
- High school diploma or GED
- Associate degree
- Bachelor degree
- Graduate degree

Please indicate how important the following skills are to the job of a police officer. Rate the importance on the following scale where 1 means not important at all and 6 means very important.

8. Writing Skills	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. Understanding basic concepts of criminal law	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. Knowledge of law enforcement practice	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. Verbal Communication Skills	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. Understanding ethical practices	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. Understanding theories that attempt to explain criminal behavior	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. Time management skills	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. Knowledge of the juvenile justice system	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. Understanding racial issues as they pertain to the criminal justice system	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. Using computer technology	1	2	3	4	5	6
18. Understanding gender issues	1	2	3	4	5	6
19. Knowledge of basic investigation techniques	1	2	3	4	5	6
20. Knowledge of forensic science	1	2	3	4	5	6
21. Understanding of basic research methods	1	2	3	4	5	6
22. Problem solving skills	1	2	3	4	5	6
23. Knowledge of community corrections	1	2	3	4	5	6
24. Knowledge of institutional corrections	1	2	3	4	5	6

Indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements by circling the number that best represents your opinion of the value of higher education.

1 = Agree Strongly	2 = Agree	3 = Somewhat Agree	4 = Somewhat Disagree	5 = Disagree	6 = Disagree Strongly	
25. I would recommend, to anyone interested in becoming employed in my position, to seek a college degree.	1	2	3	4	5	6
26. A college degree will assist a police recruit in obtaining a job in my department.	1	2	3	4	5	6
27. I feel that higher education provides skills needed for an officer to perform his/her job in a more effective manner.	1	2	3	4	5	6
28. I feel that a college degree will assist police officers in receiving promotions within the department.	1	2	3	4	5	6
29. Having a bachelor's degree, when compared to those with less education, would be advantageous in understanding/implementing problem-solving strategies.	1	2	3	4	5	6
30. I would recommend, to anyone interested in becoming employed in my current position, to seek a Bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice rather than any other discipline.	1	2	3	4	5	6
31. Having a Bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice, as opposed to a Bachelor's degree in another discipline, would allow an officer to perform his/her job in a more effective manner	1	2	3	4	5	6
32. I feel that most Criminal Justice classes at the undergraduate level will teach me what I already know about the criminal justice system.	1	2	3	4	5	6
33. Having a Bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice, when compared to a Bachelor's in any other discipline, will not be as advantageous in understanding/implementing problem-solving strategies.	1	2	3	4	5	6

34. Given your experience as a law enforcement officer, what changes to the higher education curriculum would improve the preparedness of students who wish to enter the law enforcement field?



## VITA

### BRADLEY DOUGLAS EDWARDS

- Education: East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee; Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership, 2017
- East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee; Master of Arts in Criminal Justice and Criminology, 2006
- East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee; Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice and Criminology, 2004
- Professional Experience: Lecturer, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN, 2009-Present
- Adjunct Faculty, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN, 2008-2009
- Graduate Assistant, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN, 2005-2006
- Publications: Edwards, B. & Braswell, M. (2015). Corporate misconduct and ethics. In Braswell, M., McCarthy, B. & McCarthy, B. (Eds.). *Justice, Crime and Ethics* (9th ed., pp. 395-419). Newark, NJ: Anderson.
- Travis, L. & Edwards, B. (2015). *Introduction to criminal justice* (8th ed.). Newark, NJ: Anderson.
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Whitehead, J., Dodson, K. & Edwards, B. (2012). *Corrections: Exploring crime, justice and punishment in America* (3rd ed.). Newark, NJ: Anderson.

Honors and Awards:

Recognition for Outstanding Service to the Criminal Justice Society, East Tennessee State University, 2012

Outstanding Thesis Award, East Tennessee State University, 2008

Outstanding Graduate Student Award, East Tennessee State University, 2007

Outstanding Graduate Student Service Award, East Tennessee State University, 2006