

North Carolina Basic Law Enforcement Training: A Comparative Analysis

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Executive Summary

The quality and amount of training that law enforcement officers receive can have a direct impact on their ability to correctly and appropriately enforce the law. This study explores different aspects of North Carolina's Basic Law Enforcement Training, the required training all recruits must complete to become a certified law enforcement officer. These aspects are compared to the basic training programs of neighboring states as well as literature on law enforcement training. This comparison produced several recommendations that may strengthen or improve North Carolina's Basic Law Enforcement Training, including mandated field training and an expanded entrance exam.

Introduction

Law enforcement officers are an integral part of our society. They are at our schools, on our highways, and in our communities. Their constant presence is a reminder of the general police power, the power and ability to regulate behavior and enforce lawful order, which is reserved to each state. Each officer undergoes extensive training at the beginning of and throughout his/her career to ensure that he/she enforces the laws in the correct manner. This training is imperative, as the ability to enforce laws correctly corresponds to the quality of training that law enforcement officers receive.

However, the importance of training was not always understood. Not until the late 1950s did states begin to establish training boards or commissions. Currently, all states have some form of law enforcement training or standards institution and 47 states have legislation requiring minimum training standards for new officers. However, since each state's approach to government differs, it is not surprising that there is a wide variation in minimum standards, possibly resulting in a variation in the quality of law enforcement. Additionally, as the newer community policing model has gained momentum in the last few years, training standards and requirements have never been more important.

This capstone focuses on the adequacy of North Carolina's basic law enforcement training requirements and standards and whether they have kept pace with the increasingly complex and ever changing role of law enforcement. The purpose of this research is to generate recommendations for North Carolina's Basic Law Enforcement Training (BLET). This paper begins with a literature review and program descriptions of basic law enforcement training in the surrounding states of the southeastern region. After the methodology is discussed, the following section provides the findings and recommendations for improvement. It concludes with a brief summary on implementation.

Literature Review

Recruit basic training programs are a fundamental component in assuring that law enforcement behavior is both professional and efficient, as well as accepted and respected by the public (Traut & Thom 2000; Sharp, 1997). The requirements of the different basic training programs will vary, creating differing levels of officer preparedness. This difference begins with the initial acceptance into a basic training program (Satterfield, 1985). Some programs require civil service exams, physical endurance tests, or basic abilities tests (Harris, 1973; Walker, 2005).

The length of basic training programs also varies by state. In 2006 the national median for state mandated training hours was just shy of 600 hours (Rojek, 2007). Well-trained recruits receive about 800 hours of basic training (Edwards, 1993; Hickman, 2002). Modern basic training programs also must give attention to innovative teaching methods, instructional diversity, and test development and validation (McGreedy, 1983). Teaching methods should include role playing, in-field exercises, case studies, and use of technology to complement the traditional lecture method. (Holmes, 1992; Ness, 1991; Wilson, 1992). Training programs affiliated with a college can provide greater diversity of expertise and training (McGreedy).

Additionally, as the role of law enforcement has shifted towards community policing, basic training must also shift to ensure officers have skills in verbal and written communication, negotiation, conflict resolution, and public relations, skills integral to effective community policing (Birzer, 1999; Codish, 1996; Frost and Seng, 1984). However, Bradford (1999) revealed that basic training programs put a low priority on problem solving and interpersonal skills development, and Peterson (1997) noted that research and analysis skills are lacking from law enforcement training curricula. Another integral part of preparing officers for duty is field

training. Wilson and McLaren (1972) suggested that a field training program should be included in recruit basic training in order to provide a smooth transition from classroom theory to street application.

Perhaps even more vital to recruit basic training is the evaluation of its success. Police training programs should be regularly reviewed and evaluated so that changes to curriculum and requirements are not made in a subjective, piecemeal fashion (Traut & Thom).

State Training Program Descriptions

The program information contained in this section was gathered through a four-step process: (1) Discover the commission/council in charge of each state's law enforcement training standards; (2) review each state's code/regulations in order to find promulgated standards and mandatory requirements; (3) review commission/council associated websites for further applicable standards/requirements; and (4) contact training officials for information not publicly available.

North Carolina

The Criminal Justice Education and Training Standards Commission establishes minimum educational and training standards for law enforcement officers.¹ Recruits must complete the BLET, which must be at least 620 hours, in order to be certified.² Currently, North Carolina does not have a mandated field training requirement, leaving field training up to employing agencies. The Commission incorporates into the NC Administrative Code the Basic Law Enforcement Training Course Management Guide and Training Manuals.³ These guides outline the required curriculum, training objectives, lesson plans, audio-visual aids, and practical exercises.⁴ Emphasis is placed on the use of audio-visual components as well as the use of the required practical exercises. As far as testing requirements, the Commission first requires that recruits achieve a 10th grade reading level on a reading comprehension test.⁵ Then, during the BLET, recruits are administered topic tests and must receive a minimum 70 percent score to pass.⁶ After completion of the BLET, recruits must receive a 70 percent score on a written, comprehensive exam, created and administered by the Commission.⁷

West Virginia

The Law Enforcement Training Program (LET) oversees the training and certification of law enforcement officers in West Virginia.⁸ To become certified recruits must receive a minimum of 800 hours of basic training, with field training being left up to the agency where the recruit is or will be employed.⁹ The essential functions and training objectives of the training program are included in West Virginia's rules and regulations.¹⁰ In order to demonstrate mastery of the training objectives, recruits must score at least a 75 percent on the written skills examinations administered during the program.¹¹ There is no required teaching style in West Virginia.

Maryland

The Police Training Commission regulates the training of law enforcement officers and establishes minimum training standards.¹² Each recruit is required to complete an entrance-level training program that is a minimum of 750 hours.¹³ Each recruit also is required to complete a field training program which must be at least 80 hours.¹⁴ Maryland also requires that certain Commission-created training objectives are taught and tested.¹⁵ To become a certified law enforcement officer, each recruit has to achieve a minimum overall score of 70 percent in each subject area/performance objective as verified by testing. The training director of an academy is responsible for creating and administering this written test.¹⁶ While no particular type of teaching style is mandated, the entry level-training program, which the Commission directly administers, puts a strong emphasis on scenario-based learning and also incorporates community policing strategies.¹⁷

Virginia

The Committee on Training establishes compulsory training standards for certified law-enforcement officers.¹⁸ Virginia requires that recruits receive academy training totaling at least 480 hours, with an additional 100 hours of field training. Virginia incorporates into their administrative code a Lesson Plan Guide Manual.¹⁹ This manual outlines what objectives are to be taught and tested as well as desired performance outcomes. The Lesson Plan Guide also requires that different types of teaching activities are included – practical exercise, scenario-based, etc.²⁰ In order to complete the minimum training standards in Virginia, a recruit must satisfactorily complete the criteria by achieving a passing grade on the different tests administered during and after the program.²¹

South Carolina

South Carolina has a Law Enforcement Training Council that oversees training standards and training programs.²² This Council recently updated the training program in July of 2011. They now require a total of 480 hours, up from 360.²³ South Carolina also requires 160 hours of field training.²⁴ South Carolina also requires that recruits pass their written or performance-oriented tests by scoring 70 percent. Any failure to achieve these passage rates results in a dismissal from the Academy as no re-tests are given.^{25 26}

Georgia

The Peace Officer Standards and Training Council (POST) is vested with the power and duty to establish minimum training and curriculum standards.²⁷ Recruits must pass a job-related academy entrance exam before they can begin the required 408 hour basic law enforcement certification course.²⁸ There is no official field training requirement although agencies are encouraged to provide it.²⁹ The POST training manual outlines the required instructional goals, practical exercises, and performance examinations for the training course.³⁰ Periodic testing is required for certain subjects, comprehensive testing is optional and left up to the different training directors.³¹

Florida

The Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission establishes minimum training standards and requirements. Recruits must complete a 770 hour Basic Recruit Training Program.³² There is currently no mandated field training requirement for new recruits. The Commission's training manuals establish standards for the training curriculum such as performance outcomes, training objectives, as well as activities, scenarios, role-plays and 24 required practicums.³³ However, before a recruit can even begin the above described training program they must achieve a passing score on a basic abilities test.³⁴ After completing training, recruits must then pass the State Officer Certification Examination (SOCE) by scoring at least an 80%.^{35 36}

Methodology

In response to generating recommendations by which NC's BLET can be improved, a qualitative content analysis was used to compare NC's mandated BLET with standards of other states in the southeastern geographic region. This comparison focused on the following program aspects: total training hours, field training requirements, examinations required, inclusion of training objectives or performance outcomes, and required teaching style.³⁷ In addition to the qualitative analysis, NC's BLET and the six other state programs also were compared to established academic standards and benchmarks from the literature on law enforcement training. Due to the time required to compile information from all 50 states, this comparison has been limited to the states in the southeastern geographical region.

Findings and Recommendations

The NC BLET currently requires 620 hours of training. This puts North Carolina about in the middle for required hours in the Southeastern region, but just above the national median as it was in 2006 (Rojek). Additionally, even though there are many law enforcement agencies in North Carolina that implement their own field training programs, there is not a mandated field training requirement. Maryland, Virginia, and South Carolina have mandated field training.

Another important aspect of training is the instructional method. The BLET utilizes lesson plans with built in training objectives, audio-visual aids and, practical exercises for example. However, even though the mandated course guide says additional exercises can be designed to facilitate learning, little encouragement or emphasis is placed on their importance or creation. The benefit of using role-plays, scenarios, field exercises and case studies is well documented (McGreedy). Additionally, several of the states in the southeastern region mandate these type of activity based methods, including Virginia, Maryland, Georgia, and Florida. Florida places focuses on the use of practicums by mandating and publishing 24 extensive, required practicums which must be followed exactly as published. *See Appendix A for Practicum Descriptions*

One of the strengths of the NC BLET program is in the way that it is offered. Currently there are multiple and varied offerings of the BLET across North Carolina. They can be found in police departments, technical schools, community colleges and different agencies. While many states in the southeastern region only certify one school to deliver their approved training program, having multiple and varied offerings provides greater diversity of expertise and an overall better training experience.

As the role of law enforcement turns more towards community policing, recruits need to be trained and prepared for this new kind of policing. This requires training and development of problem solving and interpersonal skills. Most programs put a low priority on these cognitive skills, and the North Carolina BLET is no exception. The only subject area in the BLET that might address these skills is the Law Enforcement Communication Unit. This Unit, totaling 48 hours, includes topics such as Dealing with the Public, Ethics for Law Enforcement, and Communication Skills for Law Enforcement. *See Appendix B for BLET subject areas and hours required*

Some states test for a minimal level of these skills. Florida and Georgia require basic abilities or job skills entrance exams before a recruit can be admitted to that state's training program. These exams evaluate recruits for a basic ability to conduct job tasks, which include problem-solving skills and deductive reasoning capabilities, skills which are essential to effective community policing.³⁸ While there is a required entrance exam in North Carolina, it is only geared towards reading comprehension and only requires achieving a 10th grade reading level to pass.

Based on the results from this study, the following policy recommendations are offered:

- The Criminal Justice Education and Training Standards Commission should consider reviewing the total hours required currently required for the BLET. Although North Carolina is average to above average for total hours, the last time training hours were increased was in 2006. Since then several states in the southeastern region have increased total training hours. Also, the ever-changing role of law enforcement, including the shift towards community policing, makes the frequent review of standards and hours vital.
- Adding a mandated field training requirement for certification as a law enforcement officer should be considered. Field training provides a smooth transition from the training

program to the street and allows officers to apply learned knowledge in real situations. Many agencies already require new recruits to complete a field training program. All new officers can greatly benefit from this type of training.

- Updating the training curriculum to emphasize role-plays, scenarios, practicums, and field exercises will better engage and prepare new recruits for service. The benefits of these types of teaching methods are well documented and are known to better communicate the information, build confidence, and enhance problem solving techniques.
- Expanding the training curriculum to include training on interpersonal communication, problem solving, and public relations should be considered. Training on these topics will enhance the ability of officers to engage in community policing. These types of skills are vital to effective community policing as well as building rapport with the public.
- Expanding the required entrance exam so that it evaluates basic abilities and skills could prove beneficial. Currently the entrance exam for the BLET program is a reading comprehension test which a recruit must only achieve a 10th grade reading level to pass. An entrance exam that tests basic abilities and skills will serve as a better gauge of a recruit's capability to engage in community policing and handle the complex role of law enforcement. It could also serve as a predictor of the likelihood that a recruit succeeds in the BLET.

Conclusion

Law enforcement officers face an increasingly demanding and complex profession that necessitates quality personnel who are trained to handle a variety of problems. The BLET is the first and most important step in preparing new officers for duty and the complex demands they will be facing in North Carolina. As such, the BLET should be constantly updated in order to keep pace with the dynamic and ever changing role of law enforcement. The recent shift towards a community policy model in law enforcement makes the review and updating of training standards even more necessary and timely.

The North Carolina Criminal Justice Education and Training Standards Commission should consider, upon review of the recommendations identified from this research, implementing updates and changes to the BLET as well as any other requirements necessary to prepare new officers for duty. Another possibility would be for the Commission to seek review of the remainder of the states in order to determine if there are additional updates and components which could strengthen the BLET. In addition to looking to other states, the Commission should also stay abreast of developments in teaching methods so that new officers receive the training they need in the most efficient and effective manner possible. Placing an emphasis on these types of changes and updates will help North Carolina become a frontrunner in basic training.

Notes

¹ N. C. Gen. Stat. §17C-6 (2011)

² N.C. Admin. Code title 12 r. 09B.0205 (2011)

³ *Id.*

⁴ Found at <http://ncdoj.gov/About-DOJ/Law-Enforcement-Training-and-Standards/Criminal-Justice-Education-and-Training-Standards/Forms-and-Publications.aspx>

⁵ N.C. Admin. Code title 12 r. 09B.0203 - 0405

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.* at r. 09B.0405

⁸ W. Va. Code § 30-29 (2011)

⁹ W. Va. CSR §149-2-7 (2011)

¹⁰ *Id.* at §149-2-8.3

¹¹ *Id.* at §149-2-6

¹² Md. Public Safety Code Ann. § 3-202 to 218 (2011)

¹³ COMAR 12.01.01.09 (2011)

¹⁴ *Id.* at 12.04.01.21

¹⁵ *Id.* at 12.04.01.09, see also <http://www.mdle.net/resources.htm> for training objectives

¹⁶ *Id.* at 12.04.01.09 (e)

¹⁷ See <http://www.dpscs.state.md.us/aboutdpscs/pct/peltp/peltp.shtml>

¹⁸ Va. Code Ann. § 9.1-101 to 112 (2011)

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ Performance Outcomes, Training Objectives, Criteria and Lesson Plan Guides for Compulsory Minimum Training Standards for Law Enforcement Officers Manual, found at <http://www.dcjs.virginia.gov/standardsTraining/compulsoryMinimumTraining/officers.cfm>

²¹ 6 Va. Admin. Code 20-20-70 (2011)

²² S.C. Code Ann. § 23-23-80 (2011)

²³ South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy Website, found at <http://www.sccja.sc.gov>

²⁴ Per South Carolina Training Official

²⁵ Found in Basic Training Rules and Regulations Handbook, found at <http://www.sccja.sc.gov/6Forms/default.aspx>

²⁶ South Carolina does not make available many aspects of their required training. However, some information for this paper was gathered from phone conversations with training officials.

²⁷ Ga. Code Ann. § 35-8-7 (2011)

²⁸ *Id.* at § 35-8-8

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ *Id.*

³² Florida Admin. Code §11b-35.002

³³ *Id.*, Electronic copies of the manuals can be accessed at <http://www.fdle.state.fl.us/Content/>

³⁴ *Id.* at 11b-35.0011

³⁵ *Id.* at 11b-30.011

³⁶ <http://www.fdle.state.fl.us/Content/getdoc/23876cc7-251b-48a3-a00b-2188d6a9f607/Exam-Results.aspx>

³⁷ Teaching style includes lecture based, demonstration based, or scenario based teaching, etc.

³⁸ See the following webpages for further description of entrance exams:

[http://www.fdle.state.fl.us/Content/CJST/Menu/Officer-Requirements-Main-Page/Basic-Abilities-Test-\(BAT\).aspx](http://www.fdle.state.fl.us/Content/CJST/Menu/Officer-Requirements-Main-Page/Basic-Abilities-Test-(BAT).aspx); http://www.gapost.org/ee_info.html

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Appendix A

Florida Practicum Description

Found in the **Florida CMS Law Enforcement Basic Recruit Training Program**, available at <http://www.fdle.state.fl.us/Content>.

Instructions for Conducting Role-Play Practicum

- There are 24 practicums throughout the basic recruit training program. The purpose of the practicum is to allow the students to problem solve, practice, and learn. The practicum is not a test. Instructors should allow students to learn through trial and error. As students practice and observe, instructors should allow them to critique and correct their own behaviors.
- The primary focus of each practicum is listed in the desired outcomes. While each practicum provides an opportunity to introduce basic concepts, such as officer safety and radio communications, students should not be required to perform tactics and techniques they have not been previously taught.
- Instructors may enhance the role-play, but should not replace it with one of their own.
- A minimum of three different student officers will participate in each practicum. Throughout the program, instructors should encourage every member of their class to participate, noting those students who constantly volunteer and those more reluctant to take part in the practicum.
- Each role-play must be performed at least three times. As with a real life situation, factors within the role play should vary each time. For example, the victim may be complacent the first time and combative the next, or at the scene of a possible burglary the victim may describe a burglary the first time and a robbery the next. Notice in this example you are addressing a call to a burglary and emphasizing elements of the crime in both variations of the role-play.

To conduct the role-play practicum:

1. Privately brief the role-players on their roles.
2. Brief the student officer(s) and class on the situation and begin the role-play with the student officer(s)'s approach to the scene of the incident.
3. Continue the role-play until the desired outcomes are reached, or it is determined that the student officer(s) has given his or her best effort.
4. Ask the class for feedback on what the student officer(s) did well or could have done differently.
5. Ask the class questions related to the desired outcome with emphasis on issues such as officer safety, type of crime, and elements of the crime.
6. Ask the student officer(s) to provide his or her own feedback on their performance.
7. Select another student officer(s) and again brief the class on the situation.
8. Continue the role-play (the victim should vary behavior and facts of the incident from the initial role-play).
9. Gather feedback as in 4 through 6.
10. Select a third student officer(s) and brief the class on the situation.

11. Continue the role-play (the victim should vary behavior and circumstances of the incident from the initial roleplay).

12. Gather feedback as in 4 through 6.

Appendix B

12 NCAC 09B .0205 BASIC LAW ENFORCEMENT TRAINING

(a) The basic training course for law enforcement officers consists of instruction designed to provide the trainee with the skills and knowledge to perform those tasks essential to function in law enforcement.

(b) The course entitled "Basic Law Enforcement Training" shall consist of a minimum of 620 hours of instruction and shall include the following identified topical areas and minimum instructional hours for each:

(1)	LEGAL UNIT	
	(A) Motor Vehicle Laws	20 Hours
	(B) Preparing for Court and Testifying in Court	12 Hours
	(C) Elements of Criminal Law	24 Hours
	(D) Juvenile Laws and Procedures	10 Hours
	(E) Arrest, Search and Seizure/Constitutional Law	28 Hours
	(F) ABC Laws and Procedures	4 Hours
	UNIT TOTAL	98 Hours
(2)	PATROL DUTIES UNIT	
	(A) Techniques of Traffic Law Enforcement	24 Hours
	(B) Explosives and Hazardous Materials Emergencies	12 Hours
	(C) Traffic Crash Investigation	20 Hours
	(D) In-Custody Transportation	8 Hours
	(E) Crowd Management	12 Hours
	(F) Patrol Techniques	26 Hours
	(G) Law Enforcement Communication and Information Systems	8 Hours
	(H) Anti-Terrorism	4 Hours
	(I) Rapid Deployment	8 Hours
	UNIT TOTAL	122 Hours
(3)	LAW ENFORCEMENT COMMUNICATION UNIT	
	(A) Dealing with Victims and the Public	10 Hours
	(B) Domestic Violence Response	12 Hours
	(C) Ethics for Professional Law Enforcement	4 Hours
	(D) Individuals with Mental Illness and Mental Retardation	8 Hours
	(E) Crime Prevention Techniques	6 Hours
	(F) Communication Skills for Law Enforcement Officers	8 Hours
	UNIT TOTAL	48 Hours
(4)	INVESTIGATION UNIT	
	(A) Fingerprinting and Photographing Arrestee	6 Hours
	(B) Field Note-taking and Report Writing	12 Hours
	(C) Criminal Investigation	34 Hours
	(D) Interviews: Field and In-Custody	16 Hours
	(E) Controlled Substances	12 Hours
	(F) Human Trafficking	2 Hours
	UNIT TOTAL	82 Hours
(5)	PRACTICAL APPLICATION UNIT	
	(A) First Responder	32 Hours
	(B) Firearms	48 Hours
	(C) Law Enforcement Driver Training	40 Hours
	(D) Physical Fitness (classroom instruction)	8 Hours
	(E) Fitness Assessment and Testing	12 Hours
	(F) Physical Exercise 1 hour daily, 3 days a week	34 Hours
	(G) Subject Control Arrest Techniques	40 Hours
	UNIT TOTAL	214 Hours
(6)	SHERIFF-SPECIFIC UNIT	
	(A) Civil Process	24 Hours

	(B)	Sheriffs' Responsibilities: Detention Duties	4 Hours
	(C)	Sheriffs' Responsibilities: Court Duties	6 Hours
		UNIT TOTAL	34 Hours
(7)		COURSE ORIENTATION	2 Hours
(8)		TESTING	20 Hours
		TOTAL COURSE HOURS	620 Hours