Little Hoover Commission- Written Testimony
Applying Research to Police Academy Training
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The Department of Public Safety Standards and Training (DPSST) is Oregon's POST agency, setting training standards, delivering basic, intermediate, and advanced training, and certifying (and de-certifying) all public safety officers in the state. The Oregon DPSST is one of the few centralized academies in the United States, meaning we provide a single academy training site. All new officers come to this site to complete their basic training. DPSST provides standards and training for all police, corrections, parole and probation, telecommunication, and liquor/marijuana regulatory specialists.

Oregon Department of Public Safety Standards and Training Website:
https://www.oregon.gov/dpsst

Through the Criminal Justice Reform and Reinvestment Act in 2013 (see Appendix A), the Oregon legislature created the Center for Policing Excellence (CPE). CPE became a small unit within DPSST, tasked with training updated policing skills based on scientific research and promoting partnerships between researchers and criminal justice practitioners. The CPE makeup is a combination of public safety and civilian members, as displayed in Table 1.

Center for Policing Excellence Website: https://www.oregon.gov/dpsst/CPE

Historical Challenges with Police Academy Training

Academy training in the United States was initially developed as a means of policing reform by addressing police misconduct and increasing professionalism (Cordner & Shain, 2011). Today, police academy training is grounded in decades of tradition, often reflecting the same para-military structure and delivery styles from its inception. Today, we ask whether training has evolved to meet the complex needs of 21st century policing.

Lack of Research

There is a lack of research to inform us whether police training is effective (Lum et al., 2016). Research shows that most knowledge and skills learned in training programs (not just police training) do not transfer to the job (Grossman & Salas, 2011). With police training, we do not know if training transfers to the field or changes behaviors because we lack that data. Another data challenge is determining how to measure officer performance in a meaningful and objective way. Officer performance evaluations are often based on an encounter's outcome rather than the officer's actual behaviors (Vila et al., 2018).

While there is a gap in police training research, there is substantial research on learning and transfer that can be applied in an academy setting. Improving training calls for a thorough examination of the research on learning, retention, and transfer (Staller & Zeiser, 2018).

Additionally, there is research regarding measuring officer performance from researchers Dr. Brian Vila, Dr. Stephen James, and Dr. Lois James at Washington State University. These metrics measure micro-level details of what police do during encounters so we can assess the string of behaviors that constitute performance and affect the probability of a desired outcome (Vila et al., 2018). This research can be applied in the development of academy training and be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the training. These metrics became the foundation for the Basic Police Training Academy in Oregon.

Training Delivery

In the United States, the average length of academy training is 840 hours (Reaves, 2106). A significant amount of learning must occur during these hours. Creating meaningful learning under these conditions requires consideration of how information is processed by a learner and an understanding of how to develop higher-order thinking, among many other factors. How we structure and deliver this learning is critical in the management and effective utilization of cognitive load.

Research identifies the ineffectiveness of the block and silo training approaches traditionally used by academies (O'Neil et al., 2019). Lengthy classroom sessions and long repetitive blocks of skills training are not effective for learning (Kim et al., 2018; Verhoeven & Newell, 2018; Wu et al., 2011) and do not lead to long-term learning (Sanli & Carnahan, 2018). The traditional academy model of training knowledge and skills in independent silos rather than as part of a holistic framework is ineffective (O'Neil et al., 2019; Renden et al., 2015).

Since the first police training school, academy training has been typically delivered in a lecture format (Schafer & Jarvis, 2017), which holds true today (Rosembaum & Lawrence, 2017). While the use of lecture is efficient, it is not effective for developing critical thinking and problem solving (Chappell, 2008; Serini-Massinger & Wood, 2016; Staller & Zaiser, 2018; Vander Kooi & Bierlein Palmer, 2014; Vodde, 2012).

The literature does provide decades of research on effective learning principles that can be applied in an academy setting. Effective practices and principles include adult learning, active learning, cognitive load, retrieval practice, spaced/varied/interleaved practice, reflection, and effective feedback, among many others.

The Oregon Police Academy Revision

Process and Timeline

In 2015, the Center for Policing Excellence began discussing the creation a new basic police training academy. Because of our focus on applying research, we became interested in the work on measuring police performance by Dr. Stephen James and colleagues at Washington State University. In May 2016, we visited Dr. James in Spokane to learn more about their research.

In December 2016, DPSST contracted with Dr. James to partner with the CPE to develop a new basic police training academy that was grounded in research. The DPSST director supported the CPE's idea to build a new academy from the "ground up."

The CPE plan was to design the new 640-hour program in a series of phases. A diverse stakeholder workgroup would drive the development of each phase. DPSST released a notice seeking interested constituent participants. Interest came in from across the state, and members were selected to bring diverse perspectives to the discussion, including:

- Geographic diversity (metro, rural, western, eastern, southern)
- Agencies of various sizes (large, medium, small)
- A variety of agency types (municipal, county, state, tribal, university)
- Diversity among rank within an agency (chiefs, lieutenants, sergeants, patrol, field training officers)

In addition to the constituent perspective, the CPE sought perspectives from outside of public safety. The first workgroup of twenty-four members included four public members representing culturally diverse communities. Additionally, the workgroup included our research partner, Dr. Stephen James, three DPSST training staff, and three Center for Policing Excellence staff serving administrative functions.

In May 2017, the phase 1 development began. The workgroup focused on the goal of *preparing recruits for interacting with the community*. From a training development perspective, training (or curriculum) should be developed using a backward design. This refers to defining the outcomes and working backward to put practices in place to achieve the outcome. This contrasts with many practices that start with assigning an arbitrary number of hours for a topic and building training to meet those parameters.

To achieve the phase 1 goal, the officer performance metrics were mapped throughout the academy. For example, one performance metric is "non-verbally greeting the civilian." We mapped where this would be introduced in the academy, which determined where we could continue to build on it and where we could expect to see the behavior demonstrated in recruit performance.

Content-wise, phase 1 included an emphasis on emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-management, and empathy), interpersonal communication, legitimacy and procedural justice, ethics, implicit bias, decision making, and resiliency. Additionally, phase 1 introduced community elements, such as understanding diverse communities, recognizing the influence of historical conflict between police and marginalized communities, and working with the community.

We began to apply principles based on decades of research on learning to our training design. Most notably, we began to break up the traditional training blocks and replaced them with shorter, more frequent sessions. We created greater connectivity among courses and topics. We created opportunities for recruits to practice self-reflection. We provided training to the academy instructors on delivering training using research-based adult and active learning principles rather than traditional lecture and slide methodologies.

Due to the significance of these changes, preparation for implementation included addressing resistance to the changes. We hosted live webinars to explain the changes to constituent agencies. We hosted round table discussions with staff. We provided reassurance that we would provide any needed support.

Dr. James and his team began collecting data on recruit interactions with community members using a force options simulator. The researchers would code each simulation based on the police performance metrics. This baseline data would be used to evaluate the new training program.

We implemented phase 1 in February 2018 and immediately began the evaluation process. The informal evaluation included an audit of all training; we observed all training, and we collected feedback from staff, instructors, and recruits. During this time, we also monitored test scores and provided support to instructors regarding training delivery. In May 2018, the first cohort participated in the formal evaluation with Dr. James and the force option simulator.

Overlapping with the phase 1 evaluation, we began the development of phase 2. A second, diverse workgroup began in March 2018. Following the same process as the first phase, the phase 2 workgroup focused on the knowledge and skills officers need to *close a call*. This included understanding legal authority and exploring circumstances that make encounters and decision-making more complex. Phase 2 included procedural and criminal law, physical skills, behavioral health, de-escalation, use of force, and reality-based scenarios. Again, the officer performance metrics were mapped throughout the training.

A significant portion of phase 2 included a complete re-design of the scenario training component of the academy. Before the revision, recruits began participating in reality-based scenarios midway through training. In the new program, recruits begin participating in scenarios in their first week of training. Entirely new scenarios were drafted in collaboration with constituents and community members across the state. Scenarios were drafted based upon the most common calls for new officers. The police performance metrics were mapped across the scenarios, becoming outcomes and intentional points for feedback.

During the phase 2 development, we continued to break apart blocks of training, integrated concepts and pulled golden threads throughout. We mitigated resistance by leaning on change champions. We trained instructors in the new expectations and delivery methods for evaluating scenarios and providing effective feedback. We ended contracts with instructors who were not of the mindset or ability to deliver training in accordance with the expectations.

We implemented phase 2 in February 2019 and immediately began the evaluation phase.

In June 2019, we convened our third diverse workgroup to complete the basic police revision. Phase 3 focuses on criminal investigations, traffic-related topics, and any remaining miscellaneous topics. Phase 3 implementation was delayed due to COVID-19 and other complications. It is currently planned to go through the formal approval process, with an implementation goal of August 2021.

Program Evaluation

In June 2020, Dr. James released the curriculum evaluation of Phase 1. The evaluation assessed 187 performance metrics and compared the results to the baseline (pre-phase 1) data. The report identified a significant change in 43 metrics from baseline to post-phase 1 implementation. Dr. James' report states:

> Thirty-nine of these metrics' changes were positive and support the emphasis placed in the revised curriculum of procedural justice, crisis intervention, and better communication. However, four metrics recorded a decline in performance. This is also valuable information to help the curriculum development team and facilitators balance their curriculum and curriculum delivery.

Next Steps

In addition to implementing phase 3, future plans include continuing the program evaluation process with Dr. James and making adjustments based on this data to continue improving outcomes. Our wish list includes obtaining a learning management system that will enable us to better identify and support individual student competencies.

Our next steps will also include a complete revision of the Field Training Manual to align with the new basic program. Additionally, the Oregon legislature is currently considering a number of bills that could impact training, so our plans include incorporating any additional mandates. Of course, the program must always evolve to remain current and relevant to the needs of police and communities.

While our new model has greatly improved our focus on measurable officer behaviors, and this focus is now grounded in research-based performance metrics rather than tradition, opinion, or even a job task analysis, we still do not know if these behaviors are transferring from the training environment to the field. This is a gap in police training research that will require significant researcher-practitioner collaboration to fill.

Summary

Our experience has included unique features.

- The creation of the Center for Policing Excellence by the legislature established a group tasked with promoting research use.
- Our relationship and collaborations with academic researchers provide us the opportunity to generate and analyze our own data.
- Our stakeholder collaboration brought diverse perspectives to the development process.
- Our program design process was holistic, considering both content and delivery.
- Our holistic approach included building an entirely new academy, including new courses, activities, schedules, scenarios, assessments, resources, and more.
- We grounded our training in research rather than a job task analysis or opinion.

Table 1

Center for Policing Excellence Makeup

Curriculum/Instructor Development Team	Program Development Coordinator • Master's in Criminal Justice, pending doctorate in Organizational Change Learning and Performance Coordinator • Master's in Education
Behavioral Health Team	Behavioral Health Program Coordinators (2): • Retired sheriff deputy (1) • Licensed Clinical Social Worker (1) ▪ Master's in Social Work, clinically licensed in Oregon and Washington Cadre of part-time instructors • Pairs of law enforcement officers and mental health workers together
Leadership Team	Leadership Program Coordinator • Retired police chief Cadre of part-time instructors
Legitimacy/Statistical Transparency of Policing (STOP) Team	CPE Manager/STOP Coordinator • Former corrections deputy Criminal Justice Researcher • Master's in Interdisciplinary Studies: Anthropology, Human Physiology, and Statistics Cadre of part-time instructors

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Appendix A

Oregon HB 3194

OREGON CENTER FOR POLICING EXCELLENCE

SECTION 48. Section 49 of this 2013 Act is added to and made a part of ORS 181.610 to 181.712.

SECTION 49. (1) The Oregon Center for Policing Excellence is established within the Department of Public Safety Standards and Training.

(2) The primary purposes of the center are:

(a) To make policing in this state more effective and efficient by:

(A) Developing and promulgating updated skills in policing among officers, managers and administrators; and

(B) Making use of the body of knowledge of effective and efficient methods in the criminal justice system.

(b) To make communities safer.

(c) To reduce, through the use of police practices proven to be effective, the number of offenders entering the criminal justice system.

(3) To accomplish the purposes described in subsection (2) of this section, the center shall provide opportunities for:

(a) Practitioners to present actual problems to researchers in order to identify potential approaches to resolving the problems.

(b) Researchers to present to practitioners the results of research on effective and efficient methods of policing.

(c) Practitioners and researchers to form partnerships to test the effectiveness of practices and approaches.

(d) The development and delivery of training to public safety personnel in this state to enhance their skills related to:

 (A) Problem solving;

 (B) Leadership and facilitation;

 (C) Effective application and use of information from reputable research; and

 (D) Identifying and addressing future challenges affecting public safety.

(4) All agencies of state government, as defined in ORS 174.111, and local government, as defined in ORS 174.116, are directed to cooperate with the center in achieving the purposes described in subsection (2) of this section.

(5) The Director of the Department of Public Safety Standards and Training may adopt rules necessary to implement the provisions of this section

Oregon State Legislature Website:
https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2013R1/Measures/Overview/HB3194