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Preparing Police Recruits of the Future: An Educational Needs Assessment

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Executive Summary

On May 15, 2014, there were 68,896 police officers in Canada (Hutchins 2015). Of these, 26,148 police officers were working in the province of Ontario alone, a rate of 191 police officers per 100,000 population (ibid.). It is further estimated that the province of Ontario spends over $4 billion a year in policing costs (ibid.). This is a significant public investment, which, when coupled with an understanding of the social importance of the policing task, necessitates ensuring that police organizations in this province receive the highest quality of applicants. What do we mean by "highest quality"? Potential recruits who bring with them a complex understanding of the world, an ability to engage in critical and strategic thinking, problem solving skills, cultural competency, technology skills, the ability to work with different stakeholders and, increasingly, an understanding of research, data analytics, as well as policing models (Wilson et al. 2010). At present, approximately half of all police officers have completed college, CEGEP or some type of diploma or certificate program (Hutchins 2015). This number increases to 60% for recruits (ibid.). As retiring officers are replaced, we can expect the number of police officers with post-secondary education to increase.

Given increasing demand for post-secondary education (PSE) within provincial police applicant pools, it is of critical importance that we ensure that the content and quality of PSE programs marketed to students as appropriate for a policing career, does, indeed, match the needs of potential employers. Further, given the costly nature of not only public investments in policing, but in criminal justice education, ensuring these investments are sound - in that they are clearly tied to labour market needs - is an imperative.

To improve our understanding of the extent to which criminal justice education in Ontario aligns with the needs of police services in this province, we conducted a study that sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What forms of policing-related post-secondary education currently exist in Ontario for potential police recruits?

2. Are these programs suitable for the needs of police organizations given the operational and other demands they face?

To address these questions, we:

1. **undertook an environmental scan of all college and university-based programs marketed as suitable for potential police recruits;**
2. **conducted detailed interviews with 12 police recruiters and 21 senior police officers from 18 services across the province.**

Based on our analysis of the data collected, we offer the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Police Foundations and other applied college programs explore ways to avoid duplication of material that is taught at the Ontario Police College.

Recommendation 2: applied college diploma programs consider increasing their analytical content and engaging with students in activities that will enhance their critical reasoning skills.

Recommendation 3: that university-based degree programs implement skills-based course content that provides students with basic tools and skills related to the professional world, including effective communication, team work, leadership and ethics[1].

[1] As an example, PSE course designers might look to programs such as that offer at Bond University (Australia), where undergraduate degree students complete four such 'Core Skills" courses (Bartels, McGovern and Richards 2015).

Recommendation 4: the development of more college-university hybrid programs that combine practical, applied aspects of police work with broader skills and knowledge, such as critical thinking.

Recommendation 5: increase accessibility for students in northern and remote communities through the creation of quality online programs and/or programs that combine online course work with classroom instruction through short (1-2 week residency periods).

Recommendation 6: support for more external research on post-graduate outcomes for students seeking entry into policing and other criminal justice fields.

Recommendation 7: development of experiential learning modules that place students within different communities as a means of learning to respect and value diversity.

Recommendation 8: programs for criminal justice to also include a range of instructional methods, from e-learning and simulation/role play exercises to student placements, professional mentorships and internships.

Recommendation 9: program developers consult the Ontario and Police Sector Council competency models when designing curricula aimed at potential police recruits and that course developers consult the Ontario Police College and other training bodies before developing courses and materials that might overlap with recruit and in-service training.

Introduction

The nature of police work has been fundamentally altered as a result of the ever-increasing array of challenges police organizations face (Wilson et al. 2010). Officers today work within complex task and decision-making environments that may require them to have an understanding of not only basic police operations and administration, but also a panoply of different anti-crime strategies and policing technologies, including intelligence-led policing, problem-oriented policing, COMPSTAT models, evidence based policing, predictive analytics, as well as new forensic techniques and changes in criminal legislation and judicial decision-making. To the extent that police agencies in Canada increasingly recruit college and university graduates (Hutchins 2015), there is a critical need to evaluate the extent to which post-secondary educational programs for potential police recruits are meeting the operational requirements of police organizations (Wilson et al. 2010). What makes this need particularly acute is that police education has generally attracted little research attention (Neyroud 2011; Stanko and Dawson 2015). In 2016, on behalf of the Canadian Society of Evidence Based Policing (CAN-SEBP), one of the authors undertook a scoping review of the published Canadian policing research literature for the period of 2006-2015 (Huey 2016). What that review revealed is that over the preceding ten years, researchers had generated no published studies of Canadian police education. When the search was subsequently expanded to incorporate research from 2000-2005, she similarly did not find any published studies on Canadian police education. At best, she could only identify studies of university and college-based from overseas (Pagon et al. 1996; Telep 2011; Heslop and White 2011; Neyroud 2011) or unpublished (and thus non-peer reviewed), and in many cases, non-systematic reviews, of Canadian policing programs (Dale 2006; Public Safety Canada 2013; Battista 2014).

Police education pre-entry: Some background

In this section, we offer a brief overview of the relevant literature on college and university programs available to individuals seeking to enter the policing profession, and, perhaps most importantly, explore what the research literature has to say about the relative utility, if any, of these programs for police services. This review is followed by an examination of the concept of core competencies and the use of competency models in police recruiting, as well as the extent to which these models inform course design and content in academic programs.

Policing and criminology/criminal justice education

In Canada, as in the U.S. and several other countries, potential police recruits can take courses at colleges and universities featuring classes with policing and criminal justice content (Chappell 2015). These are typically offered in the form of two (diploma) to four year (degree) programs. Although these programs are marketed as being suitable for individuals seeking careers in criminal justice, we note that many college or university-educated individuals enter policing with general arts or science degrees (Bruns 2010).

To prepare new recruits for the challenges of policing and to ensure optimum utilization of police resources, some scholars, notably Flanagan (2008) and Neyroud (2011), favor pre-entry schemes. Such programs require students to earn an undergraduate degree along with acquiring the basic and practical knowledge of policing. Such schemes, it is said, would not only provide adequate educational and practical exposure to the recruits but will also reduce the cost of future police training (Christopher 2015; see also Carter and Sapp 1992). Others hold a sharply different view. In a recent publication, Perry Stanislas (2015: 61) asserted that "despite the numerous claims made for university-based police education and its perceived superiority to police academy-based learning, in particular subject and skill areas, the evidence as it presently stands is not convincing". Stanislas' position is based on two facts: 1. research findings are mixed as to the utility of current

college and university-based programs in producing individuals with the knowledge, attitudes and skills deemed desirable in potential recruits (see also Paterson 2011; Chappell 2015; Albarano 2015), and; 2. college and university-based programs marketed at policing and other criminal justice hopefuls are not typically evaluated on the extent to which their curricula align with market needs, for their success in post-program employment, and/or on how well their former students do if and when they enter their chosen field (Stanislas 2015). Albarano (2015) believes that lack of consensus as to the value of a college degree in the field of policing is tied to other factors, including the lack of professionalization in policing, and thus a lack of clear-cut professional standards, and the need for longitudinal studies to assess the relative influences of education over the span of an officer's career.

What do police services need from police educators?

Police services across Canada benefit from the work of the Police Sector Council[2], a national initiative aimed at addressing human resource issues within the policing sector. One of the challenges taken up by the PSC was the development of a set of core competencies for roles within the general duty, investigation and management streams of policing. As individuals entering policing in Canada begin their careers as general duty Constables, our focus here is on the competencies identified as key to this role.

The primary responsibilities of a general duty Constable are:

1. Apply relevant legislation, policies, procedures
2. Use equipment and technology
3. Maintain safety of self and others
4. Conduct general patrol
5. Respond to calls for service
6. Assist victims of crime
7. Conduct investigation
8. Apply detainee management
9. Deliver court testimony (PSC 2013).

[2] The Police Sector Council was dissolved in 2014 due to lack of funding.

To perform these tasks, the primary behavioural competencies required of a Constable are:

1. Adaptability
2. Risk Management
3. Problem Solving
4. Stress Tolerance
5. Interactive Communication
6. Teamwork
7. Organizational Awareness
8. Written Skills
9. Ethical Accountability and responsibility (PSC 2013).

In a study of police hiring standards across Canada, Blandford (2014) surveyed 145 police services on issues related to recruitment and competency evaluation. What he found was that survey respondents "identified post-secondary education as the primary indicator of competency development for five of the nine competencies" (ibid.: 86). As he explains:

> A completed university degree ranked as the highest indicator of competency development, followed by: college diploma; some university education; high school education, then some college education as the lowest ranking. The preference for a university degree over a college diploma was minimal; conversely, the preference for a post-secondary credential compared to high school education was very pronounced. A common perception of police recruiters (based on this researcher's experience) is that an applicant who failed to complete post-secondary education, whether college or university, may be an indicator of reduced dedication to policing as a career, possibly explaining the lower ranking (ibid: 86).

Blandford also notes that learning outcomes for many college and university courses do not align with the skills or values defined as core policing competencies. He is hardly alone in this view: the extent to which current educational programs in Canada or elsewhere inculcate the knowledge, values and skills enumerated by the PSC or other police competency systems is a contested issue among academics (Trofymowych 2007; Paterson 2011).

When trying to use competency models to assess the utility of pre-recruitment educational programs, further complications arise. They arise from the fact that, although the PSC competencies are influential in many parts of Canada, most police services in Ontario use a suite of provincially defined assessment tools and competencies called the Constable Selection System

(CSS). As the CSS is treated as proprietary information, and therefore not publicly accessible, it would be highly improbable that many course instructors in provincial college and university programs would be able to draw directly upon these competencies in the development of their courses[3]. Indeed, one of the authors has been teaching criminal justice courses in Ontario for nine years, and had only become aware of the CSS within the past few months. Inability to quickly garner access and approval to use the CSS competencies provided us with an additional wrinkle: we simply did not have time within the confines of this study and its timelines to include this model as a basis for evaluating existing programs. Fortunately, we are aware of the key competencies employed by both the CSS and PSC models and, where relevant, we do reference them. However, to develop a picture of what constitutes an ideal candidate for various police services, and to assess how well current educational programs contribute to the development of that candidate, we opted to rely on the views of two other sources: police recruiters and senior officers from services across Ontario.

Research methods

The purpose of the present study was to address the following research questions:

1. What forms of policing-related post-secondary education currently exist in Ontario for potential police recruits?

2. Are these programs suitable for the needs of police organizations given the operational and other demands they face?

To answer these questions, we developed a two-part, mixed methods approach, combining qualitative interviews with an environmental scan of current college and university programs marketed to individuals seeking careers in criminal justice.

[3] The exception is, of course, those instructors who are present or former police trainers.

Environmental scan

The first part of the study consisted of an environmental scan of university and college-based programs in Ontario marketed as pre-police recruitment programs and/or as providing knowledge and skills useful for potential police recruits[4]. The purpose of the scan was to produce a basis for understanding what current programs exist for potential police recruits, including the respective strengths and limitations of program offerings available. The scan entailed program and course-related information collection on all such relevant programs in Ontario, from college-based Police Foundations courses and online schools to university criminology programs. The data collected for this portion of the study consisted of all publicly accessible program materials for each identified program, including: admission requirements, information on program structure and certificate, diploma and degree requirements, course descriptions and syllabi/outlines.

Research interviews

The purpose for the second part of the study – interviewing police recruiters and senior officers across Ontario – was to begin the process of developing a clearer understanding of: 1. police organizational needs with respect to desired knowledge, skills, training and personal qualities of potential recruits today and into the future, and; 2. the extent to which officers interviewed saw current university and college programs as helping to meet those needs.

To locate potential research participants, we developed a non-probability sample consisting of the total number of municipal police services in Ontario (n=58). Using this list, we contacted the recruiting section of each service through email and asked recruiters to participate in the study. We also contacted senior police leaders and/or senior civilian personnel[5] by email. In total, we

[4] A program was included if it clearly stated that registered students would find the program useful for a future career in criminal justice. Key terms used in our search: law enforcement, policing, police officer, police services, criminal justice and criminal justice system.

[5] To avoid inadvertently identifying a participant, throughout the report we use the term 'senior officer' for both sworn and civilian police senior personnel.

interviewed thirty-three (n=33) officers: twelve (n=12) with police recruiters and twenty-one (n=21) with senior officers at eighteen (n=18) police services across Ontario[6]. Interviews[7] were conducted with an interview guide consisting of questions from among the following topics: 1. general traits and qualities deemed desirable in current and future recruits; 2. the use of assessment tools, such as those based on General Duty Constable competencies[8]; 3. general views on police education (including content and modes of delivery), and; 4. views based on specific knowledge and experience of college and/or university-based programs.

All interview data was collected subject to the conditions set down by the University of Western Ontario's Research Ethics Board during their review of our protocol and the Tri-Council guidelines on data collection and use.

Data analysis

An initial exploratory analysis of both data sources was conducted using inductive thematic coding. For the environmental scan, we also produced basic descriptive statistics based on program type (by content (ie. Police Foundations, BA Criminology) and delivery (ie. class-based, online)), as well as by institutional type (ie. college, university).

Once our initial analysis was completed we undertook a further two-step, more deductive set of analyses. First, we 'read' the results of our interviews against the results of our environmental scan, looking to assess the extent to which the stated needs of police services (as defined by the statements of both police recruiters and senior officers) were being met through current pre-recruitment educational programs. Our findings are presented below.

[6] According to the Ontario Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, there are "approximately 58 municipal police services in Ontario." For sampling purposes, each service with a website and publicly available email address was contacted.

[7] To protect the identities of study participants, we have randomly changed genders throughout this report, and otherwise removed potentially identifying information.

[8] Competencies that are either internally defined or based on those established by the Police Sector Council (2013).

Environmental scan: Initial results

To conduct our environmental scan, we began by identifying which public colleges, private or career colleges and universities offer courses and/or programs marketed as appropriate for future careers in law enforcement.

Career colleges

According to Service Ontario, there are over 500 private career colleges in Ontario. Among these, 12 institutions offer a criminal justice diploma with a policing focus. Most of these twelve have multiple locations, so that students can attend courses at one of several sites[9]. Program lengths typically range from 42 to 52 weeks long. All policing programs are full-time and campus-based. However, the Legal and Profession Education College records and makes all lectures available online, so students can 'attend' lectures 24/7. Both Herzing College and National Academy of Health and Business also have a placement requirement (from 2 to 4 weeks). Although included for discussion here, we note that we could find little publicly available information on course content offer by career colleges. As a result, most of our comments in other sections focus on public colleges and universities.

Colleges

We found that 23 of 24 Ontario public colleges offer programs cited as being appropriate for a career in law enforcement. The majority are 2-year class-based diploma programs in the following areas: Community and Justice Services; Investigation; Police Foundations; and Protection, Security and Investigation. The highest concentration of programs is in the area of Police Foundations, with all 23 institutions offering versions of this program. Five colleges provide this program as e-learning, and students can take courses part-time, full-time or through

[9] For example, triOS College has nine locations within Ontario.

accelerated delivery. Durham College also has their Protection, Security and Investigation program available online. Five colleges also offer diplomas in Community and Justice, Police Foundations and Protection, Security and Investigation through online delivery. A further two colleges offer 1 year certificate programs in classrooms, both of which are clearly designed as entry into their two-year programs. Lastly, three colleges offer degree programs in Community and Criminal Justice, Criminal Justice, and Police Studies. These are all class-based with a placement/co-op requirement. Georgian also offers the Bachelor of Police Services part-time online.

Universities

We found 19 of 22 public universities, and one privately funded university, offer programs aimed at potential police recruits. Programs include: Criminal Justice, Criminal Justice and Criminology, Criminal Justice and Public Policy, Criminology, Criminology and Justice, Criminology and Socio-Legal Studies, Law and Justice, Policing, Policing and Criminal Justice, Sociology, Sociology and Legal Studies. The majority of these are full-time, classroom-based programs.

Collaborative programs

Five of the colleges and universities also run collaborative programs that allow students to take their first one to two years at a participating local college before transferring into the BA program at a partner university.

Answering our first research question: What forms of police education currently exist in Ontario for potential police recruits?

Analysis of our scan results reveals some interesting findings relevant to our first research question, which is centred on the types of PSE pre-recruitment programs available to potential police recruits in Ontario.

Program delivery

As we noted previously, some universities and colleges do offer online programs or courses. However, the majority of university and public college programs are delivered through traditional in-class learning modules. Most of the university programs are four years, or eight semesters. There are nine programs that also provide field placement and co-op opportunities within criminal justice professions as part of the degree. Depending on the school, students complete approximately 80-384 hours of placement.

There are six colleges that offer graduate certificates under the programs: Advanced Police Studies, Advanced Law Enforcement and Investigations, Advanced Law Enforcement and Security, and Advanced Investigations and Enforcement. Four of the programs offer field placements with local police services and the other three offer scenario-based learning including computerized driving simulators and mock trials. These programs take one academic year (two semesters) to complete.

Content

Degree programs primarily focus on abstract skills and knowledge about policing and criminal justice including theory, research skills, critical thinking, and problem solving. For example, most programs offer an introductory course to the Canadian Criminal Justice, as well as a Policing course where students learn and analyze the fundamentals of policing in Canada. Those programs that provide a placement option also placed some emphasis in their materials on the development of applied skills suitable for policing.

Almost all the college programs, aside from those fully online, provide both abstract and applied learning skills to their students. Like the university programs, college policing programs provided theoretical knowledge about criminal justice and policing. However, college programs

also teach practical and applied skills, including fitness training, investigative and interrogation techniques, and police-specific writing skills. Many of the colleges also did simulations with crime scenarios, mock trials, and court preparations. Moreover, twenty of the on-campus degree programs require a 90 to 520-hour placement within the field of criminal justice. Two colleges also noted a required community service assignment; for example, Durham's Police Foundations program gave students the opportunity to work with youth from an at-risk school within the community.

Accessibility

Given ongoing discussions in the UK, Canada and elsewhere about police education and the establishment of new minimum educational requirements for recruits, we also decided to look at the issue of accessibility. In the UK, the College of Policing recently announced a plan to implement degree-level education requirements for new officers. Given geographical and population differences, we felt it was important to include issues of accessibility in our assessment. In relation to accessibility, we were interested in two aspects: 1. Whether individuals can physically access programs (in-person or online) and; 2. Whether programs are sufficiently flexible they can meet the needs of a range of learners (from full-time and part-time programs to day and evening classes).

As the maps included in appendices 1 to 4 make clear, most educational facilities in the province are located throughout populous areas of southern Ontario. The most northern schools offering classroom-based programs for potential police recruits are Lakehead University and Confederation College in Thunder Bay. Thus, as one police officer observed, it can be very difficult for police services in northern and remote communities to recruit individuals from within their own communities who have university or college education, unless individuals go south to attend classes or take online programs.

There were three degree programs available online: a Bachelor of Human Services in Police Studies at Georgian College, a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Criminology at Western University, and a BA in Policing at Wilfrid Laurier. Both the Georgian College and Western University degree programs are offered on a part-time basis. The Policing BA from Laurier is designed for working and retired police officers, and requires at least one year of work in policing before applying.

In relation to flexibility, we looked at when courses were offered and the extent to which programs accommodate alternate schedules to the traditional semester-based course planning. Though updated course timetables were not publicly available for every program via an institution's websites, we found that at least nine of the universities provide required courses in online format. Additionally, at least nine of the schools provided night courses that began after 6pm. In relation to public colleges, several include part-time programs in their course catalogues and some have night classes available for some of their courses. One, Humber College, also has weekend courses for students.

Summary

Overall, police education for potential police recruits is primarily provided by public universities, public colleges, and career colleges. The degree programs are most commonly offered as full-time, on-campus for 4 years and diploma programs are one to two years, depending if the college is full-time or part-time, and public or private.

Both degree and diploma programs are more likely to be on-campus, opposed to online. With over 100 police-orientated programs in Ontario, only nine were available through e-learning modules. However, many university programs provide some individual courses online. Additionally, both degree and diploma programs were more commonly offered on a full-time rather than part-time basis.

Degree programs primarily provided students with abstract knowledge and skills surrounding policing and the criminal justice system, while diploma programs offer both abstract and practical, applied skills. College programs frequently facilitate field placement opportunities within their programs, contributing to the development of applied skills.

Interviews: Initial results

Interviews with recruiters and senior officers were equally informative. In many instances, interviewees from both groups shared similar perspectives on a number of issues related to recruitment, as well as on current and ideal forms of education for potential police recruits. We have grouped these comments thematically, as identified through our analysis. Where relevant, minor or major departures among otherwise common views are also highlighted.

Theme: the ideal candidate

Given the nature of our interview questions, it is not surprising that a dominant theme within each interview were individual and organizational conceptions of what constitutes the ideal candidate for police recruitment. Interviewees identified several behavioural traits and attitudes they saw as critical to successful police work, and thus important elements for which to assess potential recruits. These included:

1. Communication skills
2. Ability to problem solve/critical thinking skills
3. Confidence
4. Ability to learn/adapt
5. Self-control
6. Team work/relationships
7. Valuing diversity
8. Self-awareness

Of the traits listed above, communication skills – both verbal and written – were ranked as highly important among all participants. One officer expressed this as the "gift of the gab'." As he explained it, "you look at anyone who does really, really well in this service, not only do they have

good work ethic, but they can talk. They can relate to people, they can shoot the shit, they can laugh." A senior officer similarly stated, "I find the most important skill for any recruit, or any police officer, is communication skills … it's active listening and it's de-escalation in the manner by which they communicate." Verbal skills were deemed not only important for dealing with members of the public, but also for working in a team atmosphere. Further, as a significant part of policing entails writing reports, the writing and reading comprehension skills of potential recruits are also scrutinized. "I start looking at their written communication as soon as I see their application," one recruiter observed. "Should I get an application where the person has ignored the instruction to hand write it and they're using a computer, that tells me something right there: they may have difficulty following instruction or there's something about their handwriting they don't want to show me." She also noted, "if I find spelling mistakes throughout their resume, things that are more free-form as opposed to filling out an application, then those are the things I take note of."

Problem solving and the development of critical thinking skills are also seen as crucial to the ability of a police officer to perform tasks successfully. From a supervisor's perspective, if an officer is incapable of problem solving, "then we have to spend a lot more time directing them. And really, police officers work independently, right? So they need to be able to problem solve independently and work on their own." A critical component to problem solving is the ability to be open minded and process new information as it comes in. Not surprisingly then, one of the interviewees cited open mindedness as an important quality for incoming recruits: "every situation is new," she explained.

A trait that was emphasized by recruiters, but not by senior officers, was self-confidence. Likely, this discrepancy is due to the fact that recruiters, particularly those using the Constable

Selection System, are trained to assess individuals for self-confidence, which is seen as a core trait necessary for success in policing. As one recruiter explained,

> every time I sit with someone … I am always trying to envision them walking into someone's home, where there is a couple who has been married for 20 years, who are having a domestic and I want to envision them having the confidence, even just to fake it, to be able to sit down and relate with people and just get down to their level, because there is a lot people who come in with great educations who don't have confidence.

Another recruiter explained his views of self-confidence in different terms: "when you make a mistake, do you take responsibility for it?" For this individual, being able to make an accurate self-assessment of a situation, own one's mistakes and learn from them, is a sign of self-confidence.

Senior officers, in particular, emphasized the importance of recruits being open to learning and adaptable to new ideas and modes of education and training. As one officer explained, "we need someone that has the open mind and flexibility to be able to be taught various things … policing's always evolving, there's always issues. So, we need somebody that has the open-mindedness to be able to learn new skills and new issues." One of the perceived benefits of post-secondary education, according to this police leader, is that, "whether it be college or university," they have demonstrated, "they have that ability to be taught and they have that ability to learn." Recruiters also acknowledged the importance of "flexibility", which is one of core competencies areas for which several of the services screen. As one recruiter explained, "We look for flexibility, that temperaments aren't completely rigid."

Another trait deemed a 'core competency' area is the ability to retain a measure of self-control when provoked. As one recruiter explained, "we're looking for people who can really maintain self-control, when they're antagonized … it's not uncommon to be in situations when people are antagonizing you or trying to get a rise out of you."

A senior officer also included in his list of desirable qualities: team work. “It really is all about teamwork,” he stated. Further, he felt that while the ability to manage tensions in the community is important, it is also important to know how to resolve conflicts with one’s peers and to work well with others. Another senior officer expressed similar sentiments. In his organization, they had hired a number of former athletes and military personnel, finding that recruits with previous experience in such environments – both of which place great emphasis on team-work – increased the likelihood they would be successful in policing.

A key concern for recruiters is to identify individuals who can value diversity within the communities they serve. Contemporary Canadian policing entails working within and across diverse communities and a successful officer is one who can, paraphrasing one recruiter, ‘deal with and value diversity in culture’. A senior officer in another service stated they wanted individuals who “embrace diversity,” which he saw as an orientation much deeper and more meaningful than “simply” adopting preventative fixes to issues of bias and discrimination.

Several recruiters also emphasized the importance of another trait treated within police recruitment models as a core ‘competency’: self-awareness. One officer described this using the term ‘reflexive’. By this, he was referring to the ability to see one’s self in relation to both other individuals and groups, as well as in relation to the larger society and cultural systems. As he explained, “We have so many people that are disconnected from their community, even though they live within it. It’s so obvious when they come in. They’re so self-centered.” Using Police Studies programs as an example, he suggested that, “if you’re going to develop a Police Studies program that’s going to reflect our needs, one of [the key elements] has to be about assessing yourself.” This individual’s valuing of self-awareness among potential recruits was echoed by a senior officer, who explained, “We’re really hiring around character because if you don’t have

empathy and you don't have EQ, a sophisticated degree of EQ, and self-awareness, and those kinds of things, then you are a potential risk to the service."

Theme: university versus college

A second theme arose directly from questions as to whether police organizations preferred to hire university or college graduates. This question was explored in two ways: 1. length of program (3 or 4-year degree programs in comparison to 2-year diploma and 1-year certificate programs), and; 2. program content (as we saw through the environmental scan, university programs tend to be broader and more non-specific to policing compared to 1 or 2 year applied policing and/or criminal justice programs). What we discovered is that views as to preference were highly nuanced and there were no clear-cut answers with one exception: all recruiters stated they valued some level of post-secondary education. However, most also acknowledged they would hire someone with desirable traits – such as good communication skills or the ability to evidence self-control in taxing situations – over someone with a degree or diploma who was lacking in these areas.

To illustrate the nuanced nature of views as to the relative merits of university versus college degrees or diplomas, one officer stated, "we don't necessarily care what program it is." Instead, what this recruiter looks for is someone who has "done well in university or college, meaning steady B+'s, with A's sprinkled in," because that "says a lot about, not just their intellectual abilities, but their motivation, their drive, their determination." However, this individual also acknowledged that college level graduates received more scrutiny with respect to their grades, and thus higher expectations of consistently good grades, because most college programs are "not as tough" as university programs. Another recruiter, this one with recent university experience, worried that changes to course delivery within university programs were having a negative impact on students' ability to develop their own problem solving skills. From his perspective, course materials were now being "laid out sometimes a lot more for them than

they used to be," a phenomenon that is informally discussed within educational circles as a "dumbing down" of the curriculum (Stout 2001). In this individual's view, programs in which every aspect of the learning process emphasizes easy accessibility[10], denies students the opportunity to develop their own problem solving skills, skills that will make a significant difference in whether he or she will be recruited. A third recruiter weighed college versus university experience differently, in terms of the relative degree of exposure to applied knowledge. As she explained, "we get students and … they have a university degree, but haven't done any practical. Those Police Foundations students and the college students are more prepared for the practical purposes." This view was shared by another recruiter, who had experience of having taught in local colleges. "Police Foundations people probably get the most realistic view of police work," she explained, "because people like myself, with a lot of policing background, teach a lot of the courses." Part of the hidden curriculum[11] in courses taught by police instructors includes appropriate professional behaviour and discipline. "We talk about, 'Hey, if you did that at work, you would be in shit, if you showed up late for work, you're gonna get in trouble, so don't be late for my class'".

The positive views of applied college programs expressed in the preceding paragraph are not universally shared. For example, a recruiter in one Ontario organization opined that "the specificity of degree and college programs isn't so much the concern for me when I have people coming through here to apply for positions. Some of these, and I don't want to be too critical, but some of the two-year college programs, seem to focus more on how we're going to get you hired

[10] To be clear, this does not refer to accessibility issues for students with disabilities; rather, we are referring to the practice of providing students with not only lecture notes, but multiple choice only exams that demand little beyond rote memory learning (and guesswork). As well, many instructors now walk students through every aspect of an assignment, so that they do not develop the ability to solve problems or conduct basic library or other research without significant supervision.

[11] Hidden curriculum refers to the unintentional and/or non-overt transmission of cultural values, mores and beliefs through classroom instruction (LeCompte 1977).

in two years' time rather than it being an academic achievement." Indirectly, this view is shared by those same recruiters who, while otherwise endorsing applied college programs, also noted they tended to more carefully scrutinize the grades of those graduating from these same programs.

To counteract the perceived softness of college grading schemes, a recruiter advised he was in support of those hybrid college-university programs in which students could take their first two years at community college, then transfer to a partnered university to finish a degree. This individual felt that more such programs would help to produce a greater number of potential candidates, a view shared by a senior officer:

> the college-university combinations where you have, for instance, Georgian College, with the two-year college, combined with the two-year university for the Bachelor of Applied Arts degree, or a Bachelor of Applied Arts in Human Services, those kinds of things, are very valuable and cleverly packaged degrees. I think that's where the future will lie, in that kind of combination.

The value to the policing world of learning that blends both the theoretical and the practical aspects of criminal justice was similarly echoed in the thoughts of a senior officer who stated that in the ideal: "I do think you kind of have to have a blend of both."

Theme: criminology/criminal justice content versus other programs

The third theme identified also arose as a result of one of the questions in our interview guide, a question in which we asked whether participants had observed any differences in the knowledge or performance of candidates with a criminology or criminal justice educational background relative to those with other degrees or graduating from non-criminal justice programs. Views on this topic were less mixed, with most recruiters seeing little to no difference in the quality of candidate skills and knowledge based on program content. That said, small differences did emerge that, again, paint a more highly nuanced picture of whether Ontario's Criminology and/or Criminal Justice programs benefit students seeking to enter policing.

Most participants shared the views of a police recruiter who stated of recent graduates from his local university, "we get as many good candidates from a Physiology program, as we do from the Criminology program, because there is no difference." Another participant stated, "I support a broad range of subject matter or curriculum. I don't think it's completely necessary for those looking for a career in law enforcement to take one of these police sciences or police studies degrees." She then echoed comments heard from other interviewees, "I would take that candidate that has a degree in Sociology or Psychology or Kinesiology … I would still take that candidate if they brought more to the table outside their education." In explaining why being educated in Criminology or Criminal Justice degree was not necessarily desirable, a recruiter observed that, when compared to students in other, more science-based and/or applied disciplines, "the Criminology students that we were interviewing, they didn't have the 'gift-of-the-gab'. They didn't feel comfortable in their own skin." An explanation for this observation may lie in comments offer by a recruiter from a different organization, who spoke at length on how many university-based Criminology and Criminal Justice programs lacked practical components that would provide students with opportunities to develop interpersonal and other applied skills. Although recruiters sometimes felt that applied programs go too far in preparing individuals for future careers – often at the expense of fostering individuals with broader knowledge and reasoning skills – they also tended to see Criminology and Criminal Justice degree programs as lacking any type of applied element that would help students navigate entrance into the post-degree workplace.

None of the above is to say that Criminology and/or Criminal Justice educational content is completely devalued within policing. Officers did note that some courses and/or programs do an excellent job of helping students to understand larger social issues and their impact on criminal justice, education that was seen as highly valuable to creating competent officers. As one recruiter

explained, “I’ve seen it a couple times, someone comes in with a Criminology background, who is passionate about police work … man, oh man, talk about refreshing, because you’re talking to someone who didn’t just write the exam and pull the bathtub water, you know?” When asked about the social issues most affecting society, he states that such students, are “engaged, they’re switched on, they get it”.

Theme: instructional methods

Another topic which featured prominently in interviews was that of instructional methods, how both content is delivered to students. In particular, interviewees spoke about the desirability of different types of teaching methods in relation to issues of skill development, accessibility and increasing learning, as well as on how programs can be better structured to enhance learning for policing candidates.

In relation to classroom teaching, participants shared some distinct views as to what types of methods should ideally be incorporated to improve learning for future recruits. For example, one recruiter felt that college and university courses should, where appropriate, include role playing exercises to help stimulate learning and knowledge retention. Simulation exercises are used frequently in police training, and in other areas of the criminal justice system, so employing scenario-based exercises in the classroom would not only mirror later training post-employment, but also provide students with more reality-based, and less theoretical, ways with which to engage with material.

Another form of in-class experiential learning valued by police agencies is group activities. As noted above, policing entails extensive teamwork, and the ability to work well with others in this environment is critical. Thus, some officers felt that group activities in college and university programs were a vital tool to helping to teach potential recruits how to “get along in teams and how to work with different personalities.”

Senior officers were more likely to emphasize the importance of internships as an opportunity for students to gain insights into policing, as well as learning important professional skills. "It's the co-op component that I think is important," one officer explained, because, "the students … get a better understanding that policing is not all what's on TV … they get an appreciation of all the administrative tasks and challenges for a police officer."

As online courses are offer within several Ontario programs, and one – Wilfrid Laurier's BA Policing program is delivered completely in online format[12] – several participants spoke on their views as to the relative merits of online versus classroom based learning. One officer felt that while online courses were useful, in that they increased accessibility for individuals who might find it difficult to attend class in person. However, this individual also felt online delivery should not be the sole format used, but rather that online courses needed to be paired with classroom-based learning to increase exposure to different perspectives, topics and ways of thinking. Her explanation: "if you do a degree completely online, I just feel there's a component missing." While agreeing mostly with this recruiter's views with respect to younger students, a senior officer felt that when it comes to mature applicants, there is a critical need for online education, which affords residents greater accessibility. This view was also shared by a recruiter in another jurisdictions, who observed that potential students in northern and remote areas lack access to these programs within their own communities. Thus, online education, as one officer explained, is useful because it "helps you deliver education anytime, anywhere."

Theme: applied programs can be too applied

While it is the case that most interviewees valued the practical aspects of some of the more applied forms of education available to Ontario students – particularly course curricula found

[12] It is worth noting that while we mention this program, according to its marketing materials, it was designed for currently serving police officers and not potential recruits.

within Police Foundations and related programs – several acknowledged they also felt these same programs sometimes over-emphasized the practical aspects of police work over theory, critical thinking and analytic skills, particularly in relation to understanding broader social concerns. Thus, most interviewees felt that university-based programs have a competitive edge when it comes to helping students to develop critical thinking skills and other analytical tools. In comparison, Police Foundations and other applied college programs were more likely to be faulted for relying too heavily on rote memory learning, rather than helping students to broader reasoning skills. As one senior officer explained, "Police Foundation programs, in my opinion, are not very good at telling you *how* a police officer should think [through problems]." This lack represents "a real challenge."

In relation to concerns raised over what is perceived to be too narrow a focus within some college programs, one interviewee advised that she was aware that students in some programs receive a course that focuses on skills needed to succeed in the police recruitment process. As she explained, "they do mock interviews, and they do the physicals and they do this and they do that, but basically it's a course on how to get hired." For her, "I would get rid of something like that and substitute writing courses because … I would like to see top notch writing and communication skills."

Other participants worried that a narrow focus on 'how to become a police officer' or 'how to be a police officer' meant that students were receiving duplicate content in areas for which they would receive training later on, post-recruitment. As one participant observed, "they go through a lot of same thing that the police college does … they end up going to police college and repeating what they've just learned." Like other interviewees, this recruiter worried that while students from Police Foundations programs are well prepared with respect to certain practical elements of the job, that duplication of content likely meant that students might not be receiving sufficient

instruction and mentoring in equally important tasks, such as developing their critical thinking skills. This view was shared by a senior officer, who felt that "the specifics of policing should be taught by Ontario Police College, just so that it's consistent training."

Findings: Are these programs suitable for the needs of police organizations given the operational and other demands they face (based on police views)?

As we saw in an earlier section, police recruiters and senior officers identified the following traits and skills as highly valuable in potential police recruits:

1. Communication skills
2. Ability to problem solve/critical thinking skills
3. Confidence
4. Ability to learn/adapt
5. Self-control
6. Team work/relationships
7. Valuing diversity
8. Self-awareness

None of the individuals who participated in the interviews for this study felt that a criminal justice or criminology background was necessary, although the majority did recognize the merits of applicants having pre-existing knowledge of the criminal justice system, the police role within that system, and the broader social issues that drive police work. That said, more emphasis was placed on the relative importance of traits and skills seen as fundamental to work as a frontline patrol officer, such as the ability to communicate effectively, to problem solve and exert both self-control and confidence in one's role. In this section, we draw on both interview data and the results of our environmental scan – which included a detailed analysis of program and course content – to assess the extent to which college and university programs promote skill and/or trait development in those areas deemed critical for a successful policing career.

A significant component of police work entails communication in both verbal and written forms. While it might be obvious to even the most casual observer that it is imperative for police

officers today to be able to interact effectively within and across diverse populations through face-to-face communications, it is also the case that they must be able to competently convey information in diverse written forms – from keeping legible, detailed notes to completing complex legal documents. Thus, police recruiters look for signs that individuals have both verbal acuity, as well as strong written skills. In reviewing college and university programs marketed for potential police recruits, it is evident that there is a significant degree of variation in the extent to which either verbal or written skills are taught and reinforced in PSE through feedback and evaluation. In relation to university programs, while many include courses of which some form of written work is said to be a central component, this is not universal. Indeed, we are aware of pressures on universities and colleges to increase class sizes. Thus to accommodate growing student numbers in the classroom, many instructors rely on multiple choice only exams. This means that there are potentially a large number of students, particularly those who do not take upper levels university seminars where writing is mandatory, whose exposure to writing tasks may be minimal. The impact of this lack of exposure is being felt by police services, where, as a senior officer explained, "we are seeing are a generation of people who have been able to select the best answer" but are incapable of writing "in a coherent, concise, clear way because it's not as easy as selecting the boxes."

Limitations with respect to professional verbal communication are even more pronounced. Every officer interviewed emphasized the importance of strong verbal communication skills among potential applicants. However, the reality is that, despite the use of participation marks to encourage student communication in some classes, most oral communication by students takes place in one of two forms: 1. asking questions of the instructor, and; 2. delivering a class presentation. With email, students no longer need to engage in the former. Class presentations,

which are dreaded by many students, are often avoided by instructors who fear negative course evaluations. Thus, it is also entirely possible for a student to graduate from a four-year degree program having said or written very little, and thus received few opportunities to develop skills in these areas. One senior officer made the point succinctly in observing his service hires both community college and university graduates and, with respect to both, finds that "verbal communication skills probably need to be more developed than they are." He further questioned "whether communications is built into [course curricula] sufficiently." That said, we observed that some of the Police Foundations programs included courses in which students receive specific education and training in various forms of communication. Thus, the applied programs may provide a competitive edge in this area. For example, some offer "interviewing and investigation" courses that promise to teach the skills necessary to conduct an effective police interview. Others require students to take "communications" courses where they are required to practice writing, speaking, listening and documenting information in a criminal justice setting. Another appropriate course offered by college with Police Foundations programs is "interpersonal and group dynamics," where students learn how to effectively communicate with individuals and groups.

While the traditionally hierarchical structure of policing remains, it is important to remember that contemporary police officers are expected to work independently, often with minimal direct oversight, and, to varying extents, to employ critical thinking and analytical skills in order to function as proactive problem-solvers. Further, with the emerging emphasis placed on 'upstream' crime solutions within policing and public policy circles, individual officers are also increasingly being asked to engage with community partners in developing solutions for what can often seem to be intractable local problems. Recruiters therefore recognize the importance of individuals being able to work independently and within complex task environments that require

strong analytical skills. To a certain degree, all independent study fosters some level of independence within students; however, as it is not the manifest function of the post-secondary educational system to generate independence, it would be difficult to assess the extent to which independent thought is a by-product of exposure to college or university programs. Fortunately, the development and refinement of student analytical skills *is* typically a goal of post-secondary education, therefore we can explore the extent to which interviewees see Ontario college and university programs as encouraging the necessary critical thinking skills among potential police applicants.

Based on the views of those interviewed, most agreed that Police Foundations courses, while providing students value with respect to helping them acquire practical knowledge of policing, often fail to inculcate critical thinking and other useful analytical skills in their students. By way of contrast, university programs with their emphasis on broader learning and the development of critical thought, were seen as more beneficial for teaching students problem solving techniques and other analytical tools. That said, not all interviewees were convinced that university programs, with their emphasis on breadth of content, were necessarily producing the skills and knowledge required in policing. "I'm not 100% sure that those broader programs," one senior officer stated, "kind of drill down to what I would consider to be the core competencies that are required." Further, some interviewees did worry that universities were over-relying on study and examination methods that encourage students to do no more than 'tick the right box'. One expressed this as a 'dumbing down' of the curricula that he felt was having negative impacts on recruit quality.

Most senior officers felt that college and university programs can provide key opportunities to expose students to different cultures and teach them lessons about the importance of valuing

diversity. One of the most significant benefits of PSE, we would argue, is exposure to new people, new ideas and, in most liberal arts programs, curricula that increases awareness of society as a whole, and an appreciation for our collective differences. This view was shared by one of the recruiters who opined, "those who are in a post-secondary atmosphere for up to four years, you know, sometimes longer if they do graduate work, they are more in tune with society today." One officer suggested, however, that it wasn't enough to "just talk about that as the topic-head at the front of a classroom," and that the benefit of experiential learning modules and/or community-engagement exercises is that one can "get out there and actually go and see … what's in the community." In his view, "that's an experiential piece that you just can't get that from sitting in the classroom." Our environmental scan reveals, however, that the reality is too few college or university programs offer such placements.

Self-awareness is another trait that can be explicitly developed through learning aimed at encouraging both reflexivity[13] and empathy. We note that course material emphasizing critical self-reflection can be found in both college and university programs. However, this content is typically found within more critically oriented disciplines, such as Sociology and Women's Studies. It can be found to some degree within critical elements of Criminology and Criminal Justice, but is not a standard feature of many programs, particularly those with a more applied focus.

Although rated as important in potential recruits by the majority of police recruiters, neither self-confidence nor self-control are typically taught as specific skills within post-secondary classrooms. This is not to say that lessons about self-control, or discipline, as an example, might

[13] Appreciating where one is socially located in relation to various hierarchical social and cultural systems, most notably in relation to race, class, gender, sexual identity, disability and other status-linked positions.

not be indirectly transmitted and learned through the hidden curriculum found in post-secondary settings (LeCompte 1977). However, most university programs do not typically offer explicit instruction in these areas. Instructors within some Police Foundations and other more applied courses, however, overtly engage with students on issues of the importance of discipline, ethics and/or time-keeping, as examples, as is the case with the previously cited police recruiter, who also serves as a college instructor and relates the importance of professional conduct inside and outside the classroom. Indeed, we note that most Police Foundations programs offer an ethics course intended to teach students professional behaviour in a variety of contexts.

To sum, based on what police participants had to say about what characteristics, knowledge and skills combine to create an ideal police applicant, and the extent to which different forms of post-secondary education assist in the development of these traits, it appears that, in the main, current college and university programs in Ontario have significant strengths and weaknesses from a police recruitment perspective. However, as several interviewees stated, there has been a recent move towards colleges and universities collaborating to develop hybrid models that combine many of the best features of both systems – that is, broad skills with applied knowledge. This development was viewed universally as a positive one that would help, as one senior officer suggested, move police education beyond being "stuck" and unable to fully meet the needs of police services. In the next section, we will explore some specific recommendations intended to help along the 'unsticking' process.

Conclusions and recommendations

In a recent article on police education and training, authors Gary Cordner and Cynthia Shain (2016: 60) made the following observation:

> Given how much importance is placed on education and training within policing, and how expensive they can be, it seems advisable that police leaders and

> researchers should begin placing more emphasis on developing scientific evidence about what works in this sphere of the policing business.

We would not argue with this point. However, we do note that it is no less true for the secondary education field, where public and private colleges and universities promote offerings that either directly promise, or otherwise suggest, their programs will provide students requisite knowledge and/or skills useful for employment in criminal justice occupations. Beyond student exit surveys, and formal and informal contact with a program's graduates, many colleges and universities make few systematic attempts – at least shared in publicly available form – at rigorously evaluating their program's success in providing students with the knowledge and tools necessary to secure post-graduate employment within the individual's chosen field. Nor do many[14] schools offering criminology and criminal justice degrees, diplomas and certificates conduct rigorous needs assessments to ensure their programs actually provide the requisite knowledge and skills desired by police and other potential employers.

What this study has done is to identify some significant strengths and limitations in the current overall provision of PSE when it comes to meeting the hiring needs of Ontario's police agencies. Drawing on our findings, as presented above, we offer the following recommendations to policy-makers, program developers and education practitioners, among other stakeholder groups:

Recommendation 1: Police Foundations and other applied college programs explore ways to avoid duplication of material that is taught at the Ontario Police College.

Recommendation 2: applied college diploma programs consider increasing their analytical content and engaging with students in activities that will enhance their critical reasoning skills.

[14] This is not to say that no schools ever conduct such assessments. However, as these evaluations are rarely, if ever, made public, we cannot speak to the rigor with which they were conducted. This is also the case with measurements of a program's success with respect to student employment.

Recommendation 3: that university-based degree programs implement skills-based course content that provides students with basic tools and skills related to the professional world, including effective communication, team work, leadership and ethics[15].

Recommendation 4: the development of more college-university hybrid programs that combine practical, applied aspects of police work with broader skills and knowledge, such as critical thinking.

Recommendation 5: increase accessibility for students in northern and remote communities through the creation of quality online programs and/or programs that combine online course work with classroom instruction through short (1-2 week) residency periods.

Recommendation 6: support for more external research on post-graduate outcomes for students seeking entry into policing and other criminal justice fields.

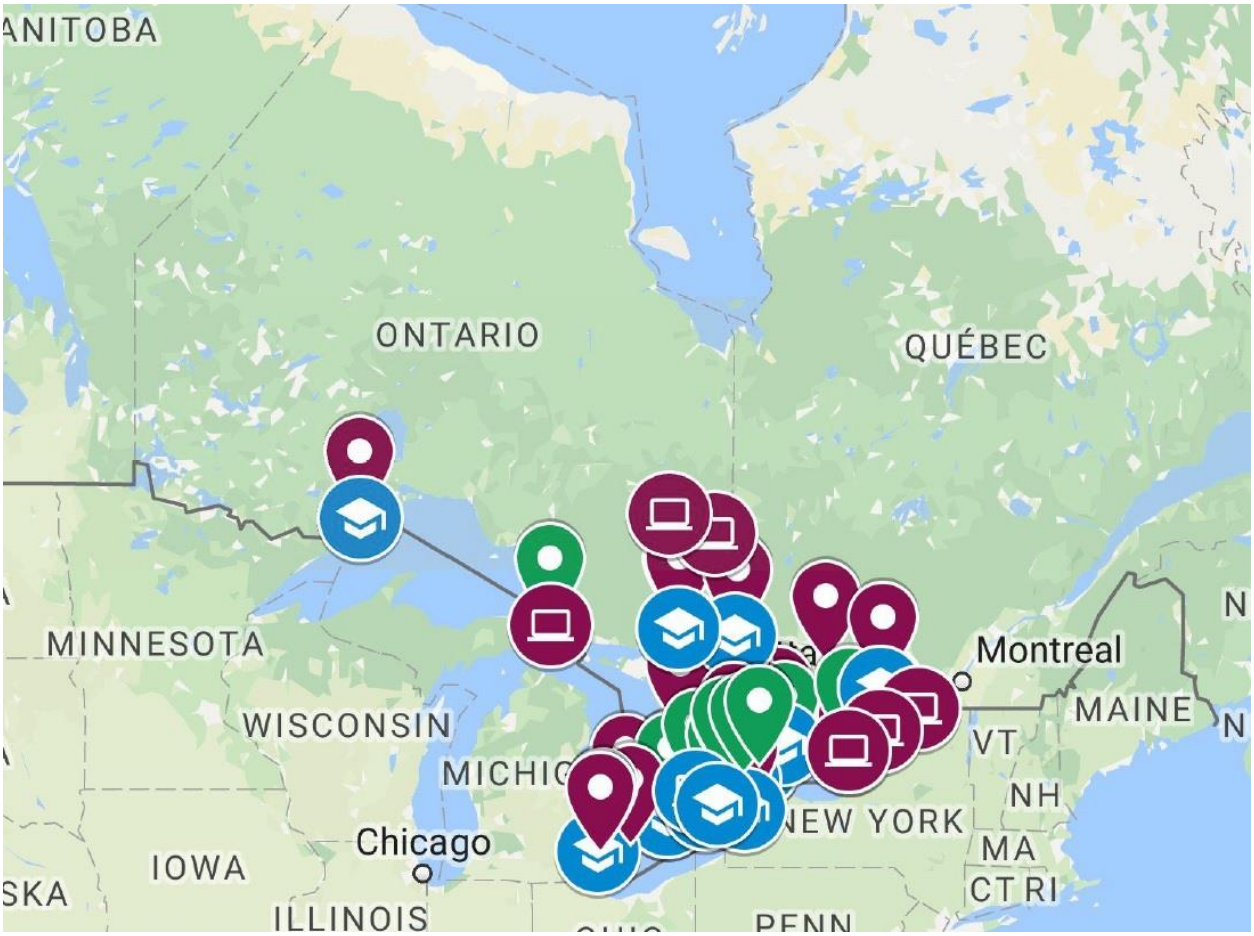
Recommendation 7: development of experiential learning modules that place students within different communities as a means of learning to respect and value diversity.

Recommendation 8: programs for criminal justice to also include a range of instructional methods, from e-learning and simulation/role play exercises to student placements, professional mentorships and internships.

Recommendation 9: program developers consult the Ontario and Police Sector Council competency models when designing curricula aimed at potential police recruits and that course developers consult the Ontario Police College and other training bodies before developing courses and materials that might overlap with recruit and in-service training.

[15] As an example, PSE course designers might look to programs such as that offer at Bond University (Australia), where undergraduate degree students complete four such 'Core Skills" courses (Bartels, McGovern and Richards 2015).

Appendix I:
Location of all educational programs in Ontario marketed as appropriate for policing careers



Key:

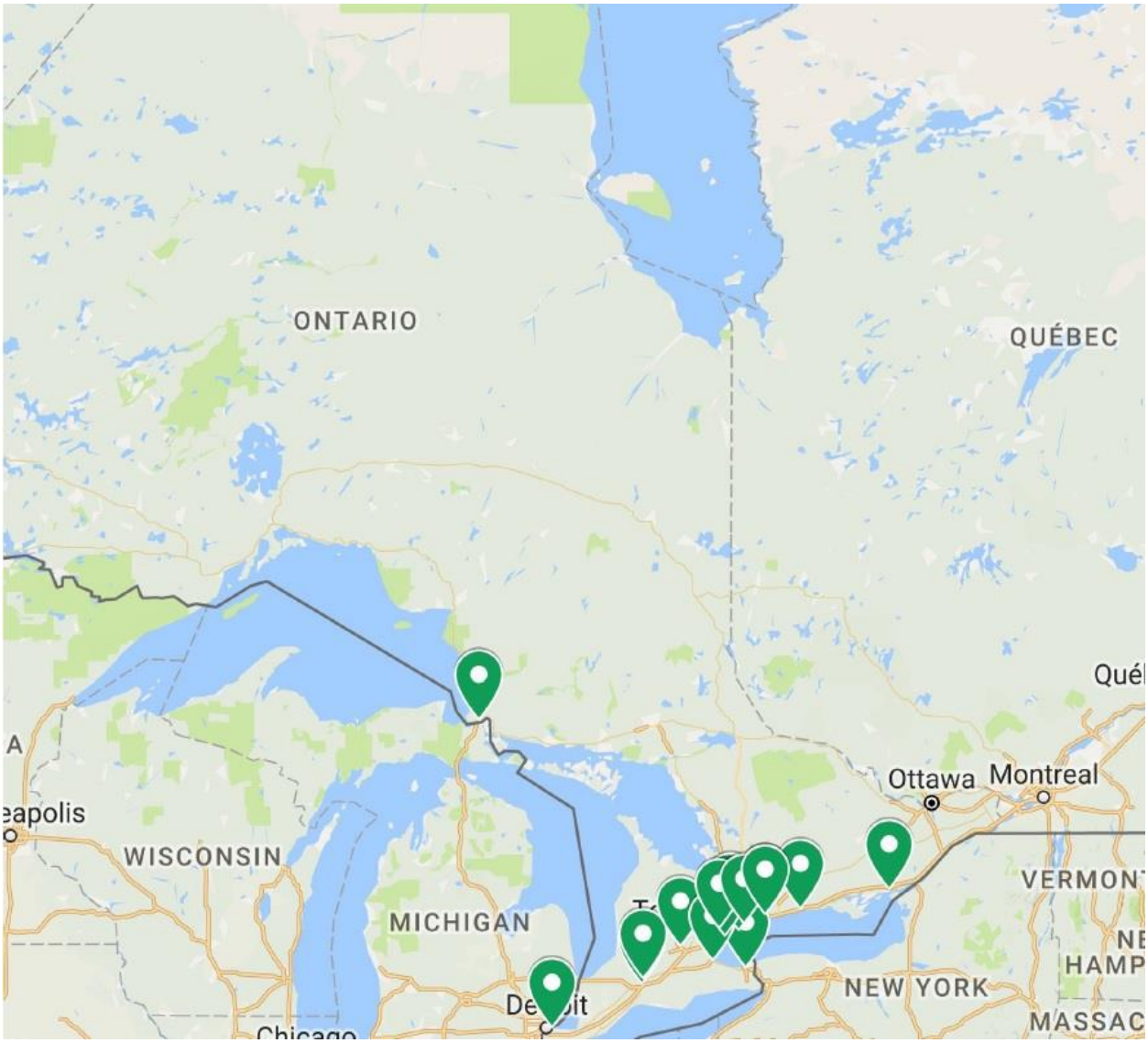
Graduate cap icons denote an **university** program

Computer icons denote either an **online** program or one with an online component

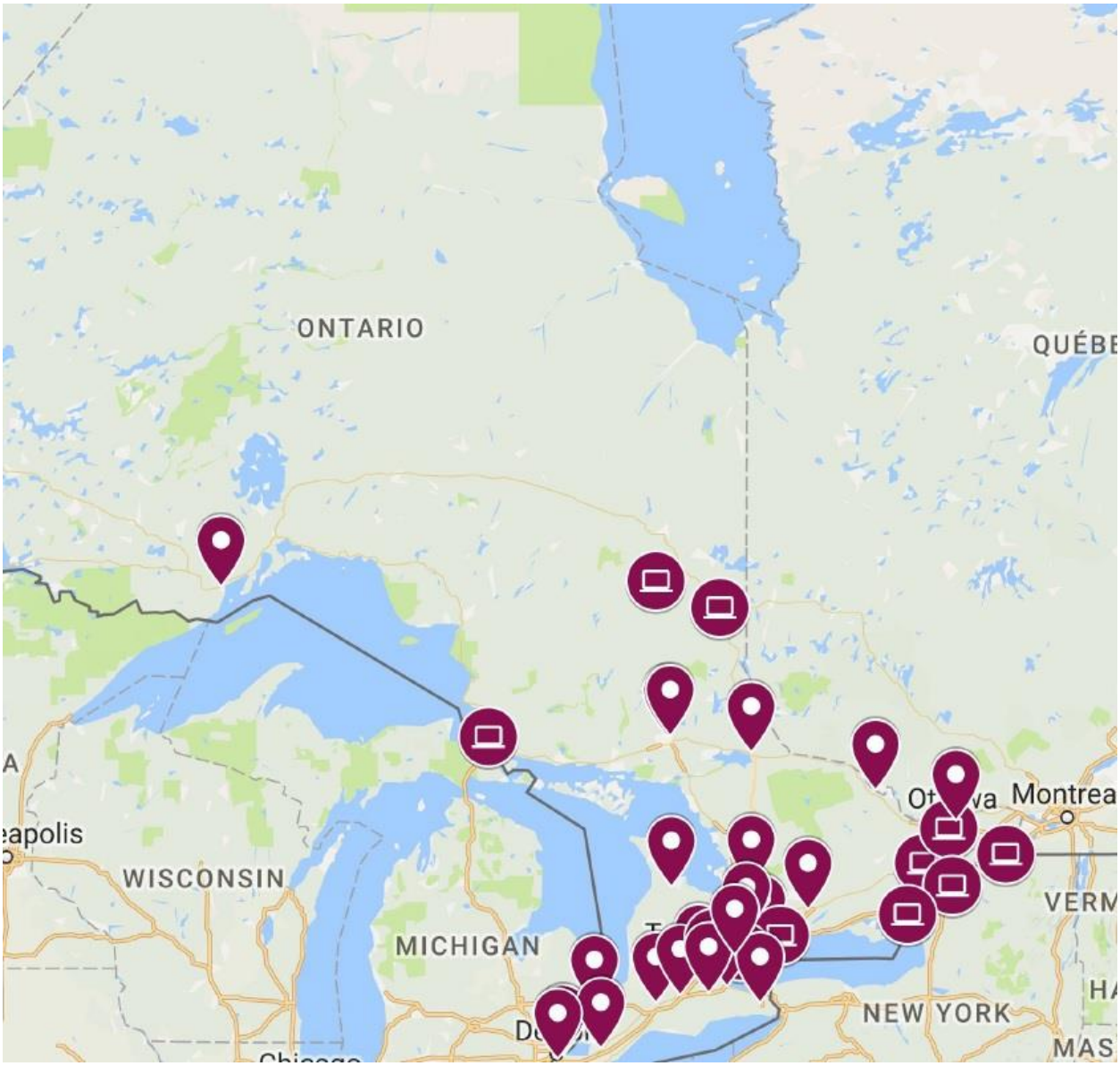
Green pin icons denote a **career college** program

Red pin icons denote a **community college** program

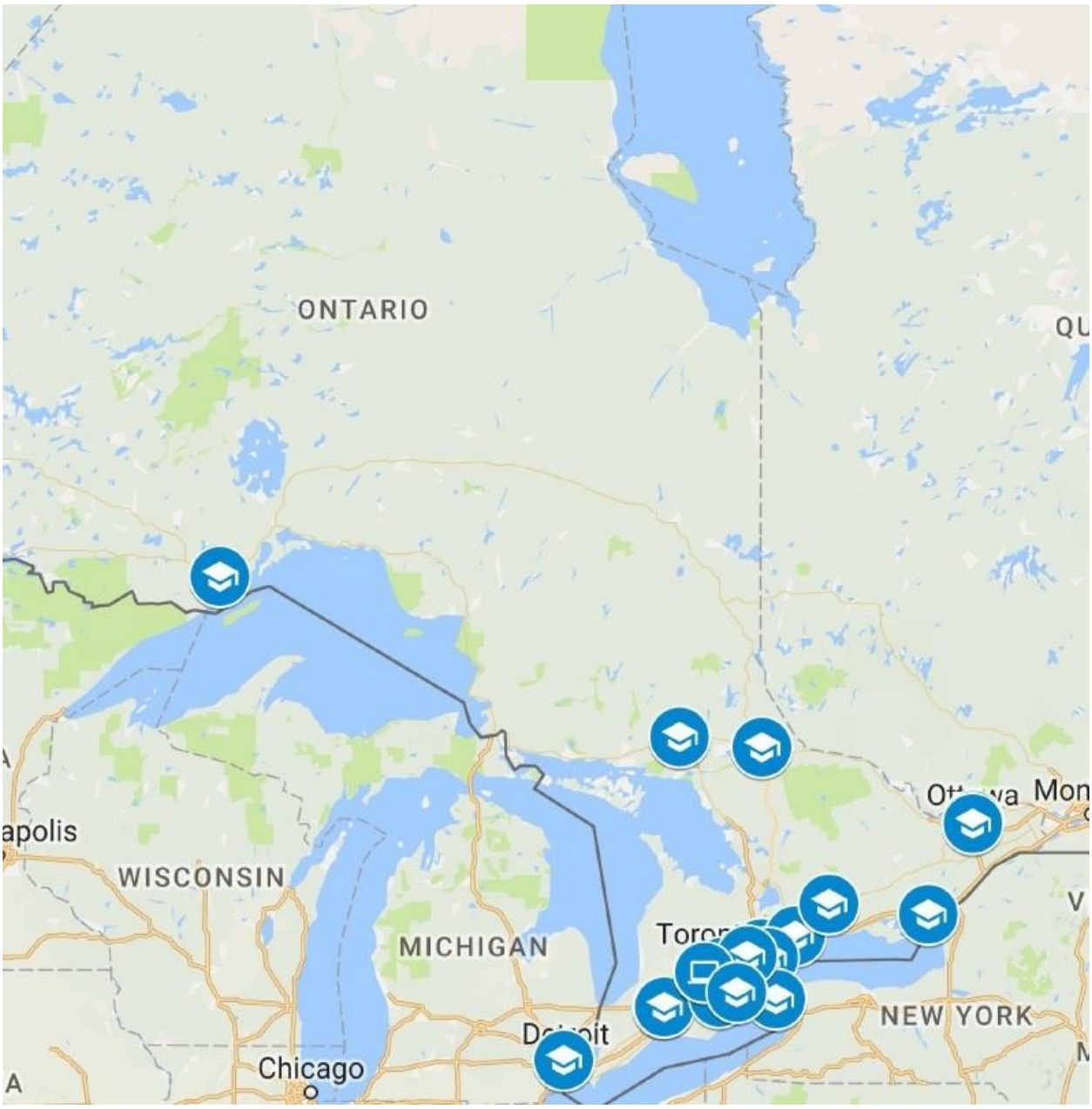
Appendix II:
Location of all career colleges with programs in Ontario marketed as appropriate for policing careers



Appendix III:
Location of all colleges with programs in Ontario marketed as appropriate for policing careers



Appendix IV:
Location of all universities with programs in Ontario marketed as appropriate for policing careers



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