PROFESSIONALISM AND CAMPUS POLICE OFFICERS

by

Julia A. Foster*

Survey research was conducted to examine the effects of education, perceptions of community attitudes, and career commitment upon overall job satisfaction of campus law enforcement officers in North Carolina. Thirteen (13) campus departments participated in the 1984 study. Findings revealed both significant and insignificant relationships. The attained level of post-secondary education was not significantly related to an officer's perception of having his/her authority questioned, nor was education related to an officer's feeling of boredom with the job. However, significant relationships were found between several variables including an officer's willingness to recommend the job to another person and his/her perceptions of community attitudes and the rank of the officer and his/her commitment to the current position. (1)

Campus police officers are thrust into a variety of roles and responsibilities that merit investigation. Their roles as peace officers, security guards, policy enforcers, and public relations officers for the institution are intermingled, and sometimes conflicting. Where does one role stop and another begin? How does this constant "hat-changing" affect the officers' performance and attitudes? The campus officers' unique challenge involves acquiring the ability to respond effectively to individuals pursuing various levels of education, and to supervisors and/or administrators possessing various levels of authority. They may be responsible for answering to a select body of students comprising a Review Board or Student Court on one end of the spectrum and answering to the

*University of North Carolina at Charlotte
Chancellor of the institution at the other end. They deal with eighteen-year-old freshmen one minute and fifty-year-old Ph.D. professors the next. Similar to their municipal counterparts, they must also be able to earn the respect of their community (the university). However, even under the most ideal circumstances, campus officers are faced with struggling for the respect of a new freshman class every fall, and are generally unable to rely upon a "good reputation" for support. Historically, the campus officer's position and responsibility has been viewed by the community as unimportant and/or unnecessary, which further hinders the officer's development of self-confidence, professional pride, and feeling of occupational worth.

The central focus of this survey was to determine the effect of campus officers' perceptions upon their job satisfaction and sense of professionalism, as measured by several variables. For example, insignificant relationships were found between education and an officer's perceptions of boredom and sense of routine; an officer's career intentions and membership in a police/law enforcement organization; and, an officer's career intentions and his/her initial interest in a campus police position.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although there have been many studies on self-perceptions of municipal, county, and state officers, few have concentrated on the campus officer (see Gelber, 1972; Jones, 1985; and Scott, 1976). One study, however, did place emphasis on the "campus cop." In their book Campus Policing, Bordner and Petersen (1983) outline the findings of their research, which involved spending six (6) weeks with a metropolitan university police department. Comprehensive and thorough, the study dealt with all aspects of campus policing. Unfortunately, they only looked at that particular institution, which was a large, non-residential university located in the middle of a southern metropolitan city. This is not the typical college campus.

Bordner and Petersen's conclusions are well-documented for the most part. However, such statements as, "While there is crime on campus that needs to be controlled on an everyday basis, there is little call for law enforcement per se" (Bordner and Petersen, 1983, p. 196) and University police work is not dangerous..." (Bordner et al., 1983 p. 77) are not supported by their data.

Jones (1985) surveyed municipal, county, and campus officers in Alabama. His purpose was to determine what difference existed among