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Employer and Training Needs: Report 12 Law Enforcement and Private Security

Joan V. Holley

University of Nebraska at Omaha

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Report Number Twelve



LAW ENFORCEMENT AND PRIVATE SECURITY

EMPLOYER AND TRAINING NEEDS

PREPARED FOR METROPOLITAN TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE



Center for Applied Urban Research

university of
nebraska 
at omaha 

LAW ENFORCEMENT AND PRIVATE SECURITY

by

Joan V. Holley

Kathryn Diesing

LAW ENFORCEMENT AND PRIVATE SECURITY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this portion of the study is to determine the employer and training needs in metropolitan Omaha in an occupational area designated as law enforcement.

Present Programs

The 1979-80 catalog of the Metropolitan Community College introduces the programs related to this occupational area with these statements:

The private security industry has experienced tremendous growth, both locally and nationally. With this growth has come the need for more professionally trained people to assume leadership in the field.

Two private security programs are described in the catalog: 1) the Two-Year Associate Degree Option in Private Security Management which prepares individuals for management level positions in the security profession and 2) the Nine-Month Certificate Option in Private Security which prepares individuals for operations level positions in the security profession.

Study Design and Execution

The target population for the study consisted of private security organizations in Omaha, local businesses and institutions that employ security personnel, and the public law enforcement agencies in Douglas, Dodge, Sarpy, and Washington Counties.

The sampling frame for the private security survey was the Omaha metropolitan telephone book which listed 13 private security and guard service organizations. The sample consisted of six of these firms. To determine the businesses and institutions that maintain a security force, informal interviews were conducted. A sampling was done of these organizations. Public law enforcement agencies included in the study were the Nebraska State Patrol, the sheriffs' offices of Douglas, Dodge,

Sarpy, and Washington Counties, and a sampling of local police departments in this four county area.

Two survey instruments used for the previous employer and training needs studies done by the Center for Applied Urban Research were used to gather data about the field of law enforcement and security. Both personal and telephone interviews were conducted. The findings of the research and conclusions are included in this report.

The Findings of the Research

Security Guard and Patrol Service

Private Security Industry Expansion. Included in the survey were three large security firms and three smaller organizations. The large firms each employed between 185 and 250 persons, and the smaller companies had between 15 and 36 individuals who assisted them in providing security services. All of the managers or owners of these private security firms indicated that their organizations had plans to expand and hire additional persons. Most of these interviewees also said that they were planning to increase the geographical area served by their firms. One stated, "We're going to go outstate and into Iowa soon." Explaining the influence of the advances in technology on the security business, the owner of one of the larger firms said that persons will be needed to fill openings in new operation categories as these jobs are developed.

With the recent predictions and indications of a recession in the United States, security company officials were anticipating an increase in the volume of their businesses. Studies have indicated that a positive relationship exists between slower economic conditions and crime in this country. Security guard and patrol service firm owners and managers cited this anticipated increase in crime as possibly creating an increased demand in the near future for the services of their companies.

Included in the study were the owners or managers of organizations maintaining their own security forces. These firms employed between 10 and 15 "in house" security persons. These participants in the study also indicated that they would be increasing the number of employees in this job category in the future.

The Need for Qualified Job Applicants. All of the security guard and patrol service interviewees indicated that there were too few qualified job applicants for the jobs available.

Discussing the requirements for employment, one owner of a security firm said, "In this business, personal attributes are more important than training." Besides requiring a high school diploma, most of the interviewees listed personal attributes as prerequisites for the security jobs: the ability to work effectively with people, communication skills, good judgment, dependability, honesty, and a good work ethic.

When asked why most applicants were not qualified for job openings, the security firm officials again listed personal attributes, such as a sense of responsibility, the ability to work with people, and communication skills. The importance of the applicants' attitudes toward work and people was emphasized by several of the security business owners and managers. Some of the security industry employers also were seeking applicants with some law enforcement experience or education.

Several of the security industry officials said that a high turn-over rate occurred in the security business. His company maintains a security guard staff of 35 persons, and has hired 50 new persons in the past two years. Another official said he had hired 75 to 100 persons in the past two years to maintain a staff of 250. A third security manager said that the turn-over rate in his company is about 30 percent per year.

Salary Range. Wages in the security guard and patrol service business varied from \$3.10 to \$10 per hour. One firm paid \$3.40 to drivers and guards and \$4.95 to messengers. The salary scale for security guards was listed as \$3.10 to \$4.10 by one firm and \$3.25 to \$4.00 by another. All the businesses in the study that hired security guards paid these employees \$4.00 per hour. The largest security firm in the study had a variety of jobs within the company with salaries related to the education and experience requirements of the positions. The computer engineers and electronic installation specialists earned about \$10.00 per hour, while the watchmen received \$3.25. The owner of the largest private security business in the area estimated that there are about 15 to 20 managerial or supervisory positions in security organizations in

Omaha. However, many of the private security firms are owner-operated so many managerial positions would not be open to employees of the companies. The salary for these positions was between \$14,000 and \$35,000 per year.

Education for Security Employment. Three of the six security business officials indicated that they would prefer applicants with no previous educational experiences who would then be involved in on-the-job training programs. The other three recommended a three-month program, a "six-month stream-lined basic security course," and a one-year program of studies. Of the three representatives of businesses maintaining security forces, one said that he preferred job applicants with no experience or training, one said "Any education or training would be helpful," and the third employed "recruits from the UN-O Criminal Justice program."

The employers said that the present Metro Tech Security program included courses which would involve all of the skills and knowledges that would be required by jobs in security. None of the businesses maintaining security forces had heard of the Metro Tech programs or employed Metro Tech graduates. Half of the security industry officials were familiar with the programs and had employed graduates of the Metro Tech security program. The other half were not aware of the programs and had never hired Metro Tech students or graduates. One of the interviewees was on the security program advisory board of Metro Tech, had developed a working relationship with the college, and had hired many of the security program graduates. This security firm owner found these graduates to be very well prepared for positions in his organization.

Public Law Enforcement Agencies

Employment Opportunities in Public Law Enforcement. In the survey sample of ten public law enforcement agencies, the size of the police forces varied from just a few officers to the law enforcement staff of 545 officers and 145 support persons in the City of Omaha. In the smaller communities the starting salaries were around \$1,000 a month, with the City of Omaha offering \$1,386 to new law enforcement employees. The salary scale was related to years of service and additional responsibilities. The highest police officer salaries, \$2,393 per month, were paid to police captains with the maximum amount of time on the force.

Douglas County employed about 97 law enforcement officers, Dodge County had 12, Sarpy County maintained a force of 45-50 officers, and

Washington County had five persons working in law enforcement. Starting salaries for county law enforcement employees also were around \$1,000 per month, with one county paying \$800 to law enforcement persons who were not yet certified. The scale of wages also was similar to the police department scales, with employees being compensated for years of service and advancements in rank. The Douglas County law enforcement officers with 21 years of service were paid around \$20,000 per year. The Nebraska State Patrol employed about 400 persons in law enforcement, with a beginning salary of \$1,150 per month.

Almost all of the public law enforcement representatives expressed a need for additional law enforcement employees. However, they also mentioned budgetary constraints on plans for expansion. Many "hoped" they would be able to increase their staffs. One interviewee told of a possible annexation that would require 16 to 20 more police officers. These study participants also mentioned that the predicted increase in crime would necessitate larger law enforcement staffs.

Education/Training for Public Law Enforcement. The police departments of Omaha and Lincoln and the Nebraska Highway Patrol have their own training programs for new employees. All other law enforcement personnel in Nebraska are required to be certified by the Nebraska Law Enforcement Academy within one year from the day of the initial appointment to the job. To be certified, law enforcement persons must attend the eight-week training session at the center and pass specific tests.

Regardless of their educational background or experience, all applicants for law enforcement positions with the Omaha Police Department must take eight different examinations. Since hiring is based on the results of these tests, a certificate or diploma from a law enforcement or security program will not guarantee employment. The head of the personnel department of the Omaha Police Department said, "When we need 20 people, we give the tests to 50 to 60 applicants since only about 30 to 40 percent of the applicants pass the tests."

One of the interviewees said, "Good sound judgment is required for law enforcement, and this can't be learned in classes or from a book." Another police official reiterated this idea, "Police work is mostly common sense and good judgment."

Various minimum requirements for employment were listed by the law enforcement agencies: a high school diploma or GED, a civil service examination, good physical condition, a valid Nebraska driver's license, a good record with no felony convictions, and legal age. Also listed as important to being a law enforcement officer were a good basic education in math and English, a sense of humor, some previous education or experience in law enforcement, a knowledge of Nebraska laws and statutes, a knowledge of public events and trends, and good communication skills.

Previous experience or education was listed as a requirement primarily by smaller communities. While the Omaha Police Department does not require any law enforcement training prior to being employed, many of the police officers have enlisted in law enforcement or security programs at both Metro Tech and the University of Nebraska at Omaha while being on the police force.

Of the four county sheriffs' offices representatives, two said that their agencies preferred applicants with no previous experience, and one said that his organization would prefer applicants with either a three-month, one-, or two-year certificate. The other said that a four-year college education would be the best preparation for a law enforcement career and that one of his best employees was a graduate of the criminal justice program at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

When shown the private security program that Metro Tech offers, most of the public law enforcement representatives said that the course of studies appeared to include most all of the skills and knowledge that would be required by a law enforcement job. Some police and sheriff department interviewees suggested that a special psychology course be added to the curriculum. This course would include a unit on personality theory, particularly as it would relate to law offenders. One sheriff said, "You have to deal differently with different kinds of people, and law enforcement officers should know about the various kinds of offenders."

Suggestions for Metro Tech Programs in Public Law Enforcement

Almost all of the public law enforcement officials participating in the study indicated that a need existed for law enforcement courses, workshops, and seminars to supplement the training at the Nebraska Law Enforcement Training Center. Many of the participants in the study recommended that these programs be more advanced and detailed than those taken during the required eight-week session at the Center. A county sheriff suggested that these programs could include classes in law enforcement management, investigation, interrogation, evidence law, and new technology. Another sheriff said that no training was available in the handling of legal papers even though every law enforcement organization served papers to offenders. He added, "If someone knew how to do that, he'd be swamped by offers from all over the state."

A police department representative said that he perceived a real need for local workshops. He explained his ideas on continuing education in law enforcement:

The field of law enforcement is changing so rapidly. It changes with each court decision, so what is legal today won't be legal tomorrow. Metro could offer workshops that would keep law enforcement people current on court decisions and other changes.

A police chief from one of the smaller communities said that the eight-week required training sessions were a "real hardship" on their police force, since additional personnel was always required to replace officers absent while attending the training sessions. He said that he would prefer to have the officers attend shorter sessions over a longer period of time. Several of the interviewees mentioned that the state training facility could be losing some of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration funding. They suggested that Metro Tech could be involved in training should a drastic cut in Federal funds occur.

While no specific education/training requirements exist for employment at the Omaha Police Department, many of the officers take classes while on the police force. The head of the personnel department said that some of the officers have enrolled in the Metro Tech and University of Nebraska at Omaha programs after working on the force for several years.

Conclusions

In the fields of private security and law enforcement, many job opportunities appeared to exist in the four county area. All the private security companies and businesses that maintain security forces had plans to hire additional security persons and indicated that there were not enough qualified applicants for job openings. Most of the security patrol and guard companies also were planning to expand their businesses, with some anticipating an increased need for their services with an increase in crime related to an economic recession. Public law enforcement agencies indicated a need for additional personnel, but most of them said that this expansion would depend on future budgetary situations. Many of the owners and managers of private security patrol and guard firms mentioned that a high turn-over rate occurred among their employees.

The findings of the research indicated that a wide variation existed in the education/training recommended to gain employment in the fields of law enforcement and private security. About half of the participants in the study said that their organizations preferred applicants with no previous education or experience, while the other half recommended a three-month, one-, two-, or four-year program to prepare for a job in private security or law enforcement.

All public law enforcement officers are required by state law to take an eight-week training program at the Nebraska Law Enforcement Training Center, regardless of the employee's previous training or experience. The Omaha Police Department also has eight tests which determine which of the applicants will be hired, regardless of the applicants educational background. Almost all of the employers participating in this study emphasized the importance of personal attributes as a qualification for employment. Attributes mentioned by the security and law enforcement officials included good judgment, common sense, honesty, dependability, and the ability to work effectively with people.

About half of the participants in the study were not familiar with the Metro Tech security programs. After examining the program of studies, most of the law enforcement and security employers said that the program included the courses which would provide the student opportunity to gain the skills and knowledge necessary in security or law enforcement work.

The only addition to the program suggested was a psychology course in personality theory so that the officers could better understand the different types of persons encountered in law enforcement work.

Many of the law enforcement officials said a need existed for seminars, workshops, and courses to supplement the training at the Nebraska Law Enforcement Training Center. Thus, the law enforcement employers recommended a continuing education role for Metro Tech in the field of law enforcement.