

Police – Community College Partnerships: *increasing the number of suitable police candidates*

Discussion Paper – Part I

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Executive summary

Police services are facing unprecedented recruiting challenges. Community college law enforcement programs have enormous numbers of students. Colleges are a potential source of candidates but there is no organized or structured developmental path that links them directly to police recruiting by legislation or policy.

The goal of this discussion paper series is to share insights, generate meaningful discussion about colleges as one source of increasing suitable applicants, and explore ways to connect community college law enforcement programs with police recruiting through structured partnerships.

The series will be organized as follows:

-Part 1 is a starting point that generally explains the Niagara Regional Police –Niagara College Ride-along partnership. This Ride-along program has been acknowledged as a ‘model’ for police- community college partnerships. The general benefits will be listed in Part 1 to form the ‘core discussion’ component.

- Part 2 explains anecdotal research and findings that explores specific strengths and weaknesses of the Ride-along partnership.

- Part 3 explains anecdotal research and finding that explores: (i) the ‘reality’ referring to the ‘potential’ of community college law enforcement programs as a source of candidates, and (ii) partnership strategies to develop candidates to full ‘entry-level’ potential

I. Summary of the Ride-along partnership

Niagara Regional Police and Niagara College Police Foundations program have built and maintained a partnership for almost two decades centered on a structured, extensive Ride-along program that has been instrumental in the development and hiring of a number of currently serving officers across Canada. The Ride-along program has been a work in progress. After evolving into an abbreviated version of the Constable Selection process, the Ride-along partnership has moved to the proposal/discussion stage for a ‘mentoring

program’, where the Niagara Regional Police and Niagara College Police Foundations program would collaborate to increase the number of suitable *applicants*. For the purpose of the mentoring program, ‘candidates’ and ‘applicants’ are viewed as two separate concepts. An ‘applicant’ refers to a person who has met pre-application requirements (eg: minimum legislative standards and provincial requirements such as the Ontario Chief of Police Certificate) and has formally applied for a constable or cadet position. A candidate is a person working toward becoming an ‘applicant.’ .

The Ride-along partnership has been a collaborative effort between two organizations to identify and develop suitable candidates. The formation and evolution of the partnership is a model of simple, efficient, and meaningful cooperation by like-minded groups of people. It is a shining example of a team effort that is interested only in putting up ladders, not obstacles, for the next generation of police candidates. The Ride-along partnership is evidence of how two distinctly different organizations can be united by one common goal. The ethos of a police organization and a college organization are worlds apart but they are brought together by student career goals.

On June 20, 2008, Niagara Regional Police Deputy Chief Gary Beaulieu made a presentation to the Niagara College Police Foundations Program Advisory Committee (PAC) explaining the ‘experience deficit’ and recruiting challenges that that NRP are facing, prompting this series of discussion papers. The problem of the ‘experience deficit’ is the expertise void caused by a high volume of retiring officers. Replacing the volume of outgoing experience is a daunting task. The number of applicants has dropped by almost 50%. However, a the basis of a natural solution exists: (a) The NRP training branch is situated on the Welland Campus at Niagara College (b) In September, 2008, 654 students will be enrolled in two Niagara College law enforcement programs. The volume of community college students should be a source of potential applicants as a partial solution. These factors were the impetus of a Phase 1 “Mentoring Program” proposal intended to expand the Ride-along partnership for the purpose of developing more ‘suitable’ applicants. A ‘suitable’ applicant not only meets the minimum requirements but surpasses them, allowing the public to be protected by the ‘best and the brightest.’ Like all police organizations, the Niagara Regional Police are committed to preserving recruiting integrity.

II. The Niagara Region

The Niagara Region is a unique regional municipality, located in Southern Ontario, Canada, because of its:

- i. geographic enormity,
- ii. fluctuating and diverse population,
- iii. economic diversity,
- iv. border crossings to the U.S.A
- v. close proximity to North America’s seventh largest metropolitan area, the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

On January 1, 1970, provincial legislation joined 12 municipalities, creating a regional municipality that covers 1896 sq. km (715 sq. miles.) Its population of 410,000 people is a blend of urban and rural that annually explodes through tourism to about 15 million people. The region is bordered by three waterways – two Great Lakes and the Niagara River separating Canada and U.S.A. Consequently, the Niagara Region’s public safety is governed by two law enforcement organizations: Niagara Regional Police Service (NRPS) and Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) – two separate, distinctly different organizations with one common goal – public safety.¹

III. Niagara Regional Police Service (NRPS)

The Niagara Regional Police Service is the oldest regional police service in Ontario. Formed on January 1, 1971, the NRPS employs approximately 1000 police officers and civilian employees (approx. 650 sworn officers and 350 civilians). The above-mentioned five factors that distinguish the Niagara Region create unique policing challenges.²

IV. Niagara College Police Foundations and Law & Security Administration programs

Niagara College has two 2-year law enforcement diploma programs: Law & Security Administration (LASA) and Police Foundations (PF) and a unique collaborative degree-diploma program offered with Brock University.

Law & Security Administration (LASA) is over 40 years old. Police Foundations (PF) is 10 years old. The Brock-Niagara collaborative degree-diploma is 6 years old.

LASA emerged in 1967 from research and legislation that created the Ontario community college system in response to an accurately predicted need for an educated workforce to cope with an anticipated changing economic landscape. After forecasting the dramatic technological explosion and social transformation, Ontario reformed the single-tier post-secondary system dominated by universities and their strict admission standards by adding another tier open to all students. Colleges featured an open-admission system and vocation-oriented programs. The goal was simple – develop students so they could enter the workforce as soon as possible. Colleges were expected to ‘close the gap’ by taking a student with minimal qualifications and develop working competencies. The Ontario government passed legislation to ensure that college education was ‘open’ to any one.³

¹ Arcaro, Gino(2007).*Post 9-11 Effect on Law Enforcement in the Niagara Region*. Niagara College Research & Development Dept; Welland, Ontario

² ibid

³ Arcaro, Gino (2005). *Designing a Workable Plan for Ontario Community College*. M.Ed requirement. Brock Univeristy, St. Catharines, Ontario

LASA was among the initial programs offered in 1967. Police Foundations emerged 30 years later from the recommendations emerging from research conducted by the then-called Ontario Ministry of the Solicitor General, that intended to create a new two-tier police recruit training system. Police Foundation was supposed to become the mandatory first-tier of academic preparation. Ontario Police College was to be the second-tier (AKST – Applied Knowledge and Skills Training). However, those recommendations were not implemented. Police Foundations became a new program but it was not mandatory

Both Police Foundations and LASA experienced explosive growth. Annually, both programs include a total of over 500-600 students. In April, 2008, 555 students were enrolled. In September, 2008, 654 total students are expected. The distribution of students is approximately a 2-1 PF-LASA ratio.⁴

In 2002, the collaborative degree – diploma was signed for a six-year period. The structure required students to apply to and be accepted one of three Brock University programs: psychology, sociology, or political science. Years 1, 2, and 4 are completed at Brock University. Year 3 is the year 2 of Niagara College Police Foundations program of study. Students attend Niagara College full-time during their third year and study only the second year of Police Foundations. At the completion of 4 years, graduates earn both a degree and a PF diploma. Adding to the uniqueness is the 3-way partnership: Brock University, Niagara College, and Niagara Regional Police, who do not guarantee employment but endorse the program. In May, 2008, the agreement was renewed for another six-year period.

IV. The “Candidate Paradox”

The ‘candidate paradox’ represents the gap between where candidates are when they enter community college and where they have to be to get hired as a police officer

Community college programs have an open-admission policy, mandated by provincial legislation. Constable section includes significantly higher standards. The gap between the two is significant. It is either a positive or a negative. From the positive perspective, the gap represents a development pathway – an opportunity to develop the competencies required by the constable selection process. A negative perspective views the gap as barrier – an insurmountable hurdle. The gap either has a bridge to cross it or is a canyon that cannot be crossed.

Every developmental program for any endeavour - occupational or athletic – is either a ladder or an obstacle. The key is finding ways to put up ladders instead of obstacles.

V. The Ride-along Program

The Niagara Regional Police (NRP) ride-along program is a currently a non-credit, value-added component to the PF program, governed by an NRP General Order. The Ride-

⁴ PF-LASA Program Advisory Committee meeting, June 20, 2008, Niagara College, Welland, Ont.

along is available to second-year PF students only. Students earn a separate certificate. The NRP Ride-along is not a mandatory part of the PF program of study simply because of the volume of students. The NRP cannot accommodate almost 200 second-year PF students. One Ride-along selection process is available in both the fall and winter semesters.

The Ride-along started with a proposal in 1990 to former Deputy Chief Frank Parkhouse. The proposal included three components:

1. pedagogical benefits
2. recruiting benefits
3. structure – a selection process

Deputy Chief Parkhouse approved the proposal. The selection process included an application and interviews that replicated the 1990 selection process. After the Constable Selection process changed, the protocol was revised to replicate the current Constable Selection process. The revised protocol was the product of collaboration between the Niagara Regional Police Association, NRP administration, and Niagara College PF program. The goal was to reduce liability. The front-line members of the NRP Association played a key role in submitting recommendations for a draft proposal. Shortly afterward, the NRP passed the General Order that currently governs the Ride-along. The protocol includes:

- i. an application by cover letter and resume with a transcript that must prove a minimum GPA of 70%
- ii. interviews before a Selection Committee composed of a minimum of 2 currently serving police officers and the PF program coordinator
- iii. an abbreviated ECI interview that includes a maximum of 9 questions during a 15-20 minutes time period.
- iv. The selection committee gives immediate feedback, by informing students of the strengths and weaknesses that need improvement.
- v. Successful candidates are sworn-in and assigned to a coach officer.
- vi. The amount of patrol hours are determined by the NRP Training Branch. The amount of hours varies according officer availability.
- vii. The Coach Officer completes an evaluation after every patrol. The Coach Officer assigns a mark that determines whether the student continues.
- viii. Students must submit notes and General Occurrence Reports for every call responded to. The PF coordinator marks them in accordance to ‘real-life’ expectations, which includes the possibility of re-writing reports until standards are met.
- ix. Extensive seminars are conducted to teach students how to succeed. With NRP approval, students are taught how to structure a resume and how to answer competency-based questions. The goal is to prepare students for success without coddling.

VI. Benefits

Part 1 of this discussion series presents only an anecdotal summary of benefits to build a *discussion core* before progressing to the second discussion phase.

A number of benefits have emerged. The following is a list of the 10 general benefits:

1. verbal communication skill improvement
 2. written communication skill improvement
 3. performance anxiety
 4. developing the competitive edge. Distinguishing oneself
 5. immediate feedback – mastery learning model
 6. officer ECI skill improvement
 7. officer mentoring skill development
 8. frontline evaluation: the dual-evaluation - “bringing back the cadet rank”
 9. coach officer leadership experience
 10. meaningful portfolio development & background check interviews
- verbal communication skill improvement: Anecdotal research overwhelmingly shows that the abbreviated ECI was the most compelling college experience that improved student public speaking skills. The consensus among currently serving officers who graduated from the NRP Ride-along found that the abbreviated ECI was the essential catalyst that contributed to their success at their formal ECI that led to their hiring.
 - written communication skill improvement. The volume of GOR writing has improved every student who submitted 100% of assignments. Those who committed to GORs improved within a range of 32 % - 51%.
 - Performance anxiety. Research shows that fear of public speaking is the second greatest fear after fear of death. The same holds true in college. Anecdotal findings show that: (i) fear of the ECI interview is the number one reason why students do not apply for the ride-along, and (ii) the abbreviated ECI has been the most stressful experience in the lives of many college students.
 - developing the competitive edge – ability to distinguish oneself. Anecdotal evidence shows that fear of competing with other candidates is the number two reason that prevents students from applying. Those who applied reported that the experience taught them how to distinguish themselves from other candidates
 - immediate feedback – mastery learning model. The Ride-along includes every element of Bloom’s mastery learning model but the element emphasized most is immediate feedback. ECI panelists give students immediate, honest evaluation. Anecdotal evidence shows a 100% consensus that the immediate feedback is the most valuable and most appreciated learning experience in a student’s academic career. The reason is the source of the immediate feedback – expert front-line officers.

- officer ECI skill improvement. Every panelist has reported improvement in their own ECI skills. Their experience as a panelist has helped them in promotional interviews.
- officer mentoring skill development. Empirical research shows that:
 - (i) the act of mentoring is a powerful source of intrinsic motivator and a catalyst to higher performance by the mentor.
 - (ii) developing others is a potent source of personal growth where the mentor may move to a level of expertise and maturation because of the process known ‘transferring deep smarts,’ a finding reached by researchers Dorothy Leonard and Walter Swap in their landmark 2004 study.

The volume of police officers who have volunteered as unpaid panelists and who have genuinely committed to the ECI evaluation and selection process, have not been motivated by money or any other reward. There has never been a shortage of unpaid police volunteers because each one has reported authentic satisfaction from mentoring students at the ECI interview.

- frontline evaluation. The best way for a student to evaluate policing as a legitimate career choice is to experience it on the front-line. The best way to evaluate a candidate is having a front-line officer assess the student in an actual front-line environment. This dual-evaluation replicates the ‘cadet’ rank. The ride-along program has the same effect as “bringing back the cadet rank.”
Commentary: Bring back the cadet rank for two reasons. First, being ‘promoted’ to constable increases respect for the uniform patrol branch – officers won’t be in such a hurry to escape it. Secondly, the cadet rank has proved to be an outstanding developmental program. The evidence is the number of accomplished officers who entered at the rank of cadet.
- coach officer experience. All coach officers volunteer for that role. Uniform officer who volunteer as coach officers have reported that the coach officer experience has provided them with valuable leadership development.
- meaningful portfolio development & background check interviews. Academic references are part of background check is the constable selection process. The enormous Police Foundations enrolment creates the distinct reality that students may easily dissolve in the mainstream and be just a ‘number.’ The ride-along program prevents that. Students can make themselves memorable by strengthening their work ethic in the ride-along program. After every patrol shift, each student must meet with the coordinator to have GORs marked and receive immediate feedback. The volume of literature increase student portfolios and allows meaningful academic references.

Part 1 conclusions:

1. Ride-along programs increase the number of suitable applicants.
2. Ride-along partnerships emerge from 'benefit-oriented proposals that form policy, start with pilot projects, and evolve through constant evaluation, communication, and collaboration
3. Police Associations play a key role in the success of Ride-along program

Despite the benefits of the Ride-along program, weaknesses and challenges exist. Improvement is needed to reach the full potential of the program. Those will be explored in Part 2.

Discussion regarding Part 1 is invited. Comments or questions can be emailed to garcaro@niagarac.on.ca