The Diffusion of Accreditation Among Florida Police Agencies

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AMONG FLORIDA POLICE AGENCIES

by

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine how the adoption of state accreditation has diffused or spread among Florida municipal police law enforcement agencies.

Design/methodology/approach – The study group consists of all municipal police departments operating continuously in the State of Florida from 1997 through 2006. Independent variables are taken from an annual survey, sponsored by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, to compare agencies that became accredited (n = 81) with agencies that did not gain state accreditation (n = 189).

Findings – While accredited agencies differ from non-accredited agencies on a host of indicators at the zero-order, it does not appear that the state accreditation process itself is responsible for nurturing organizational change. Having received national accreditation is an important predictor of gaining state accreditation.

Research limitations/implications – Instead of looking at organizational details, future researchers might wish to conceive of accreditation as a credentialing process and concentrate on characteristics of agency leaders, especially those who are seeking upward mobility in their professional careers.

Practical implication – State accreditation status has reached only a small portion of the intended audience and appears to have morphed into a credential rather than an actual tool for meaningful reform.

Originality/value – This paper informs accreditation oversight bodies as to who their self-selected constituents tend to be and which members of the target audience are not being reached.

Keywords – Accreditation, Diffusion, Adoption of innovation

Paper type – Research paper

INTRODUCTION

The quest for recognition as a profession has led law enforcement on an elusive hunt. Early reform efforts focused almost exclusively on raising the caliber of incumbents which, in turn, was expected to elevate the delivery of police services. Enhancing the quality of officers became the mantra of a steady stream of blue-ribbon commissions and task forces throughout the 20th century. As a result, the atmosphere gradually shifted towards an emphasis on better-educated recruits, gender and racial diversity, extensive pre-service training, more stringent background checks, sterling character, and other personnel improvements. As Lumb (1994) aptly notes, despite substantial gains in recent years, there is still much room for further growth in personnel development.

A parallel development refocuses attention away from the individual level and concentrates on upgrading law enforcement organizations through a process known as "accreditation." Accreditation means that a law enforcement agency implements a host of operational standards considered to be current "best practices" in the industry. These procedures are designed to combat crime more effectively, deliver services more efficiently, enhance cooperation with other players in the criminal justice system, and boost public support. The hope, of course, is that accredited agencies will emerge with a more modern and professional orientation (Joseph, 1980).

The catalyst for a national accreditation campaign came when the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives, the National Sheriffs' Association, and the Police Executive Research Forum

combined forces during the late 1970s to promote greater organizational accountability. A task force compiled what one might construe to be a set of minimum standards for law enforcement agencies. Prior to this time, regulatory bodies within each state had formulated their own series of minimum standards which all recruits had to satisfy in order to become certified as sworn personnel. However, scant attention was devoted to police agencies. As a result, the goal behind the accreditation movement was to parallel the officer certification process and to apply it to law enforcement organizations.

An independent non-governmental entity, the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement agencies, Inc. (CALEA), was established to oversee the credentialing process. CALEA devised, and periodically updates, a series of mandatory and non-mandatory standards to which departments seeking national recognition must adhere. Satisfaction of these prerequisites, verified via on-site visits by trained assessors and inspection of supporting documentation, eventually culminates in the decision as to whether CALEA should grant its seal of approval to the aspiring agency. Once an agency corrals this professional stature, reviews occur every three years to ensure ongoing compliance and currency with new developments.

One early observer mused that, under ideal conditions, a continued expansion of interest in accreditation eventually would deplete the roster of eligible agencies within two decades (Mastrofski, 1986). The reality of the experience suggests otherwise. Since its inception some 25 years ago, CALEA has conferred its mark of distinction on less than 3% of all local, state, and federal agencies in the United States (Hougland and Mesloh, 2005). Only 10% of all Florida municipal agencies have become CALEA-certified. In other words, 97% of all U.S. agencies and 90% of all Florida municipal

agencies have not seen a compelling need to pursue this opportunity. Obviously, the diffusion or spread of accreditation has not enjoyed quite the enthusiastic reception that early supporters had envisioned.

Much of the apparent reluctance to pursue CALEA approval stems from the concerns of police leaders regarding the actual value of accreditation and the high costs, both direct and indirect, associated with this endeavor (Carter and Sapp, 1994; DuPont, 1993; Kurz and Kelly, 2005). With few exceptions (Burlingame and Baro, 2005; Hougland and Mesloh, 2005; McCabe and Fajardo, 2001), not much is known about the impact of accreditation. While the benefits remain amorphous and extremely nebulous, an agency is expected to invest considerable resources during the two-year self-study period it typically takes to muster professional review. Incurred costs include application fees, office space and equipment, personnel salaries, assessor expenses, and other sundry items. Such a capital outlay is more than what some agencies can afford to allocate for the promise of intangible returns.

As Appendix A illustrates, this quandary has lead a number of states to copy the national accreditation process, tailor it to more localized needs, and charter their own independent, scaled-down version of this credentialing mechanism. More pertinent to the present inquiry is that the 1993 Florida legislature charged the Florida Sheriffs' Association and the Florida Police Chiefs' Association with developing a voluntary law enforcement agency accreditation program (*Florida Statues*, Chapter 943.125). This effort culminated in the establishment of the Commission for Florida Law Enforcement Accreditation, Inc. (CFA).

<Insert Appendix A about here>

The CFA, modeled in part after CALEA, designed a series of professional standards for Florida law enforcement agencies to emulate. Departments that have acquired CALEA standing can skip the overlapping criteria and only have to meet a smaller subset of state-specific standards. The CFA application fees are substantially lower than what CALEA charges and the assessor travel costs are considerably reduced since CFA reviewers reside within the state. In short, the CFA is a scaled-down, Florida version of CALEA and is offered to agencies at a much more affordable price. Despite being an apparent bargain, only 30% of Florida municipal agencies became state-accredited during the 1997–2006 interval. What distinguishes these agencies from non-adopting agencies is the central focus of this study.

THE PRESENT STUDY

A number of states have seated their own accreditation bodies over the past several years. Many of these organizations have broadened their mandates beyond the traditional law enforcement focus and now incorporate additional areas such as public safety communications, pre-service training academies, college and university campus safety departments, jails, correctional facilities, and crime laboratories. Despite this proliferation, law enforcement accreditation remains a relatively understudied enterprise. As a result, the purpose of the present study is twofold. The first goal is to shed light on a previously unexamined facet by focusing on how CFA-accreditation has spread among Florida law enforcement agencies. The second aspect is to better understand how CFA-accreditation has impacted Florida law enforcement agencies.

Political scientists (Berry and Berry, 1990; Glick, 1981; Gray, 1973; Rogers, 1962; Walker, 1969) and sociologists (Best, 2006; Grattet, Jenness, and Curry, 1998; Jenness and Grattet, 2005; Pampel, 2002; Wejnert, 2002) have cultivated an interest in studying the adoption and diffusion of innovations for some time now. This topic has been heralded as a promising orientation for understanding administrative, organizational, programmatic, and technological developments in policing (Klinger, 2003). Among other things, this framework enabled Weiss (1997) to monitor adoption of computer enhancements by police agencies, Morabito (2008) to look at the spread of community policing, and Weisburd and his colleagues (2003) to track the rapid embracement of Compstat operations. Despite a growing body of insights, some gaps persist in our understanding of how law enforcement agencies incorporate change (King, 2000; Morabito, 2008). As a result, the present study draws upon this intellectual heritage in an effort to better understand police accreditation.

THE STUDY GROUP

There are a number of reasons why Florida represents an ideal venue for this study. First, the local atmosphere is conducive to the pursuit of state accreditation because of the grass-roots manner in which the CFA was conceived. Both the Florida Sheriffs' Association and the Florida Police Chiefs' Association were involved in the early planning stages of this venture, a move that added to its authenticity. Second, according to the most recent *Census of State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies* (Reaves, 2007, p. 10), Florida housed 2.2% of all city police departments in the nation, 4.9% of all sworn municipal personnel in this country, and 5.3% of full-time local law

enforcement employees in the United States. Third, not only is Florida home to four of the fifty largest municipal agencies in the country, it also has a high concentration of smaller agencies, a group which the *Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics* (LEMAS) survey routinely excludes. For example, the 2007 CJAP report reveals that 21% of Florida's municipal police agencies employ ten or fewer full-time law enforcement officers, 49% of the agencies contain ten to 49 officers, and 12% fall into the 50–99 range. Finally, commentators have described the typical innovation diffusion pattern as resembling an S-shaped curve (Best, 2006; Rogers, 1995). In other words, the novelty starts out slowly with a handful of adopters, gains popularity rather quickly, and then levels off. At least two criminal justice innovations, the Compstat program (Weisburd et al., 2003) and the adoption of SWAT teams in American policing (Klinger, 2003), have followed this pattern. A plot of the Florida diffusion data (not shown here) reveals that CFA-accreditation of Florida municipal police departments mimics this same manner of adoption.

The focus is on all Florida municipal police departments in continuous operation from 1997 until the end of calendar year 2006. Data are not included for the handful of agencies that disbanded during this time frame, the several new departments that were installed, and the two local police agencies that failed to provide complete survey information to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE). As a result, the final study group consists of 270 of the 288 Florida municipal police agencies in continuous existence during this period.

DEPENDENT VARIABLE

The simplest way to examine accreditation status is to rely upon a dichotomous measure. This crude classification reveals that 30% (n = 81) of the Florida police departments had gained CFA-accreditation during the 1997–2006 time frame. While this observation invites the obvious inquiry of who is and who is not accredited and how these agencies differ (McCabe and Fajardo, 2001), such a limited approach could gloss over other interesting details. For instance, some agencies may have sought accreditation as soon as it was available. A perusal of the data reveals that 14 agencies led the pack and gained the CFA imprimatur during the first two years of its availability. Other departments hesitated before diving into the process. For example, the CFA conferred this accolade on 21 agencies during 2004–2006. In contrast, a third cluster has lacked the necessary impetus to initiate such activity or has decided to forego this self-study process altogether.

Figure 1 contains a visual depiction of how CFA-accreditation has spread throughout Florida municipal agencies during the study period. The industry standard among geographers and spatial analysts, ArcGIS© (produced by ESRI), was used to generate the figure. The underlying map layer of Florida and its counties came from the U.S. Census Bureau boundary files and the overlayed agency addresses were derived from the self-reported CJAP survey. The project required insertion of addresses in latitude-longitudinal form so batch geocoding was performed using Google Maps API. For the several addresses that did not exist (misspellings, imprecise geographical directional indicator, post office boxes, and renamed streets), cross-checking relied on department or municipal websites.

<Insert Figure 1 about here>

Larger agencies took the lead in gaining CFA-accreditation, followed by medium-sized departments. The initial adoptions of state accreditation occurred primarily inside major metropolitan statistical areas located in central and southeast Florida. By 2000, accreditation continued its stronghold on the southeast coast, but also started to branch out to other urbanized areas and rural municipalities on the west coast and into the central part of the state. The 2003 map shows a continued proliferation throughout the entire state and there are several distinct clusters by the end of 2006.

The diffusion literature generally relies upon a more sensitive measure that reflects how quickly an agency avails itself of an innovation. The original intent of this paper was to operationalize diffusion to reflect the speed with which an agency fully complies with CFA directives and earns accreditation. The standard formula for diffusion is 1 - (*a*/*b*), where *a* represents the number of months separating the lead agency and the agency under consideration and *b* reflects the number of months in the study period (Walker, 1969, p. 882). Higher scores reflect speedier adoption of the innovation, lower scores distinguish agencies that were relatively slower to attain this recognition, and a value of zero indicates no involvement. While one might prefer to include the speed of adoption in the analysis, there was a correlation of .86 between the interval- and nominal-level accreditation measures. Coupled with a set of almost identical independent-dependent bivariate correlations, the inescapable conclusion was that the two variables indexed the same concept. Those considerations lead to the decision to proceed with the much simpler dichotomous operationalization. While some researchers have looked at the temporal aspects of criminal justice policy diffusion (Doerner, 1979;

Grattet et al., 1998), other investigators have found it very fruitful simply to distinguish adopters from non-adopters (Giblin, 2006; Jenness and Grattet, 2005; Weisburd et al., 2003; Williams 2003). Given this background, it appears that employing a dichotomous measure is a more palatable approach to take.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

FDLE conducts an annual survey of law enforcement organizations operating within the state. The survey bears a strong resemblance to the periodic national *Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics* (LEMAS) sponsored by the U.S. Department of Justice. There are, however, three important differences. The project is confined to Florida law enforcement agencies, is more inclusive since it includes agencies with fewer than 100 sworn personnel, and data collection covers a larger array of variables. The instrument gathers details on entry-level personnel, agency benefits, equipment, pay, agency characteristics, officer demographics, and other facets. The 2000 Criminal Justice Agency Profile (CJAP) forms the foundation for the present study. The strategy of this study was to capture indicators that would typify forward-looking agencies that would be more amenable to seeking CFA distinction. These variables were grouped into five categories: college education standards, occupational and health concerns, job conditions, community partnerships, and agency characteristics.

While a high school diploma or its equivalent is the minimum state educational standard for officer certification, agencies retain the discretion to impose more stringent requirements if they wish to do so. Three educational indicators were selected for inclusion in this study. They reveal whether some college study is necessary for

applicants to secure an entrance-level sworn position, whether college credits are needed for promotional eligibility, and whether the agency has a college tuition reimbursement benefit for current members. According to the 2000 CJAP statistics for Florida municipal agencies, only 11.5% (*n* = 31) of the departments required incoming personnel to have some college exposure, 30% (*n* = 82) valued higher education as a prerequisite for advancement through the ranks, and 71% (*n* = 191) encouraged officers to attend college by providing tuition reimbursement. The expectation is that agencies which lean toward supporting a college education exemplify a concern for having better qualified personnel and would be more likely to seek CFA-accreditation.

A second constellation of indicators accesses occupational and health concerns. CJAP taps information regarding whether an agency has an embargo against tobacco use by its members, the presence of an in-service fitness or wellness program, and if police officers have access to an on-site gym or receive discounted memberships to a health facility. In 1997, Governor Lawton Chiles spearheaded a settlement with the tobacco industry to provide funds for smoking cessation initiatives among school children and to assist Floridians who had developed adverse medical conditions from their tobacco use. Of course, the topic of stress and its adverse implications for police officer health has commanded considerable attention. According to the 2000 CJAP, 35% (*n* = 94) of Florida police departments restrict employee tobacco use, 35% (*n* = 95) have either voluntary or mandatory fitness requirements, and 47% (*n* = 126) have on-site gym facilities or help defray the cost of health-club membership. Given this atmosphere, the thinking is that proactive agencies that have taken the lead in recognizing the benefits of employee health and wellness would be more avant-garde and, thus, receptive to

accreditation efforts.

A third vein of variables concentrates on basic job conditions. These items index whether members have collective bargaining representation, have take-home cars, are outfitted with firearms upon hiring, and receive premium pay for working night or weekend shifts. The CJAP survey reveals that 54% (n = 147) of Florida municipal agencies are unionized, 72% (n = 193) have some type of a take-home car program, another 83% (n = 224) supply officers with firearms, and 20% (n = 53) pay a premium for night-shift duty. The major focus of accreditation is to ensure that agencies have their policies and procedures in writing to ensure uniformity and fairness. The anticipation is that agencies characterized by a union presence and organizations that supply officers with job-related items would be more amenable to meeting accreditation standards.

A fourth set of characteristics deals with community partnership. The CJAP statistics reveal that 76% (n = 205) of the municipal departments report being engaged in community policing, 63% (n = 171) have put officers on bicycles, and 43% (n = 115) have assigned officers to work in the local schools. Agencies which have instituted a community-oriented policing program, established bicycle squads, and deploy school resource officers have embraced broader strategies beyond the simple "respond-to-calls-for-service" approach. It is anticipated that these agencies exemplifying such a non-traditional view of their mission would be more prone to pursuing accreditation status.

Other organizational variables, such as the annual entry-level salary, along with the racial and gender composition of full-time sworn personnel, and the number of sworn personnel are used to assess an agency's propensity to become accredited. Higher paid, more diverse, and larger agencies are presupposed to be more inclined to seek

accreditation.

Finally, the diffusion perspective holds that the spread of an innovation throughout police circles depends upon the flow of communication within social networks and followers who imitate the lead of the innovators and early adopters (Roberts and Roberts, 2007; Weiss, 1997). Unfortunately, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to gather these data retrospectively over a broad geographical expanse such as an entire state. As a substitute, this paper relies upon a proxy measure to reflect the geographical sphere of influence. More specifically, inserting the address of a police headquarters into a customized script based on the Google Maps API allows one to calculate the driving distance from the agency under consideration to the nearest already accredited department. There are plenty of online forums in the GIS community, academic projects, and government-funded research that resort to open-source software because of its added flexibility and user control over data queries and unique mapping functions. Currently, ESRI does not provide a flexible extension to perform a matrix of shortest driving distance calculations of multiple locations. The software has a canned feature to perform "as-the-crow-flies" distances and an add-on that calculates single driving distance between pairs of points. With more than 280 locations to analyze, there were over 13,000 calculations to consider. This massive task would have taken weeks on ArcGIS©. While there are third-party solutions developed for ArcGIS©, those that offer combinational calculations still rely upon the underlying roadmap layers that a researcher imports into a project. The Google Maps API reduces the margin of error from omitting a particular layer. In addition, the database query can be programmed to prompt the user for specific address-matching errors instead of setting an arbitrary tolerance level as is

done in the ArcGIS© software. A JavaScript code relying on Google Maps API completed this task in much less time than ArcGIS© would have consumed and the code's distance outputs are at least as precise, if not better, as the proprietary software's measurements.

RESULTS

Table 1 displays the univariate distributions for CFA accredited and non-accredited agencies. The comparisons reveal substantial differences between the two types of police departments. Accredited organizations have a relatively higher regard for the benefits they can derive from college-educated employees than do non-accredited agencies and also hold an edge when promoting employee health and wellness. In terms of job conditions, CFA-sanctioned agencies are significantly more likely to have memberships represented by collective bargaining, are more apt to provide officers with sidearms rather than requiring sworn personnel to purchase their own personal weapons, and have installed a shift-differential pay benefit. Significant differences also emerge between the two types of agencies with respect to involvement in bicycle patrols, school security, and community policing. Accredited organizations typically are substantially larger than non-accredited agencies, have a higher proportion of female officers, offer a higher starting salary, and are more likely to have attained CALEA recognition. In short, departments that have earned CFA approval score significantly higher in 15 of the 19 comparisons, adding credence to the notion that accredited agencies also have the distinction of being more progressive, avant-garde, or on the cutting edge.

< Insert Table 1 about here >

The non-binary predictors (number of sworn members, percent female officers, percent nonwhite officers, starting salary, and driving distance to the nearest accredited agency) exhibited large dispersions. While variance inflation factor indices and zero-order correlation coefficients (not shown here) do not reveal significant problems with multicollinearity, the unequal variances make it difficult to compare these variables. A linear or logarithmic transformation would reduce each predictor's variation across sample points, but the distributions would remain unequal across mean values. As a result, the researchers performed normal standardizations to generate a consistent metric.

Table 2 summarizes the probit regression equation predicting CFA-accreditation status. None of the college education standards, occupational and health concerns, or job conditions emerge as significant variables. Community-oriented policing and CALEA exert very strong effects. Their presence increases the probability of CFA-accreditation by 31% and 22%, respectively. Other significant measures include percent non-white officers, starting salary, and distance to the nearest accredited agency. Offering an entry-level salary that is one standard deviation ($5,400) above the mean adds 9% to the probability of seeking accreditation. Both percent non-white officers and geographical distance do not act as expected. As minority representation decreases and distance from other accredited organizations increases, the chances of state accreditation rise. The significant log-likelihood value of -113.06 means that at least one variable is non-zero. When reduced-form models are examined, there is no improvement in the mean-square error so the model appears to be well-specified.

< Insert Table 2 about here >

One pressing issue concerns the impact of accreditation on police organizations and whether CFA recognition introduced reform into these agency operations. Table 3 displays a select group of agency characteristics for the two years prior to gaining accreditation, the year in which CFA conferred its approval, and for the two years immediately after accreditation was conferred. None of the characteristics evidence any significant alterations during this time-frame. In other words, CFA approval is not associated with any change in college education standards or with alterations regarding occupational/health concerns, job conditions, or community partnership.

<Insert Table 3 about here>

DISCUSSION

The initial impression generated by these data is that agencies that have sought and received state accreditation tend to be more advanced and more forward-thinking than their peers. However, examination of diffusion patterns and closer inspection of agency characteristics before and after the conferral of accreditation suggest the exact opposite is more likely to be the case for at least three reasons. First, the structure and features associated with accredited agencies are not necessarily any different from what exists in non-accredited departments. Second, CFA approval is not a catalyst for inducing or fostering organizational change. Third, organizational features are not associated with diffusion patterns.

The inability to differentiate accredited from non-accredited agencies is not unprecedented. When McCabe and Fajardo (2001) pitted nationally accredited

departments against their non-accredited brethren, they found only three of 17 comparisons attained significance at the .05 level (entry-level education, housing a drug unit, and having a child abuse investigative unit). However, Burlingame and Baro (2005) did uncover pronounced personnel differences between accredited and non-accredited departments. They reasoned that accredited agencies should score more prominently on recruitment and promotion of non-traditional employees because CALEA standards demand that rosters mirror the composition of the local community. The analysis demonstrated that accredited agencies had proportionately more entry-level female officers, more women in supervisory roles, and greater female representation at the command-staff level. Thus, Burlingame and Baro (2005: 409) concluded "the CALEA-accreditation process appears to encourage and facilitate the recruitment and promotion of women."

One explanation for these apparently contradictory findings could stem from the habit of cherry-picking indicators and isolating variables in a vacuum apart from any historical context. For example, McCabe and Fajardo (2001) selected 17 benchmarks without offering any insight as to how these constructs might pertain to accreditation. Burlingame and Baro (2005), on the other hand, provided a far too casual and benign interpretation of female presence within law enforcement agencies. Although they (2005: 393-394) acknowledged that consent decrees have been formidable tools in the struggle to compel recalcitrant agencies to achieve a more equitable employee racial and gender balance, Burlingame and Baro opted not to control for whether an agency had fallen under court purview in the past. There is some research that attests to the importance of consent decrees and affirmative action programs in promoting profound organizational

change (Felkenes, Peretz, and Schroedel, 1993; Martin, 1991), although that influence does appear to be waning as of late (Zhao and Lovrich, 1998; Zhao, He, and Lovrich, 2005; Zhao, Herbst, and Lovrich, 2001). As a result, Burlingame and Baro's (2005) reliance upon elevated levels of female officers as a measure of contemporary organizational progressiveness runs a very serious risk of succumbing to a spurious interpretation. To paraphrase Hale and Wyland (1993), the risk is that one might mistakenly herald yesterday's "dragons and dinosaurs" as today's vanguard.

Another interesting feature is that 21 of the 28 CALEA-accredited agencies also had won CFA approval. This observation invites the basic question of whether state or national recognition came first. One might surmise that state accreditation would precede the CALEA application because it is less expensive, not as complex, and logically would serve as a stepping-stone to achieving the higher prize of national prominence. Interestingly, three-quarters of these dual-status departments (n = 16) had earned the CALEA distinction prior to seeking the less renowned CFA designation. One reason for this practice, perhaps, is administrative résumé building. A second accreditation plaque does not command a hefty price tag. The staff already occupies that bureaucratic niche and there is a lull in activity after the national accreditation ceremony. In any event, procuring a second accreditation award becomes an additional credential or another status symbol.

This interpretation of accreditation as a credential, rather than as a meaningful reform, receives support from several quarters. Walker (2005), for example, criticizes CALEA standards as being too vague and toothless. While CALEA requires agencies to have a written policy on various aspects, it does not provide any guidance as to what

these directives should contain. Similarly, Giblin (2006) found too much room for manipulation when he examined the proliferation of crime analysis units in police departments. He found several agencies managed to comply with CALEA standards by simply renaming a position with the title of crime analyst. However, the actual employee job functions never changed. In other words, having an organizational slot bearing the title of a crime analyst on paper, without engaging in any actual crime analyses, was an organizational subterfuge that allowed agencies to slip by and gain CALEA status.

Trying to account for the diffusion of accreditation solely in terms of organizational traits might be a misdirected route. Maguire (1997), for instance, found the adoption of the community-policing model had no structural impact on most police organizations despite a heavy emphasis on flattening the command structure. In essence, researchers continue to struggle with an explanation for how law enforcement agencies change.

A more inclusive approach would incorporate a focus on a different beneficiary, namely the agency head (Morabito, 2008; Weiss, 1997). Police leaders serve relatively short terms (Dantzker, 1996; Enter, 1986; Penegor and Peak, 1992; Tunnell and Gaines, 1992) and Florida police chiefs are no exception. For example, Murdaugh (2005) surveyed Florida police chiefs and found 36% of the incumbents had been in office for less than two years. That figure comports with the National Advisory Commission's (1976, p. 7) finding some three decades earlier that 40% of all American police chiefs had been in their current positions for less than three years. Tenure can be somewhat shorter for many female and minority executives (Schulz, 2003; Thompson, 2006).

This continuous turnover at the helm means that police executives must be nimble

and watchful for career-enhancing opportunities that would make them more marketable. This orientation would help explain the steady stream of initiatives over the past two decades touted as organizational improvements. Some examples would include the integrated criminal apprehension program, total quality management, management by objectives, team policing, problem-oriented policing, and community-oriented policing. As Hunter and Barker (1993, p.163) so aptly observed, "new strategies are bandied about to deceive the public into thinking that administrators are progressive." It may be, then, that the accreditation movement falls squarely into this camp.

THE NEED FOR A FULLER RESEARCH AGENDA

The continued expansion of the national and state law enforcement accreditation movements has been remarkable. According to its annual report, a 2007 audit revealed that CALEA had amassed over $6.3 million in total assets (CALEA, 2008, p. 34). Agency fees brought $1.75 million into the coffers and conference registration fees fell just shy of the $1 million mark (CALEA, 2008, p. 35). Salaries, fringe benefits, retirement benefits, and payroll taxes exceeded $1.6 million (CALEA, 2008, p. 36). Apparently, national accreditation has become a profitable enterprise.

There were 332 nationally accredited agencies within the United States by the end of 2007 and CALEA also made inroads into departments located in Canada, the Caribbean, and Mexico. Furthermore, the organization has expanded its accreditation programs to include law enforcement dispatch centers and training academies and also had 33 network alliances in place (coalitions of already certified agencies within a state or region whose purpose is to help aspiring departments gain accreditation status).

Joining this picture are 16 known state accreditation bodies that oversee standards for law enforcement agencies. Rounding out the landscape are numerous free-lance consultants who assist agencies in their efforts to secure either state or national recognition. In short, the law enforcement accreditation movement has generated a lucrative cottage industry.

Amazingly, this enterprise has escaped scrutiny. For example, what tangible benefits does accreditation produce? The CALEA web site offers a collage of testimonials and anecdotal stories that tout improved community relations, reduced civil liability, savings on insurance premiums, increased productivity, better employee deployment, and other outcomes. Despite these assertions, the claims remain unsubstantiated by any independent third-parties. What is needed are reputable empirical assessments aimed at determining whether accreditation does live up to these promises.

Both CALEA and CFA cite more efficient service delivery, improved crime control, and better use of agency resources as some of the benefits that accredited agencies reap. However, neither organization can point to an existing body of systematic evidence that supports, or refutes, these statements. The CALEA web site does contain an endorsement that attributes higher clearance rates to organizational changes prompted by its self-study process. For example, Keesling (1999) claims that accreditation was responsible for the Kingsport (TN) Police Department registering a 56% Part I clearance rate in 1998, compared to 19% in 1987. Whether the Kingsport situation is an isolated instance or reflects a common outcome of accreditation remains unknown. While some researchers have turned to clearance rates as a basic measure of police efficiency (Addington, 2006; Alderden and Lavery, 2007; Allison, Schuck, and Lersch, 2005; Lee,

2005; Roberts, 2008; Snyder, 1999), the linkage between accreditation status and clearance rates has still not been vetted.

Other benefits that accreditation supporters point to include a reduction in citizen complaints, fewer civil liability lawsuits, more dismissals and summary judgments, more favorable verdicts, and smaller awards (Gaskins, n.d.; Herbert, 1997; Keesling, 1997; Kutzke, 1999; Murphy, n.d.; Murray, 1997; Tucker and Flores, 1998). Anecdotal case studies are notorious for fostering misleading interpretations. Once again, researchers have neglected these areas.

Both national and state organizations contend that accreditation markedly enhances public trust and dramatically improves community relations (Ives, 1998; Tucker and Flores, 1998; Wales, n.d.). One more time, let the record show there currently is an insufficient body of research substantiating these heralded beliefs. For instance, while DuPont (1993) counted 84 articles published on accreditation since 1980, these outlets were largely restricted to such venues as *The National Sheriff Magazine*, *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, *Crime Control Digest*, *CALEA Commission Update*, *The Police Chief*, and *Law and Order*. It is time to move beyond the focus group approach that many of the early descriptive studies took. While it was prudent to examine the motivations behind the decision to decline or pursue accreditation at that juncture, the field has not advanced beyond that very necessary first step. Although researchers have expended resources and energy examining public opinion and community sentiment, they have not yet seized the opportunity to conduct a rigorous study investigating the role of accreditation in these matters.

In short, the law enforcement accreditation movement is being driven by faith alone. Despite its prominence in some police circles and the large financial commitments it commandeers, accreditation is not a proven commodity. For whatever reasons, it has managed to fly below the radar screen and elude academic interest for 25 years now. Given the current economic climate, it seems prudent to chart a more accountable course of action.

CONCLUSION

The current paper adds to the growing literature on the diffusion of criminal justice innovations by examining the topic of law enforcement accreditation from this angle. Accreditation status has reached only a small portion of the intended audience. Whether accreditation is just another fad or a durable development remains to be seen. Until then, skeptics might be correct in warning that accreditation has morphed more into a credential rather than an actual tool for meaningful reform.

FIGURE 1

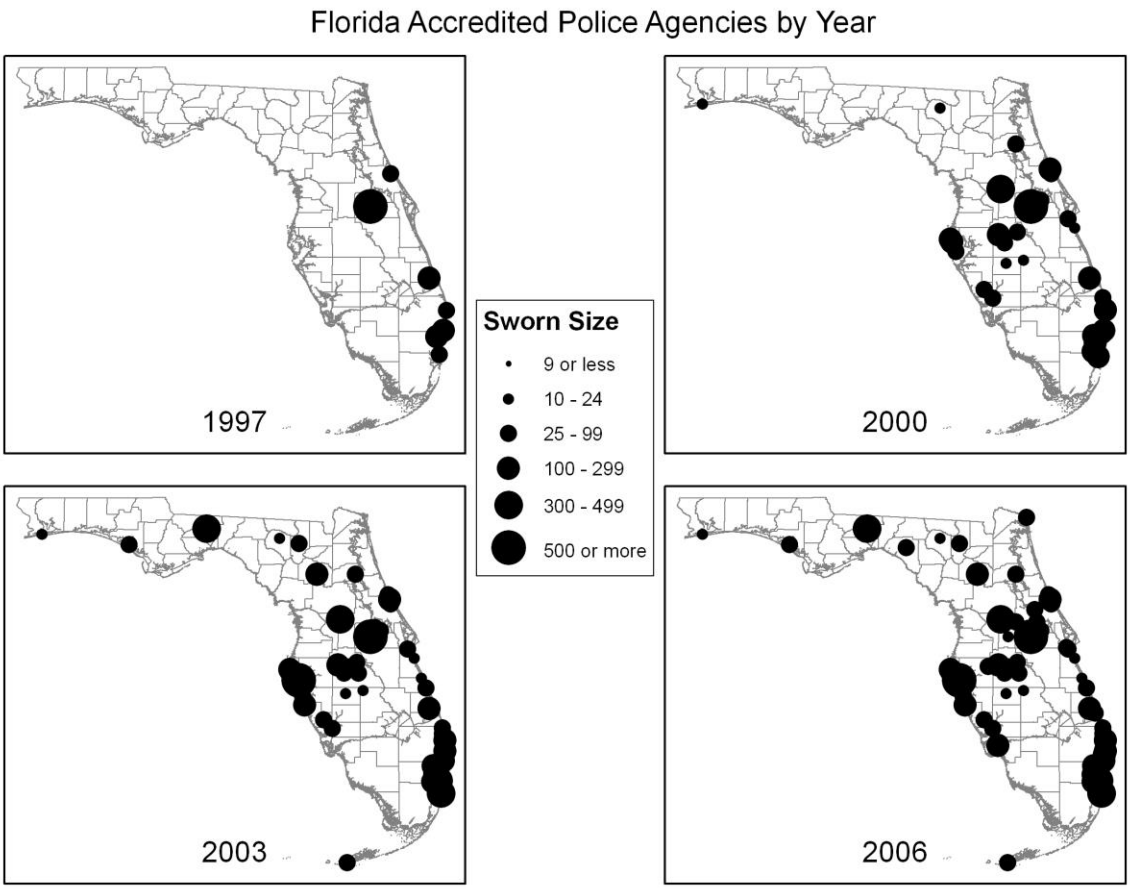
Florida Accredited Police Agencies by Year
1997
2000
2003
2006
Sworn Size
9 or less
10 - 24
25 - 99
100 - 299
300 - 499
500 or more

TABLE 1

Florida Police Agency Characteristics by State Accreditation Status

	Accredited (n = 81)		Non-Accredited (n = 189)		
Characteristics	Mean	*SD*	Mean	*SD*	*t*-test
College Education Standards:					
Entrance Requirement	.20	.401	.08	.271	2.43*
Promotion Requirement	.44	.500	.24	.430	3.15*
Tuition Reimbursement	.93	.264	.61	.488	6.78*
Occupational/Health Concerns:					
Restricted Tobacco Use	.41	.494	.32	.469	1.31
Fitness/Wellness Program	.49	.503	.29	.455	3.12*
Gym Access	.73	.448	.35	.480	6.16*
Job Conditions:					
Collective Bargaining	.73	.448	.47	.500	4.27*
Take-Home Vehicles	.77	.426	.69	.462	1.25
Handguns Provided	.91	.283	.79	.406	2.78*
Shift-Differential Pay	.32	.470	.14	.351	3.07*
Community Partnership:					
Bicycle Unit	.79	.410	.57	.497	3.85*
School Resource Officers	.58	.497	.36	.481	3.37*
Community-Oriented Policing	.98	.156	.67	.473	8.02*
Agency Characteristics:					
# Sworn Members	103.57	116.942	38.99	110.044	4.23*
% Sworn Female	10.85	5.017	8.58	8.101	2.80*
% Sworn Nonwhite	13.87	11.412	14.07	20.465	-0.10
Entry-Level Salary	29,133	4,641	25,417	5,458	5.71*
% CALEA Accredited	.26	.441	.04	.189	4.37*
Distance Nearest Accredited Agency	31.69	60.497	18.90	16.691	1.87

* denotes significance at the .05 level.

TABLE 2

Probit Regression Predicting State Accreditation
among Florida Police Agencies (N = 270)

Variable	Marginal Effect	*SE*	*z*	*P*>|*z*|
College Education Standards:				
Entrance Requirement	-0.06	.07	-0.78	.44
Promotion Requirement	0.08	.07	1.17	.24
Tuition Reimbursement	0.12	.07	1.53	.13
Occupational/Health Concerns:				
Restricted Tobacco Use	0.02	.06	0.28	.78
Fitness/Wellness Program	-0.01	.06	-0.13	.90
Gym Access	0.11	.06	1.65	.10
Job Conditions:				
Collective Bargaining	0.03	.06	0.40	.69
Take-Home Vehicles	-0.06	.07	-0.91	.37
Shift-Differential Pay	-0.01	.07	-0.21	.83
Handguns Provided	0.11	.06	1.50	.13
Community Partnership:				
Bicycle Unit	-0.03	.07	-0.49	.62
School Resource Officers	-0.02	.06	-0.32	.75
Community-Oriented Policing	0.31	.04	3.52	.00*
Agency Characteristics:				
# Sworn Members	0.02	.03	0.76	.45
% Sworn Female	0.00	.03	0.08	.94
% Sworn Non-White	-0.08	.04	-2.10	.04*
Entry-Level Salary	0.09	.04	2.53	.01*
CALEA Accredited	0.22	.13	1.95	.05*
Distance Nearest Accredited Agency	0.13	.05	2.53	.01*

* denotes significance at the .05 level.

TABLE 3

Select Characteristics of Florida-Accredited Agencies (n = 81) Before and After Accreditation

Characteristic	Year					
	t-2	*t*-1	*t*	*t*+1	*t*+2	*F*
College Education Standards:						
Entrance Requirement	19%	18%	16%	19%	21%	0.433
Promotion Requirement	30	38	33	40	42	1.219
Tuition Reimbursement	93	95	93	95	94	0.092
Occupational/Health Concerns:						
Restricted Tobacco Use	33%	32%	33%	37%	36%	0.213
Fitness/Wellness Program	35	46	54	48	47	0.819
Gym Access	78	86	86	84	77	0.439
Job Conditions:						
Collective Bargaining	72%	77%	76%	76%	70%	0.796
Take-Home Vehicles	67	65	72	82	86	0.933
Shift-Differential Pay	27	26	30	41	35	1.012
Handguns Provided	88	89	92	92	94	0.276
Community Partnership:						
Bicycle Unit	77%	84%	75%	77%	70%	0.593
School Resource Officers	60	66	64	61	60	0.281
Community-Oriented Policing	90	88	86	83	83	0.253

APPENDIX A

State Law Enforcement Accreditation Bodies

Alaska Law Enforcement Agency Accreditation Commission
http://www.aacop.org/ALEAAC.htm

Delaware Police Accreditation Commission
address not located

Commission for Florida Law Enforcement Accreditation
http://www.flaccreditation.org

Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police, Agency Certification Program
http://www.gachiefs.com/statecertification/index.htm

Illinois Law Enforcement Accreditation Program
http://www.ilchiefs.org/bridge.asp?pagenumber=46342

Indiana Law Enforcement Accreditation Commission
http://www.iacop.org/ileac/index.htm

Massachusetts Police Accreditation Commission
address not located

Mississippi Law Enforcement Accreditation Commission
http://www.mschiefs.org/accreditation.htm

New Jersey Law Enforcement Accreditation Commission
http://www.njsacop.org/index.cfm/lea

New York State Law Enforcement Accreditation Program
http://criminaljustice.state.ny.us/ops/accred/accred02.htm

Oklahoma Law Enforcement Agency Accreditation and Professional Standards Program
http://accredit.okla-chiefs.org

Pennsylvania Law Enforcement Accreditation Commission
http://www.pachiefs.org/accreditation.htm

Rhode Island Law Enforcement Accreditation Commission
address not located

South Carolina Law Enforcement Accreditation
http://www.sheriffsc.com/joomla/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=13&Itemid=32

Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission
http://www.dcjs.state.va.us/accred

Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs
http://www.waspc.org/index.php?c=Accreditation

Wisconsin Law Enforcement Accreditation Group
http://www.communityzero.com/wileag

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