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## LAW, CRIMINOLOGY & CRIMINAL JUSTICE | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Evaluating legitimacy and marginalization: Campus policing in the State of Rhode Island

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**Abstract:** The identity and legitimacy of campus police officers is often difficult to define, largely due to their obvious connection to the educational environment. With the lack of research on campus police in general, and their legitimacy as a law enforcement entity in specific, how these officers perceive themselves and, just as importantly, how they believe others perceive them, becomes questionable and may have a distinct impact on their performance of duties and their interactions with the campus community and other law enforcement personnel. This study considers self-perceived levels of legitimacy of campus police officers employed at four statutorily defined campus police departments in the State of Rhode Island from a review of various issues of perceptual self-worth, their effects on officer morale, and their impact on levels of service to the campus community. Findings indicate that while they are, indeed, granted legislative police authority that is comparable to their more public counterparts, campus law enforcement officers perceive a lack of legitimization and support from their community; have high levels of self-perceived feelings of marginalization; and face an ever uphill battle in their efforts to obtain the same levels of legitimacy as their traditional counterparts.

**Subjects:** Policing; Policing & Police Law; Socio-Legal Studies—Public Policy; Education; Police

**Keywords:** campus police; police legitimacy; perception; trust and confidence; job satisfaction; employee attitudes

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lieutenant Charles P. Wilson, currently, serves with the Rhode Island College, Providence, RI Campus Police Department as a patrol shift supervisor. With a professional career dating from 1971, his previous law enforcement experience has included service as a Detective/Patrolman with the Woodmere Village, Ohio Police Department, where he also served as its first African-American Chief of Police from 1988 to mid-1990. He earned his Bachelor of Arts Degree with an emphasis in Justice Studies from the Rhode Island College in Providence, Rhode Island, and is a three-term National Chairman of the National Association of Black Law Enforcement Officers, Inc. His current research interests lie in issues related to campus safety, minority law enforcement, and police–community interactions.

### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This article discusses an exploratory review of perceptions of self-worth and legitimacy of campus police officers employed at four statutorily defined campus police agencies situated in the State of Rhode Island to determine the impact of those perceptions on job satisfaction and community interaction. Their legitimacy, both real and perceived, has much to do with the manner in which campus safety is ensured and professional services are attained, both of which are key to public awareness and confidence.

This article discusses an exploratory review of perceptions of self-worth and legitimacy of campus police officers employed at four statutorily defined campus police agencies situated in the State of Rhode Island to determine the impact of those perceptions on job satisfaction and community interaction. Their legitimacy, both real and perceived, has much to do with the manner in which campus safety is ensured and professional services are attained, both of which are key to public awareness and confidence.

One of the basic tenets of human behavior is that people act on their perceptions, not on reality. And in law enforcement, as in most other organizational settings, the world as it is perceived is the world that is behaviorally important. This holds true regardless of whether it involves a large municipal police department or a college or university law enforcement agency. However, where campus law enforcement is concerned, the aspect of police behavior that has not been fully or consistently emphasized is the problem of perceived legitimacy, specifically how college and university police officers perceive themselves and how they believe that the communities they serve, and their professional counterparts, perceive them. These perceived concepts of legitimacy, both of themselves and from others, are then crucial and become key factors in the role of campus police in the maintenance of order and social control that must exist in the campus environment.

Based on subjective influences such as professional background, values, needs, and interests, perception is a complex process that often yields a unique picture of things that may be diametrically different from someone else's concept of reality (Luthans, 1997). Recognition of this difference is vital in understanding police-community relations, particularly where it involves those relations in the closed environment of a college or university campus. Wada, Patten, and Candela (2010) have indicated that the legitimacy of campus police officers is crucial to their ability to combat crime and maintain public order, with this legitimacy tied distinctly to the levels of public support and cooperation they receive.

Police legitimacy, as defined by Sunshine and Tyler (2003), is that property of authority that makes people feel that it is entitled to be deferred to and obeyed. And it has been suggested that if the decisions made by police officers mean very little, the laws they enforce will also have little meaning (Tyler, 2008). In the campus setting, however, police legitimacy does not seem to be consistently realized, particularly where campus police officers are required to function without the full benefits of otherwise normally accepted police equipment, technology, and procedures.

Consequently, the legitimacy of campus police may be key in securing feelings of obligation, responsibility and adherence to rules and regulations in the campus environment. Thus, the question of campus police legitimacy may well be defined by how the officers themselves', members of the campus community and their traditional counterparts respond to the question of "Are they the real police?"

Due to the lack of significant research on campus police in general, and specifically their legitimacy as law enforcement agents, this question, where campus officers are concerned, may greatly influence and define their relationships with members of the campus community, as well as their interaction with their more public counterparts. Few studies, however, have considered how police officers perceive they are viewed by the communities they serve (Lim, Teo, & See, 2000; Skolnick, 1966; Vera Institute, 1968), finding in most that police perceived they are viewed negatively by the public. And even fewer have addressed this topic where campus police are concerned, either in general or specifically (Wada et al., 2010; Wilson & Wilson, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c).

The legitimacy of the police then, whether it is one of the more traditional agencies or campus-based agencies, is the foundation of police authority. And the evolvement of campus law enforcement over the last two decades has followed a path quite similar to their traditional police counterparts. Yet their identity and legitimacy as part of the general law enforcement community remains somewhat blurred (Wada et al., 2010). College and university administrators, students,

faculty, and staff may not accept them because they are “police”; other law enforcement agencies may not consider them as police officers due to their connection with the campus environment. Campus police may thus at times be seen as lacking legitimacy.

### **1. Campus law enforcement in Rhode Island**

The appointment of campus police officers in Rhode Island is guided by separate statutes for public and private institutions of higher education. And although the appointment process differs for each type of institution, all officers are provided full statutory law enforcement authority through the same statutory language that gives enforcement authority to traditionally employed law enforcement personnel (RIGL § 12-7-21).

Currently, there are five institutions listed within this statute, three publicly supported and two private, one of which is currently undergoing certification procedures. All officers attend the state’s POST-certified police academy or its equivalent, and at least two institutions require officers to complete an additional field training program afterwards. The principal hiring methodology appears to be the recruitment of officers who have retired from various municipal agencies, seeking a second career.

Rhode Island appears to be singular, however, in its treatment of campus officers where the use of police firearms is concerned as, while the appointment statute for officers at private institutions is silent on the issue, officers at state-supported institutions are statutorily enjoined from carrying firearms unless authorized by their governing board (RIGL § 16-52-2). Consequently, while at least one of the private institutions is armed, only one of the three state-supported institutions has been authorized to carry weapons while on duty. This, in addition to not benefiting from statutes defining disciplinary procedures for police and being required to belong to labor groups which are all-inclusive of other categories of personnel, has caused various levels of concern and dissatisfaction amongst campus police officers in the state.

### **2. Prior research**

Given that there are over 15,000 sworn campus police officers in the United States and the lack of research regarding these members of the law enforcement community, the study of campus policing systems is a pressing policy issue. While they are structured the same as their traditional counterparts, they are not often viewed organizationally with the same functional equivalence or general legitimacy, due to their unique environment. Yet, researchers have theorized that there appears to be convincing evidence that the best fit for large educational institutions may be a professional, well-educated municipal-styled police department which mirrors the municipal agencies in the areas the institution is located (Hummer, 2004).

Research on police in general has indicated that perception based on what the police can and cannot do has an effect on police–citizen interaction (Carte, 1973; Decker, 1981; Glauser & Tullar, 1985), with much of the literature on public expectations of the police suggesting that the public holds the police responsible for a wide range of issues, with the control of crime at the top of the list (Koehle, Six, & Hanrahan, 2010). This is apparently no different in college or university populations as they also expect police to detect criminal misconduct as well as maintain social order (Miller & Pan, 1987). And gender appears to be an important factor as it relates to student perceptions of campus police (Griffith, Hueston, Wilson, Moyers, & Hart, 2004; Kelly & Torres, 2006; Wilcox, Jordan, & Pritchard, 2007).

Various studies have indicated that young people are less likely to have favorable attitudes towards police (Hurst & Frank, 2000; Leiber, Nalla, & Farnworth, 1998), with those attitudes having a greater degree of cynicism and negativism than those exhibited towards other authority figures (Levy, 2001; Taylor, Turner, Esbensen, & Winfree, 2001). Studies have additionally shown that traditional law enforcement methods are felt to be more important for the police than

service-oriented goals, with highly visible policing allowing community members to see the police working at trying to control crime (Hawdon & Ryan, 2003), however, victimization and the receipt of traffic citations reduced confidence in the police (Ren, Cao, Lovrich, & Gaffney, 2005).

Campus police agencies, in general, have sought to become more professionalized since the days of the first night watchman, and are now an important part of college and university administrative functions (Peak, Barthe, & Garcia, 2008). Studies using Hall's 1968 Professionalism Scale concluded that officers possess higher than average professionalism attitudes (Carlan & Lewis, 2009). College students whose aspirations included someday becoming police officers themselves were found to view policing as a profession rather than just another employment resource (Bumgarner, 2002). And these concepts of professionalism, particularly those related to community policing, have become entrenched in the non-traditional venue of campus policing on a wide scale (Wilson & Wilson, 2011b).

There has, in fact, been considerable and enormous progress made in the last two decades towards professionalizing campus law enforcement, both procedurally and programmatically (Peak et al., 2008). Campus agencies provide a wide range of services to both the campus community and the community-at-large. Fully engaged in various community policing initiatives, these agencies and their personnel provide the same services, and more, that are not typically found from their more traditional counterparts.

While the jurisdictional authority of most campus law enforcement agencies is usually limited to the campus environment, their role appears to be very much in-line with those of their more traditional counterparts (Atwell, 1988; Bromley, 2003; Sloan, 1992). Campus officers respond to all manner of emergency situations, including medical emergencies, and provide first aid when needed, as well as conducting foot and vehicular patrols 24 h a day, 365 days a year, enforce traffic and parking rules and regulations, along with state and local statutes, and campus rules and regulations. While they are typically considered "first responders" for all issues evolving in the campus community (Bromley, 2003; Wolf, Pressler, & Winton, 2009), the development of various Memorandums of Understanding with their traditional counterparts provides them with additional supportive resources for responding to serious offenses such as shootings, sexual assaults, and other high-level criminal offenses. And with most following a "community-oriented policing" model, they appear to engage in stronger levels of community interaction, mentoring, and other supportive systems which are dynamically designed for the campus environment (Bromley, 2003).

Studies have equally considered the comparisons of operational practices and procedures between campus and municipal agencies (Bromley, 2003; Bromley & Reaves, 1998a, 1998b; Sloan, Lanier, & Beer, 2000), finding that in many instances campus and municipal law enforcement agencies both utilize the same operational procedures for patrol, investigation, unit management, incident response, and administrative controls. These similarities have often provided the basis for cooperative programs in so-called town-gown programs and have ultimately served as the foundations for campus police legitimacy.

Limited research exists, however, regarding how campus agencies and officers themselves are perceived and legitimized by those who benefit from these programs, with perhaps the most comprehensive studies done prior to the start of the new millennium (Bordner & Petersen, 1983; Bromley, 1996; Gelber, 1972; Johnson & Bromley, 1999; Sloan, 1992; Trojanowicz, Benson, & Trojanowicz, 1988). And campus police departments seem to have no reliable data regarding community opinions and perceptions (Griffith et al., 2004).

Yet even though various researchers have considered the different historical origins of campus police agencies and the variations in legal powers given to campus officers (Grant, 1993; Hummer, Austin, & Bumphus, 1998; Skogan, 2005; Sloan, 1992; Smith, 1989; Wilson & Wilson, 2011b) which have left their role unclear and sometimes confusing, the perceived legitimacy of campus law

enforcement officers remains an area of uncharted and limited empirical study. And this perception of legitimacy may be a critical factor in securing feelings from their campus constituencies of obligation, responsibility and compliance with the laws, rules, and regulations they are required to enforce.

This perceived legitimacy may be strongly tied to the sense of community alienation felt by campus officers. Examples of this effect have been previously considered. Berg, Gertz, and True (1984), determined the lack of community support resulted in increase of perceived alienation and greater apathy among police. Mottaz (1983) found that lack of this support was associated with greater degrees of inactivity, while Pogrebin (1987) determined that an increase in the sense of community alienation resulted in greater levels of negative feelings and lethargy. Shernock (1988) determined that the more police felt isolated or alienated, they exhibited more negative feelings towards the community they served. And where campus law enforcement officers specifically were studied, Heinsler, Kleinman, and Stenross (1990) determined that campus police felt they were divested of their police role and identity, feeling they were given tasks more suitable to non-law enforcement workers.

Concepts of legitimacy and legitimate power are born from people's beliefs that instill a willingness or sense of obligation to obey authority figures which then translates into their actual compliance with that authority. Without this sense of legitimacy, people are less likely to support those in authority and the programs they propose (Levi, Sacks, & Tyler, 2009). However, while a number of researchers have looked at issues concerning the potential arming of campus police (Bratton, 2002; Hummer et al., 1998; Jiao, 2001; Lavarello, 2003; McBride, 2009; McCall-Delgado, 2008; Smith, 1989; Wilson & Wilson, 2001, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c; Vanbenthuyzen, 1976), little is known of the legitimacy attributed to campus police, how campus police officers self-perceive their roles, or of how they are perceived by their more traditional counterparts or their community (Wilson & Wilson, 2013).

Where the concepts of police legitimacy are concerned, research has predominantly centered on the more traditional police agency and its personnel. And, with few exceptions (Wada et al., 2010), published literature regarding police legitimacy that focused specifically on campus police was found to be outdated (Heinsler et al., 1990; Nichols, 1985; Smith, 1989). The current study may then shed new light on this topic where campus police are specifically concerned.

Tyler (2004) determined that when people legitimize authority they allow it to determine their behavior. Weber (1968) framed the issue of legitimacy by saying that the ability to issue commands does not rest on the possession of, or ability to use power. Tyler and Huo (2002) determined that the degree to which police are viewed to be legitimate influences the basis upon which people may decide to accept police decisions. Ankony and Kelley (1999) commented that, when an increase in community alienation is perceived, the confidence levels of police officers may decrease, and they may lose their motivation to proactively enforce the law.

Some have determined that the visibility of police is a more important factor in determining perceptions of police legitimacy than knowledge of policing tactics or informal contacts with police themselves (Hawdon, Ryan, & Griffin, 2003). Others have found that a key feature of legitimacy is the conferring of the right to command and the duty to obey those commands which are given (Weber, 1978; Tyler, 1990), with Tyler providing evidence that it may be policing styles that influence public beliefs about police legitimacy. Tankebe (2007) argued that police legitimacy must simultaneously encapsulate both police perceptions of the morality of their authority and citizens affirmations of police claims to legitimate power.

Where the legitimacy of campus police officers was specifically addressed, previous research by these authors determined their legitimacy to be keyed to community perceptions of equality with their more traditional counterparts (Wilson & Wilson, 2011b). Heinsler et al. (1990) found that, without a valued identity, campus law enforcement officers viewed themselves as being in a series of devalued roles, being often criticized and rarely thanked.

Wada et al. (2010) indicated that no studies have determined whether a campus police officer and “mainstream” police officer’s perceived legitimacy levels differ, and that college students had lowered perceptions of legitimacy towards campus officers than their traditional counterparts. Through the use of Turner’s theory of liminality (Turner, 1974), which describes transitional periods between two social standings, they also determined campus law enforcement officers to be permanently liminal, and therefore are marginalized into a perpetual ambiguous state of being.

Ultimately, it is those public beliefs of how policing is conducted that generate concepts of their legitimacy. Hinds and Murphy (2007) indicate that the most important factor in how the public assesses police legitimacy is procedural justice, or how fair they assess police and their actions to be. Hough, Jackson, Bradford, Myhill, and Quinton (2010) determined that public trust in justice builds institutional legitimacy and thus compliance and commitment to the rule of law, with cooperation with the police strongly predicted by legal cynicism and their perceived legitimacy. Jackson and Bradford (2010) measured police legitimacy as a multi-dimensional concept dealing with the obligation to obey, normative justifiability, and legality. It is the shared assumptions, values, and accepted norms of every organization that impact and define its culture, and is a key factor to organizational effectiveness (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Dennison, 1990; Zheng, Yang, & McLean, 2010). Thus, how people perceive the fairness of police authority and the trust they apply to those perceptions, will also dictate their sense of legitimacy.

Studies related to officer self-perception have indicated that police officers believe they are perceived less favorably by the community, and that their perceived image was significantly related to their job satisfaction and effectiveness (Yim & Schafer, 2009). Burke (1991) indicates that self-perception may also determine a persons’ social identity. Functionalistic roles, such as the duties required in relationship to their job, were determined to be a clear part of the police officers identity (Mead, 1934). Several have also recognized that the police role has numerous tensions that are a consequence of the wide discretionary powers officers possess (Bittner, 1967; Manning, 1977; Wilson, 1968), and that the public has empowered the police to resolve issues that they consider unsavory or displeasing (Bittner, 1967).

The few studies related to issues of role-perception conflict of campus public safety departments have indicated that a majority of campus safety directors were in agreement that campus public safety officers should be called “police officers” rather than “security officers” (Nichols, 1985). Currently, only the previous work of Heinsler et al. (1990) has provided any view of how campus officers themselves self-perceive their roles.

Where both emotive and value dissonance were concerned, all police officers were found likely to experience some level of dissonance as a byproduct of the various issues associated with policing (Schaible & Gecas, 2010). How officers believe themselves to be perceived and their own perceptions of job satisfaction has been found to be strongly related to job satisfaction and thus their overall effectiveness in their job (Yim & Schafer, 2009). Others have indicated that the perceived image of police influences their ability to function effectively in the maintenance of order, and that officers perceptions of how others see them has a direct effect on their pride and confidence in their duties (Lim et al., 2000). These feeling may become more exaggerated in the campus environment where the status and role of campus police officers may be seen as lacking in capital (Heinsler et al., 1990; Wilson & Wilson, 2014).

Some have posed that, when the public treats the police with a lack of respect and views them as incompetent, such responses evoke negative reactions from police, causing less job satisfaction and lowered organizational commitment (Lim et al., 2000). Others have indicated that disrespectful treatment in the workplace may lead to job dissatisfaction, decreased trust in management, and decreased organizational commitment (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001), along with higher levels of cynicism regarding their role (Poole & Regoli, 1980).

Finally, Tyler, Callahan, and Frost (2007) suggest that the beliefs of law enforcement officers that organizational authorities are legitimate, whether their rules and policies are morally right or wrong, and procedural justice, is an important influence on and central to rule adherence.

### 3. Design and method

Because of the exploratory nature of this study, the following research questions were developed: (1) How do campus police officers perceive themselves as members of the law enforcement community? (2) How do campus police officers believe they are perceived by the community and members of more traditional law enforcement agencies? (3) Do those perceptions impact their attitudes and behaviors during interactions with members of the campus community? (4) Does their perceived job image impact their job satisfaction? (5) Does the arming status of campus law enforcement officers impact their perceptions of who they are and how they believe they are perceived by others?

#### 3.1. Sampling procedure

The current study focuses exclusively on sworn campus police officers employed at four statutorily defined campus law enforcement agencies (RIGL § 12-7-21) in the State of Rhode Island. In total, 75 officers ranked from patrol officer through captain were found to be employed, therefore it is fair to assert that the officers included in this study adequately represent the number of sworn campus law enforcement officers in the State of Rhode Island.

Officers were surveyed regarding how they self-perceived their role as law enforcement officers, and their perceptions on how they were seen by campus community members and members of more traditional police agencies. The survey document, containing 30 questions related to self-perceptions of worth, legitimacy, and job satisfaction was mailed to all officers at the four institutions ranked patrol officer through captain, with follow-up notices mailed at intervals of 30 and 60 days after the initial mailing, and a final notice sent 90 days after the initial mailing.

Reactivity to surveys is a common weakness in their implementation, however, anonymity and confidentiality were emphasized to all participants to reduce this risk. Sixty-one questionnaires were returned for an initial 81.3% response rate. Three provided no response. This resulted in a total of 58 usable questionnaires giving a final response rate of 77.3% for the entire sample.

#### 3.2. Measures

All participants were asked to provide demographic information which included information on their age, gender, race, span of law enforcement background, number of years in campus law enforcement, rank, educational background, and political ideology. For this data, all participants were assured of confidentiality and that this data would not be used to identify them individually.

The dependent variables were based on self-reported perceptions of worth as a law enforcement officer and perceived worth as a law enforcement officer by traditional agencies and members of the campus community. These included questions such as whether the respondent considered themselves to be a police officer, how strongly they believed members of traditional law enforcement and members of the general campus community considered them to be a police officer, and the perceived level of support received in their role as campus police officers.

The independent variables were placed in four general themes related to officer perceptions of worth, perceptive community support, issues related to arming, and issues related to position-strengthening. These included questions related to perceived general knowledge of traditional law enforcement and campus community members regarding the authority of campus police; perceived level of support from traditional police and campus community in role as campus police officer; whether they experienced adequate support from campus administrators and labor unions; perceived effects on quality of service; impact of arming status on self-perception as police; impact of arming status on perceived legitimacy by traditional agencies and community members; and standards of accountability for campus police.

Questions were based on a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, unsure, agree, and strongly agree), which has proven useful in measuring constructs of attitudes and opinions, with responses coded 1 through 5, and evaluated self-perceived notions of legitimacy and acceptance in their role as law enforcement officers. Low scores indicated perceptions of legitimacy and were determined by participants' belief of police officer status. Two open-ended questions were provided to help determine self-expressed issues related to both role legitimacy and job satisfaction, and themes developed from these two questions were evaluated through a qualitative process.

#### 4. Analysis and findings

Twenty-eight questions were considered using frequency analysis methods. These included eight questions seeking demographic information, six questions seeking information on self-perceptions of their role as campus police officers, five questions regarding their perceptions of support in their role, five questions regarding their attitudes and perceptions on arming campus police, and four questions concerning their self-perceptions of police legitimacy. Two open-ended questions which considered their self-perceptions of methods to enhance legitimacy and job satisfaction were evaluated based on themes established from the responses and analyzed based on frequencies of themes.

##### 4.1. Respondent demographics

Respondents to the survey were predominantly male (87.9%,  $N = 51$ ), and ranged in age from 25 to 68 years, with a mean age of 53.05 years. The majority of these officers were Caucasian (89.7%,  $N = 52$ ) and had between 1 and 42 years of law enforcement experience, a total of more than 1,400 years, with a mean level of police experience of 25 years. 41.3% ( $N = 24$ ) of respondents had more than 10 years of prior municipal experience. Officers additionally had a mean of 12 years service as a campus police officer. 69% ( $N = 40$ ) served at the rank of patrol officer, 13.8% ( $N = 8$ ) at the rank of Corporal or Sergeant, and 17.2% ( $N = 10$ ) at the rank of Lieutenant or Captain. Where levels of education were considered, 22.4% ( $N = 13$ ) held high school or general education diplomas, 43.1% ( $N = 25$ ) had some college education, 22.4% ( $N = 13$ ) held associate degrees, 10.3% ( $N = 6$ ) held baccalaureate degrees, and 1.7% ( $N = 1$ ) held masters degrees. This indicated that campus police officers were highly skilled as members of their chosen profession, were well versed in the practices and procedures of police work, and were, generally, well educated (see Table 1).

##### 4.2. Perceptions of role as law enforcement officers

Where their role and status as a police officer was considered, 72.4% ( $N = 42$ ) of respondents indicated that they believed their role and authority to be the same or no different as their more traditional, public counterparts. Interestingly, of those with 10 years or more prior municipal law

**Table 1. Respondent demographics**

	Raw	Pct (%)
Male	51	88
Female	7	12
White non-Hispanic	52	90
African-American	6	10
Prior municipal law enforcement	24	41
Serve at patrol officer rank	40	69
Serve at corporal or sergeant rank	8	14
Serve at lieutenant or captain rank	10	17
High school/GED	13	22
Some college	25	43
Associate degree	13	22
Baccalaureate degree	6	10
Masters degree	1	2



enforcement service (56.8%,  $N = 33$ ), 72.7% ( $N = 24$ ) indicated positively that they believed themselves to still be police officers, even though serving in a different venue. A concern was found, however, when attempting to determine reasons why retired, more experienced officer's migrated into the field of campus policing, as their perceptions of worth as campus officers were specifically noted in the retrieved data. While their prior perceptions of campus law enforcement are unknown, and may well be beyond the scope of the current study, it does appear that they have successfully acclimated themselves to this new environment and have maintained their perceptions of their role as criminal justice professionals, albeit working in a much different, and seemingly more diverse in terms of attitudes, behaviors and perceptions, and community.

Similarly, data indicated that 69% ( $N = 40$ ) of all respondents believed that campus police officers should be held to a standard higher than their traditional counterparts. 22.4% ( $N = 13$ ) of respondents, however, stated that they did not consider themselves to be police officers. Of these, 46% ( $N = 6$ ) were found to have prior municipal police experience. It is unknown whether previously held perceptions of campus law enforcement had an impact on those respondents.

We next examined how officers believed that they were considered by both their more traditional counterparts and members of the campus community. Where perceptions of acceptance by traditional law enforcement agencies was concerned, 46.2% ( $N = 27$ ) of respondents indicated they felt that they were not perceived to be the equals of their traditional counterparts, and 67.2% ( $N = 39$ ) believed that their role as law enforcement officers was not fully understood by them. 50% ( $N = 29$ ) of respondents, however, believed that they were supported in their role as police officers by their traditional counterparts.

What appeared to present a more considerable concern was their perceptions of community acceptance, as 58.6% ( $N = 34$ ) of respondents believed that members of the campus community did not perceive them to be police officers, 63.8% ( $N = 37$ ) believed that campus community members did not understand their role as law enforcement officers, and 56.9% ( $N = 33$ ) perceived that the campus community did not support them in their role. 69% ( $N = 40$ ) of respondents also felt they were not provided adequate support by college administrators, and 63.8% ( $N = 37$ ) felt the same way about their labor unions (see Table 2).

These results appeared to be consistent with previous studies on police legitimacy in general, provided a strong sense of perceived marginalization among campus police officers, and appeared to have an effect on both the perceived level and quality of service that they provided as well as their perceived job satisfaction, as 60.3% ( $N = 35$ ) indicated that this perceived lack of support affected

**Table 2. Perceptions of worth as police officers**

	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
Considers self as police officer	72	5	22
Treated as Equals By Traditional Agencies	35	19	46
Role understood by traditional agencies	17	17	65
Role supported by traditional agencies	54	21	25
Considered as police by campus community	21	19	60
Role understood by campus community	21	19	60
Role supported by campus community	35	14	52
Adequate administrative support	17	15	67
Adequate support from labor unions	21	17	62
Support levels affect service	60	10	29
Support levels affect self-worth	53	14	33

both the level and quality of their service, with another 53.4% ( $N = 31$ ) indicating that it had an effect on their perceived self-worth as law enforcement officers.

#### 4.3. Perceptions of effects of arming status

In the State of Rhode Island, the arming of campus police is a highly contentious and inflammatory issue and was found to have a strong impact on campus officer self-perceptions, legitimacy, and marginalization. 86% ( $N = 50$ ) of respondents indicated that they believed their arming status had a direct impact on how they are perceived by their more traditional counterparts, as well as how they are perceived by the campus community (84%,  $N = 49$ ), with 81% ( $N = 47$ ) of respondents also indicating that their arming status had an effect on their own self-perceptions of being a police officer. Where the need to arm campus police was concerned, 79.3% ( $N = 46$ ) of all respondents believed that campus officers should be armed as opposed to 3.4% ( $N = 2$ ) who felt there was no need to arm campus police. Thus, it is clear that the arming status of campus police has a direct correlation to how they perceive themselves and how they believe others look at them (see Table 3).

#### 4.4. Perceptions of job-related issues

We then considered the manner in which disciplinary measures were dispensed and the type of labor support provided to them to determine the impact on their perceptions of self-worth and job satisfaction. When considering this data, it was determined that 86.2% ( $N = 50$ ) of respondents strongly opposed the concepts and practice of non-law enforcement personnel (campus administrators or human resource personnel) taking part in the police disciplinary process, with 98.3% ( $N = 57$ ) of respondents indicating that disciplinary proceedings for campus police officers should be exactly the same as those used for more traditional law enforcement officers and 100% ( $N = 58$ ) believing their labor groups should be composed of police officers only.

Of the two open-ended questions that considered officer perceptions of what was needed to improve legitimacy and issues concerning job satisfaction, responses were found to fit into several discovered themes. Where themes related to what was felt needed to improve the legitimacy of campus police were considered, dissatisfaction with police administration (50%,  $N = 29$ ), under-funding of police functions (46.6%,  $N = 27$ ), under-staffing (70.7%,  $N = 41$ ), and being ill-equipped to handle the various tasks required to fulfill their functions as police officers (67.2%,  $N = 39$ ) were found to be major concerns.

**Table 3. Effects of arming status**

	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
Has effect on perception held by traditional agencies	71	17	12
Has effect on perception held by campus community	77	17	6
Has effect on self-perception as police officer	73	15	12
Believe campus officers should be armed	73	23	4

**Table 4. Perceptions of job-related issues**

	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
Use of non-police decision makers for discipline	7	7	86
Use of traditional LEO disciplinary measures	98	2	0
Police only labor groups	100	0	0
Dissatisfaction with police administrators	50	26	24
Under funding of police activities	47	35	19
Under staffing of police	71	14	16
Improper or ill-equipped to handle tasks	67	24	9

Job satisfaction issues indicated that satisfactory student interaction (68.9%,  $N = 40$ ) was a primary source of satisfaction in their role as campus police officers, thereby providing emphasis on their additional perceived role of acting as mentors and educating students (see Table 4).

## 5. Discussion

While the results of this study do provide confirmation of existing research regarding police legitimacy in general, they also find serious issues in the aspect of legitimacy for campus police officers in the State of Rhode Island, which may likely have a dynamic impact on the level and quality of service being provided to the campus community and thus, the manner in which safety is ensured. Findings show that while they are, indeed, granted legislative police authority that is comparable to their more public counterparts, campus law enforcement officers perceive a lack of legitimization and support from their community; have high levels of self-perceived feelings of marginalization; and face an ever uphill battle in their efforts to obtain the same levels of legitimacy as their more traditional counterparts. Consequently, the results of this study may provide further insight into what may be considered as the more highly specialized area of campus law enforcement, particularly as it relates to the State of Rhode Island.

As mentioned earlier, a concern regarding our findings was in determining reasons for retired, more experienced officer's migration into the field of campus policing, as their perceptions of worth as campus officers were specifically noted in the retrieved data. While their prior perceptions of campus law enforcement are unknown, and are beyond the scope of the current study, it is possible that their choice of a secondary career in campus law enforcement may have been impacted by the availability of various educational incentives offered by their institutions. It does appear, however, that they have successfully acclimated themselves to this new environment and have maintained their perceptions of their role as criminal justice professionals, albeit working in a much different, and seemingly more diverse in terms of attitudes, behaviors and perceptions, and community.

The study of campus policing systems has not been as broadly based as that completed on their more traditional counterparts, and thus is a pressing policy issue. And the concept of legitimacy for campus police officers cannot be lightly overlooked, as it is crucial to the success of the many community policing programs that have now become the staples of these campus agencies, without which they cannot survive. Caught between their perceived roles as the visible extension of campus administrative authority and their legislated status as police officers, campus administrators, police managers, and legislators alike must work closer together to provide campus police officers better tools that form the foundations for a more professional performance of their duties.

The success or failure of these campus police agencies and their personnel will continue to rest upon the support that they receive from their campus constituents, and the manner in which officers themselves perceive that support, as even with full statutory authority campus police may, at times, be considered second-class members of the law enforcement community. Legal authorities, such as campus police, gain when they receive deference and cooperation from the public they serve. And if campus police officers perceive that they are not seen, accepted and recognized as full members and partners in the greater law enforcement community, their effectiveness may subsequently be lessened and imperiled.

Likewise, and most crucial, is their acceptance and recognition in the campus environment. Describing or referring to them as nothing more than "glorified security" will be seen as demeaning, thus weakening their sense of legitimacy, perceived worth in the community, job satisfaction and willingness to serve. Restricting their access to those generally accepted tools and accoutrements of their profession, benefits typically ascribed to their traditional counterparts, and constantly relegating them to tasks viewed as outside the realm of the police function, will continue to cause feelings of distrust of administrative processes, ambivalence in service deliveries, and may result in a greater likelihood of job dissatisfaction leading to increased levels of misconduct.

How they are perceived in the overall scheme of the law enforcement and campus community affects both the morale and quality of service of campus police officers. These perceptions, then, may have a great deal of impact on how they provide service to the campus community. If they perceive that their services are either belittled, considered as non-consequential or less worthy than others, they may serve in a lackluster manner which then imperils the overall safety of all campus constituents.

These are issues that must be directly addressed, not only by campus police officers themselves, but more importantly by those that administer their service, as they have potentially dire consequences in the manner in which law enforcement services are rendered and order maintenance on campus is achieved. Consequently, it is campus administrators who must face the challenges of changing organizational culture and norms associated with equity, power, and privilege where campus officers are concerned. And this goal will by no means be easy, as the challenges of changing ingrained attitudes are well known.

Strengthening of their legitimacy must, ultimately, begin at the administrative level, as officers may take their cues from those who directly manage their efforts and performance. There would appear to be a need to more properly define their authority and grant a more liberal level of latitude where their jurisdictional boundaries are concerned, as given the unique nature of university and college communities, many of today's college campuses are often cities unto themselves.

Statutorily, campus police agencies should be provided the exact same levels of authority and jurisdiction as their municipal, county and state counterparts in order to withstand this issue of legitimacy. These issues should be deemed necessary to provide a stronger sense of legitimacy in their every day dealings with students, faculty, staff and administrators on campus, as well as traditional agencies that they interact with. Thus, the full range of authority, rights, privileges and immunities which are granted to more traditional law enforcement agencies should also be extended to campus police agencies. This may involve specific inclusion under various sections of state penal, traffic and criminal codes, the rights to participate in civil process service, pension and disciplinary process.

Legislation should be constructed to make the arming of campus officers who are granted full law enforcement status mandatory so as to provide them with greater ability to respond appropriately to all levels of campus crime and violence, as well as provide for their inclusion in all statutory language that pertains specifically to other state, municipal and county law enforcement personnel. Access to, and use of, reporting systems that mimic those used by their traditional counterparts should now be considered as a standard bill of goods, so as to better facilitate the sharing of information amongst agencies.

Strongly built and worded Memorandums of Understandings must also be put in place to insure the cooperation and presence of local and state forces during instances of campus unrest or violence-related issues. This may include the establishment of local agency outreach centers physically on the campus which specifically define the connections between the campus environment and the local community.

For all institutions, campus-based mechanisms should be put in place to monitor and review the activities of campus law enforcement personnel for allegations of misconduct and abuse of authority. These reviews are necessary not only to insure the highest levels of professional service, but also to provide administrators and officers alike with clear, transparent methods of community interaction and build stronger relationships with the campus community. Members of these review panels should be required to have sound knowledge of campus law enforcement practices, procedures and policies, and the terms and conditions of employment of campus police officers, as it is only by this means that they may properly assess their actions.

Labor groupings should be configured so as to exclude those persons not functioning in a law enforcement-related capacity. It becomes quite problematic when union officials and members attempt to impose their status when interacting with those who are sworn to enforce the various regulations that they may be accused of. And regardless of the type of institution, stronger programs of outreach to both the campus community and that which surrounds it should now be brought into play, as each depends upon the other for its strength and survival. It is these programs that will assist in generating community trust and perceived legitimacy for campus police. The fact that strong, committed support of campus administrators and faculty for these programs is both necessary and needful for their success is left without saying.

In the final assessment, it is perhaps the level of professional service that is expected and desired to be provided that must actually dictate both the perceived and real legitimacy of campus police. Former United States Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy once stated, "Every society gets the kind of criminal it deserves. What is equally true is that every community gets the kind of law enforcement it insists on" (Kennedy, 1964). While his comments were obviously directed towards the more traditional settings of law enforcement, they are no less true when transposed to the campus environment. The level of professionalism in campus law enforcement, and thus their perceived legitimacy, will only be that which is desired, or insisted upon, by the campus community.

## 6. Implications for further study

While this study focused on issues of police legitimacy as they relate specifically to campus police officers in the State of Rhode Island, this issue is analogous to campus officers throughout the country. Consequently, a cross-national review covering multiple institutions from several geographic areas may shed a more precise light on this issue and provide the ground work for meaningful discussion and changes in both officer perceptions and institutional administrative methodologies.

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