

# **2011-2012 GRAND JURY REPORT**

## **College of the Desert – Public Safety Academy**

### **Background**

The College of the Desert (College) is a two-year community college located in Palm Desert in the Coachella Valley of Riverside County, California.

The College was established in 1958. Voters approved the formation of a junior college district in Coachella Valley and funded the building of the College campus with a bond issue. In 1962, the new college opened on its 160 acres and received accreditation in 1966. The College offers certificates and two-year Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees.

The current student population is approximately 10,200. During 2011-2012, the College received approximately \$23 million property tax revenue from Riverside County, a portion of which goes to the Public Safety Academy (Academy).

The Academy, founded at the College on January 1, 2001, offers basic peace officer training. In the past, the Ben Clark Training Center (BCTC) had partnered with the Academy to provide additional training courses to supplement the College's Basic Peace Officer Training program. To complete the peace officer safety certification training, required to become a full-time peace officer, there are three Module Training Programs:

- BPOT-061 Basic Peace Officer Training Module III
- BPOT-062 Basic Peace Officer Training Module II
- BPOT-063 Basic Peace Officer Training Module I

The Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) is a state agency, which regulates training required to become a peace officer in California. POST also certifies training centers that provide basic academy training and advanced officer training.

This report addresses issues with the Academy.

## Findings

### POST Certification

1. The College promotes itself as “a leader in providing ...public safety training” and advertises its **Public Safety Academy** that claims to provide “well defined academic programs leading to degrees and certificates in ...**Basic Peace Officer Training**”. The “Program Overview” states:

*At the College of the Desert Public Safety Academy (COD-PSA) you can complete the POST Certified Training which is required to become a Full-Time Peace Officer or a Reserve Police Officer.*

The Academy further lists the three required classes in the Module Training Program and orientation dates which include a date “pending” for Module I, followed by the cost breakdown of the three modules and “Total Estimated Costs \$3,223.”

From the published information it would appear that an interested applicant could become a fully-trained peace officer through the College’s program. The College is not currently certified to offer Module I Training.

In a letter dated May 12, 2011, the Riverside County Sheriff’s Office (RSO) outlined to the College administration, the basic requirements for a “long-term, collaboration and effective law enforcement training program with College of the Desert”. Included in the letter were these requirements:

#### GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

- *All aspects of training conducted in collaboration with the Sheriff must be coordinated solely through the commander of the Ben Clark Training Center (BCTC). The Sheriff’s Training Center is responsible for any coordination with POST, or application of POST requirements.*
- *Scheduling of all POST courses can be made in close collaboration with COD. However, the RSO must be able to conduct training that spans more than one traditional college semester and starts and/or finishes at a time not traditional to other college courses. RSO must have the authority to schedule training in order to minimize operational costs.*
- *Advisory input for academy operations must be made through RSO Academy Advisory Committee, which already contains the members of COD PSA’s. It is critical that Basic Academy operations are consistent in*

*both fulltime and modular formats. ...The current overlapping committees create confusion and duplication.*

## MODULAR ACADEMY REQUIREMENTS

- *RSO must certify and coordinate all modules of the academy. RSO certifies a whole academy not just a module. Producing only one part of a POST Regular Basic Course does not serve the interest of the greater law enforcement community. There must be unity of command to insure [sic] accountability.*
- *No Deviation from POST Standards. Operations, oversight and management of the academy must meet POST standards and RSO standards...*

At this time there are no active negotiations between the College and the Sheriff.

### **Academy Curriculum**

2. Through interviews with all the chiefs and commanders of law enforcement agencies in the Coachella Valley, which utilize most of the graduates of the Academy, the Grand Jury learned that there is a lack of effectiveness in classroom instruction at the Academy. This ineffectiveness is attributed to outdated instructional methods and curriculum being used. The Grand Jury found that only one Academy graduate of all three peace officer training modules in the past five years is still employed in the Coachella Valley. Some chiefs stated that recruits were unprepared to pass the probationary period, after receiving training at the Academy.

During its investigation, the Grand Jury learned that some instructors at the Academy are teaching classes that lack relevance to the students' required training. An example of this lack of relevancy is an eight-hour course about the history of the handgun. Other instructors do nothing more than show videos, thus limiting and/or totally eliminating opportunities for class participation and providing no follow-up to the pseudo-instruction.

POST trains highly qualified law enforcement personnel, who are subject matter experts in quality orientation instruction, to become mentors to those instructing at law enforcement academies and regional training centers throughout the state. The **POST Master Instructor Certification Course** is a two-year program to train and certify law enforcement personnel in developing curriculum and modern methods of delivery of that material. These master instructors train the trainers at academies and training centers. They are used by POST training agencies to assist their instructors to improve their curriculum and teaching techniques in the classroom.

## **Advisory Committee**

3. POST mandates that police academies have an advisory committee with local law enforcement leaders. Interviews with the nine members of the Advisory Committee revealed a number of problems with the committee:
  - Membership
    - a. One did not know he was a member of the committee.
    - b. One was not sure he was a member of the committee.
    - c. One said he was a member in name only.
  - The majority are not sure of their duties or responsibilities.
  - Members agree that meetings are not held on a regular basis. Most indicate they had not been to or rarely attend meetings.
  - Committee members, in general, think the committee is ineffective because there is little interaction between the committee and the Academy.

## **Information Accuracy**

4. The Academy publicizes that it provides the training necessary for the three levels of peace officer training. Currently, the Academy does not offer Module I through which a student can become a sworn peace officer. It leaves the impression on its website, as of June 11, 2012, that the program is, or soon will be, available. From sworn testimony the Grand Jury concluded that this practice is misleading to potential students.

## **Recommendations**

### **Riverside County Board of Supervisors College of the Desert**

1. The College must obtain a POST Certification for Module I. This can be accomplished by obtaining its own Certification from POST or through an agreement with the County Sheriff, similar to the agreement between Riverside Community College District and the Ben Clark Training Center.

2. The Academy staff must be proactive in providing effective, up-to-date instruction and curriculum to their students. To accomplish this, the Academy must utilize POST Master Instructors.
3. The College must reorganize the Advisory Committee to make it effective. The members must be made aware of their duties and responsibilities. The College must involve the committee by seeking and considering ideas and advice from the committee regarding Academy programs. Meetings, with pre-published agendas, must be held quarterly, at a minimum. They must be held on regularly designated dates and times and meet at one specific location (ideally on the College campus).
4. The College must immediately correct literature, including Internet sites, which incorrectly indicate that complete training to become a peace officer is available.

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