

# UNIVERSITY of NEW HAMPSHIRE

*“Excellence in Outreach Scholarship”*

*Outreach Scholars Academy*

## **1. PROJECT TITLE**

*Behind the Blue Curtain: Managing Reputation and Identity with Citizen Police Academies*

## **2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

My research objective is to examine how Citizen Police Academies work in terms of building the reputation of a local police department by building identity between a police department and the community. These concepts of “reputation” and “identity” are familiar in traditional organizational settings and they may prove useful in terms of bridging management scholarship and the community policing function.

In this research context, not only are scholarly concepts tested in novel settings, extending or staying generalizability, but they also are applied to solving the problems or identifying the opportunities of communities in New Hampshire. In this way, both academic and community partners forge a relationship to both generate and apply knowledge for understanding and problem solving.

## **3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION/STATEMENT OF THE ISSUES/PROBLEM**

The role of police has always been of interest to citizens. The television media has capitalized upon this curiosity with shows such as “Cops”, “America’s Most Wanted”, and “Stories of the Highway Patrol.” Each week, real police action is broadcast into the living rooms of millions of Americans. Numerous police agencies have benefited from the curiosity that citizens have about the police. These agencies have formed Citizen Police Academy programs that create an expansion of their community based efforts. These programs are intended to open the lines of communication between the community and the police department. To the citizen, it may appear that sometimes the police are not doing their job or are exceeding their boundaries. By allowing citizens a first-hand look at what rules, regulations and policies the police follow, some of the misunderstanding may be alleviated. The objective of the Citizen Police Academy is to produce informed citizens. The citizens and police officers meet each other face-to-face in a neutral, friendly setting and each becomes a person to the other. In the past, citizens have simply seen a uniform, now they have an understanding about the person behind the badge.

The guiding question in the study is how to design educational sessions that will both educate and foster relationships between citizens and officers. The goals are thus learning and integrating police-citizen identities under the community umbrella.

## 4. PROJECT DETAILS

### Goals and Objectives

The general goals of this study are to investigate how Citizen Police Academies influence citizens in terms of sharing police life behind “the blue curtain” so as to encourage shared identity, enthusiasm, and information sharing regarding the department’s positive reputation. Toward those ends, this study seeks to identify design parameters of particularly successful academies in the state of New Hampshire.

### Target Population/Audience

I plan on contacting police departments in New Hampshire to see if they have a Citizens Police Academy and to recruit their participation in a larger study of how Citizens Police Academies manage reputation and identity in their communities.

### Methods

The main methodology will be citizen participant surveys including measures of (1) learning, (2) quality of instruction, (3) shared identity, and (4) enthusiasm. The expectation is that whether citizens share what they learn as ambassadors for their police department depends on effective teaching and class experiences which maximize social influence. Because most Citizen Police Academies average ten weeks in duration, multiple measures will be collected throughout the duration of the academy.

### Evidence of External Collaboration and Partnership:

My external partners will be police officer instructors from departments throughout New Hampshire, citizen participants, police officials, and community leaders such as the Mayor of Dover or the Town Council in Durham. I plan to study how communities design their Citizen Police Academies to identify best practices for learning and influence.

The benefits of the project will be in terms of how to best manage reputation in nonprofit organizations with critical connections to a community. Findings should assist police departments in designing their academies for maximum impact and also inform organizational theory regarding the link between information and influence in large-scale systems.

### Expected Impact:

External partners will receive a summary report highlighting best practice design conditions. In addition, each department will receive summary ratings regarding instructors’ *teaching styles* and their abilities to *explain* the material. In a pilot study, these two factors explained a major portion of the variation in whether participants planned to share lessons from a class. Measurement will be primarily by survey with open-ended interviews planned with representatives from all key stakeholders.

My plans are to write a scholarly paper detailing the goals and conclusions of the study and to submit it to a management journal. In addition, I will prepare an executive summary that police

departments can share with city officials and newspapers to publicize their voluntary efforts and, in the process, continue to recruit citizens.

### **Scholarly Connection:**

My interest in understanding work behavior and influence in organizational systems is central in this study of Citizen Police Academies. Linking learning and mood was a goal in an earlier study of mine on community service. Extending this link to shared identity and shared perceptions of the reputation of a police department constitute new application in complex systems (community-police department interface). The notion that citizens would willingly serve as ambassadors for their local police department refines and extends the concept of community policing which was the original impetus for Citizen Police Academies in England.

## **5. EVALUATION PLAN**

In terms of the research, I will be documenting the normative principles of Citizen Police Academies in New Hampshire. As such, both partners and myself will not be attempting an intervention. The prescriptive findings generalized across the entire sample of participating academies will be the basis of future intervention. Producing "basic" findings is the goal of this study. Follow-up with those academies who wish to alter their designs would constitute the application-of-new-knowledge phase.

The scholarship component would be satisfied if the set of relations among the variables in the pilot study continue to hold and are, in fact, more robust. These associations would show how learning environments influence identity, mood, and information sharing that serves to enhance the reputation of a local police department. A pre-post design will ensure that the surveyed results are directly related to Citizens' Police Academies. To be sure, I would ask local city councils for permission to randomly survey a brief sample (as directed by the council) of the citizenry on the outcome variables in the study.