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TECHNICAL REPORT

# First Year Evaluation of the Caruth Police Institute at Dallas

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*Robert C. Davis*

Sponsored by the University of North Texas with funds from the Communities Foundation of Texas



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## Summary

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In March 2009, the Dallas Police Department (DPD) began a unique partnership with two local universities, the University of North Texas (UNT) and the University of Texas at Dallas (UT Dallas). Start-up funds to create the W. W. Caruth Jr. Police Institute at Dallas (CPI) were provided by a \$10 million gift from the Communities Foundation of Texas (CFT). The institute will provide training for officers at all stages of their careers and will serve as the research and problem-solving arm of the DPD, providing solutions to complex policing problems and developing effective crime-fighting strategies.

This report describes the results of a first-year process evaluation of CPI based on an evaluation design that RAND researchers prepared with funding from CFT. The design included a process evaluation of the institute's first-year operations and an impact evaluation to assess whether and how the institute is able to make the DPD more effective. The process evaluation described in this report focused on the setup of the institute. It examines the extent to which the institute is meeting its operational goals and the milestones set forth in its business plan developed for CFT. It also examines obstacles to implementation and how the institute has responded to these challenges.

In addition to gathering data for the process evaluation, we also collected data during the first year to serve as a baseline or benchmark for measuring the institute's effects in subsequent years. The results of the baseline measures of community opinion of the police, officer job satisfaction, and several other items are contained in the companion RAND document, *Measuring the Performance of the Dallas Police Department: 2008–2009 Results* (Davis, 2009).

Methods used in the process evaluation included collection of information from DPD and institute records, interviews with CPI staff, interviews with senior DPD managers, interviews with participants in CPI's inaugural course for lieutenants, course evaluations completed by participating lieutenants, and observations of CPI board of steward meetings and classes. Through the use of these multiple methods, we hoped to gain a solid understanding of the start-up challenges that the institute faced and the extent to which the institute is meeting its operational goals and milestones.

The report finds that, although the institute got off to a slow start, it assembled a well-qualified staff that created a state-of-the-art leadership class for lieutenants as its first course. The course, given in weekly modules over a period of six months, included lectures by CPI staff instructors, guest lecturers, case studies, and Friday forums that featured candid discussions between DPD chiefs and CPI staff on a variety of current topics. The class, which could be taken for UNT undergraduate or graduate credit, was well-received by participants, based on the student evaluations. Interviews with participants indicated that the course had significant team-building value: By graduation, the lieutenants had developed a common approach

to leadership, a common language, and a common commitment to apply the leadership principles that they had learned to their jobs. The development of a cohort of midlevel managers who think similarly on issues is something that distinguishes CPI from other quality leadership programs.

The research and problem-solving component of the institute is also off to a solid start. The fact that the institute had to be quartered initially at DPD headquarters (because UNT Dallas did not yet have space available to house CPI) proved to be fortuitous. Institute fellows from UT Dallas have several significant research projects under way. Moreover, the institute has been receiving an increasing number of requests from members of the DPD command staff to use research to inform or evaluate DPD programs. It is unlikely that this integration of the institute would have happened as quickly or to the same extent had the institute been housed outside of DPD headquarters. The institute's research capacity is currently limited, however, by the fact that the institute has not effectively filled the position of research director. The executive director has so far acted as research director on an ad hoc basis, but this is not a tenable long-term solution because the executive director's time is being stretched increasingly thin.

Adherence of the two universities to their commitments will be key to long-term sustainability. Between the universities and the city, the four senior positions in the institute, as well as office space, should be covered once the initial four-year budget period ends. However, the fact that the research-director position has not yet been picked up as specified in the memorandum of understanding (MOU) between CFT and the university partners is cause for concern. Another cause for concern is the fact that the City of Dallas has discontinued tuition reimbursement for police officers taking academic courses. This likely will continue to have a significant impact on the proportion of officers who use CPI courses to pursue academic degrees and dampen enthusiasm for participating in CPI courses, whether on a credit or noncredit basis.

Demand for course participation from agencies in the region is building as word of the institute spreads. Opening courses to other agencies is one of the keys to sustainability: The extent to which the institute limits its scope to Dallas versus becoming a regional public-safety training center is one that institute staff, CFT, the two universities, and the City of Dallas will need to work through in the coming years.