

Missouri Police Chiefs Association, a Success Story in Statewide Virtual Learning

Paving the way for other states, the Missouri Police Chiefs Association (MPCA) has successfully implemented a video Internet-based training program providing law enforcement staff around-the-clock access to computer training. The program, Virtual Learning and Educational Training Academy (VLETA), came online in the fall of 2001 and has provided more than 3,000 field-specific training hours to police officers, administration, and support staff. According to MPCA's Training Director, Bryan Reid, "The benefits have been great, especially for small departments because they can receive the same quality training no matter the location or size of department."

More than seventy classroom hours are currently available through police car Mobile Data Terminals, department Internet-enabled computer stations, and personal home computers, all delivered in fifteen-minute segments. In addition, over 150 new classroom hours are under development.

An added value is that VLETA courses meet Missouri Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) requirements for continuing education. For POST certification, officers must complete a minimum of 48 continuing education credits every three years in specific categories: Interpersonal, Legal, Technical, and Skills. The VLETA courses have been designed to cover topics in these categories and include subjects such as: domestic violence, cultural diversity, gang identification, prescription drug fraud, and weapons of mass destruction. Since courses are delivered in short fifteen-minute segments, retention is much higher than that of traditional classroom instruction.

"Police officers love it because they have the chance to take the training at their own pace" said Reid, "and administration loves it because it saves money." This type of training eliminates compensation, travel and per-diem costs, rescheduling, personnel shortages, and most importantly, candidates remain available during training for emergency situations.

Financially contributing to the program's success is the Missouri Public Entity Risk Management Fund (MOPERM), a self-insurance fund offering broad liability coverage protecting Missouri law enforcement employees and public officials. MOPERM reimburses police departments \$50 per officer from their liability fund in a proactive effort to reduce liability claims. This reimbursement reduces the \$85 annual subscription fee to \$35 per officer.

When asked about officers completing the series of courses, Reid replied "...they're never done; we don't stop adding material." While some take the courses individually, generally entire departments are enrolled at once. Kansas City, Missouri, Police Department will be the next office to come online with 1,400 students.

In developing training "...we use subject matter experts from all over the United States," said Reid. Currently, Missouri has reciprocity with 15 other states for continuing education credits. Due to the strict standards in what qualifies as certified law enforcement training, officer associations in other states are now communicating with each other to bring their states online. New Jersey will be the next state to join this initiative.

Other groups are also realizing VLETA's potential. Reid indicated that not only are courses provided for law enforcement, but also for fire marshals and members of the broadcasting field. Missouri broadcasters are designing their own training classes and utilizing the VLETA technology to make training available to their staff. Additionally, VLETA offers policy manual training that presents policy models for out-of-state or small office policy chiefs when drafting policies.

For additional information regarding the VLETA program, please visit www.mopca.com, or contact Bryan Reid, Training Director, at (573) 636-5444 or breid@mopca.com.