



ACADEMY CURRICULUM RECOMMENDATION

TO: Chief Lisa Davis, Austin Police Department
FROM: Director Gail McCant, Office of Police Oversight
DATE: August 18, 2025
SUBJECT: **BPOC Chapter 25: Verbal Communication**

Dear Chief Davis,

The Office of Police Oversight (OPO) is collaborating with the Educational Development Unit of the Austin Police Department (APD) to enhance the academy's curriculum. OPO's Policy Compliance Consultant is a member of the Professional Advisory Committee (PAC), which is responsible for reviewing, evaluating, and providing feedback for improvement.

In addition to the subject matter experts hired by APD, the OPO has reviewed APD's curriculum for the Verbal Communication course and provided the following recommendations for improvement:

BPOC (Basic Peace Officer Course) Chapter 25: Verbal Communication

Unit Goal: Effective techniques of utilizing verbal communication/public interaction.

The following OPO recommendations emphasize the vital importance of respectful, impartial communication in policing. By integrating these values into both curriculum and evaluation, and aligning them with real-world feedback, APD can effectively improve officer conduct and community-police relations.

1. OPO recommends that the Verbal Communication course curriculum emphasize the importance of adhering to GO# 301.2 Impartial Attitude and Courtesy.

The second-highest complaint category for the OPO continues to be "courtesy and impartial attitude" (301.2 Impartial Attitude and Courtesy). It is important to set the expectations for interactions with the community for cadets. There should be a continued focus throughout Academy training on the Verbal Communication course material as it pertains directly to General Order # 301.2. Instructors should reference applicable General Orders to ensure cadets understand the policies that govern their behavior. Also, courtesy and impartiality should be included as core components in cadet evaluations, and actionable feedback should be provided when skills fall short of expectations.



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2. OPO recommends that APD integrate the principles of the Verbal Communication course throughout other Academy courses.

APD should ensure that verbal communication principles are integrated across all relevant Academy courses, rather than being limited to just one. Introducing this course early in the Academy curriculum enables cadets to cultivate their verbal communication skills and apply them in future courses on topics such as Crisis Intervention and Use of Force situations. Consistent exposure to this material aids cadets in internalizing respectful communication as a daily practice.

3. OPO recommends that APD enhance scenario-based training with real-world complaint themes to reinforce respect and empathy under pressure.

APD should include role-play scenarios that simulate real-world complaints tied to officer demeanor and communication. Cadets should be allowed to practice emotional intelligence, reciprocity, and personal respect in high-pressure situations. Preparing cadets for high-pressure encounters, focusing on perception and public impact, improves long-term community relations.

SME Feedback: OPO disagrees with the SME's that the term "verbal judo" is problematic.

The resource Verbal Judo by Thompson and Jenkins (2013) is widely recognized for its emphasis on empathy, respect, and tactical persuasion, which aligns with modern community policing goals. APD should clearly define Verbal Judo as a de-escalation tool, not as a precursor to force.

The Office of Police Oversight appreciates the opportunity to provide constructive feedback on the Austin Police Department's academy curriculum and recognizes the potential for continued improvement. We look forward to ongoing collaboration on current and future curriculum development to support continuous progress and effectiveness.

Sincerely,

Gail McCant

Director

Office of Police Oversight