**Report of the**

**Disciplinary Purview of Emergency Management Focus Group**

**Held September 10-11, 2012 at EMI**

**Participants:**

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**Preface**

The Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) Higher Education Program hosted a focus group from September 11-12, 2012 at the Emergency Management Institute (EMI) to help explore characteristics of the emergency management discipline such as its disciplinary purview and a set of basic research questions. The focus group had two days of robust discussion and debate that resulted in group consensus on the disciplinary purview of emergency management, disciplinary responsibilities related to education and research, and other topics. Despite the diverse experience of the participants, the group achieved remarkable consensus regarding all of the topics discussed.

**Report**

The following short report the results of the group’s meeting as well as progress made by the group toward the stated objectives. The report also shares the plans to present their ideas and rationale to the wider emergency management higher education community through the development and wide distribution of a white paper and then a presentation at the 2013 FEMA Higher Education Conference.

**OBJECTIVE: Discuss and debate what is currently perceived to be the disciplinary purview of emergency management.**

The group discussed various definitions of emergency management (EM) that have been offered and the degree to which these various definitions are suited to EMHIED, particularly EM as an emerging academic discipline in its own right. A consensus emerged that current definitions of emergency management were not appropriate for the emergency management higher education community (EMHIED) because of one or more of the following reasons: 1) the definition was referring to how EM should be practiced; 2) the definition was referring to the EM profession or the job of an emergency manager; 3) the definition was too narrow; 4) the definition did not reflect the role EMHIED does/could/should play within academia; 5) the definition did not lead to consideration of the full body of knowledge available to ground EMHIED; 6) the definition did not relate to, or set the stage for, understanding EMHIED’s approach to research. After significant discussion about what the definition of the emergency management academic discipline should entail, the group achieved consensus around the following definition:

*The Discipline of Emergency Management*

**Emergency management is the study of how humans and their institutions interact and cope with hazards, vulnerabilities, and resulting events (i.e., emergencies, disasters, catastrophes, and complex humanitarian crises), particularly through activities related to preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation.**

The group then moved onto what the educational and research responsibilities of the emergency management academic discipline should include. The group recognized that EMHIED serves the emerging profession of EM. Armed with an EM education, some degree program graduates will go on to seek employment as emergency management professionals. Emergency management professionals are employed at each level of government (e.g., city, county, state, tribal, and federal) and within various governmental agencies at each level (e.g., Departments of Emergency Management, Departments of Public Health, Departments of Transportation, Departments of Public Works), domestic and international nongovernmental organizations, and businesses. The group acknowledged that degree program graduates who choose to pursue an emergency management career will be most successful if they choose to complement their higher education experience with significant training and one or more internships.

The group agrees that EMHIED ought not just to be viewed as serving those who wish to be full-time EM professionals. In addition, EMHIED also can serve students who will enter a host of other professions (e.g., public administration, law, natural resources and environmental management, business administration, nonprofit administration, social work, public health practice, hospital administration, and engineering) that undertake a diverse array of EM related tasks and activities before, during, and after events occur. Any level of EM education is a suitable and strong complement to individuals seeking, or already practicing in, careers in any of the aforementioned areas. Thus, the group believed that the discipline of emergency management’s educational responsibilities include the following:

*Disciplinary Responsibilities: Education*

1. **Educate future emergency management professionals in a manner that will benefit them wherever they enter the broad profession (i.e., nonprofit, business, local government, state government, federal government, international humanitarian assistance); and,**
2. **Educate those throughout society who perform tasks and activities related to emergency management (e.g., those who will become our community’s planners, assessors, fire fighters, police officers, public works employees, engineers, etc.).**

The group acknowledged that the aspirations and career goals of students, the knowledge base and experience students bring to their degree program, and how material is presented and discussed will differ by level of education. The group also believed that each type of degree program in EM has a unique purpose and that degree programs of all types are needed. Specifically, it was thought that EMHIED needs to continue to strengthen programs that offer the following types of degrees:

1. Doctoral degree to develop a significant depth and breadth of knowledge of the emergency management literature and research methodology in order to pursue teaching, research, or policy work in emergency management;
2. Master’s degree to gain a higher level of understanding to enhance, enrich, or otherwise expand their knowledge of emergency management and how to apply it. Master’s degree students will serve in particular those who desire a supervisory or leadership role in emergency management;
3. A bachelor’s degree that provides a broad-based education in the foundational knowledge required to pursue an emergency management career; and,
4. Associate’s degree, minor, and graduate certificate as complements or supplements to a major in a variety of other academic disciplines and career goals.

Despite the important differences in degree type, the group felt that the areas in which EM students ought to be educated and the body of knowledge that should be drawn upon in should be the same.

The focus group thought that EMHIED should educate students on the basis of the vast and rich body of knowledge available. The group acknowledged that contributions to the body of knowledge have been made by scholars in a wide variety of disciplines (e.g., sociology, public administration, geography, anthropology, economics, political science, communications, engineering, psychology) and can be found in books, scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles, and research center publications; and, further, that the EM body of knowledge is increasingly also found reflected in emergency management textbooks. The body of knowledge available has evolved over decades and will continue to evolve and expand as a diverse array of academic disciplines continue to explore hazards, vulnerabilities, and resulting events through their research and as EM scholars (i.e., those academics who identify themselves with the emerging discipline emergency management and Ph.D. holders in emergency management) contribute to the body of knowledge through their own research.

Indeed, the group believed that EM, as a discipline in its own right, has important research responsibilities. A key conclusion reached by the group: The discipline of EM has a responsibility to collect, analyze, integrate, and synthesize the literature related to hazards, vulnerabilities, and resulting events. No academic discipline currently perceives this task as their responsibility or domain; no academic discipline bases its education of students on such an approach exclusively; and, the research of all other disciplines on the topics of hazards, vulnerabilities, and resulting events remains incomplete without a foundation on integration and synthesis. Thus, EM has a unique opportunity to contribute by basing both the education we offer and the research we conduct on the integration and synthesis of the hazards and disaster literature. While the group believed that the EM academic discipline, like any other, has a responsibility to conduct both basic and applied research, its foundation will rest upon the literature related to our topics that has been generated by scholars from a host of disciplines. With respect to research responsibilities, the group suggested that the EM discipline has the responsibility to…

*Disciplinary Responsibilities: Research*

1. **Collect, analyze, integrate, synthesize literature related to hazards, vulnerabilities, and resulting events;**
2. **Generate new knowledge through original research (i.e., basic and applied) and critical assessment of existing hazards and disaster literature; and,**
3. **Promote the dissemination, application, and utilization of the results of original research.**

The group also discussed the research focuses that EM ought to pursue. The research focuses of other disciplines were explored as a means of generating conversation and comparison. A range of ideas were presented on the first day as to potential research foci for EM. On the second day, the group returned to their original list, held additional discussion, and reduced the list significantly. The group believed that EM research ought to primarily explore the following:

*Emergency Management’s Primary Research Foci*

1. ***Describe and explain variation* *in and patterns related to* how humans and their institutions perceive hazards, vulnerabilities, and resulting events;**
2. ***Describe and explain variation in and patterns related to* the how humans and their institutions cope with hazards, vulnerabilities, and resulting events through tasks and activities related to preparedness, response, mitigation, and recovery;**
3. ***Evaluation and measurement* of the degree to which humans and their institutions are prepared, have responded, have mitigated, have recovered;**
4. ***Evaluation and measurement* of the degree to which the tasks and activities undertaken by humans and their institutions result are *effective and/or efficient*; and,**
5. ***Evaluation and measurement* of the degree to which the tasks and activities undertaken by humans and their institutions are *adaptive* (e.g., lead to sustainability, resilience, and/or resistance).**

Regardless of the focus of EM research, the group felt that all EM research must be grounded in the integration and synthesis of topic-related literature as previously discussed. Moreover, the group felt that EM researchers must situate their research within context (e.g., historical, political, social, cultural, physical, and economic) at the beginning and end of their research and to the extent possible work toward the practical application of their research findings.

The focus group determined that EM has scholarly responsibilities that go beyond education and research. Specifically, the group believed that EM scholars are obligated to not only disseminate the findings of their research in scholarly, peer-reviewed journals, books, and conferences but also through forms, formats, and forums that are accessible to and used by EM practitioners and policy makers. The group discussed an initial list of both scholarly and practice-oriented outlets for EM research. The list was provided to the Research Standards Focus Group that was meeting later in September for their review and discussion. Beyond merely making findings available and accessible through multiple sources, the group felt that EM scholars should actively seek to collaborate with individuals working in the EM profession and policy makers to bridge the theory-practice divide. EM scholars must also go beyond these audiences to advocate within their institutions and communities for a culture of shared responsibility to cope with events. And, finally, EM scholars have the responsibility to increase understanding of what the EM discipline is and the contributions the discipline make within our institutions and across other academic disciplines.

*Disciplinary Responsibilities: Scholarly Activity*

1. **Seek to foster the utilization of research findings and to the extent possible foster practical application of research findings;**
2. **Make the results of our research available and accessible in form, format, and forum to multiple audiences (e.g., policy makers and practitioners);**
3. **Collaborate with those working in the profession so that theory shapes practice and practice shapes theory;**
4. **Seek to influence policy;**
5. **Advocate for a culture of shared responsibility; and,**
6. **Foster the legitimacy and development of the academic discipline and profession of emergency management.**

The group pondered the many and significant hurdles that EMHIED will have to overcome to see the purview developed through its discussions (and outlined in this short report) adopted. From recognition of the disagreement across the EMHIED community regarding how EM education should be approached, to the lack of a professional association of EM educators, to programmatic resource issues (e.g., faculty, staff support, funding, lack of quality textbooks), and institutional barriers (e.g., the location of EMHIED programs in other disciplinary departments), there are many issues that the EMHIED community will have to address in the near future. Yet, the group felt that just because there are obstacles facing EMHIED does not mean that disciplinary development should not proceed. In fact, further disciplinary development (along the lines of and expanding beyond what has been presented in this paper), may be part of the solution to addressing the issues EMHIED faces.

In fact, as the focus group explored what might be achieved as a result of implementing the disciplinary purview it had developed, it became clear that adoption and implementation of the disciplinary purview throughout EMHIED had the potential to facilitate the following:

*Potential Societal Impacts of the EM Discipline*

1. Safer, less vulnerable world with increased capacity to cope with hazards and disasters; and,
2. Reduction in the frequency and impacts of events.

*Potential Impacts of the EM Discipline in Academia*

* + - 1. Increased engagement in hazards and disaster research area across all academic disciplines;
      2. Improved the quality of the hazards and disaster research being done by other disciplines; and,
      3. Introduction of a discipline that is perceived as both legitimate and credible across academic disciplines and academic institutions of higher education.

*Potential Impacts of the EM Discipline in EM Practice*

1. Emergency management policy based on empirical research findings;
2. Improved emergency management practice and programs through bridging the theory to practice divide and; and,
3. Shape a new generation of professional emergency managers.

*Potential Impacts of Disciplinary Development to Current EMHIED Programs*

* + - 1. Clearer communication of our identity and needs within our departments, colleges, and individual institutions;
      2. Clearer communication of the education we have to offer students at various degree levels and how such an education relates to various possible career paths;
      3. Appeal to a broader base of students. Some students will go on to seek employment as a professional emergency manager but most will seek careers outside of the emergency management profession. This broader base increases program visibility and sustainability within higher education generally, and our individual institutions specifically, (e.g., increased numbers of students in EM classes) without further increasing the pressure on programs to have their students employed as EM professionals upon graduation; and,
      4. Increased quality of EMHIED curriculums by grounding our coursework in the body of knowledge available.

**OBJECTIVES: Discuss and collaborate on a white paper detailing the focus group’s suggestions for emergency management’s disciplinary purview and core research questions and supporting rationale. The white paper (of between 10-25 page length) will be submitted to the Higher Education Program Manager for posting on the Higher Education Program website prior to the 2013 Higher Education Conference AND discuss and agree upon a schedule for completion of the white paper as well as individual focus group member roles related to the production of the white paper.**

The group realized that this short report would not comprehensively reflect its discussions, its perspectives, and the rationales for its perspectives prior to the assembly of the focus group at EMI in September. Thus, the intent of the focus group from the beginning was to collaboratively produce a white paper related to its discussions and convey its discussions through a presentation at the 2013 FEMA Higher Education Conference.

Toward that end, group members developed an outline for the white paper, who would do the initial drafts of each section, and the approximate page lengths of each section. The working outline follows:

* 1. Preface—1 page (Jessica)
     1. History of the project
     2. Goals
     3. Dates
     4. Who is involved
  2. Introduction—no more than 3 pages (Claire)
     1. Evolution of higher education
     2. Brief historical review
     3. Explanation of why it is that way
     4. Current issues in the discipline
     5. What must be accomplished
     6. Vision for what can be accomplished as a result of adopting and implementing this purview
  3. What Emergency Management Is—2 to 3 pages (Dave)
     1. Professional discussion group had

### What it is; what it is not

## A discussion of the distributed nature of emergency management (Emergency management is an emerging profession. More importantly, it is a distributed function. Emergency management higher education has to do research that serves and educates both. )

## A discussion of the implications of that for higher education

## An analysis of the implications versus where we are currently doing

# Defining the Purview of Emergency Management Academic Discipline—2 to 4 pages (Jessica)

## The definition (Emergency management is the study of how humans and their institutions interact and cope with hazards, vulnerabilities, and resulting events, particularly through activities related to preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation.)

## Other definitions but why ours

## Other disciplines and the uniqueness of this one

# Disciplinary Responsibilities and Values—2 to 3 pages (Jane)

## The list and explanation of that list

## The values

# Core Research Domains—3 to 5 pages (Shirley)

## What they are

## Distinction between hazards/disaster research and emergency management research domains

## Necessity of context

# Implementation—2 to 3 pages (Jane/Claire)

## Dependent nature of what’s being suggested here

## Steps being taken across high ed programs and individual programs

## Steps being taken across faculty and individual faculty

## Implementation activities

# Conclusion—1 to 2 pages (Jessica/Dave/Shirley)

## Contingent nature of the future of the discipline

## Recommended future actions

## Research Gaps to be Filled

# Appendices—1 page each (Jessica)

## Outlets for Emergency Management Research

## Core Concepts

The final paper will have 1-inch margins; be double-spaced; be in 12-pt. Times New Roman font; use the APA citation style; offer explanation endnotes where needed; and use bolded font with capitalized major words for main headings and bolded, italicized font for secondary headings.

All group members agreed to write their individual sections and deliver to Jessica by January 10, 2013. Jessica will put the document in Google Docs. Each group member will have a dedicated 2-week period to make their edits across the document.

* Dave – January 14–25
* Claire – January 28–February 2
* Shirley – February 11–22
* Jane – February 25–March 8
* Jessica – March 11–22

Following the individual document review period, Jessica will provide a copy of the document as a Word file by email. Group members will have a 3-week period in which to make changes to the whole document using the Track Changes function in Word. The week of April 8, there will be a group a conference call to discuss final changes to be made. The group’s goal is to have the completed paper to Barbara on April 29.

The group also discussed presenting its work in a panel presentation with all focus group members for a 1½-hour breakout session in the coming FEMA Higher Education Conference. Ideally, the group recommends that someone(s) from the group have an opportunity to do a short plenary session brief on the group’s work before a follow-on breakout session presentation.

**OBJECTIVE: Make recommendations for future meetings.**

While the focus group was pleased with its progress, much work remains to be done if EM is to be an academic discipline in its own right. The FEMA Higher Education Project could support this work in a range of ways. For example:

* A variety of core concepts that must ground an emergency management education (e.g., hazard, vulnerability, resulting events (i.e., emergency, disaster, catastrophe, complex humanitarian crisis), stakeholder, etc.) are defined differently from book to book, article to article, EM program to EM program, and faculty member to faculty member. The lack of agreement as to what constitute the core concepts of EM as an academic discipline as well as how they are defined is a major issue from a disciplinary perspective as much as it is a significant source of frustration for students and faculty in EMHIED. The FEMA Higher Education Project could help EMHIED by sponsoring a focus group to discuss the core concepts that must ground emergency management higher education as well as their definitions and dimensions and develop materials to distribute across EMHIED to foster shared conceptualizations of the core concepts among faculty and students.
* The body of knowledge related to EM is vast. Contributors to the body of knowledge come from dozens of academic disciplines and disseminate their work in hundreds of journals, books, edited volumes and monographs, etcetera. Tens of thousands of pieces of literature related to hazards and disasters await collection, analysis, integration, and synthesis. These pieces lay waiting to be read by students and educators in EM. Yet, finding the body of knowledge is difficult to say the least. Challenges such as a lack of knowledge about hazards and disaster specific journals, the diversity of other outlets where EM relevant work is published, search engines that do not recognize common EM keywords, and a lack of familiarity with how to locate the literature leave both students and faculty frustrated. The FEMA Higher Education Project could support the efforts of the higher education community to address this issue by sponsoring a focus group to discuss the development of 1) a short training course designed for both students and faculty as to what constitutes the emergency management body of knowledge and how to find it and 2) what should be included/will be required to build a database for emergency management specific literature.
* Most academic disciplines rely on a combination of large databases (e.g., EBSCO, Project Muse, ProQuest, Sage, Web of Science, and the like) and disciplinary specific databases to provide significant citations/articles in response to queries. As previously mentioned, the large databases do not respond well to common EM keywords and there are no discipline specific databases to support the development of the EM discipline. Development of such a database would require significant financial, technical, and logistical support. The FEMA Higher Education Project could sponsor an effort to engage academics, FEMA EMI Learning Resource Center representatives/library specialists, and IT specialists to explore what would be required to develop such a database and to what extent such a database might be developed in the near future.
* EM scholars and educators have the opportunity to gather once a year at FEMA’s Annual Higher Education Conference; however, outside of the conference there exists no formal means of developing standards, addressing curriculum issues, discussion of issues and possible solutions, etcetera. Professional associations commonly provide both forms and forums for such discussions to take place on a regular basis. The FEMA Higher Education Project could sponsor a focus group to discuss the development of a professional association of EM scholars and educations including what would be required to develop such an association, how it should be structured, and a plan to develop an association in the near future.
* While there are a variety of scholarly, peer-reviewed journals related to EM (e.g., *Journal of Emergency Management*, *International Journal of Emergency Management*, *Journal of Homeland Security and Emergency Management*, etc.), there does not currently exist an outlet for articles related to the development of the EM academic discipline including how EM education should be approached in the classroom, curriculum design, theory development, communicating standards for research, etcetera. The FEMA Higher Education Project could support the efforts of the EM higher education community to address this issue by sponsoring a focus group to develop an (annual to start) *Journal of Emergency Management Education and Theory* to complement existing field-related journals.

Jessica Jensen, Assistant Professor in the Department of Emergency Management at North Dakota State University authored this report on behalf of the focus group. Please contact Jessica ([ja.jensen@ndsu.edu](mailto:ja.jensen@ndsu.edu) or 701-131-5886) with feedback or concerns related to this report.