



Challenges of Emergency Management in Higher Education:

Planning and Strategies

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Public Entity Risk Institute

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ISBN 978-0-9793722-7-8

Volume 1, 2011

Printed in the United States of America

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Next Steps in Emergency Management's Professionalization Process: Who Will Be the Gatekeeper of the Profession of Emergency Management?

Carol L. Cwiak, JD, PhD

THE DISCUSSION ABOUT THE PROFESSIONALIZATION of emergency management in the United States began in earnest in the late 1990s¹ and led many in the field to expect that it was only a matter of time until emergency management was viewed as a bona fide profession.² Yet more than a decade later, emergency management's progress in reaching the status of profession has been slow and even tortured at times.³ For many years the field's forward movement was stymied by issues of identity.⁴ A number of times during the past decade, members of the emergency management community found their identity defined and redefined by those outside the community on the basis of high-profile events.⁵ Unfortunately, while these definitions and redefinitions caused angst among and were resisted by those in the emergency management community, the community until recently lacked the strength to actively shape its own future.

A dramatic shift has taken place over the past five years as the emergency management community has built a more cohesive voice.

The governmental activity committees of professional organizations that represent it have played an increasing role in informing, reviewing, and advising legislation that affects and is relevant to emergency management.⁶ Additionally, the wholesale buy-in across the community of the "Principles of Emergency Management"⁷ has provided a solid and uniform identity for emergency management as a field. Members of the community have been able to use the document to educate those outside it about emergency management's role and its key tenets, thereby strengthening not only the field's identity, both internally and externally, but also the level of solidarity within the field itself.

Emergency management now stands at an important juncture in its movement forward toward professionalization. The status of profession is not awarded merely on the basis of a field's longevity or its desire to be a profession. It is instead based on identified characteristics of a field and on that field's exercise of power over those outside it. The power inherent in a profession is primarily focused on the profession's creation of dependence in others, its ability to control entry into it, and its ability to control itself internally (as opposed to being controlled by those external to it). These characteristics can be identified as follows:

- *Monopoly:* The profession involves abstract, specialized knowledge that requires a university education and a knowledge base that is fostered, informed, and continually molded by professional associations, professional journals, universities, and the overall professional culture.
- *Autonomy:* Professionals can "rely on their own judgment," which is based on their mastery of the knowledge base; because such mastery could leave a client vulnerable, autonomy necessitates an accountability mechanism to the profession's standards.
- *Authority:* Professionals have control over clients and subordinate occupational groups that is rooted in the knowledge base and is supported and maintained by professional associations, which ensure that access to the profession is regulated and controlled.⁸

Most simply put, professions are those fields that have been able to institutionalize the dependence of the outside community on their abstract, specialized knowledge and expertise.

It is easy to see these three key components in the recognized professions of medicine and law. People do not simply get to become doctors or lawyers because they believe they would be good in those endeavors. A rigorous education, standardized testing, continuing education throughout one's professional career, and adherence to baseline standards and ethics (monitored by professional or state-level organizations) are all expected of entrants into these professions.

As for the applicability of these components to emergency management, it is apparent that the field is advancing toward professionalization. In terms of monopoly, it has made tremendous strides over the past fifteen years. With the establishment of the FEMA Higher Education Program⁹ and that program's success in nurturing the development of independent programs of study in various academic institutions, the foundation not only for disseminating current knowledge in emergency management but also for creating new knowledge has been growing by about 10–15% annually.¹⁰ Emergency management practitioners have increasingly tapped into and partnered with the emergency management higher education (EM Hi Ed) community's teaching, research, and professional advancement efforts, coordinating the training agendas of the Emergency Management Institute with products promoted through the FEMA program and the EM Hi Ed community.¹¹ Additionally, other key partners of emergency management training and education—including the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM), the National Emergency Management Association (NEMA), the Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP), and the National Fire Protection Association 1600 Committee—have joined the EM Hi Ed community to produce the "Principles of Emergency Management" and items in support of these principles, all of which have enriched, expanded, and rearranged the knowledge base.¹²

As for the other two components, autonomy and authority, the professionalization of emergency management in the United States is largely a matter of the role that professional organizations should play. Again, autonomy relates to the knowledge base and the requirement that those in the field be held accountable to accepted standards; authority relates to the regulation and control of access to the profession. As is the case in the aforementioned professions of medicine and law, entry into the profession, adherence to standards, discipline, and expectations of continuing education are all managed under a gatekeeper organization composed of organizational staff and members of the profession who have been selected by their peers to represent the profession's collective interests. All members of the profession must go through the gatekeeper organization, agree to its governance, comply with the professional standards it is tasked with maintaining, and pay some level of registration or membership fee that helps support the organization's operational budget and lobbying efforts. Such an organization does not currently exist for emergency management, yet one will ultimately have to emerge if emergency management is to become a profession.

Currently there are two key professional organizations on the national level that influence the advancement of the field of emergency management: IAEM and NEMA. In addition, a number of other organizations (e.g., the Emergency Management Professional Organization for Women's Enrichment, the Emergency Management Higher Education Consortium, and the International Network for Women in Emergency Management) are focused on advancing special-interest areas or special groups in the field.¹³ IAEM and NEMA in particular have been strong and tireless lobbying powers for the field and have been successful in enhancing the community's profile with the legislative community.

IAEM boasts more than 5,000 members worldwide, and membership is open to anyone who is practicing or interested in the field (local, state, and federal emergency managers; homeland security officials; educational, military, private, nongovernmental and volunteer

practitioners) and pays the requisite membership fees.¹⁴ Its mission is "to advance the profession by promoting the principles of emergency management; to serve our members by providing information, networking and professional development opportunities; and to advance the emergency management profession."¹⁵ NEMA membership is likewise open, but NEMA is very specific in defining itself as "the professional association of and for emergency management directors from all fifty states, eight territories, and the District of Columbia."¹⁶ IAEM and NEMA have created initial frameworks for individual certification (the Certified Emergency Manager® [CEM®]), national mutual assistance (Emergency Management Assistance Compact), and operational program accreditation (EMAP).

IAEM's and NEMA's successful efforts in creating structural frameworks, coupled with the strength of their lobbying efforts, would seem to make them likely front-runners in the discussion of emergency management's gatekeeper organization. Alas, while both organizations are firmly committed to the advancement of the field, both face challenges should they want to ascend to the role of gatekeeper organization for the emergency management profession.

NEMA, by virtue of its very specific focus on state-level emergency management practitioners, seems to have too narrow a focus to be able to assume the role of gatekeeper for the entire profession. And owing to its limited focus on state-level practitioners is an even narrower focus on public sector emergency management, which accounts for an even smaller segment of the overall emergency management community. Thus, as a professional organization invested in emergency management, NEMA appears to be too far removed from the larger emergency management population to serve as gatekeeper for the profession as a whole.

IAEM, on the other hand, has a very broad audience—one that includes emergency management practitioners from the public, private, and nongovernmental sectors as well as from around the world. For the student, higher education, and affiliate members within its ranks, IAEM seems better able to understand, embrace, and

serve the entire emergency management community, its actual members represent only a small percentage of that community. Conversely, NEMA has been able to gain widespread participation from its limited target audience. Ironically, IAEM's strength underscores its weakness as a potential gatekeeper for the profession.

IAEM has made a phenomenal effort to promote the "Principles of Emergency Management" to all its members internationally. As a direct result of that effort, the principles have been translated into multiple languages, adopted by a number of agencies, and established as the ideals for the practice of emergency management globally¹⁷—successes that have helped the field transcend national governments' roles, rules, and processes and have elevated what had historically been compartmentalized and nationalized discussions about emergency management to the level of international professional discourse. This has been highly beneficial to the identity and status of the field overall. However, the international nature of IAEM's overall efforts ultimately makes the organization less viable as a gatekeeper for the profession within the United States. Of note, IAEM does have a series of specific councils—the United States being one of them—but its overall mission is international in nature.

Even if this issue could be overcome, a more complicated matter arises in relation to the CEM® program, to which IAEM has devoted increasingly more time and resources promoting and administering. Application fees for an initial package are currently \$325 for IAEM members and \$450 for nonmembers.¹⁸ With over 1,400 CEM® designations awarded to date (a number of which have not been renewed upon expiration after five years) and an application review process that is anchored by volunteer CEM® commissioners who gather a few times a year to evaluate the merits of applications, the certification process has become a cottage industry of sorts for the organization and arguably one that IAEM and all credentialed CEM® holders are invested in maintaining.

The CEM® has been touted as "the benchmark for individual achievement of excellence in emergency management," and when it

was first rolled out, it very much functioned as such, with many seasoned emergency management practitioners applying for and receiving the certification. Early on, it offered a level of internal equity to practitioners who had spent years in the field and were now in the position of hiring graduates with degrees in emergency management. Over time, however, the CEM® has evolved and become decidedly more inclusive than exclusive. There has been a dramatic rise in the numbers of those seeking and obtaining the certification, which its promoters increasingly consider to be a baseline requirement for those in the field. Indeed, the IAEM website also touts the CEM® as providing an indication that "a professional emergency management practitioner possesses at least a minimum of knowledge, skills and abilities in emergency management against the set benchmark standard."¹⁹ Also, the CEM®, like the IAEM membership, is not exclusive to U.S. members or even to IAEM members, but instead is viewed as a globally accepted endorsement of emergency management qualifications.²⁰

The problem lies in the fact that the CEM® is an already established credential that is wholly in the control of one organization and does not establish the appropriate baseline (i.e., the university-level abstract, specialized knowledge base) for entry into the profession of emergency management.²¹ Further, as presented at its highest level—again, as "the benchmark for individual achievement of excellence in emergency management," which connotes years of experience and contributions to the field—the certification would be cheapened if adjusted to be a baseline certification, and those at the lowest level—those with "at least a minimum of knowledge, skills and abilities in emergency management against the set benchmark standard"—would get an undeserved bump by having obtained the certification without having first earned an emergency management degree (which would necessarily be a requirement for a baseline entry certification, among other things). Even if the CEM® as it sits today could be tinkered with to meet the need for a baseline certification for entry into the profession, the negative impact that such an amendment would have on those who have already received the CEM®²² and on the esteemed status that

IAEM has worked so hard for it to achieve would outweigh the value in the effort.²³

Thus, the international scope of IAEM, when combined with the nature of the CEM[®], makes IAEM an unlikely gatekeeper of the profession in the United States. However, both IAEM and NEMA should continue to represent members of the profession and their interests regardless of the gatekeeper organization that will ultimately have to be established. The same is true for other existing professional organizations that are designed to meet the needs of special-interest areas or groups: none of these needs is likely to be reduced by the establishment of a gatekeeper organization that controls entry into the profession and manages compliance with the professional expectations and standards of its members. All these organizations will be important in helping to shape the framework (the establishment of baseline entry standards, expectations for adherence to those standards, a disciplinary structure for ethical or quality standard violations, and the setting of expectations for continuing education) that will ultimately be used to allow entry into the profession of emergency management.

This discussion, although complex and likely to be contentious, is a necessary precursor to emergency management becoming a profession. Once the framework is established by the collective, the gatekeeper function should become rather perfunctory in its day-to-day operations. The real strength of a profession lies not in the gatekeeper organization but in the proud members who maintain integrity by upholding its standards and staying true to its core principles.

Endnotes

- 1 Jennifer L. Wilson, "The State of Emergency Management 2000: The Process of Emergency Management Professionalization in the United States and Florida" (PhD diss., Florida International University, 2000), Dissertation Abstracts International 61 (07), 2947A.
- 2 Carol L. Cwiak, "Strategies for Success: The Role of Power and Dependence in the Emergency Management Professionalization Process" (PhD diss., North Dakota State University, 2009), Proquest (AAT 3391652), proquest.umi.com/pqdlink?did=1947083911&Fmt=7&clientid=79356&RQT=309&VName=PQD.
- 3 Ibid.

- 4 Carol L. Cwiak, Issues, Principles and Attitudes—Oh My! Examining Perceptions from Select Academics, Practitioners and Consultants on the Subject of Emergency Management (Emmitsburg, Md.: Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2007), www.training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/edu/emprinciples.asp.
- 5 Claire B. Rubin, ed., Emergency Management: The American Experience 1900–2005 (Fairfax, Va.: Public Entity Risk Institute, 2007).
- 6 Cwiak, "Strategies for Success."
- 7 FEMA, Emergency Management Institute, "Emergency Management: Definition, Vision, Mission, Principles," at www.training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/edu/docs/emprinciples/0907_176%20EM%20Principles12x18v2%20Johnson%20%28w-o%20draft%29.pdf.
- 8 Cwiak, "Strategies for Success," 18–19; Randy Hodson and Teresa A. Sullivan, The Social Organization of Work (Florence, Ky: Wadsworth Publishing, 2001), 282–285.
- 9 See FEMA Higher Education Program at training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/edu.
- 10 Cwiak, "Strategies for Success."
- 11 See FEMA Higher Education Program at training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/edu.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 See www.IAEM.com, www.nemaweb.org, www.empower-women.com, www.ndsu.edu/emgt/mehc/ and www.inwern.org.
- 14 See www.iaem.com/certification/generalinfo/documents/CEMBrochure051410.pdf.
- 15 See www.iaem.com.
- 16 See www.nemaweb.org.
- 17 See www.iaem.com/EMPrinciples/index.htm.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Brian V. Boyrn, "CEM Corner: Benchmarks in Emergency Management—Pinnacles of Success or Just Window Dressing?" (2009), at www.iaem.com/certification/CEM_Corner/Benchmarks.htm.
- 20 See www.iaem.com/certification/generalinfo/documents/CEMBrochure051410.pdf.
- 21 The educational requirement is offered as an example here, but there are other criteria and processes used by the CEM[®] that are also not in line with what would be required for baseline entry into the emergency management profession.
- 22 Even if those who currently hold the credential were able to be grandfathered into a new system, they would have to meet the new criterion of the baseline measurement when it came up for renewal, which would open the potential for the original CEM[®] to be devalued should renewals not be sought or should attempts at renewal be unsuccessful. Even if renewals are sought and obtained, such a process could lead to a whole host of issues within the profession, including divisiveness and matters of internal equity. Ultimately such a restructuring of the CEM[®] could result in an experience drain that would significantly affect the profession of emergency management.
- 23 Currently, the CEM[®] is increasingly recognized as a credential of value. Its stature outside a baseline system could continue at the same level of credibility.

The CEM® and baseline credentialing are not mutually exclusive, and it is conceivable that those who have met baseline credentialing will seek the certification as a nod to the years of experience and the quality of contributions they have made to the profession. This will necessarily mean that the CEM® will evolve as the baseline certification evolves, but it does not eliminate the esteem that the certification confers.

The Argument for a Disciplinary Approach to Emergency Management Higher Education

Jessica Jensen, PhD

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MANY ACADEMICS ACTIVE IN DISASTER studies and hazard studies would argue that emergency management in higher education, or “the study of how human beings create, interact with, and cope with hazards, vulnerabilities, and the events associated with them,”¹ must be approached from an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary perspective. Arguments in favor of these approaches appear grounded in the following claims:

1. The study of emergency management is so complex that understanding and developing knowledge involving these topics require the input of more than one discipline.²
2. Many academic disciplines have made or could make valuable contributions to the study of emergency management.³
3. Research on topics in emergency management is already trending toward being multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary.⁴
4. Either a multidisciplinary or an interdisciplinary approach is the best way to improve not just our understanding of hazards,