

Foundation for Higher Education  
Accreditation in Emergency  
Management

History and Benefits

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## Foundation for Higher Education Accreditation in Emergency Management:

### A History and Benefits

Internationally, education is the fastest growing industry in general, and in emergency management, particularly. There is an international shortage of qualified faculty, specifically those having doctoral degrees. There is also a shortage of those with bachelor's and master's degrees in emergency management to fill positions at the state, tribal, local, and campus levels, as well as in the private and nonprofit sectors. In fact, according to the Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, emergency management is among the top 20 of growing profession in the US.

In the early 1990's, FEMA's Emergency Management Institute was able to offer training to about 5,000 people every year but there were another 5,000 applicants who were turned down for lack of space, faculty, and funding. Eventually, online training was offered to millions around the world, through FEMA's Independent Study Course Program.

The concept of partnering with institutions of higher education to assist with this educational and training challenge was born with the launch of the FEMA Higher Education Project in 1994 by Kay Goss, CEM, Associate FEMA Director in charge of National Preparedness, Training, and Exercises (Presidential Appointee, US Senate Confirmed), and John McKay, CEM, Director of FEMA Training, a Senior Executive Service (SES) career employee. Chair of the EMI Board of Visitors at the time was Dr. Dennis Mileti, Director of the Natural Hazards Center at the University of Colorado at Boulder. At the time, there were two or three higher education degree programs in the country, notably the University of North Texas and State College in Trenton, New Jersey.

Soon thereafter, Goss and McKay selected Dr. B. Wayne Blanchard, CEM, to manage the Higher Education Project. Blanchard initiated several processes to keep interested stakeholders informed and to move the discipline forward – regular reports on news, activities and technical assistance to institutions establishing programs, as well as definitions, bibliographical information, 50 most recommended books for graduate students, course development, think pieces, syllabi, college lists by degrees and states. The initial goal was to establish degree programs in every state by 2001. Blanchard supervised the development of 22 college courses; however, many of the courses offered throughout the country were developed locally.

In 1997, FEMA made the decision to host an annual conference to bring together higher education officials offering degrees and certificates in emergency management, as well as professors developing these courses. Soon thereafter, practitioner leaders were also invited. The FEMA Higher Education Program Conference started out with about 80 in attendance and has grown each year.

In 2011, the 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Higher Education Program Conference drew 400 participants, including seven countries, even though Blanchard had retired the year before. There are now over 235 of higher education programs offering degrees or certificates in Emergency Management. Another 100 programs are under consideration or development. In addition, there are about 100 homeland security degree or certificate programs.

A continuing topic of conversation for the last seven or eight years at the Higher Education Program Conference has been the need to institute an accrediting process for degree programs. When the Higher Education Program was new, Goss was hesitant to start an accreditation program, concerned that it might slow the growth during the earliest days of the program. However, once a critical mass of degrees had been established, it became clear that growth was robust. The next natural step in assuring quality programs in behalf of students and faculty was to develop an accreditation process.

In preparation for the FEMA Higher Education Program Conference in 2000, Goss asked Dr. Alan Walker, who was then the Associate Dean of Continuing Education at Louisiana State University, to prepare and present a white paper on the accreditation process in higher education for fire service degree programs<sup>i</sup>. A few years later, the late Craig Marks, CEM, Director of the Community Preparedness and Disaster Management Program at the University of North Carolina, said something like, “If not now, when, and, if not us, who?”

The Foundation for Higher Education Accreditation in Emergency Management was launched in 2005 with a four-pronged approach, emphasizing accreditation, honor society, research, and collaboration. The original board included Marks (President), Goss as co-Vice President along with Daryl Spiewak, CEM, Dorothy Miller, CEM (secretary) and Valerie Lucas-McEwen, CEM, CBCP (communications.) Since then, the foundation has been expanded to include Dr. Bill Waugh, Dr. Craig Zachlod, CEM, Dr. Derin Ural, Landon Densley, CEM. Dr. Micheal Kemp, CEM, was the student representative on the board and later served as an assessor for one institution, as did Dr. David McEntire. Dr. Rick Sylves has joined the Board most recently and will serve as an assessor, as his schedule permits.

In 2006, Craig Marks tragically died in an accident at his home and Goss succeeded him as President. Daryl Spiewak, CEM, serves as Vice President and Director of Standards. The honor society, Epsilon Pi Phi, was established in 2006 and now has over 300 members. Dorothy Miller, CEM, manages the honor society. Valerie Lucas-McEwen, CEM, manages the foundation’s website and overall communications.

The website was launched in 2008 and contains the draft standards, a self-evaluation guide, bios of board members, information on joining the Epsilon Pi Phi honor society, and contact information.

The objective of the foundation is to serve the emergency management educational communities who have or are in the process of developing post-secondary coursework and programs, including those for use in Associate, Baccalaureate and Graduate Programs. Emergency Management programs are located in a variety of disciplines or departments, some are in public administration, while others are in political science, criminal justice, government, geography, fire technology, sociology, engineering, geology, seismology, continuing studies, general studies, professional development, community studies, public health, nursing.

Three accreditations were provided as pilot projects – Arkansas Tech University, American Public University/American Military University, and Western Iowa Technical Community College. Three additional institutions are in the process of scheduling assessments this year, with a fourth in early 2012..

Accreditation represents that institutions with Emergency Management degree programs are adequately preparing students to lead emergency management programs in compliance with the highest voluntary standards contained in the Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP) and the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1600 “Standard for Emergency Management and Business Continuity Programs”, and the International Association of Emergency Manager’s Certified Emergency Manager Program, as well as those in the FEMA guidance contained in the National Incident Management System and the National Response Framework.

Periodic updates of the standards are made, based on new laws, guidance in the Federal Register, and updated editions of EMAP (2010) and NFPA 1600 (2010). For example, the new FEMA National Recovery Framework will be included at the upcoming board meeting.

The Epsilon Pi Phi honor society on many campuses works closely with the IAEM-Student Association in supporting student and faculty efforts to build the profession of emergency management on their campuses. The Foundation and Honor Society have sponsored poster contests at the annual conferences and present annual awards for the largest chapter and the service award at the silver and gold levels.

The foundation salutes the original leading research institutions in emergency management such as the Disaster Research Center at the University of Delaware and the Natural Hazards Center at the University of Colorado at Boulder, the Higher Education Consortium and the Foundation for Comprehensive Emergency Management Research Network. The Foundation also recognizes the Journal of Emergency Management, the Journal of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, Emergency Management Magazine, as well as the many hundreds of textbooks, articles, white papers, and monographs which have been published over recent years. All these build the profession and provide for the publication of research. When the higher education project was launched, there was only one basic Emergency Management textbook, published by the International City Management Association, dubbed the “green book.”

The International Association of Emergency Managers has offered a Certified Emergency Manager (CEM) designation, for twenty years, based on having a bachelor’s degree, 100 hours of emergency management training and 100 hours of general management training, professional references, six areas of public service, an exam and an essay. There are 221 CEMs who have had this qualification for at least 10 years, including several members of the foundation board.

Accreditation of emergency management programs in institutions of higher education is the next natural step in the evolution of the building of the profession of emergency management.

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<sup>i</sup> Walker, Alan G. Development of Specialized Accreditation for Emergency Management Degree Programs. June 29, 2000.