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Emergency Management Profession Gets Boost From Increase in Degree-Granting Programs

By: Bob Jaffin, govtech.com

Professions such as law enforcement, fire science, emergency management and homeland security continue to evolve and develop. Simultaneously higher-education course delivery methods also continue to evolve. In fact, both adult education and online education continue to grow faster than traditional programs.

The development of emergency management as a profession and a recognized discipline is a direct result of the large increase in degree-granting programs. This has made it necessary for many who entered the field early to now earn undergraduate and advanced degrees or certificates in their areas of expertise, such as finance, budget and public administration.

This article will briefly examine a cross section of opportunities available for anyone willing to obtain academic degrees or certifications. At the same time, we as a society are recognizing the inherent value of lifelong learning. Part of that comes from extended life expectancies, and another part comes from the growing body of knowledge we use in our professional endeavors.

You can take multiple paths as part of a nontraditional solution to earning a degree. This isn't merely distance education or online learning; I'm talking about gaining credit for military courses and training, as well as courses taken through corporations, professional and volunteer associations, schools, training suppliers, labor unions and government agencies.

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Prior Learning Assessment

The concept of the prior learning assessment (PLA), as used by many universities today, captures the essence of this concept. It's based on an individual's ability to apply what they have learned. This process doesn't focus on how you acquired the knowledge, skill and ability; rather it looks at how well you can apply what you have learned.

In simplest form, this requires you to identify specific courses for which you feel you deserve credit. Based on the course learning objectives and the course description, be prepared to develop a 10- to 12-page essay demonstrating that you've acquired and can apply the knowledge that the course has been designed to impart to the student. This is a method to prove competency, but it's a time-consuming and expensive undertaking for the institution. A well-run program that accepts PLA will typically charge you a reasonable fee to evaluate your submissions.

The organization that has spearheaded PLA as a legitimate approach in the workplace is the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. The two institutions with accredited programs and a long history of nontraditional education opportunities are New Jersey's Thomas Edison State College

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and New York state's Excelsior College. Based on your life experience, willingness to complete the necessary paperwork and ability to apply the knowledge gained, you could earn a legitimate degree from an accredited and recognized institution.

Credit for Coursework

The greatest opportunities to earn credit for work already completed revolve around military service and training. Those with prior military service can start at the Defense Department's Defense Activity for Nontraditional Education Support (DANTES) home page: www.dantes.doded.mil. It gives active-duty military and veterans access to information on a wide variety of special programs.

For law enforcement, there are opportunities under the Peace Officers Standards and Training programs administered by states. The most comprehensive reference for identifying courses that are eligible for either graduate or undergraduate credit is the American Council on Education, www.acenet.edu. Another source especially attuned to first responders is the National Program on Noncollegiate Sponsored Instruction, a broad-based program administered by New York's regents, www.nationalponsi.org.

Testing for Credit

There are a number of opportunities to take existing standardized tests to earn transfer credit against specific recognized college courses.

The two major variations are the existing programs, such as the College-Level Examination Program, www.collegeboard.com and the DANTES subject standard tests, although the second is limited to those who serve or have served in the military. The other option is to inquire about the opportunities to challenge exams to get transfer credit for one or more catalog courses. There are large variations in how this concept is applied, and it's strictly at the discretion of

each institution. Some institutions may not honor challenge exams, others might allow them for basic skills or other unique subsets of material, while others may allow you to challenge any specific course.

In the majority of cases, the number of credits allowed for transfer to the programs based on these nontraditional routes is limited. Many institutions will require that you take a minimum number of credits to earn degrees while a few of the more cutting-edge institutions may be willing to accept all external credit toward a degree. There's no one better choice and no one best school; the decision ultimately rests with you as an individual.

The reality is that there is a minimum of two good reasons to work toward degrees, advanced degrees or certificates. One is that emergency management is a multidisciplinary field that relies heavily on experiential knowledge. That means there's always new information leading to new knowledge. The only way to keep up with that is committing to your personalized version of lifelong learning. The second and in some cases more pressing reason to continue your education is the growing recognition of the field and the concurrent requirement for more education and certification. For example, the International Association of Emergency Managers Certified Emergency Manager program is one of the oldest and best programs for professionals, and it embraces the concept of lifelong learning.

To grow and progress in a career, you must maintain subject-matter knowledge, acquire management skills and knowledge, and eventually acquire the mantle of leadership. That progression in many ways matches the steps of educational development -- starting with practical training; moving through undergraduate degrees, graduate degrees and terminal degrees; and finally to the expansion of your educational horizons beyond your subject-matter expertise.

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To accomplish this and earn respect and credit for hard work, perhaps the most important key is to choose an accredited institution and program. Regional accreditation is the defining issue for choosing an institution. In addition, emergency management programs and programs for many of its contributing disciplines are already subject to -- or will soon be subject to -- some form of professional program certification.

-Bob Jaffin is a member of the International Association of Emergency Managers, where he sits on the training and education committee. He has been involved in education and training programs for ASIS, the International Association of Counterterrorism and Security Professionals, the National Sheriffs' Association and the National Domestic Preparedness Coalition. He is currently a full-time faculty member at the online American Public University System.



The more you know: 211, The Nation's information & referral service

By: Michael Gregory, edited by Eric Sawyer

211 is the national abbreviated dialing code for access to health and human services information and referral. 211 is a free, confidential service with universal social value, accessible to the entire population and national in scope. Calling 211 will help anyone get information and access to vital community services.

Emergency Management officials should collaborate closely with 211 to expand the benefits of this service. Many of the issues facing emergency management can be solved by 211.

One example is the use of 211 for Emergency Public Information. In addition to standard means of distributing information, the emergency management officials can work to provide 211 with important information, such as shelter locations or supply distribution sites. In turn, the public can be advised to call 211 for such information.

Many 211 systems have reciprocal agreements with other states, to be sure that the 211 service is always available. As of November 2008, 211 serves over 234 million Americans (more than 78% of the entire population) through 244 active 211 systems covering all or part of 48 states. The remaining states are all in various stages of planning and implementation. Every few weeks, these coverage numbers increase.

www.211us.org

DHS Announces Revised National Incident Management System

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) recently released a revised National Incident Management System (NIMS) -- the national standard for incident management. NIMS establishes standardized incident management processes, protocols, and procedures that all federal, state, tribal and local responders will use to coordinate and conduct response actions.

NIMS expands on the original version released in March 2004 by clarifying existing NIMS concepts, better incorporating preparedness and planning and improving the overall readability of the document. The revised document also differentiates between the purposes of NIMS and the National Response Framework (NRF) by identifying how NIMS provides the action template for the management of incidents, while the NRF provides the policy structure and mechanisms for national-level policy for incident management. You can download the Fact Sheet at off the IAEM website.

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Individuals, student chapters, regions and allied organizations are invited to submit articles, events, training opportunities and news.

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in 2009



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