

International Association of Emergency Managers Region XII Annual  
Report: Present Status and Future Trends of Emergency Management  
Students

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[www.iaem.com/about/membership/regions/studentregion/studentregion.htm](http://www.iaem.com/about/membership/regions/studentregion/studentregion.htm)

## **Background**

Each year, the President of the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM<sup>1</sup>) Region XII<sup>2</sup>, or whomever he/she designates, conducts a student “status” survey that is intended to show what students are thinking and feeling about their respective Emergency Management (EM) programs worldwide. The research is conducted, analyzed, and presented at the FEMA Higher Education Conference in Emmitsburg, MD at the National Emergency Training Center.

This year, I was approached by Dr. Wayne Blanchard, head of the Higher Ed. Project at FEMA to be the student representative at this year’s conference. It was with great pleasure that I accepted to conduct and present my findings at the 2007 conference. The following paragraphs and pages detail the survey methodology, results and lessons learned from this year’s survey.

## **About the Survey**

I worked with the IAEM Region XII Immediate Past President, as well as the Undergraduate Representative to devise a survey that ran the gamut in all aspects of their college lives. What we came up with was a 130 question survey that asked questions about their EM Programs including: Demographics, Program Content, Course Content, Professors, Independent Research Projects, Conferences, and Opinion questions.

As an undergraduate student who has never conducted independent research, I felt it was important to develop, survey, and then analyze the results of the research independently without help from an outside organization. This would enable me to develop a greater understanding of conducting research and presenting the analyzed results on my own.

The survey was hosted on surveymonkey.com and received 228 responses from all levels of students with the Undergraduate level being the most highly represented at 54%. This was a huge increase from last year’s survey due to a number of reasons. The first was the excellent help from the various program administrators around the world. I had sent out a letter requesting their support, and though a few had some negative comments about the product, the response from the administrators was overwhelmingly positive and allowed for such a great return. The second reason the survey was so successful was due to the efforts of list-serves on both the IAEM website and through each school’s chapter of the International Emergency Management Student Association (IEMSA).

Since the findings were to be presented on June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2007, I felt that it was necessary to give the students the maximum amount of time to take the survey, so it was placed on the website six weeks before the end of the spring semester. By doing that, it allowed me to

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<sup>1</sup> The International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM) is a non-profit organization of over 3,000 emergency management professionals from local, state and federal governments, military, private industry, and volunteer organizations. IAEM has consistently promoted the goals of saving lives and protecting property from disaster since 1952. See [www.iaem.com](http://www.iaem.com).

<sup>2</sup> The IAEM Region XII is the Student region in IAEM. It consists of over 700 students and 13 IEMSA chapters worldwide and is regarded as the most “international” of all the 15 Regions in the organization.

gain the maximum amount of responses as well as give me ample time to interpret the raw data that came through.

### **Key Findings**

In previous years, statistics were shown about the demographics of the student body. I wanted to take the statistics one step further this year and attempt to define “who” the average emergency management student was. I found that the average emergency management student is a 31 year old single white male that has spent some time in the workforce in a previous career. He lives off-campus and belongs to an EM related student group (such as IEMSA). While most of the demographic related areas such as marriage status and gender were somewhat close (64% single and 60% male), the most alarming area that I found was in the Ethnicity column because 84% of students, regardless of age or sex, are White/Non-Hispanic. This is a troubling statistic because there is very little ethnic diversity in the classroom, thus not allowing for a richer cultural experience for the students and professors.

Students are also getting younger (Table 1). As the number of institutions increase at an exponential rate, the amount of young first time college students is increasing, and will continue to increase as the EM profession becomes more well known worldwide.

**Table 1. Age of Emergency Management Students Worldwide**

| <b>Age Group</b> | <b>Percentage (05-06)</b> | <b>Percentage (06-07)</b> |
|------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| 25 and younger   | 21                        | 36 <sup>3</sup>           |
| 26-30            | 15                        | 18                        |
| 31-33            | 8                         | 8                         |
| 34 and older     | 56                        | 37                        |

Overall, the students reserve a high level of regard and respect for their schools, professors, courses, and overall programs. In these series of questions, the students were allowed to give three positive or negative quotes about each topic (I will include a few of the quotes in this paper to help illustrate their views more effectively). In the first topic, 68% of the students surveyed rated their program as either very good or excellent.

*“Could have included more hands-on functions”*

*“The idea of an educational EOC or more hands on practice would be excellent for this program”*

*“The [...] program does well in the fact that it is so interdisciplinary”*

The quotes above (and subsequently in the following pages) show the need for more practical applications such as a functioning/educational Emergency Operations Center (EOC). They are very pleased that more and more programs are starting to offer online

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<sup>3</sup> Note: The 25+ group experienced a growth of 15% from the 2005-06 survey.

courses and that the programs (including 100% in-residence programs) are ensuring that the content delivered is interdisciplinary in nature.

The professors and program administrators also received high marks in their areas. Almost 80% of the students rated their professors and administrators as either very good or excellent and feel that they are top notch and exhibit a passion that makes the students more interested in the subject material, allowing for a richer educational experience. Though most students hold a high regard for their professors, they feel that sometimes it is “*a little too easy to walk away with a 4.0 in the core classes.*”

### **Courses**

Overall, the feedback in this series of questions led me to the conclusion that they like the courses that they have to take. The readings that are out there are good, in their opinions, but there seems to be a disconnect between theory and practice in the student’s minds (this topic will be discussed later).

Though it seems like I’m coming across negative here, I notice that there are a lot of positive changes coming that will help bridge the gap, including standardized curriculum and readings. The Emergency Management Roundtable Principles Working Group that many practitioners and members of academia are working on will also greatly aid to progress the strong need for an EM identity.

### **Internships**

Not that many students have held internships. Out of the 228 students that responded, less than 30% of them have held an internship while in their program. This is attributed to the fact that the bulk of students that responded were undergraduates at the Freshmen, Sophomore or Junior levels.

In regards to paid versus unpaid internships, a slight majority of students are working for free. I’ve always been a strong advocate for paid internships because I feel that the students and the offices that employ them will get much, much more out of the students. This is where I ask students, academia and practitioners to fight for more paid internships because the students will be able to focus their time and efforts more on their work and not have to worry about getting a second job. This will potentially improve the student’s grades as well.

Lastly, the students felt that the training that they received during their internships was adequate. This tells me that the offices that employ them are doing a great job at supplementing the education that they are receiving, regardless of whether they are able to pay them or not.

### **Research and Publications**

Over half of the graduate students have conducted independent research<sup>4</sup>, so this tells me that they are at least interested in their subject. Though half of the students have

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<sup>4</sup> The term independent research is defined in this paper as being “research conducted and/or published outside of normal classroom assignments.”

conducted research, only 7% have had their projects published. This again, is due to the amount of undergraduates, who on average, do not tend to publish projects.

So even though there are over half of the graduate students participating in independent research, there is still a large minority that is not participating in this aspect of their education and the question of “why not?” needs to be asked. In analyzing the raw data and talking to students personally, I’ve found a couple of reasons. First, there is either a lack of funding for their projects, or they simply do not know how to acquire funding to help them. Second, regardless of graduate/undergraduate status, on average, more full time students participate versus part time students. Finally, a lot of the students, mainly undergrads, have not had the opportunity to conduct research.

### **Conference Attendance**

The greatest amount of change was in the participation of students at professional conferences. This again, is due to the lower level of undergraduates who responded. I came to this conclusion because I know for a fact that the opportunities for student participation are increasing at an exponential rate. Just last year at the IAEM Annual conference, over 50 students participated as volunteers which was a huge jump from less than 20 students in the prior year<sup>5</sup>.

While the opportunities are growing for student participation at conferences, there is still a problem present with those who are not attending. First, there is a lack of funding because the students either having to use their own money to participate or they can’t get a grant from a third party. One way to help remedy this cure is to look at what Arkansas Tech University is doing for their students, because each year, a grant is secured so that about 5 students can attend without having to dip into their own bank accounts.

There are more reasons including tests, projects, papers, as well as private life interferences, but I feel that the lack of funding for students is the greatest cause for lack of participation.

### **What Would Students Change?**

Part of assessing a successful emergency management program is looking at what can be improved. The students have a great respect and positive view about their programs, but they also feel that change is necessary and beneficial to the success of those programs.

Students want to see more integration with international programs. This could take the form of an exchange student program with the different EM related programs in the UK, Poland and Australia, and I know for a fact that if given the opportunity, a lot of the students surveyed would have been on the first plane to any of those countries to learn about their version of emergency management.

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<sup>5</sup> Note: Opportunities for student participation at conferences and symposiums are increasing worldwide. In example, the Emergency Management Association of Texas (EMAT) and the FEMA Higher Education Project have offered roughly 15-20 positions for student volunteers at their particular annual events and will continue to offer these opportunities in the future.

A new group of students is emerging: The first time college student majoring in Emergency Management. They want to have the “college experience” while still being able to learn about this job. One of the suggestions is to have classes offered in the morning and early afternoon. This will really support the first time college students (at the cost of having to hire more permanent faculty) who seek the “college experience” while learning about EM and will continue to grow the populace.

If you were to walk up to a random person on the street and asked what a Firemen or Policeman do for a living, you will usually get the same answer. The case is not so when you replace “fire” or “police” with Emergency Manager. No one on the outside really has an idea about what an Emergency Manager is or what they do, so it is our responsibility as students, and the responsibility of faculty to help educate the public about EM. I mentioned the need for a consensus-based identity earlier in the paper and briefly addressed a viable solution, so I won’t go into too much detail on this area of change.

The emergency management student is dying to see an EOC<sup>6</sup> built on campus. This is a great idea because there are new jobs opening up for University Emergency Managers and a great relationship can occur between the practitioners and the faculty on staff. This will also allow for classes to take place for students who don’t normally get to work in an EOC anywhere else until they graduate.

### **What Would Students Keep the Same?**

While students want change, they also recognize that some things are best left unchanged. They recognize the passion that the professors have for the subjects they teach so that in turn makes them more interested. They love the fact that current events can be discussed with open ears and minds and that those current events can be translated into real-life applications of what is being learned in the classroom.

The small class sizes, coupled with how they are divided up, are enjoyed by the students and the presence of an internship at an EM related office really helps to supplement the education.

### **Speaking on Their Behalf**

I decided to keep the “If you were here...” questions this year and with last year, the answers that were sent back were very good ideas. The students want their programs to succeed so they want administrators to find new ways to promote their programs by attending events at high schools, community colleges, and at professional conferences.

They strive for academic perfection, but with the gap between research and practice still present, they would like to incorporate real world exercises (full scale, table-tops, etc.) and try their best to develop their program with post-graduation in mind. With the job market currently drying up due to budget cuts and other causes, it would be great to

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<sup>6</sup> The University of North Texas recently received a grant to develop a University EOC that would expose and “throw” students into an EOC environment as well as provide training on EM software such as Web EOC or E-Team. They hope that in the future it could serve a dual purpose as a research lab as well as an educational tool.

consider what happens to students after the program is over, especially if the student has no prior emergency management experience.

### **Opinion Questions**

The last set of questions that the students answered were more opinionated in general than the set of questions that asked about Demographics or School Services. I wanted to add these questions so that administrators will know a little bit more about their students' current mindset.

The first question was "*In your opinion, what single event has had the most effect on the policies and direction of Emergency Management?*" The options available were September 11, Hurricane Katrina, Northridge Earthquake, Indian Ocean Tsunami, Oklahoma City Bombing, and Other. September 11 emerged as the top indicator of change in EM because in one student's opinion,

*"[...] it changed the focus from natural hazards to terrorism. Putting FEMA under the umbrella of DHS and cutting preparedness and mitigation programs made the country more susceptible to natural hazards and the disasters they will generate"*

The second question asked of the students was whether or not they feel that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was detracting from EM. 44% of the students said that yes, DHS is detracting, while 30% were unsure at the time the survey was conducted. One student wrote that

*"While issues in EM and the DHS overlap, I think FEMA, as an example, functioned better and had a better public image before it was brought under the guise of the DHS."*

Another student gave an excellent quote that I included in my presentation at the Higher Ed. Conference (this was probably the most eloquent of responses that I received) that stated

*"DHS is detracting because they are more interested in terrorist activities and other similar types of threats. They seem to ignore the need for education and mitigation from natural hazards and other man-generated threats (such as riots, and technological failures and accidents). They also seem to miss the boat somewhat on the social aspects of disasters as well."*

The third question that was posed to the students dealt with the gap that is present with research and practice and whether or not they felt that such a gap exists. A resounding 71% agreed that there is a gap between research and practice. They also acknowledge that a holistic approach needs to be used to address this problem. How this problem is solved, I feel, does not need to be addressed in this paper, but I do know that better relationships between practitioners and academia need to be cultivated quickly before the gap widens.

### **Conclusion**

As I finished my research, there were a few findings that really stood out to me. There are more and younger first time college students entering EM programs as Freshmen.

Vast majority of students have a positive view of their programs, courses, and professors. There is very little ethnic and cultural diversity present in the classroom. More and more students are joining EM related student groups such as IEMSA and the parent organization, IAEM Region XII.

These issues need to be looked at with a serious and scrutinizing eye at the administration level. While some of the issues are negative, there is an overwhelming trove of positive issues showing up worldwide. It is with my position as a recent graduate that I offer the following challenge to professors and administrators worldwide.

Continue to fight for what you want in your programs; listen to your student's opinions, praises and concerns; work closely with local EM offices for exercises, plan revisions, and other matters; work for greater diversity in the student populace because a more diverse group will greatly enhance the interdisciplinary programs; bridge the gap between research and practice; keep up the good work, the students enjoy going to class and listening. Last, but certainly not least, challenge the students. They want to succeed in their programs so that they can succeed in the real world. Without the teachings, guidance, and the body of knowledge in academia, they can't be the successful leaders of tomorrow.