**Emergency Management Higher Education Degree Program
Accreditation Survey Report**

Introduction

During the 15th Annual Emergency Management Higher Education Conference, two breakout sessions concerned the subject of degree program accreditation. After hearing these presentations, many individuals felt that a focus group should be formed to facilitate discussion of emergency management standards and the process for accreditation in the future.

The FEMA Higher Education Program hosted an accreditation focus group meeting on these topics on September 12-13, 2012. The group's discussions were productive and led to consensus on several points. A white paper detailing the discussion and preliminary recommendations of the group was produced and is included as an appendix to this report (Please see Appendix A).

During its meeting, the focus group determined that it was necessary to survey institutions offering degree programs in emergency management and gauge their support for its recommendations regarding accreditation and an accrediting body. This determination was made because the members of the focus group collectively believed institutions beyond those represented should also have the opportunity to indicate their preferences and provide feedback. The focus group thought that meaningful progress regarding accreditation, as well as other important issues with respect to emergency management education, would require such an inclusive, transparent, and purposeful approach.

Regardless of whether the data indicated agreement with its recommendations, the group's intent was to use it to inform future work regarding accreditation. Thus, a short survey was developed and participation of degree offering institutions enlisted. This report presents the findings of the survey and discusses how the findings might inform future accreditation efforts.

Methods

A survey, hosted by SurveyMonkey.com, was developed to assess the degree to which there existed buy-in into the focus group's recommendations and the rationales for those recommendations. In addition to demographic questions, the survey asked institutional representatives to answer up to 4 questions based on those articulated in the Accreditation Focus Group Report. Institutional representatives were also provided space to leave comments regarding each of the questions asked. The survey is included in Appendix B.

The survey was intended to be a census of all institutions identified on the FEMA Higher Education Program website's College List under each of the following headings: associate level, bachelor's degrees, master's level, and doctoral level. Based on these criteria, the population for the survey included 114 institutions.

The group wanted to elicit the perspective of the individual with responsibility for the institution's degree program(s). Thus, a significant attempt was made to identify who that person was as well as their email address and phone number. This attempt included review of program information sheets on the FEMA Higher Education website. When that information was discovered to be out-of-date or incorrect, thorough review of institutional websites and/or calls to institutional information phones lines were undertaken. In the process, it was found that 8 institutions identified on the College List had discontinued their degree programs. This discovery reduced the population to 106.

An email invitation to complete the survey was sent to all of the individuals for whom an email address had been located through the aforementioned process (the 2012 Accreditation Focus Group Report was included as an attachment). A follow-up call to the email invitation was made to all persons who were sent an email invitation (assuming their phone number could be located). An invitation was made by phone for all contact persons for whom a phone number could be located but not an email address. Finally, a reminder email was sent to all of the individuals who had not completed a survey on behalf of their institution. These contacts took place during Summer 2013. Appendix C identifies the following related to the sampling for this survey:

- institutions that have discontinued their degree program(s);
- institutions for which no contact person or contact information for the degree program could be identified;
- institutions for which only an email address for the individual responsible for the degree programs could be found (i.e., no phone number);
- institutions for which both an email address and phone number were found, but when the phone number provided was called there was no voicemail and no answer;
- institutions who ought to have received all of the communications outlined above but did not have a survey completed on their behalf; and,
- institutions for which a representative completed a survey.

This process resulted in a total of 65 completed surveys—a response rate of 57 percent[i]. The survey data reported here represents 65 institutions and their combined 22 associate's level, 23 bachelor's, 21 master's, and 6 doctoral level programs.

> Surveys were completed on behalf of 65 emergency management higher education institutions—57 percent of the population as defined in this report.

Results

The results section reports the findings from the question- and comment-data. Where findings from the comment-data are related, italicized quotations from the data are provided as supporting evidence.

The Basic Issue of Accreditation

The first substantive question concerned the basic issue of whether emergency management higher education degree program accreditation should be pursued. Institutional representatives were provided narrative related to the Accreditation Focus Group and its opinion prior to the survey question (see Appendix B).

80 percent of respondents (n=52) indicated their institution's support of accreditation while 20 percent of the institutions represented in the sample (n=13) indicated that their institution did not support the pursuit of accreditation.

Among those who did not support accreditation, there was significant consensus as to their rationale. Those not in favor of accreditation widely believe it is premature to pursue accreditation.

> *As a group, we have not even established criteria for 2-year, 4-year and graduate programs completely. I believe we are jumping ahead to think of accreditation at this point. Perhaps both initiatives should happen in tandem. We are a young discipline and have not developed a body of knowledge unique to the field, although that is now happening. Still, we need a balance between application and theory.*
>
> *A main issue is that the identity of emergency management undergraduate programs needs to be established prior to our program strongly considering accreditation…If in the future, emergency management scholars could establish an identity for undergrad programs that stands on its own and implement that accreditation program through a process populated by credible scholars from the emergency management domain, accreditation may be worth considering.*
>
> *There was a panel a few years ago at the annual conference entitled "What Shall We Call Ourselves." If we can't yet agree on a name, then maybe it is premature...*

> 80 percent of the institutions represented in the data are in favor of accreditation.

While some respondents disagreed with the need for accreditation, most were in favor. The comments left by those in favor of accreditation suggest their support is predominately due to the perception that some degree of standardization and improvement of quality is needed across programs.

> *A fundamental shortcoming among existing Emergency Management programs is the wide berth with which they create their courses of study. Many programs in actuality are stocked with generic management courses with an emergency management course or two required along the way. This cheapens the value of any degree/certificate earned and does a disservice to both the recipient and whichever institutions they come to represent.*
>
> *It is important to adopt recognized standards for educational excellence and a recommitment from higher education institution to build programs upon a foundation of*

programmatic innovation and the highest academic standards. Accreditation has an add-in value for students as it creates the impetus for relevancy and currency of faculty, programs, and courses to best serve students. The pursuit of accreditation reinforces a commitment to continuous improvement, innovation, and scholarship. Additionally, accreditation promotes an outcomes assessment process linking goals, activities, and outcomes.

Despite their support, it is important to note that those in favor of accreditation had concerns. In fact, most institutional representatives who supported accreditation indicated one or more of the following range of concerns: the potential cost of accreditation, the need for academics and scholars to develop/conduct accreditation, the need for institutional control over the content of the degrees offered, fear of an overly bureaucratic accreditation process, the need to interact with professional organizations on the topic of accreditation, and the need for a timely and transparent accreditation process, among others. These concerns are discussed in more detail in the discussion section.

> It is important to note that those in favor of accreditation were not without concerns.

The survey ended at this stage for those institutional representatives who indicated that their institution was not in favor of accreditation. The survey took those who favored accreditation to a question regarding an accrediting body next.

An Accrediting Body

Respondents were asked through which of two choices their institution preferred accreditation of emergency management programs be pursued including 1) through an outside accreditation organization (e.g., IFSAC) and 2) through an internal accreditation organization (e.g., an accreditation organization devoted solely to emergency management). Narrative from the Accreditation Focus Group Report was provided as context for the question (see Appendix B).

> 31 percent of the institutions in favor of accreditation prefer an outside accrediting body.

16 respondents indicated their preference that an outside accrediting body administer emergency management degree program accreditation—institutions with this view represent 31 percent of the institutions in favor of accreditation and 25 percent of the sample overall.

The preference for an outside accrediting body was, at least partially, pragmatic. Comments indicated that the amount and variety of resources (e.g, staff, funds, CHEA approval) that would be required to support the development of an internal accrediting body make this option unrealistic.

> *Having no staff and no start-up money, I don't see how a dedicated emergency management-related organization is currently possible....*

Nearly all institutional representatives who favored an outside accrediting body suggested that their preference was rooted in the accreditation role that the International Fire Service

Accreditation Congress (IFSAC) is currently, or could potentially, play in accrediting emergency management degree programs.

Some with this view represented institutions that had both a fire service and emergency management program. Their comments reveal that their fire service program is accredited through IFSAC and their institution is likely to pursue accreditation for their emergency management program through IFSAC because it will be efficient and less costly than other options are likely to be.

> *The Fire Service and Emergency Management work hand in hand and many institutions have them coupled under the same director or dean. Being able to go through one organization (IFSAC) streamlines the accreditation process and simplifies the process of accreditation and would ease some of the fiscal burden to educational institutions by only having to deal with one agency reducing site visits and not having to duplicate efforts to please more than one accreditation program.*

> *We already hold program accreditation from IFSAC, as do some other emergency management programs. IFSAC is officially CHEA recognized as the only fire-related accreditation body in the United States. IFSAC already accredits emergency management programs as they are considered related to the IFSAC mission. We would not expect to seek another accreditation from another body should one be created for said purpose.*

Still others indicated that their preference for an outside accrediting body—specifically, IFSAC—is based on their belief that IFSAC is, or could become, an appropriate body for accrediting emergency management programs.

> *I believe that IFSAC has an adequate structure to incorporate EM accreditation within its degree assembly. Therefore, I support the minority position to affiliate with an existing and closely related accreditation organization such as IFSAC.*

> *IFSAC is presently recognized by the Conference on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) as the competent accrediting organization for Fire Science degree and certificate programs. IFSAC has a self-study and peer-review process in place that can be readily adapted to Emergency Management & Planning programs. But this speaks to the underlying premise of Question #10: IFSAC would not be an "outside" accreditation organization. Accreditation of EMP programs could be entirely peer-driven.*

At this stage, the survey was completed for those who identified a preference for this first option.

36 institutional representatives indicated their support of accreditation through an internal organization devoted solely to emergency management. Those with this view comprise 69 percent of those in favor of accreditation and 55 percent of the sample. Some holding this view seemed to do so because they found IFSAC to be an

> 69 percent of those in favor of accreditation, or 55 percent of the overall sample, prefer an internal accreditation organization.

unacceptable alternative.

> *Emergency management needs to clearly distinguish itself from the fire sciences. There are simply way too many issues and problem sets in the field that require expertise that fire cannot and doesn't address.*

> *I feel that the IFSAC accreditation would be too narrow and specialized in focus. An EM related organization would be a better choice…*

> *IFSAC could further confuse the distinction between emergency management and the first responder disciplines.*

> *We do not think that IFSAC would represent the discipline well and is not rigorous enough in their academic accreditation to be of any value. It only represents about 18 academic programs and most of them are associate degree level only.*

Others preferring this option seemed to believe that an internal organization is critical, not because alternatives were unacceptable, but, because such an organization is the best option for emergency management.

> *I feel strongly that any attempt at establishing an accreditation program must occur under the auspices and guidance of an established emergency management organization. Attempts to initiate this process under any other organization virtually negates the value (and therefore the draw) of becoming accredited.*

> *If you wish to have general buy-in from academic institutions in general, I believe it would be best to first have a membership of interested academic institutions and begin with no organization. The membership could then create everything from the ground up, including the creation of the emergency management organization and to identify and vote for its officers, guidelines, methods, and costs.*

> *In the long run, I think that a dedicated emergency management related organization would be preferred as an accrediting body. It will take longer to mobilize this organization, but that might be the right time for most Universities to be ready to pursue accreditation.*

Those identifying a preference for an internal accreditation organization were asked which of the following options their degree program(s) preferred: 1) accept the Foundation for Higher Education Accreditation along with its standards and processes as currently constituted, 2) accept the Foundation for Higher Education Accreditation with options for altering the current standards and processes, and 3) develop a new accrediting organization. Institutional representatives who progressed to this survey question were also provided the narrative regarding the focus group and its recommendation as context (see Appendix B).

Of those in favor of accreditation through an internal body 72 percent indicated that they would like to see the Foundation for Higher Education Accreditation be the accrediting body for emergency management degree programs with options for altering the current standards and

processes (n=26). 25 percent preferred the development of a new accrediting body (n= 9). And, 3 percent preferred that the Foundation for Higher Education Accreditation be accepted along with its standards and processes as currently constituted (n=1).

Those who preferred an internal accrediting body were asked which of the following they preferred: 1) an accrediting body that is operationally autonomous of any umbrella organization that addresses research, honors society and collaboration yet still part of such an organization or 2) the operations and administration of the accrediting organization is handled by the umbrella organization. Narrative regarding the Focus Group and its discussion again preceded the question (see Appendix B).

Of the institutional representatives who viewed this question (36/65 responding to the survey), 26 preferred an operationally autonomous accrediting body while 10 preferred that the operations of the accrediting body be handled by the umbrella organization.

Discussion

> KEY FINDING

There is strong support for accreditation among those institutional representatives who completed a survey—52 out of 65, or 80 percent, of the institutions represented in the sample favor accreditation. The support appears to be grounded in a perception that some degree of standardization across programs and improvement of program quality is needed and that accreditation is a means of addressing these issues.

This finding will come as welcome news to those individuals within the emergency management higher education community who have advocated for accreditation of emergency management programs. The data seems to suggest that there exists a foundation upon which to begin developing the idea further. And, it seems likely that there will be a number of institutions interested in having their degree program(s) accredited in the future.

Yet, it is important to note that 41 institutions—39 percent of the population as defined in this report—did not have a survey completed on behalf of their emergency management degree program(s). Success of accreditation will likely be predicated upon widespread institutional participation; and, the fact that the perspectives of such a significant number of institutions are not represented in the survey data (for whatever reason) suggests it would be imprudent to assume that there exists a mandate to begin developing accreditation on their behalf.

Population = 106
- For (n= 52)
- Against (n= 13)
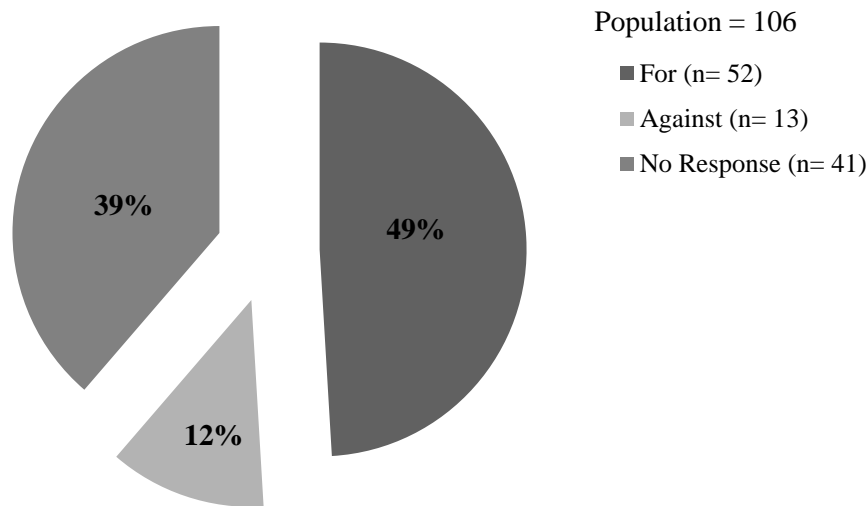- No Response (n= 41)

Figure 1. Perspectives of Institutions Offering Emergency Management Degree Programs on Accreditation

Additionally, while the majority of institutions represented in the data are in favor of accreditation, it was not without caveats. Three concerns emerged most strongly in the data. First, there was a concern that accreditation should develop through the efforts of scholars representing institutions who will seek accreditation.

> *It is imperative that emergency management scholars (and not others outside the field - even if related) define the curriculum, learning outcomes, etc.*

> *I am concerned that groups outside of higher education will have more of an influence than they should within the development process for accreditation.*

> *I agree that it is important for academics to play a role in developing accreditation standards and crafting a fair and deliberative process.*

> *There was strong agreement [among our faculty] that scholars from larger programs have more say in how the organization is run and how accreditation will take place. In short, the academic community needs to have more control over academic accreditation. Practitioners and smaller programs should be involved, but it will be imperative to get scholars and larger programs on board if legitimacy is to be acquired.*

Second, institutional representatives voiced a fear that accreditation would be overly prescriptive or burdensome.

> *An accreditation program is desirable. However, great care must be exercised…A nascent field like emergency management cannot afford rigidity and exclude potential avenues of academic inquiry and collaboration just to meet static, preconceived notions.*

8

Concerns are to create a reasonable process and timeline - supporting current quality mandates we have but not extraordinarily burdensome.

One thing that prompts me to emphasize flexibility and the importance of intellectual enquiry in the field is my worry about what college administrators will do with language that is too tightly conceptualized. This impacts not only the accreditation of programs but also faculty.

Third, there was a concern that the process of developing an accreditation body and related standards and processes is transparent and inclusive. There is little to no benefit to sharing the specific comments here since the data supporting this concern represent criticisms of individuals or groups that have been, or are currently, engaged in the accreditation dialogue. A judgment call was made to simply note the concern.

While strong institutional support for the basic idea of accreditation exists, this support may erode if careful attention is not paid to these concerns as well as the fact that a significant number of institutional perspectives are not represented in the data.

> KEY FINDING The majority of those favoring accreditation preferred that an internal organization accredit emergency management programs. Of those favoring an internal organization, most would like to see the Foundation for Higher Education Accreditation be the accrediting body for emergency management degree programs with options for altering the current standards and processes.

The significance of this finding should also be interpreted with caution. As noted previously, a large number of institutions are not represented in the survey data. Even if one were to assume that these "missing" institutions would support the notion of accreditation because a significant majority of those represented in the data did so, there is enough variation in the data regarding the accrediting body that it would be unwise to assume that any one of the options would be preferred by the "missing" institutions.

Regardless, it would appear from the survey data that sufficient support does not exist to move forward with any one type of accrediting body at this point. As Figure 2 shows, while nearly half of those in favor of accreditation prefer moving forward with the existing internal organization (n= 26), those institutions preferring an outside organization combined with those preferring a new organization represent nearly half of those in favor of accreditation (n= 25). And, when those institutions not in favor of accreditation are added, those preferring the existing internal organization are outnumbered—27 to 36.
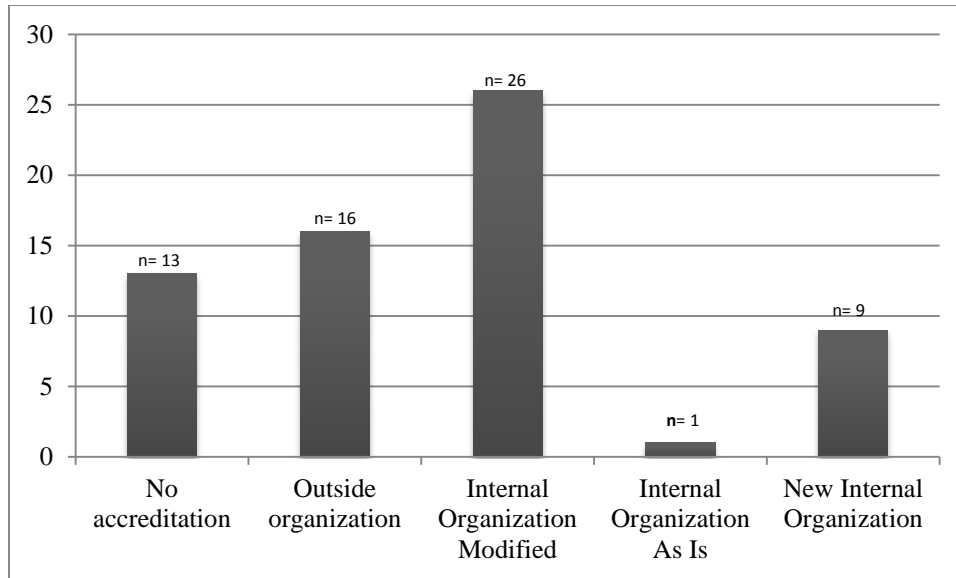
Figure 2. Breakdown of Institutional Preferences Regarding an Accrediting Body

Based on this analysis, it would seem that accreditation efforts should proceed—but slowly and purposefully.

While a significant number of institutions are not represented in the data, there was a considerable effort mounted to ensure they knew of the opportunity to participate in the survey. Regardless of the effort made, it is unlikely that there would have ever been a complete census of the population. And, it is also unlikely that all institutions offering emergency management degree programs will ever be in favor of accreditation. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to suggest that a "critical mass" of support for accreditation is required before efforts are undertaken to develop the idea both to ensure the legitimacy of accreditation standards, process, and an accrediting body and to ensure that there are sufficient institutions which will seek accreditation. The data seems to suggest that it is safe to conclude that there is enough support for accreditation to pursue the idea even while there is not as yet enough support for one particular type of accrediting body.

Recommendations regarding future efforts to develop the basic accreditation idea as well as an accrediting body are offered based on the data and data analysis.

The Basic Accreditation Idea
1. Identify benchmarks in the process of developing the accreditation idea and a timeline for achieving the benchmarks. Examples of possible benchmarks include an outline of an accreditation process (e.g., self-study, off site review of materials, campus visit, etc.), determination of who will accredit programs (e.g., qualifications, number), development of program level standards, and development of degree level standards.
2. Publicize the benchmarks/timeline widely to institutions offering degree programs.
3. Leverage focus groups to continue work on the accreditation idea.

4. Ensure the focus groups are comprised of representatives of institutions offering emergency management degree programs.
5. As work product related to each benchmark is produced, solicit feedback from degree offering institutions to check for consensus and provide the opportunity for comments.
6. Ensure that the feedback provided through this process informs future work of focus groups. Share with those who provide feedback how their feedback was used; and, if feedback was not used a rationale for why it was not.
7. Provide the opportunity for dialogue regarding progress developing the accreditation idea at FEMA Higher Education Conferences each year.

An Accrediting Body
1. Temporarily table making a decision on what body will accredit emergency management degree programs.
2. Determine one or more representatives of institutions offering degree programs (perhaps in the form of a focus group) who will continue to communicate with those bodies that are currently, or plan to, accredit emergency management degree programs.
3. Indicate to these bodies that an effort is being mounted by institutions offering such programs to craft their own standards and design their own process. Request that these bodies agree to a moratorium on accrediting degree programs for a specific amount of time to allow degree offering institutions to make progress (as outlined above).
4. Discuss with these bodies what emergency management accreditation might involve if it were to occur through one or another of these bodies in the future.
5. Pursue an ongoing dialogue with these bodies as accreditation development progresses.
6. When the accreditation idea has been more fully developed through the process outlined above, again ask degree offering institutions which organization they would prefer accredit emergency management programs. To assist with decision making, provide information as to what accreditation would involve it were to occur through one or another of these bodies (e.g., how operations would be administered).

Conclusion

The survey discussed in this report was undertaken to assess the degree to which institutions offering emergency management degree programs agreed with the recommendations of a focus group that met in September 2012 to discuss and debate the topic of accreditation. The focus group desired that this population be surveyed so that it might use the feedback provided to inform its future efforts. The data suggests that there is significant support for the basic idea of accreditation but suggests there is not enough consensus regarding a body to accredit degree programs at this point. Recommendations were offered as to how to negotiate a process that would result in progress developing accreditation while ensuring that progress made is supported and perceived as legitimate by institutions offering degree programs.

Appendix A. Accreditation Focus Group Report

Emergency Management Higher Education Program Accreditation Workshop

Panel Participants

Tony Brown, Oklahoma State University

Jessica Jensen, North Dakota State University

David A. McEntire, University of North Texas

Daryl Spiewak, Vice President of the Foundation for Higher Education Accreditation

Stacy Willett, University of Akron

Emergency Management Institute, Emmitsburg, MD
September 12-13, 2012

I

Preface

 During the 15th Annual Emergency Management Higher Education Conference (held on June 4-7, 2012 at the Emergency Management Institute in Emmitsburg, MD), two presentations covered the subject of program accreditation. One of the breakout sessions pertained to the efforts of the Foundation for Higher Education Accreditation and the other dealt with the activities of the International Fire Service Accreditation Congress. After hearing these presentations and discussions, many individuals with a vested interest felt that a focus group should be held in a neutral setting to facilitate a discussion of what currently constitutes the emergency management standards and how the accreditation process should proceed in the future. The FEMA Higher Education Program graciously agreed to host an accreditation focus group meeting on these subjects. The first accreditation focus group convened at the Emergency Management Institute on September 12-13, 2012, to discuss the status of accreditation and make suggestions to the academic community on how to improve emergency management academic programs in the future. This report summarizes the findings of this focus group and provides several questions to be considered by the higher education community. It is hoped that this report will be one of many steps toward the advancement of the interests of those involved in emergency management higher education.

Prior and Current Accreditation Efforts

 A number of organizations are involved or interested in the accreditation of emergency management academic programs. Some of these initiatives have come from external partners while others originated within the emergency management higher education community itself. As of yet, none have obtained sufficient consensus and support to move the process forward and in a manner that is acceptable to the emergency management higher education community.

 The International Fire Service Accreditation Congress (IFSAC) is one of the organizations involved in the accreditation of emergency management programs domestically and abroad. IFSAC has traditionally focused on the accreditation of fire science and fire service programs (both fire academy and degree granting institutions), but in recent years this entity has also acquired interest in accrediting emergency management programs (which are often housed in fire science/service departments). Thus far, IFSAC, which has been accredited by the CHEA (Council on Higher Education Accreditation), has accredited two associate level and two bachelor degree level emergency management degree programs.

 After 9/11, others took interest in accreditation activities relating to emergency management programs. For instance, in 2005 NORTHCOM worked with 25 educators to identify the core competencies that should be present in a graduate degree program in homeland security. In 2009, a similar process was repeated with the Center for Homeland Defense and Security to develop standards. The Homeland Security/Defense Education Consortium provided recommendations that may have a bearing on the interests of the emergency management higher education programs. To our knowledge, no homeland security program has been accredited under these standards.

 More recently, some scholars associated with the American Society of Public Administration (ASPA), the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA), and the

American Criminal Justice Association (ACJA), are exploring how to accredit emergency management concentrations in their related academic programs. Thus, it is evident that many outside organizations are interested in overseeing accreditation of emergency management higher education programs.

Practitioners and scholars inside the higher education community have become concerned about the accreditation of degree programs at all levels of higher education. After witnessing a few new master's degree programs adopt FEMA associate level emergency management prototype courses as part of their curriculum, a group of alarmed stakeholders began to ask what could be done to ensure rigorous and successful academic programs. Various professionals and professors met in 2004 at the FEMA Emergency Management Higher Education Conference and pushed for the establishment of the Foundation of Higher Education (FOHE). This organization, now known as the Foundation for Higher Education Accreditation (FFHEA), created standards to accredit emergency management programs in 2006 which are based in large measure on NFPA 1600. Although 6 institutions of higher learning have received accreditation from FFHEA thus far, the Hi Ed community may not have been adequately involved in setting standards and determining procedures for accreditation. As a result, the legitimacy of the foundation has been questioned at times and an insufficient number of programs have sought accreditation.

With this background information in mind, it is apparent that there is currently no organization that is widely accepted as the accrediting body for emergency management degree programs. Organizations from outside the FEMA Hi Ed community are interested in accrediting their emergency management related programs, but they may lack expertise in and full commitment to this area. In contrast, emergency management professionals and scholars have the appropriate knowledge base to establish a legitimate accrediting body, but they have yet to fully identify and support accepted standards and processes.

For this reason, the accreditation focus group met to assess the current situation and make recommendations to the higher education community so the accreditation process can be strengthened. Several questions guided our efforts:

- Is accreditation of emergency management higher education programs desirable?
- What organization should be given responsibility for accreditation and how should that organization be structured?
- What should accreditation look like?
- What should the standards of accreditation include?
- What barriers to effective accreditation exist, and how can these be overcome in the future?

Is Accreditation Desirable?

The focus group spent considerable time discussing the advantages and disadvantages of accreditation (see Table 1). Participants acknowledged a wide variety of viewpoints regarding the issue. Some were against the idea based on perceptions of how the accreditation process developed initially or they were worried that accreditation might limit academic freedom. The focus group was also

concerned about the impact of accreditation on new programs or the significant resource commitments that accreditation requires. In contrast, others suggested that accreditation provides many benefits to faculty and students as well as the discipline and profession of emergency management. It was argued that accreditation will advance standards in the discipline and therefore improve program quality.

Table 1: Pros and Cons of Program Accreditation

Pros of EM accreditation	Cons of EM accreditation
•Emergency management is a demanded degree, and accreditation will increase its visibility and legitimacy. •Accreditation limits the extent to which others define what emergency management is •Accreditation helps to form, unify and protect the identity of the discipline. •Accreditation can be a positive educational process for administration and increase university support for the academic program. •Accreditation will provide guidance for strengthening programs, including institutions that offer on-line degrees. •Accreditation may distinguish strong vs. weak programs, and thereby be used to market and recruit students. •Accreditation can be used as leverage to acquire additional resources (e.g., more faculty or funding). •Accreditation will better ensure that student and employer expectations are met. •Accreditation can help strengthen relationships between scholars and practitioners.	•Many other established disciplines do not accredit their programs. •There is no regulatory or professional requirement to accredit emergency management higher education programs. •It is too early in the development of the discipline to start thinking about accreditation. •Curriculum content and learning outcomes are evolving too fast to make accreditation feasible. •Everyone won't agree with accreditation standards/there is a lack of consensus on program content. •Accreditation could take away flexibility and lock programs into unwanted content. •Some programs won't seek accreditation or will fail accreditation. •The legitimacy of the accrediting body and reviewers may be questioned. •Accreditation is an added cost for both the program and accrediting body •Accreditation creates additional work for both the program and accrediting body (time, travel, reviewing materials, etc.).

After discussing the benefits and drawbacks of accreditation in detail, the focus group unanimously agreed that accreditation is important for emergency management higher education programs. The focus group recognized that accreditation efforts are already taking place with or without the involvement of the higher education community so it is imperative to firmly establish the identity of emergency management and specify what constitutes an acceptable academic program.

> Does the higher education community agree that degree program accreditation is important for the discipline and profession of emergency management?

Who Should Oversee Accreditation?

The focus group also explored the inquiry about who should be in charge of emergency management accreditation. The participants of the focus group examined the possibility of accreditation through both external and internal organizations. A comparison of benefits and drawbacks of having an external organization (outside of the emergency management discipline) accredit programs is provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Pros and Cons of External Accreditation

Benefits of External Accreditation	Drawbacks of External Accreditation
- Organizations like IFSAC already exist and are CHEA accredited. - IFSAC is a long standing, well developed organization with more resources than other accrediting bodies. - This organization has an international focus (and can therefore accredit US institutions teaching overseas). - EM has, in many programs, a close relationship with Fire Science programs. - IFSAC standards apply to both online and traditional standards. - IFSAC accredits both certificate and degree programs. - Joining with IFSAC limits our discipline's responsibility and commitment. - Participation with IFSAC can improve visibility based on IFSAC's name recognition. - Participation with IFSAC or existing agency provides an opportunity to influence EM accreditation in an established agency and prevent duplication of effort and expense	- Accreditation through an outside organization may limit disciplinary autonomy. - Having an external organization accredit emergency management programs limits disciplinary identity as well as the development of the profession. - An external organization may not fully understand discipline and profession of emergency management. - The EM community may not have a reciprocal relationship with the accreditation body (the primary interests of the organization may dominate). - EM scholars may not have equal membership representation within that accrediting body. - Will emergency management instructors have a say in standards and what constitutes an effective program? - Accreditation may be more expensive through an established group. - It may be difficult to get EM programs to rally behind an external accrediting body.

The focus group also considered the advantages and disadvantages of accreditation through an internal (emergency management related) organization (see Table 3).

Table 3: Advantages and Disadvantages of Internal Accreditation

Advantages of Internal Accreditation	Disadvantages of Internal Accreditation
- Internal accrediting organizations may already exist (e.g., FFHEA). Internal accreditation allows for more autonomy and control over the accreditation process. - An internal organization will increase the visibility of emergency management programs. - Understanding of the discipline or profession is more likely to be guaranteed under internal accreditation. - An internal organization is more likely to accept and promote the core values and missions of the EM community. 100% of evaluators would come from the EM community. - It may be much quicker to make changes and adapt processes through an internal organization. - Accreditation could be less expensive due to volunteer labor, limited organizational overhead, and incremental administration and start-up costs. - An internal accrediting body would help to move the	- Obtaining consensus on the nature of the accrediting body could be difficult (who will be included and how will it be organized). - Starting up an accrediting body could be challenging and require significant time and resources (e.g., determining the structure, obtaining infrastructure, personnel, labor). - Accreditation through an internal organization could be biased by individual academic programs. - Without an external accrediting agency, universities may need to assume additional accrediting expenses (to keep the organization strong). - Getting enough participants to be involved in the accrediting organization or process may prove problematic. - A new agency would be competing with existing accrediting agencies for a limited number of programs.

discipline and profession forward more than an external organization.	

After considering the various viewpoints on external and internal accreditation, the focus group acknowledged that a short-term arrangement with an existing organization could be feasible (provided certain conditions about autonomy, membership, standards and process were met). For instance, the minority vote recommended that IFSAC be presented with a proposal specifying conditions (e.g., standards and procedures appropriate for accreditation of EM programs as opposed to fire science, fire service, or fire administration programs) under which the EM academic community would participate in the IFSAC organization and accreditation process. However, the majority felt that it would be best for the discipline and profession to pursue accreditation through a dedicated emergency management related organization.

Would the higher education community prefer accreditation through an existing external organization (e.g., IFSAC)?

Or, would the higher education community prefer that accreditation took place through an internal (emergency management) organization?

Since the majority of the focus group participants supported the internal option, the discussion then shifted to which specific organization would be best suited to oversee accreditation. Three options became apparent. First, the higher education community could accept the existing internal organization (the Foundation for Higher Education Accreditation) along with its standards and processes as currently constituted. Second, the higher education community could accept the existing internal organization (the Foundation for Higher Education Accreditation) with options for altering the current standards and processes. Finally, the higher education community could develop a new accrediting organization.

Through significant discussion, the focus group determined that second option was preferable. The panel arrived at this conclusion because of concerns that the existing internal organization may not have the full support of the academic community currently. In addition, it was determined that the development of a new accrediting organization would be extremely difficult and time consuming. For these reasons, the focus group proposed that the Foundation for Higher Education Accreditation, the only currently active internal accreditation organization focusing on Emergency Management, be accepted as the accrediting agency for Emergency Management. However, the focus group also recommended the organization be open to further discussions about organizational structure and governance, accreditation standards, and the accreditation process. A name change to reflect this overhaul and direction may also be considered in the future.

Does the higher education community accept the existing internal organization (the Foundation for Higher Education Accreditation) along with its standards and processes as currently constituted?

Would the higher education community accept the existing internal organization (the Foundation for Higher Education Accreditation) with options for altering the current standards and processes?

VI

How Should the Accrediting Organization be Structured?

Since the focus group felt that it was best to adapt the existing accrediting organization, a discussion ensued about the relation of the Foundation for Higher Education Accreditation to a parent organization that would be involved in broader efforts including the advancement of research, the development of an Honors Society, and collaboration with external partners. The focus group felt that it would be best if accreditation was handled solely by the accrediting body and not the overarching organization as a whole. The majority also decided that the accrediting entity would be a membership driven organization and have a democratic governing process.

CHEA Accreditation and FFHEA Standards

The focus group also explored questions surrounding CHEA accreditation and existing standards of the FFHEA. Assuming the higher education community agrees to accreditation through the FFHEA, a conversation about the accreditation of this organization ensued. It was learned that FFHEA has not yet achieved accreditation itself, but that it would seek accreditation through the Council of Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and possibly through the Department of Education. The focus group therefore reviewed the current bylaws of FFHEA and made a number of changes to ensure the document conforms to CHEA requirements. The focus group also compared accreditation standards within IFSAC and FFHEA (see Table 4). However, the participants were not able to complete the discussion about CHEA accreditation and FFHEA standards due to the lack of time.

Table 4: Comparison of Standards

	IFSAC	FFHEA
Focus • **Programs accredited** • **Progress to date**	Fire Science/Services, and EM. • Associates, Bachelors, and non-degreed programs • Four programs in EM	Emergency Management • Bachelors and Masters, non-credit certificate • Six programs
Governance and Membership	Have an overall board elected from their assemblies. Each assembly has their own board. Officers are elected. Has a rotating board every three years.	Board of directors and set of officers. Officers are founders, non-elected. No rotation in leadership. B.O.D. has been volunteers. Operates under

	Operates under bylaws.	bylaws.
	Have voting and non-voting membership categories. Voting members come from paid dues and accredited program representation.	No membership currently or mechanism to become a member.
Standards	Content driven with standards for Fire Service, not EM. Only looks at program elements and larger college and university support elements.	Focused on NFPA 1600. Looks at program elements and larger college and university support elements.
Process	Self-study and a site visit comprised of experts in fire science/service, with limited EM knowledge.	Self-study and a site visit comprised of academics familiar with Emergency Management and practitioners.

Barriers to Accreditation

The focus group acknowledged that, while accreditation is desirable, it will be constrained by numerous factors. For instance:

- It will be difficult to agree on the accrediting body and find consensus on organizational structure and governance.
- Any accrediting body will need to obtain CHEA, and perhaps Department of Education, accreditation.
- Different opinions about standards (at all levels of higher education) are likely to exist.
- Current perceptions about emergency management (among university administrators) are likely to question the legitimacy of accreditation.
- A great deal of resources (financial, personnel, labor) will be required to develop a strong accreditation program.
- Volunteers involved in accreditation will require training and commitment.
- Programs will need to buy in to the notion of accreditation to make it viable.

Recommendation Actions

Based on the initial discussions about accreditation, the focus group determined the need to conduct a survey of the emergency management higher education community and obtain feedback on the preliminary conclusions it has reached. The survey should to be sent out for comments as soon as possible and include the questions that have been identified in this document. Replies should be received before taking any additional steps toward accreditation (e.g., further focus groups). Findings

should also be shared in the 2013 FEMA Higher Education Conference, with opportunities for attendees to shape accreditation organization, standards and processes.

The focus group also recommends additional steps to move the accreditation process forward. This may include:

- A focus group on the organization of the Foundation for Higher Education Accreditation, with specific reference to the relation of the accrediting body to a professional association for the discipline, honors society, research activities, professional outreach, etc. It would be helpful if the focus group examined what other organizations like IFSAC and NASPAA are doing.
- A focus group on FFHEA by-laws to determine governance issues, membership voting, the updating of standards, fee structure for membership and accreditation, etc.
- A focus group (or series of focus groups) on standards to determine what exists and how they should be changed to reflect accreditation requirements at all levels of higher education as well as for certificate programs and on-line programs.
- A focus group on the process of accreditation, to include discussions about the self-study, site visits, qualifications and training of evaluators, etc.
- A focus group on the accreditation of homeland security programs, since this may be similar to and different than accreditation of emergency management academic degrees.
- Continuous efforts to promote and strengthen accreditation in the future. For example, if FFHEA obtains CHEA accreditation, will existing accredited programs seek accreditation under new standards?

Conclusion

The focus group expresses gratitude to Houston Polson and Barbara Johnson of the FEMA Higher Education Program for their willingness to convene this initial panel on emergency management academic program accreditation. The participants of the focus group also acknowledge that the findings presented here should be considered as a starting point for further discussion, rather than a final determination of where the higher education community is headed. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the focus group and this document it produced will help shape the future of emergency management education in a positive manner.

Appendix B. Survey

Emergency Management Higher Education Accreditation

Survey Background

During the 15th Annual Emergency Management Higher Education Conference (held on June 4-7, 2012 at the Emergency Management Institute in Emmitsburg, MD), two presentations covered the subject of program accreditation. One of the breakout sessions pertained to the efforts of the Foundation for Higher Education Accreditation and the other dealt with the activities of the International Fire Service Accreditation Congress. After hearing these presentations and discussions, many individuals with a vested interest felt that a focus group should be held in a neutral setting to facilitate a discussion of what currently constitutes the emergency management standards and how the accreditation process should proceed in the future.

The FEMA Higher Education Program graciously agreed to host an accreditation focus group meeting on these subjects. The first accreditation focus group convened at the Emergency Management Institute on September 12-13, 2012, to discuss the status of accreditation and make suggestions to the academic community on how to improve emergency management academic programs in the future.

The following survey is based on the Accreditation Report provided on the FEMA Higher Education Project's website at X. If you have not yet read the short report, please do so before beginning the survey.

The survey questions that follow are based upon the key decisions points related to accreditation that the wider emergency management higher education community needs to address. As you proceed through each page of the survey, you will first find a statement of the focus group's recommendation and a brief rationale for its recommendation. Next, you will find a question that asks your opinion.

If you should encounter any issues as you complete this survey, please contact Jessica Jensen at 701-219-4293 or ja.jensen@ndsu.edu.

NOTE: We ask that only one survey be completed per higher education institution offering one or more emergency management degree programs. The best person to complete the survey is the program director or a person officially delgated the task by the program director.

*1. Are you the person with the authority to speak on behalf of all of your institution's emergency management programs?

○ Yes

○ No

Demographics

Emergency Management Higher Education Accreditation

*2. Please identify the following information.

Name: _____

Institution: _____

Address: _____

Address 2:

City/Town: _____

State: [   ]

ZIP: _____

Email Address:

Phone Number:

*3. What is your position title?

*4. What institution do you represent?

*5. In what academic department are your emergency management programs housed?

*6. What emergency management nondegree and/or degree programs does your institution offer?

[ ] Undergraduate Certificate

[ ] Graduate Certificate

[ ] Minor

[ ] Bachelors Degree

[ ] Masters Degree

[ ] Ph.D. Degree

[ ] Other (please specify)

Focus Group Recommendation
After discussing the benefits and drawbacks of accreditation in detail, the committee unanimously agreed that accreditation is important for emergency management higher education programs. The committee recognized that accreditation efforts are already taking place with or without the involvement of the higher education community so it is imperative to firmly establish the identity of emergency management and specify what constitutes an acceptable academic program.

7. Comments?

*8. Does your emergency management program(s) agree that degree program accreditation should be pursued?

○ Yes

○ No

Focus Group Recommendation

After considering the various viewpoints on external and internal accreditation, the panel acknowledged that a short-term arrangement with an existing organization could be feasible (provided certain conditions about autonomy, membership, standards and process were met). For instance, the minority vote recommended that IFSAC be presented with a proposal specifying conditions (e.g., standards and procedures appropriate for accreditation of EM programs as opposed to fire science, fire service, or fire administration programs) under which the EM academic community would participate in the IFSAC organization and accreditation process. However, the majority felt that it would be best for the discipline and profession to pursue accreditation through a dedicated emergency management related organization.

9. Comments?

10. How would your degree program(s) prefer that the pursuit of accreditation of emergency management programs be pursued?

○ Through an outside accreditation organization (e.g., IFSAC)

○ Through an internal accreditation organization (e.g., a accreditation organization devoted solely to emergency management)

Emergency Management Higher Education Accreditation

Focus Group Recommendation

The majority of focus group participants preferred that an internal emergency management organization be the vehicle for pursuing accreditation of emergency management higher education programs. The discussion shifted to which specific organization would be best suited to oversee accreditation. Three options became apparent. First, the higher education community could accept the existing internal organization (the Foundation for Higher Education Accreditation) along with its standards and processes as currently constituted. Second, the higher education community could accept the existing internal organization (the Foundation for Higher Education Accreditation) with options for altering the current standards and processes. Finally, the higher education community could develop a new accrediting organization.

Through significant discussion, the panel determined that second option was preferable. The panel arrived at this conclusion because of concerns that the existing internal organization may not have the full support of the academic community currently. In addition, it was determined that the development of a new accrediting organization would be extremely difficult and time consuming. For these reasons, the panel proposed that the Foundation for Higher Education Accreditation, the only currently active internal accreditation organization focusing on Emergency Management, be accepted as the accrediting agency for Emergency Management. However, the focus group also recommended the organization be open to further discussions about organizational structure and governance, accreditation standards, and the accreditation process. A name change to reflect this overhaul and direction may also be considered in the future

11. Comments?

12. Which of the following options does your degree program(s) prefer?

( ) Accept the Foundation for Higher Education Accreditation along with its standards and processes as currently constituted

( ) Accept the Foundation for Higher Education Accreditation with options for altering the current standards and processes

( ) Develop a new accrediting organization

Focus Group Recommendation

The panel felt that it was best to adapt the existing accrediting organization. A discussion ensued about the relation of the Foundation for Higher Education Accreditation to a parent organization that would be involved in broader efforts including the advancement of research, the development of an Honors Society, and collaboration with external partners. The panel felt that it would be best if accreditation was handled solely by the accrediting body and not the overarching organization as a whole. The majority also was of the view that the accrediting entity ought be a membership driven organization and have a democratic governing process.

13. Comments?

```


```

14. Which of the following would your degree program(s) prefer?

( ) An accrediting body that is operationally autonomous of any umbrella organization that addresses research, honors society and collaboration yet still part of such an organization

( ) The operations and administration of the accrediting organization is handled by the umbrella organization

Appendix C. Institutional Sampling Detail

The original population as described in the Methods Section of the report included 114 institutions, but was determined to be 106 once the institutions no longer offering a certificate or degree program were removed. 65 institutions (61 percent) had a representative complete a survey on its behalf while 41 of the remaining institutions (39 percent) did not respond to the survey.

Institutions no longer offering an emergency management certificate or degree program include the following (n=8):

Arizona State University
Bucks County Community College
Casper County Community College
Norwich University
Purdue University, Calumet
Salem Community College
Sonoma College
Southeast Arkansas College

Institutions for which no contact individual or program contact information could be located include the following (n=6):

Ashford University
Coastline Community College
Erie Community College, SUNY
Everglades University
Grand Canyon University
St. Leo University

Institutions for which only an email address for the individual responsible for the degree programs could be found (i.e., no phone number) include the following (n=7):

American Public University
Capella University
Delaware County Community College
Thomas Edison State College (no personal email available for Joseph Youngblood but emailed Watson School's generic email address)
University of Puerto Rico, School of Law – Center for the Study of Disaster Law and Policy Center
Walden University

Institutions for which both an email address and phone number were found, but when the phone number provided was called there was no voicemail and no answer. These institutions include the following (n=2):

Red Rocks Community College
San Antonio College

Institutions that ought to have received 3 contacts regarding survey but did not have a representative complete the survey include the following (n=27):

Bluegrass Community and Technical College
Broward College Casa Loma College
Casa Loma College
Central Texas College
Concordia University
Elmira College
Flathead Valley Community College
Frederick Community College
Georgetown University
Ivy Tech Community College
Jackson State University
John Jay College, City University of New York
Massachusetts Maritime Academy
Nash Community College
National Labor College
New River Community and Technical College
Nova Southeastern University
Ohio Christian University
Pikes Peak Community College
Saint Louis University
St. Petersburg College
SUNY Canton
SUNY Ulster County Community College
Tulane University
University of Chicago
University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center
University of Delaware

Institutions that had a representative complete the survey include the following (n=65):

Adelphi University
Anna Maria College
Arkansas Tech University
Barry University
Barton County Community College
Boston University School of Medicine
Caldwell Community College
California State University, Long Beach
Central Georgia Technical College

Clackamas Community College
Coastal Carolina Community College
Columbia Southern University
Community College of Southern Nevada
Delaware Technical & Community College
Durham Technical Community College
Eastern Kentucky University
Edmonds Community College
George Washington University
Georgia Perimeter College
Georgia State University
Guilford Technical Community College
Hesston College
Indian River State College
Jacksonville State University
Kansas Wesleyan University
Lakeland Community College
Loyola University Chicago
Madonna University
Meridian Community College
Metropolitan College of New York
Millersville University of Pennsylvania
Montgomery College
Montgomery County Community College
New Jersey Institute of Technology
Niagara County Community College
North Dakota State University
Northwest Florida State College
Oklahoma State University
Onondaga Community College
Park University
Philadelphia University
Pierce College
Portland Community College
Savannah State University
Trine University
Union College
University of Akron
University of Alaska, Fairbanks
University of Central Missouri
University of Maryland University College
University of Nevada at Las Vegas
University of North Carolina Charlotte
University of North Texas
University of Washington
University of Wisconsin Oshkosh

Upper Iowa University
Utah Valley University
Vincennes University
Virginia Commonwealth University

Wayne Community College
Western Carolina University
Western Illinois University
Western Iowa Tech Community College
West Texas A&M University
Yavapai College

---

[i] Of note, during the data collection process a number of individuals representing institutions that did not offer a degree program in emergency management and/or were not listed on the FEMA Higher Education Program completed the survey. Their participation was not sought directly and it is unknown how they came to learn of, or access, the survey. Their input is appreciated, but this particular survey was designed to elicit the feedback of a very specific group of institutions.