

**The State of Emergency Management 2000:
The Process of Emergency Management
Professionalization
in the United States and Florida**

by
Jennifer L. Wilson

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

THE STATE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT 2000:
THE PROCESS OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
PROFESSIONALIZATION IN THE UNITED STATES
AND FLORIDA

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

SOCIOLOGY

by

Jennifer L. Wilson

2000

To: Dean Arthur W. Herriott
College of Arts and Sciences

This dissertation, written by Jennifer L. Wilson, and entitled The State of Emergency Management 2000: The Process of Emergency Management Professionalization in the United States and Florida, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

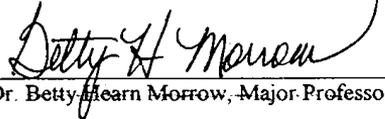
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Dr. David M. Neal



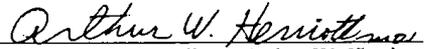
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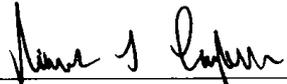
Dr. Betty Hearn Morrow, Major Professor

Date of Defense: July 20, 2000

The dissertation of Jennifer L. Wilson is approved.



Dean Arthur W. Herriott
College of Arts and Sciences



Dean Richard L. Campbell
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my grandfather, Dr. Curtis Burt Cunningham, and my grandmother, Mrs. Bessie Blanche Webb Cunningham. Their commitment to our family and our education was a very strong and steady guiding influence on my life. The completion of this degree is in tribute to them. May their heritage be honored and may they rest in peace.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

THE STATE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT 2000: THE PROCESS OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONALIZATION IN THE UNITED STATES AND FLORIDA

by

Jennifer L. Wilson

Florida International University, 2000

Miami, Florida

Professor Betty Hearn Morrow, Major Professor

This dissertation analyzes the current status of emergency management professionalization in the United States and Florida using a qualitative case study. I investigate the efforts of various organizations at the national and state levels in the private and public sectors to organize emergency management as a profession. I conceptualize emergency management professionalization as occurring in two phases: the *indirect institutionalization of the occupation of emergency management* and the *formal advancement toward an emergency management profession*. The legislative, organizational, and procedural developments that occurred between approximately 1900 and the late 1970s became the indirect institutionalization of the occupation of emergency management. Over time, as our society developed and became increasingly complex, more disasters affect the security of the population. In order to adapt to increasing risks and vulnerabilities the emergency management system emerged and with it the necessary elements upon which a future profession could be established providing the basis for the formal advancement toward an emergency management profession.

During approximately the last twenty years, the formal advancement toward an emergency management profession has encompassed two primary strategies—certification and accreditation—motivated by the objective to organize a profession. Certification applies to individual emergency managers and includes all training and education. Accreditation of state and local emergency management agencies is reached by complying to a minimum level of proficiency with established standards of performance. Certification and accreditation are the mechanisms used to create an emergency management profession and thus act as axes around which the field of emergency management is organizing.

The purpose of this research is to provide a frame of reference for whether or not the field of emergency management is a profession. Based on sociology of professions literature, emergency management can be considered to be professionalizing. The current emergency management professionalization efforts may or may not be sufficient to achieve the ultimate goal of becoming a legitimate profession based on legal and public support for the exclusive right to perform emergency management tasks (monopoly) as well as self-regulation of those tasks (autonomy).

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation presents a historical analysis of the development of emergency management as a profession in the United States. I investigate the efforts of various organizations at the national and state levels in the private and public sectors to organize emergency management as a profession through accreditation and certification processes. In particular, I study Florida's current actions to professionalize the practice of emergency management.

As I began to investigate the sociology of professions literature and the emergency management field, a conceptualization of the process of emergency management professionalization soon evolved from my work. It became clear that this process needed be divided into two phases. The first phase I call *indirect institutionalization of the occupation of emergency management* and the second phase I call *formal advancement toward an emergency management profession*. These phases can be summarized as indirect and direct means of organizing an emergency management profession respectively.

I have labeled the developments that occurred between approximately 1900 and the late 1970s as the indirect institutionalization of the occupation of emergency management because during this time period there is an indirect correlation between organizational development and professionalization. This is a consequence of the increasing complexity of society. Over time, as our society developed and became increasingly complex, more disasters affected the security of the population. The emergency management system emerged and with it the necessary elements upon which a future profession could be established. During this

period, emergency management dealt with disasters, natural and technological, outside the framework of a professional setting. Indirect institutionalization of the occupation of emergency management is a consequence of development and social change within the field resulting from adaptations to increasing risks and vulnerabilities. This organization became the foundation of the emergency management occupation by providing the infrastructure for what I label the formal advancement toward an emergency management profession.

Since the late 1970s, the United States has been experiencing the maturity of the field of emergency management manifested in the consolidation of all federal emergency management related agencies into an integrated system. In concomitance with this systematization, a new trend of formalization emerged in attempts to create an organized profession. Until then, emergency managers at all levels of government had not shared the same idea of who was a *professional emergency manager* or even what the *emergency management profession* entailed. There was a need to define what the field of emergency management encompassed, who could call themselves an emergency manager, and what were the qualifications and skills needed to perform emergency management duties. In other words, how do emergency managers identify themselves? How do they become recognized? In order to answer these questions, emergency managers perceived that they had to form an organization to give meaning to their work despite the different trades participating in the new practice of emergency management.

Over the last twenty years, emergency management professionalization is an endeavor in progress. The formal advancement toward an emergency management profession encompasses two primary trends: certification and

accreditation. I consider these trends as formal advancement toward an emergency management profession because they are current developments within the field motivated by the objective to organize a profession. Certification and accreditation act as axes/pivots around which the field of emergency management is organizing. They are the strategies used to create the organized emergency management profession. In other words, they are the mechanisms by which emergency management is professionalizing.

Certification applies to individual emergency managers and includes all training and education. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) administers certification at the federal level through the Emergency Management Institute. Various organizations provide state level certification such as the Florida Division of Emergency Management. Higher education institutes and universities in the public and private sector as well as professional emergency management associations also certify individuals through degree and certificate programs. In other words, I use the term certification as a heuristic tool to represent all emergency management credentialing of individual emergency managers. Although certification applies to individual emergency managers, I study the organization of the certification processes as an institutional and organizational device to promote professionalization.

Accreditation applies to emergency management programs and refers to emergency management organizational tasks. It involves setting standards for performance of emergency management functions at a minimum level of proficiency. Accreditation of state and local emergency management agencies is reached by complying with established standards of performance. Therefore, accreditation is the principal mechanism by which standardized measures of emergency

management functional proficiency at the agency level will be established so that a credible and reliable emergency management practice will be accomplished nationwide. Proficiency and thus accreditation are the foundation to achieve legitimacy and consequently monopoly and autonomy.

Significance of the Study

Emergency management professionalization is important to study for it illustrates the current status and the trends of an increasingly important governmental function—providing for the safety and well being of the citizenry in an ever more risky natural and technological environment. Natural and technological disasters have not diminished with increasing development but rather continue to increase causing more lives to be at stake and more valuable, highly localized property to be at risk. Thus, it is necessary to establish a highly reliable emergency management system as the social mechanism to mitigate disasters. I view emergency management professionalization as part of the on-going process of disaster mitigation. Emergency management is one of the fastest growing areas within federal and state bureaucracies, as illustrated by the fact that FEMA's annual budget has been increasing \$100 million a year for at least five years to reach a current \$3.4 billion (FEMA 1999c). So much importance is placed on this objective, that a whole new network umbrella type organization—a new profession—is being formalized to give meaning and direction to this task. Professionalization is being implemented primarily through the emergency management accreditation and certification processes. The goal is to create a structural niche for a specialized labor force to have exclusive rights to perform specific work without outside interference. The outcome of this endeavor will be a highly reliable nationwide emergency management system

constituted of a dependable, efficient, and capable work force.

Contributions of the Study

This study provides a distinctive analysis of the process toward professionalization of emergency management in the United States. It examines the evolution and current status of the emergency management field. This work makes a unique contribution to social science disaster research because it analyzes the relationship between civil defense management and natural disaster management within the historical evolution of emergency management. This study contributes to the sociology of professions as I formulate a new theoretical framework to conceptualize emergency management professionalization. This framework establishes an important relationship between indirect institutionalization of emergency management (historical development of the trade) and the consecutive formal advancement toward an emergency management profession, primarily through the processes of accreditation and certification, establishing that both aspects are conditions *sine qua non* a profession cannot exist. Previous work has not examined the development of this field within the general context of professionalization. This is the first in-depth analysis of the development of a profession that is gaining greater importance and visibility in modern complex societies.

Research of this nature contributes to the field of emergency management at all levels, but principally the executive level by providing an independent and impartial analysis of its current efforts to professionalize. Because this study analyzes what I label the indirect institutionalization of the occupation of emergency management, it provides emergency management planners and practitioners with a

new historical perspective of the field's progress. Furthermore, it provides an in-depth analysis of the current state of the profession.

This study is timely. Emergency management has not yet culminated into an organized profession, but rather is actively advancing toward this end. As it is currently moving forward with the accreditation and certification processes in order to become an exclusive and self-regulated profession, this project serves as a reflective device. By providing a contextual frame of reference it can be a valuable tool in understanding and assessing professionalization in the midst of the process.

This work will not only impact the domestic emergency management system but can be used as a reference for international emergency management organizational efforts. Just as Florida's emergency management system is a model for the United States, so the U. S. system is likely to provide important direction to other nations.

Research Questions

This study addresses the following questions: How has emergency management evolved as a field? How is emergency management becoming a profession? How does its development fit into a sociology of professions framework? What factors are associated with its movement toward exclusiveness and self-regulation through the processes of accreditation and certification? What prognosis can be made from the examination of an exemplar case study?

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study of emergency management professionalization includes the federal government's role in piloting the emergency management system in this country and leading the current professionalization efforts. My research revealed that the process of professionalization is primarily a top-down one beginning at the national level, extending to states, and flowing down to local communities. Congress established the federal government's role in disaster management through a number of legislative acts and formed the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to lead the work in this area. Thus, FEMA is the driving force in the emergency management system because it possesses resources allocated to it by Congress that can then be distributed among the states to be later distributed among counties. FEMA has the means to attach funding to specific work at the state and local level for mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.

Moreover, several nationally recognized professional emergency management associations have formed to help define and identify the field of emergency management by providing forums for knowledge transfer and networking and by promoting awareness of emergency management. These organizations consist of membership from all regions of the nation and all levels of government. In particular, the National Emergency Management Association (NEMA) and the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM), formerly known as the National Coordinating Council on Emergency Management (NCCEM), are sponsoring and advocating formal emergency management professionalization through accreditation and certification programs. Thus, these organizations' efforts are an important part of the study.

A thorough understanding of the top-down nature of emergency management professionalization necessitates analysis of the state perspective as the nationally driven professionalization efforts are actually implemented at the state level. Moreover, the states are the most important stakeholders in the professionalization effort and are acting as partners with the other parties mentioned above in the development and implementation of a highly efficient and professional emergency management system.

I study Florida because the state's emergency management system is well established and one of the most important within the nation. First, Florida has a history of being particularly geographically vulnerable to hurricanes. Throughout the last century since hurricanes have been recorded, Florida has experienced landfall of a hurricane 57 times with 24 of these storms Category 3 or higher on the Saffir/Simpson scale (Lecomte and Gahagan 1998), more than any other state in the nation. The people of the state of Florida have plenty of experience with these natural hazards, the most relevant being Hurricane Andrew in 1992, which is nationally recognized as the most devastating of its kind with more than \$25 billion in damages. In addition, Florida has one of the fastest growing populations in the country, placing more people and property at risk to a multitude of hazards, particularly hurricanes. The composition of Florida's population further complicates this issue. Rapid population growth derived from national and foreign migration, including a large segment of elderly—with little if any hurricane knowledge—settling in the most vulnerable coastal areas is a challenge to emergency managers. Therefore, high risks to the state's population from hazards have fueled the development of one of the leading emergency management systems in the nation. For these reasons, and for matters of propinquity, I chose Florida for its leading role in our nation's emergency management professionalization efforts.