ABSTRACT

Emergency management (EM) is a rapidly growing and evolving discipline. While only two degree-level programs existed prior to 1995, they were joined by an additional 40 programs by 2005. These new programs contributed to a broad expansion of courses and instructional materials. However, none of this growth has been guided by a commonly agreed upon curricular framework. As a result, degree-level programs have varied widely in terms of what they consider an appropriate EM curriculum. The past several years have seen repeated efforts by a small group of academics and professionals to develop a standard curricular framework based on mutually agreed upon competencies, functions, and skills. This research project refines and builds upon these earlier efforts to create a unified list of broad curriculum-level goals. These goals were then qualitatively and quantitatively measured to identify specific themes that could be used to build an appropriate curriculum for EM bachelor’s and master’s degree-level programs.

Key words: emergency management, education, curriculum, professional standards

INTRODUCTION

Emergency management (EM) has grown rapidly over the last decade, with 40 new educational programs introduced since 1995. These new programs contributed to a broad expansion in available courses and instructional materials. However, none of these programs shares a common curricular framework. As such, programs within and between degree levels vary widely depending on what they define as appropriate and necessary in terms of EM education.

The past several years have seen repeated efforts by small groups of academics and professionals to develop a uniform curricular framework out of lists of EM competencies, functions, and skills identified from various existing programs.

This article restates the core concepts identified in these earlier research efforts and attempts to refine them into a general curriculum model that can be used to establish a common standard for all EM higher education programs. This framework is necessary if a more coherent system of educating emergency managers is to be established in the future either through new programs or through the modification of existing programs. General curricular goals must be in place before specific, instructional-level goals can be established, as seen in other established academic disciplines.

METHODS

An analysis of current EM literature resulted in a list of 19 potential curriculum-level goals or variables. These 19 goals were examined to see whether specific instructional goals were recurrent among them, which would then help identify model curricula for associate’s, bachelor’s, and master’s level EM programs. The identified goals (and abbreviations used in Tables 1 and 2) were:

1. research methods (RESEARCH)
2. analytical methods (ANALYSIS)
3. dimensions of EM practice (FOUND)
4. government systems, political skills, and human relations (POLS)
The primary research goal was to identify whether significant agreement (a minimum of 80 percent) could be attained from an expert panel of emergency managers and faculty on a set of general curriculum-level goals sufficient to create model higher education curricula.

Study design

The study used a two-stage, mixed-methods research design. Stage I was a qualitative study using the Delphi technique. (The Delphi technique is a method for eliciting information from participants to facilitate problem solving, planning, and decision making without physically assembling the contributors.)
Instead, information is gathered via mail, fax, or email). Stage II was a quantitative study using the general linear model. Results from both stages were used to identify sets of curriculum-level goals that would differentiate the various academic degree levels (Tables 1 and 2).

### RESULTS

Results in Table 1 show that general agreement exists among EM faculty and professionals regarding which curriculum-level goals are important to include in associate’s, bachelor’s, and master’s degree EM programs. The results are ranked by level of importance. The potential to use these results to establish a core curriculum at each degree level can readily be seen.

Table 2 extends this analysis by doing a side-by-side comparison of associate’s/bachelor’s and bachelor’s/master’s curriculum goals to indicate patterns that are common or unique for each degree level. Although most of the curriculum-level goals common to each degree level were confirmed by matching the empirical survey responses with the responses from the expert panel, some important differences became apparent. For instance, only two of six empirically ranked goals for associate-level programs were confirmed when matched against the expert panel’s responses, while 12 of 14 matched at the bachelor’s level, and 13 of 16 matched at the master’s level. As a result, although curriculum-level goals can be identified for bachelor’s and master’s degree programs based on these results, the same conclusion cannot definitively be drawn for associate’s degree programs.

### DISCUSSION

The literature regarding instructional development indicates that general goals are necessary when
developing a curriculum to form the basis of instructional-level goals. By looking at the common curricular-level goals outlined in Table 2, individual institutions should be able to establish a program with a common framework upon which individual instructional-level courses can be added and adapted.

In addition, while 11 of the 19 goals originally identified were included in this model curriculum, six goals were eliminated because of a lack of agreement on their importance between the expert panel and the empirical survey. However, because they were important to one or the other of our methods, these goals should be the subject of future research. Two other curricular-level goals of the original 19, HEALTH and ENVIRON, were ranked at the bottom of each list of goals from both research methods. Careful consideration should be given to their relative usefulness before they are included in future studies.

**CONCLUSION**

In summary, the goal-based curricula for each degree-level identified and empirically supported through this study should prove vitally useful in better defining the discipline and profession of EM as it evolves over the coming years.