As the profession of emergency management has matured, the roles and responsibilities of emergency managers have expanded, new technologies have been deployed, and emergency management education grown and has become better connected to emergency management practice. This special topic coverage (in three parts) addresses many of the changes in emergency management education over the past four decades, including the expansion of academic programs for those preparing to enter the field, those transitioning from emergency response and other fields, and those moving into supervisory and management positions in emergency management and related organizations. It also addresses some of the issues that academic programs have encountered as they have developed and have found their places in academic institutions.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency and its state and local and nonprofit sector counterparts, professional emergency management organizations such as the International Association of Emergency Managers and the National Emergency Management Association, and associations of government officials such as the National Association of Counties and the International City/County Management Association have contributed to the professionalization of emergency management and supported the development of appropriate educational programs. The Certified Emergency Manager (CEM®) program focused the profession on the development of general management skills and on a range of core emergency management skills. The CEM program also began differentiating between broad emergency management skills and primarily emergency responder skills. The identification of a common body of knowledge for the field followed. Recognition that emergency management required a skill-set and knowledge base different from law enforcement, the military, the fire services, and other professions grew. The profession was finding its identity.

Catastrophic disasters have given impetus to the professionalization process. From the first “billion dollar” disasters, it was clear that communities have to be more aware of the hazards that surround them and better prepared to deal with the disasters that might occur. Social science research offered answers to some of the important questions about human behavior before, during, and following disasters and helped identify even more questions. In 2007, a group representing professional emergency managers, disaster researchers, consultants, standard-setting bodies, and professional organizations helped fill in some of the blanks by identifying eight Principles of Emergency Management that explain emergency management roles and function. The profession was finding its identity. Today, through the adoption of standards to provide benchmarks for performance, emergency management has come of age.

I hope you enjoy this first installment of *Higher Education in Emergency Management: Pathways to Professional Excellence in a Demanding Career*.

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