

The Journal of Homeland Security Education: The Right Journal at the Right Time

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COMMENTARY

I am pleased and honored to contribute to this inaugural issue of the Journal of Homeland Security Education. It is not the first journal dedicated to the subject of homeland security, but it is the first to focus on Homeland Security *Education*. Recognition as an academic discipline comes from having learned societies devoted to the subject; dedicated academic departments or faculties; and *having quality academic journals in which research is published*; clearly, our academic discipline and community have arrived!

The content of this journal will reflect the roots from which the discipline was derived, as well as those topics that have contributed to making this a field in its own right. I have long argued that homeland security is a combination of three existing areas, namely Emergency Management (EM), Public Administration (PA), and National Security Affairs. I make this claim for several reasons, foremost of which is common and pertinent content. Two of these areas, EM and PA, have taken like roads towards recognition as academic disciplines. Additionally, all three, at least initially, were also fields of practice, with the primary practitioners being government employees.

The oldest example, and perhaps the one with the most parallels, is Public Administration. Scholars recognized it first as an occupation, and despite its existence since the Wilsonian era, it is without an accepted definition because of its broad scope. There is debate to this day as to whether it can be called a separate discipline or simply a subfield of management or even political science (Kettl, n.d).

Similarly, gauging what to include in homeland security, and perhaps more importantly, what to exclude, has yet to reach consensus; clearly this difficulty is exacerbated by its broad scope. Practitioners and academics both will tell you however, that, like pornography, while it can't be precisely defined, they know it when they see it.

Emergency management has had, and continues to have, a similar evolution. Throughout the last century, empirical studies done following disasters provided the intellectual foundation upon which a new profession could be built. But there were no emergency managers – mostly sociologists and social geographers. They provided the theoretical underpinnings, and action taken by the government at all levels was needed to move this along. State and local civil defense offices,

starting in the late 1940s, helped in the aftermath of an attack. If a natural disaster occurred, prior to the late 1970's and the establishment of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, there were over 150 different federal units that had specialized interests, programs, and resource priorities that would be called in to assist. It wasn't until the 1990's that FEMA came to be recognized as an effective organization to deal with disaster response and mitigation, due to events (Hurricane Andrew) and governmental action, to include President Clinton's efforts to make the organization more efficient. The "professionalization" of Emergency Managers, and beginning of the academic discipline came with development of societies, such as the International Association of Emergency Managers; the flourishing of academic programs; and establishment of devoted scholarly journals. It should be noted that FEMA's Higher Education Project played a key role in both program and academic discipline development (Drabek, 2009).

The third area, National Security Affairs, is generally not considered a unique discipline, but there is debate as to whether it is a component of political science or international relations. Efforts by the government starting at the beginning of the Cold War, helped launch mostly graduate programs to develop the scholars and practitioners required for this "War." It clearly fits under the rubric of homeland security because of its focus on terrorism, the transnational nature of terrorism, and on the prevention of terrorism.

Naysayers may argue that homeland security is these three distinct areas working side by side, but the interdisciplinary nature of homeland security academics and operations goes squarely against their argument. The fact that there are hundreds of programs further testifies to its acceptance as a discipline. Additionally, the number of students enrolled in these programs continues to grow exponentially and it is precisely the broad, multidisciplinary nature of the subject which makes them valuable and appealing to students and those entities that employ them after graduation. I can attest from personal experience that our academic institutions have constructed quality programs, and that cooperation from experts in these three and other related areas may be at an all-time high.

Homeland Security education has been in existence for a mere 10 years, and American academe has been challenged to develop programs with relevant content and, perhaps even more so, with its dynamism. The dynamic and multidisciplinary nature of the field, make for exciting times in terms of research and education. Further fueling this excitement is coinciding expansion of distance learning methods and technologies. This provides opportunities to not only explore our content, but also to explore how to best get that content to our widespread and diverse audience. This journal will fill a key role.

This short commentary on where our community has come from points directly to the importance and purpose of Homeland Security and consequently Homeland Security Education. But more important than reflecting on the past is deciding

our direction for the future. The manmade threats and adversaries we face have shown a remarkable ability to adapt, even under the intense scrutiny of the prevention sector of our community. Their operational security has improved, making detection significantly more difficult. Their use of modern technology and media has increased their reach in both depth and breadth. Additionally, the number of natural disasters is measurably on the rise, requiring more resources and research on how to handle them with the greatest efficiency. The importance of what we do as homeland security academics cannot be understated. Our role must be to reach further into the depths of knowledge to ultimately out maneuver and outlast our opponents and our challenges.

Ben Franklin (n.d.) said, “The doorstep to the temple of wisdom is a knowledge of our own ignorance.” At no time in history has the exploration of knowledge been more important.

REFERENCES

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