

How Do You Prepare Your Community for Disaster?

A Report of the Third Annual Disaster Preparedness Summit

March 6, 2005
New York City

Alice W. Villadsen, Ph.D.

Sponsors:
Community College National Center for Community Engagement
League for Innovation in the Community College

Community colleges continue to be institutions with special expertise and local responsibilities in the homeland security educational arena. In a continuing effort to support community colleges in this endeavor, the third Disaster Preparedness Summit was held in New York in March 2005. The specific purposes of the summit were to aid community colleges in creating or improving disaster preparedness programs and to increase prospects for community engagement.

Both service-learning and civic-engagement opportunities abound when colleges are faced with the need to respond to local disasters or to prepare the community for such events. Many colleges are now involved in academic curricula revisions that connect disaster preparedness and various disciplines. Since community colleges are the locations where 80 percent of first responders are trained, the extensions of the concepts within disaster preparedness are logical directions for community colleges' agenda.

An opportunity available for colleges wishing to institute or enlarge homeland security-related service-learning options is the Supporting Actions for Engagement (SAFE) grant. Presenters for the summit were recipients of the SAFE grant and active participants in service-learning options for students. Lyvier Conss, Executive Director of the Community College National Center for Community Engagement (CCNCCE), provided to summit participants basic information about SAFE grants. SAFE grants provide financial support for colleges to involve young people in civic and political institutions through homeland security projects. Not only is terrorism a possible focus of SAFE grant activities but also natural disasters and the threat of war. More information about the SAFE grants, as well as other service-learning and engagement initiatives, is available at the CCNCCE website: <http://mc.maricopa.edu/engagement>.

Community partners are crucial to colleges' disaster plans and their responses to those disasters. The many and varied partners range from local law enforcement agencies and hospitals to municipalities and public schools to volunteer agencies and utility providers. When hurricanes hit central Florida recently, Brevard Community College's Institute for Business Training and Community Education partnered with the Space Coast Licensed Roofers Association to set up fast-track roofing classes as a way to meet the critical need for roof repairs. Civic engagement is a part of the responsibility that most community colleges take on regularly, but action is especially crucial at times of emergency in the local community.

The Summit

The Community College National Center for Community Engagement, in partnership with the League for Innovation in the Community College, sponsored the summit titled *How Do You Prepare Your Community for Disaster?* Held in conjunction with the League's *Innovations* Conference in New York, the summit enrolled 90 preregistered participants in the day-long workshop.

The morning program included three presentations about service learning and civic engagement as a natural outcome of disasters in the community and of colleges' attempting to provide disaster preparedness education to the community. The colleges making presentations were Brevard Community College in Florida, Raritan Valley Community College in New Jersey, and

Northampton Community College in Pennsylvania. The afternoon session saw the participants practicing the principles gained by the morning presentations through reacting to seven disaster scenarios: The FBI Visit, The Train Wreck, An Afternoon of Tornados, Oil Spill on the Bay, The College Fire, The Irate Professor, and The Anthrax Scare. (Appendix A includes the 7 scenarios.)

The Brevard Community College Story

President Thomas E. Gamble, Brevard Community College, and his colleagues Roger Henry and Danny McKnight, comprised the panel presenting the story and lessons resulting from the highly unusual weather experienced in central Florida during fall 2004. Central Florida was hit by four hurricanes, beginning with Charley, August 13; followed by Frances, September 5; then Ivan on September 15; and finally Jeanne, September 26. Florida Community College Risk Management put the total hurricane damage to Florida's community colleges at over \$25 million.

Brevard Community College was affected by all four storms. It received significant damage in the first storm and then found itself unable to repair the damage in time for the second storm. Drenching rains swept through damaged buildings' roofs and broken windows. There were three buildings with major roof damage on two campuses and one building with significant glass breakage. All together, the college suffered damage to 10 buildings, primarily through water damage. The total estimated cost for repairs at Brevard is \$2.5 million.

Gamble closed the college two times in advance of the two hurricanes that made direct hits, Frances and Jeanne. Students and faculty lost 10 class days. All teaching days could not be recovered, and Florida attendance regulations were eased as a part of the solution. However, two days were added to the semester, and changes were made to the final examination schedule. Gamble reported that the health sciences were the most negatively affected programs because of clinical schedules and other laboratory requirements.

The college had never faced successive disasters before, and the well-developed safety plan was put to the test. The plan was implemented with the first hurricane and then modified several times based upon feedback from faculty, staff, and students. Gamble said, "The plan had to be a dynamic one, and I would advise that all safety plans be dynamic." Brevard learned something new with each storm, and plans were changed immediately as improvements surfaced. Finally, Gamble indicated that the college learned much from neighbors.

The second Brevard panelist was Roger Henry, veteran faculty member and director of community service-learning programs for 31 years at Brevard and at Kent State University. Under Henry's leadership, Brevard Community College has become a well-known leader in service learning and community engagement. Also former director of the Florida Campus Compact, Henry influenced the infrastructure for service learning in the Southeastern United States.

Henry reported that the hurricanes "took a tremendous toll on my students." Because of the hurricane's impact, both in physical damage and in the psychological stress of waiting and preparing for storm after storm, Henry said, "the life appeared to be sucked out of them [students]." Students were understandably distracted from their studies, faculty were unable to

cover expected material, and many students' and college employees' lives were disrupted at home, at work, or sometimes, in both locations. A planned field research project could not be done because of the acute loss of "focus, direction, priorities, and stress."

Service learning and the opportunity for civic engagement were obvious and logical results for students and faculty at Brevard following the disaster. Students volunteered in many ways: They staffed the Salvation Army comfort stations, some helped to remove trees from local parks, others repaired damaged wharfs, and still more used shovels to aid in stemming the significant erosion caused by the storms. One student was presented the Civil Air Patrol Life Saving Award. When asked about their experiences in volunteering, students noted that they "would never be the same," "would treasure and protect nature in a new way," "would become lifelong volunteers," and "saw real connections between their coursework and the experience around them." A new maturity and a value for teamwork were evident in students' remarks about the aftermath of the hurricanes.

Faculty too were affected significantly. A Humanities faculty member was reminded of the social fragility that disaster uncovers. Her response: encouragement of her students to volunteer with field-relief agencies rather than their usual beach cleanup project, since her house was too damaged to host the event. A Veterinary Technology faculty member decided to renew efforts to aid the local Humane Society in animal disaster preparedness. His students "volunteered more." This faculty member suffered tremendous stress from losing most of his house, and he experienced heat exhaustion. Amazingly, he reported that he volunteered with the Salvation Army.

New community commitments and partnerships resulted from the hurricane experiences. New or revised trades and apprenticeship programs (Drywall, Using Generators, Roofing, and so forth) were added at the college. New partners included the Civil Air Patrol, Red Cross, Salvation Army, Parks and Recreation, Storm Water Utilities, and the Humane Society. Curricula were affected, from biology to criminal justice to humanities; many service-learning components were added to existing courses.

Internal changes at Brevard included faculty recognizing the need for and implementing more flexibility in their courses, making service-learning improvements, and encouraging rapid redeployment of volunteer efforts to aid the disaster. Faculty quickly revised teaching plans that semester so that, rather than follow the prescribed schedule of the term, new options resulting from the hurricane were provided. An obvious result also was sensitivity to the inclusion of environmental issues within the curriculum.

The third panelist from Brevard, Colonel Danny R. McKnight, U.S. Army, Retired, returned to Brevard County to become the Homeland Security Program Coordinator in the Criminal Justice Center at Brevard following his 29-year military career. Areas covered in his program include crime, natural disasters, and terrorism. His expertise in disaster preparedness, and the fact that Brevard had the Homeland Security program, aided the college during the emergency and beyond. Colonel McKnight was instrumental in making changes in the Safety Plan and in developing a structure for the new Brevard Disaster Preparedness Task Force. (Brevard PowerPoint slides are included in Appendix B.)

Following the disaster, the college has made a concerted effort to ensure that students and staff are aware of all elements of safety and disaster preparedness. A renewed effort at disaster planning is under way. Since the Safety Plan and the Safety Team had been crucial elements to the college's response to the hurricanes, the priority for safety rules and disaster preparedness increased significantly among college employees and students who previously were not interested. The Brevard Disaster Preparedness Task Force has adopted a more detailed plan (see Appendix C) that includes preparation, response, and recovery elements. Potential risks at Brevard are divided into (1) natural causes, (2) accidental causes, and (3) civil or social causes. Responsible individuals head subcommittees representing the central components at the college (Student Services, Plant/Facilities, Plant/Maintenance, Communications and Media Relations, Public Safety and Security, Technology, Human Resources, Faculty/Academics, and Public Health and Safety). Although not fully implemented, the model is helpful to colleges attempting to anticipate all sorts of emergencies.

Raritan Valley Community College, the 9/11 Challenge, and the SAFE Grant

Lori Moog, Program Manager of Community Outreach at Raritan Valley Community College (RVCC), gave the second presentation at the summit during the morning session. Moog also is project director of the Supporting Action for Engagement (SAFE) grant initiative and has coordinated RVCC's Service Learning Program for eight years. The Raritan Valley Service Learning Program has become a national model for service learning and community engagement.

Through the SAFE grant, Raritan Valley's Service Learning Homeland Security Project brought together students, faculty, and community to study the impact and problems associated with September 11 and its aftermath. Raritan Valley was seriously affected by 9/11. Located near New York City, the college had been close enough that students, faculty, staff, administrators, and their families suffered as victims themselves in some cases. Using the disaster as an opportunity to enhance civic responsibility and service-learning options, the college has been successful in several ways:

1. Curriculum has been developed that incorporates homeland security themes in academic courses. In Health Science Education, Early Childhood Education, Science and Engineering, and Business Science Education, key faculty members serve as project leaders, supported partially through the SAFE grant.
2. Additional service-learning opportunities have resulted through identifying new community partners and deepening existing relationships at a time when the cooperative spirit was high following 9/11. Senior citizen groups have been mobilized to take part in volunteer activities with many of the new community partners.
3. Projects include the college's conducting workshops on the lessons learned as well as workshops specifically designed to teach the development of homeland security issues within all disciplines.
4. A Service Learning Community Advisory Board was created and is now composed of stakeholders from many backgrounds, providing additional resources and ideas for service-learning experiences for students.
5. Based upon new Department of Justice requirements for certification of community police officers, the college provides 10 one-day modules of the Department of Justice curriculum. Recruit awareness of homeland security preparedness was, in turn, a means whereby they learned homeland security issues and then were able to make the community more aware of them.

Moog read from letters sent by students and community members expressing thanks and reflections about the college's positive engagement during such a serious time in the life of the region. (See Appendix D for presentation.)

Northampton Community College and the SAFE Grant

Debra A. Borh, Service Learning Specialist at Northampton Community College in Easton, Pennsylvania, gave the final morning presentation. Responsible for recruiting and training faculty for service learning as well as recruiting student participants, she is an experienced grant writer and coordinator for volunteer services.

Northampton Community College recently received a SAFE grant. Being the only college in Pennsylvania to be awarded an Americorps/Vista person dedicated to Homeland Security, the college decided to develop a countywide emergency resource guide. Through planning the guide, the college became aware of the SAFE grant, a perfect means to implement some of the ideas being generated through emergency preparedness discussions.

Northampton decided to use a multidisciplinary approach in implementing service learning, a new option for its students. Programs with service-learning components include Veterinary Technology, Emergency Services, Biology, Criminal Justice, Journalism, and Nursing. Bohr presented three projects resulting from the new emphasis on service learning and homeland security.

In Veterinary Technology, students decided to focus on emergencies and the care of pets. Materials were written about the basics of pet preparedness, and pet emergency kits were developed. Wanting a way to get the message out to the community about their work in pet preparedness, one student designed, purchased materials for, and built an informational kiosk containing materials, kits, and brochures relating to pet preparedness and evacuation. The kiosk was then showcased at the annual Springfest held by the college.

In Journalism, students were given a three-hour workshop about disaster preparedness. They then visited the 911 Call Center to see operations and conduct interviews with emergency services personnel to gather further information about disaster preparedness. An article about the project was published in the college newspaper, so journalism students got experience in writing about homeland security.

Finally, two students, Claudette Carr and Yasmin Candelo, presented their experience in a biology class. Given the opportunity for a service-learning project, the students decided to focus upon emergency-preparedness needs of seniors in a local nursing home. With dementia and Alzheimer's Disease prevalent among the seniors, the students soon discovered in talking with residents and staff that emergency procedures were hampered by the fact that these seniors could not read or interpret emergency signs. Knowing that the seniors enjoyed the game of bingo, the students developed and field-tested a bingo-matching game, Safety Bingo, using emergency signals and signs rather than letters. The seniors learned the meaning of the emergency signals and enjoyed the experience as well. (See Appendix E.)

The presentations of the morning reinforced the fact that emergencies can be an opportunity to engage students and the college staff in civic responsibilities, and that service learning is a logical means of codifying that volunteer experience.

Other resources at the Summit

Three faculty and administrators from the Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC) were summit participants. They shared experiences from the 9/11 attacks. BMCC is located within a few blocks of Ground Zero, had a newly constructed building damaged beyond repair as the towers fell, yet reopened the college for teaching and learning only two weeks after the tragedy. Strong college leadership was crucial during the trauma, since many students and staff were directly affected through the loss of family members and friends. BMCC's president decided that normalcy as soon as possible was crucial for the college. Therefore, schedules were altered, locations were changed, and the college resumed operations more quickly than anyone could have imagined. BMCC's response to 9/11 has been used as a model for other community colleges looking for ways to cope with their own emergencies.

Wayne Blanchard, Higher Education Project Manager of the Emergency Management Institute (EMI) of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in Emmitsburg, Maryland, joined the summit at the invitation of the facilitator. He brought significant expertise and knowledge not only about hazard, disaster, and emergency management and training programs throughout the nation, but also about the many resources available online for community colleges wishing to study effective programs already in place. The Emergency Management Institute has developed a prototype curriculum for associate degrees in emergency management based upon existing EMI training courses. A compilation of course syllabi and outlines of courses taught at colleges and universities is available online and free of charge. In that some colleges may be lacking qualified faculty to teach at the associate degree level in such areas as disaster response, hazards management, or social dimensions of disaster, the Emergency Management Institute has developed a series of courses that are available electronically for faculty development. The courses are intended for junior, senior, and graduate-level students and include detailed teaching guides.

To learn more about the available courses and programs in emergency management, visit

<http://www.training.fema.gov/emiweb/>

or contact Wayne Blanchard at

wayne.blanchard@dhs.gov.

Following the three college presentations, participants used the afternoon to answer questions about possible emergency issues at each participant's college and practice emergency scenarios. All were given the following questions for their consideration:

1. Although many kinds of emergencies affecting our colleges are possible, name the most likely disaster that could occur at your location. Why?
2. Do you have a safety plan? What kinds of emergencies are included within the plan? Do you rehearse college response and actions? Do you spend the most effort on the most likely disaster scenario?
3. Should a disaster of the sort that is most likely to occur at your college happen, what are the most serious issues you are likely to face?
4. What community partners are essential as you prepare for your most likely disaster? How can you, or how have you, developed those partnerships?

Participants then joined an assigned group to review and discuss the seven emergency scenarios. Included in scenarios were considerations about how each could lead to civic engagement-action and service-learning opportunities.

Following the table discussions, the groups reported out to the larger audience with many lessons evident from the three morning presentations. Basic findings were that colleges need emergency plans to be flexible; they need to provide plans for the most likely disasters first, but all types of disasters need consideration and planning; no plan is perfect, and constant updating is important; and key constituencies need to be a part of the planning, including facilities, police, public information, faculty, and staff. Opportunities for taking civic responsibility to a higher level of consciousness among students and staff are significant outcomes of disasters in communities. Student and staff sensitivities to such community needs are life-changing for many: Volunteerism is strengthened; understanding of the interconnectedness of community and natural systems is more obvious; individual responsibility, especially in early, first disaster response, is evident. All the disaster scenario work included opportunities for a college to convert experience into service-learning options. Participants especially appreciated the time of sharing and of learning ways to improve disaster plans, increase civic responsibility, encourage volunteerism, and find funding for homeland security-related projects.