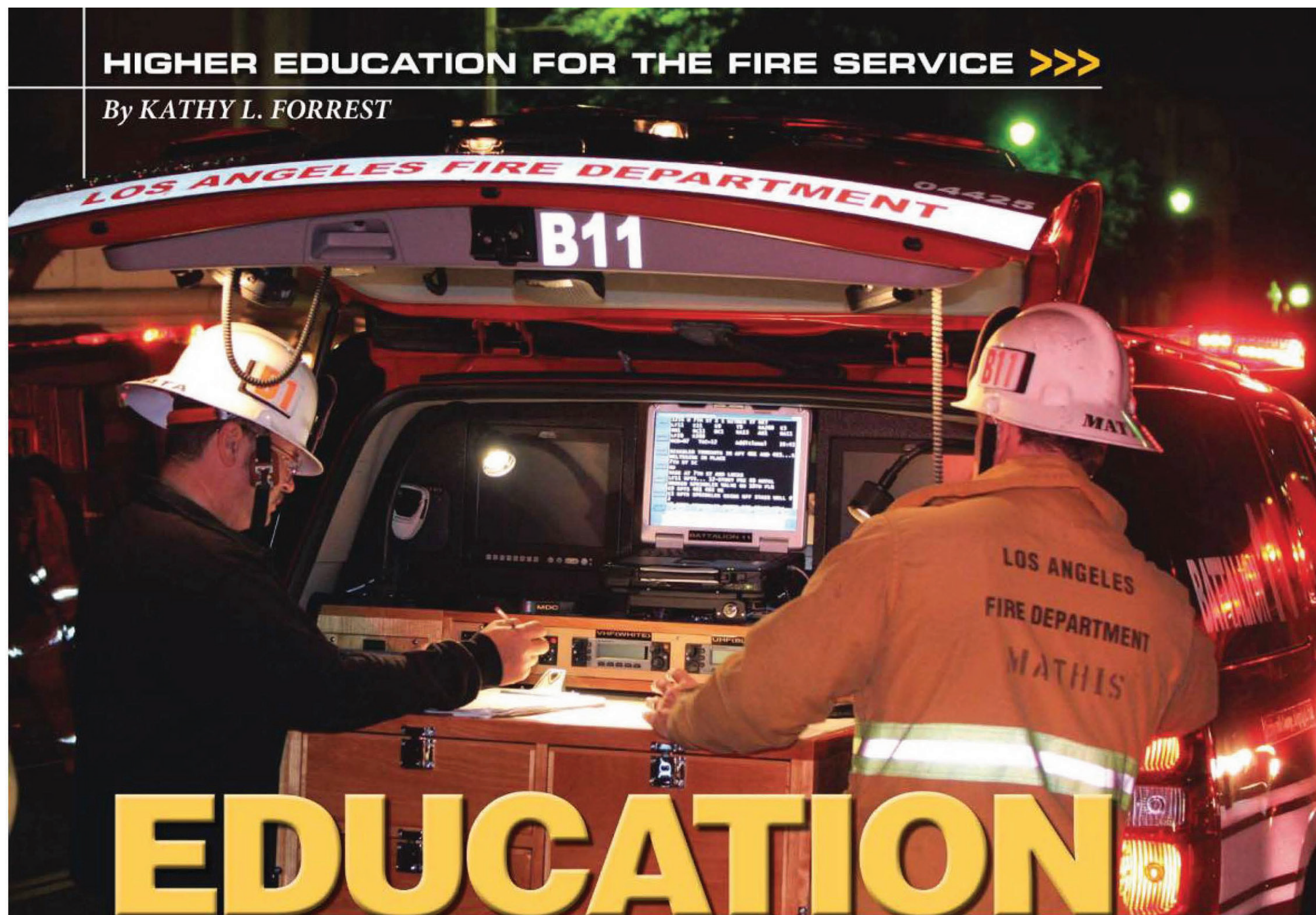


By KATHY L. FORREST



Jeff Zimmerman

EDUCATION

Promotes Effective Emergency Management

Today's public safety challenges demand multi-faceted & highly educated leaders. By Kathy L. Forrest

The problems facing public safety officials today are complex, requiring the attention of multi-faceted, highly educated leaders. The rapidly evolving profession of emergency management will require leaders who not only can apply their practical skills, but use social and natural science, innovative technology, superior business management skills, executive leadership skills and theory-based knowledge to mitigate, prepare for, respond to and recover from the increased hazards in the United States.

Through higher education, emergency managers are able to broaden their vision for public safety and begin to share in the responsibility for the social, economic and quality of life challenges and build resilient American communities. In the past, practical public safety training has not kept pace with changing demographic and the evolving legal environment nor has it promoted professional managerial skill sets or addressed cultural competencies. In addition to these shortcomings, the catastrophes we face are different. Emergency managers have not been prepared for increased numbers of natural disasters due to climate changes or shifts in population, which placed an increased number of people living in high-hazard areas. Today's mega-cities also have complex social systems in which the lessons learned from past emergencies are no longer applicable. Emergency managers are not prepared to lead multi-disciplinary teams to address threats to significant number of people, such as emerging pandemics or the current threat of terrorism in the United States.

The evolving disaster landscape and the need to bolster the emergency management profession has attracted the concern of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) training branch, the Emergency Management Institute (EMI). In its 2009 strategic plan, EMI strives to "contribute to the further legitimization of the emergency management profession through the establishment and growth of an academic emergency management discipline." (EMI, 2009, p.7)

As the level of professionalism increases to meet the new demands and society's expectations, the profile of the emergency

management subject matter expert must also change. Assigning emergency management duties to a public safety official without professional training and higher education will no longer be adequate. The profession now requires a person with a more diverse background. Skills in social and natural sciences will be needed to forecast future events and calculate the amount of potential damage and loss of life and property. These skill sets are often missing in traditional public safety training offerings.

Emergency management is a "lateral field of knowledge that spans as many as 35 different traditional academic and professional fields many qualifications are indeed relevant." (Alexander, 2008) As such, the optimum professional competencies would be best obtained by applying the knowledge learned from a master's degree program in emergency management. The academic path to achieve this goal, could progress in two manners: a straight academic progression in undergraduate and graduate studies in emergency management; or a tiered academic progression in which the professional uses practical skills and bachelor degree studies in a complementary profession and graduate studies in emergency management.

In the past, the thrust of emergency management efforts were mostly focused on response and recovery tasks. However, new threats have shifted efforts toward mitigation and preparedness. This will require professional communications and managerial skills with new partners, particularly engineers, architects, urban planners, medical workers and law enforcement intelligence agencies. "Higher education will position communities to develop a culture of preparedness and prevention wherein the emergency manager understands and accepts the importance of community capacity building; and wherein the emergency manager more actively brings people together from a variety of backgrounds and disciplines to refract problems through the prism of complementary minds allied in common purpose." (EMI, 2009, p.7) The profession of emergency management needs senior leaders to develop the culture of preparedness.

As the profession continues to grow, EMI strives to support continued growth of existing emergency management collegiate programs by defining core curriculum at each academic level. (EMI, 2009, p. 8) It is essential that the core curriculum address competencies in executive leadership. Dr. John Hook advises that in recent years, many organizations have experienced crises due

to failures in leadership at the top. (Hook, 2008, p. 1) As such, development of senior leaders should be a high priority and he has written a book outlining the requirements for senior executive effectiveness. On a routine basis emergency managers address risk, risk avoidance, promote change of policies, procedures and behaviors and ultimately lead during crisis situations. "Leadership is more important during times of trouble." (Hook, 2008, p. 352) Emergencies are a fact of American life and threaten safety, property and the economy. The ability to manage during a crisis can be developed through an expanded leadership knowledge base attained in a master's degree program in emergency management.

"A quickly changing social landscape, changing job roles, rapid technological advancement, domestic terrorism and increased scrutiny have combined to renew the debate over higher education" for public safety workers. (Roberg and Bonn, 2004) EMI has also acknowledged a need to create new knowledge and its strategic plan calls for research through the EMI higher education community. Highly educated emergency managers are needed to answer this call for action.

The profession of emergency management has evolved from the disciplines of law enforcement, fire-rescue and the military. Police officers report that "officers with criminal justice degrees reported that the degree substantially improved their knowledge and abilities on a wide range of areas from the criminal justice system to conceptual and managerial skills." (Carlan, 2007) "Police officers with criminal justice degrees value its mental and conceptual contributions." (Carlan, 2007) So, it is true when fulfilling the functions of emergency management. Higher education will better position our communities for identify risk, mitigate and manage risk when needed.

"When people are seriously injured they expect good, professional medical care to be readily available, but curiously when major emergencies have turned into mass-casualty incidents we have been content to leave their management to people who are completely lacking in formal education." (Alexander, 2008, p. 1) Society will no longer accept reactive emergency management.

The costs of emergency management failures are increasing and the just-in-time emergency management will be too costly. This disaster inflation phenomenon is the result of population shifts and increased infrastructure replacement values. Cities across the nation are becoming more densely populated and complex. Communities may have emergency managers with the most innovative and sophisticated technology, vast amounts of equipment and staff, but if they do not have the leadership that can handle the problem, regardless of the risks, failures will occur with huge financial implications.

The future of emergency management is bright as more and more quality academic programs are surfacing across the nation. It is critical that the profession evolves to the senior executive level to best position our country to prevent and prepare for disasters.

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