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Independent study
Fall 2021

Individual interview; Hannah Myers, Current position: Emergency Management Specialist, Rowlett, Texas

Abstract

The field of disaster science has grown exponentially in the past five years. This increased demand presents new challenges in the growing field of disaster management education and in particular, public health disaster management education. While the demand for public health disaster management professionals is increasing, the field is rapidly increasing in complexity, and practitioners are expected to have a wide range of skill sets, including analytic, communications, problem-solving and critical thinking. The demand for disaster managers is growing in parallel to the number of natural disasters and crises. According to a 2020 FEMA survey; both undergrad and graduate programs have seen a 50% increase in enrollment and expect an increase in enrollment over the next three years¹. The effort to educate these professionals is hampered however by a lack of high-quality efficient programs, both undergrad and graduate, especially for those aspiring to careers in public health settings. There is demand for graduates with skills that are applicable in the disaster management field, but we don't know, for instance, what skills are specifically needed in today's challenging environment in the field of public health disaster management. This study will investigate what additional and or new skills, is in demand for today's public health disaster

Objective:

I met with alumnus Hannah via Zoom, on Wednesday, October 20, 2021, this interview is part of my independent study identifying any new skills that are needed for the growing and evolving field of disaster science/management. Hannah has provided such profound insight and identified skills needed to be successful in the field that I decided to write an individual paper highlighting her responses. Hannah graduated from NYU with both an MPH and the Advanced Certificate in Public Health Disaster Science, Policy and Practice in May 2020. her current title is Emergency Management Specialist for the county of Rowlett, Texas and she has been in her position for almost a year. It took Hannah approximately 7 months to obtain her current position, which was created in response to the Covid-19 crisis and is part of a team of three; two full time professionals and one intern. Hannah mentioned that similar positions are being created based on need, and that's how her position was created.

I had sent her the questions beforehand via email in preparation for the Zoom interview.

Q: What would you tell a freshman student just starting the certificate program?

A: Although the certificate provides an excellent foundation, the student must be aware that there is a lot of learning on the job, the professionals I encountered on the job have already had a bachelor's or master's degree in emergency management. Be prepared to know that your education doesn't end when you graduate, there is a lot of on-the-job training on the field.

Also; people have no idea what Emergency Management means- so be prepared to explain what it is. Have the elevator speech ready when people ask you.

Q: Were there any new skills you found you needed to learn for your current job?

A: I had to learn weather monitoring, learn how to read radars, and weather terminology, it's vital for professionals residing outside of New York, especially in small counties like Rowlett, Texas

Q: Are there any skills you felt that the certificate program should provide to future students?

A: A scenario-based course where you could actually learn to manage an incident from beginning to completion. Project management is key in the disaster management field. Time management is also a very valuable skill to learn.

Q: Did you come across any surprises in your current position? if yes, what were they?

A: Yes, Financial management - FEMA reimbursement – after an event the county can request reimbursement, how to receive and process the required paperwork; that is a real marketable skill.

Q: Were there any skills that you wish you knew when you started your position?

A: In class we took FEMA courses like 200 and 700, both are excellent, but I also recommend taking courses 300 and 400, especially important if students who want jobs in the Incident Command Center anywhere in the country.

E0300: ICS 300: Intermediate Incident Command System for Expanding Incidents

E0400: ICS 400: Advanced Incident Command System for Command and General Staff Complex Incidents

FEMA in-person courses – 300 and 400 – do a class on the FEMA courses or specific courses – planning sessions chief operating. The student will receive exposure to a variety of positions and what they mean, they can try operations, management or finance, general staff, and command staff for ICC. These courses give students an understanding of what they want to do after graduation.

Q: Which course in the certificate program give you the foundation you needed to be successful in your position?

A: The most valuable course in the certificate program was risk communication with Dr. Abramson – I use the skills I learned in the course daily.
Project management- skills to manage and work with people. Another valuable skill is to know how the fire service, police service, and public works operate, perhaps putting people in a ride-along with fire service, police service, and public works to understand what infrastructure is and how it keeps the city running. The gas, electricity, and sewer lift stations would be interesting to experience since the job calls for protecting them it – would be a great experience to see how it all works.

Hannah went on to say that students need to be aware that this is not a nine to five job, although there are times you are behind the desk filling out paperwork and working on plans, most of the time you are out in the field. She is on call 24/7, especially when there is an extreme weather event on the horizon, such as a hurricane. She and her team are alerted and working with the county to make sure the preparations are in place.

Conclusion:

Hannah provided insightful, excellent concepts that can be incorporated into future competencies. Hannah's position was created in response to the Covid-19 crisis, which is proof positive that the disaster science/management field is constantly growing and evolving. With both climate change and extreme weather events increasing in frequency; positions like Hannah's will also increase and graduates from both the certificate and soon graduate program will only continue to be in demand.

References

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