

## Homeland Security Education: Reading the Tea Leaves

STEVE RECCA Naval Postgraduate School, Center for Homeland Defense and Security

### COMMENTARY

Many of you will be reading this issue of the Journal of Homeland Security Education as you begin the fall semester course load. You may find some comfort—or, at least, a bit of *schadenfreude*—in knowing that this essay is being written during the crunch of grading finals and end of term projects, the stress of which is now but a distant, hazy memory. One can only hope.

That the writing coincides with grading lends some thought to a summative evaluation of the state of homeland security education. At the risk of offending just about everyone, here is the progress report: Overall, homeland security education gets a solid C.<sup>1</sup> Our community has done plenty right. Yet, we have lots of room for improvement. Of course, the grade is entirely subjective, and higher education is notoriously famous for avoiding self-evaluation. But, allow a few words of explanation to either make some sense or dig a deeper hole.

In the decade since 9/11 jump-started homeland security as a *discipline* within higher education, there has been a rapid and steady growth in the number and quality of academic offerings. Universities—and, more often than not, a highly motivated individual faculty member or small team—pushed hard to identify, build, and deliver core homeland security content to a student population hungry to understand a new security paradigm. Academia's motivations were straightforward:

- Unique aspects of homeland security set the field apart from other disciplines;
- High levels of student demand drove development of homeland security-related content, particularly in areas of terrorism, infrastructure protection, and related strategies; policies, and legal issues; and,
- Government interest—and funding—stoked the initial fire.

Higher education's response during this initial phase was—on the whole—positive.<sup>2</sup> The success of the first university homeland security programs fueled interest that led to the rapid expansion in offerings that we see today.<sup>3</sup> Public, private and for-profit universities have grabbed the baton and have run with it.

Enlightened self-interest? Sure. But, the quick (in academic time) acknowledgement of the need to bring homeland security into higher education is a true success story. Perhaps we can call this first round of activity “Homeland Security Version 1.0.”

Not surprising, higher education tracked closely with developments in national policy, strategy, and funding. So, when Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast and government structures and processes designed to respond proved inadequate, universities looked for ways to engage. In many cases, the existing programs that were closest to the problem were those working homeland security, where—even with the focus on terrorism prevalent in 2005—education and research already wrestled with tough questions in intra and interagency relationships, technical challenges in a multidimensional operating environment, as well as regulatory considerations. Katrina and the aftermath may have provided the forcing function, but again academia came through the period with a fundamental appreciation that homeland security and emergency management were conjoined, in the classroom if not in culture. This, in simplified form, might be classified as “Homeland Security Version 2.0.”

Looking back, Versions 1.0 and 2.0 might be considered the *prerequisites* for the upper-level work at hand. As a class, we did pretty well in these early iterations, with a strong “B” sent to the Registrar’s Office by 2008. But, since then? In my role with the Naval Postgraduate School Center for Homeland Defense and Security, I travel to universities and agencies around the U.S. and Canada sharing resources, advising on content where appropriate, and listening/learning. It is absolutely not the case that program *quality* has decreased. On the contrary, programs are refining and maturing their homeland security and emergency management content, while developing assessment tools to align content with the demands of the professional field and job market.

The homeland security education challenge is not one of quality, but of *breadth*. We did v1.0 and v2.0 pretty darn well. Faculty at the Associate’s, Bachelor’s and Master’s levels are teaching strong, well designed core homeland security and emergency management courses. Yet, are we—in another context—fighting the last war? Outside of a few well resourced or extraordinarily creative programs, there is no wave of new content or new offerings in *exotic* areas of homeland security and emergency management. “Exotic” refers to those seemingly peripheral elements of our discipline, which may prove the cornerstone to understanding the next generation of homeland security challenges. A short list might include segments of “concern” areas already included in many survey

courses:

- **Cyber Security.** While today's hot topic, the cyber domain—and, in particular, the policy aspects—will clearly outlive most of us as an area of research and education.
- **Border Security.** Much of the content appears to focus on gates, guards and guns. *NEXGEN* border courses might consider cultural, financial, social, and technical aspects of security.<sup>4</sup>
- **Arctic Security.** The Arctic would seem to be a microcosm challenging security issues: environmental, transportation, border security, international relations and national sovereignty. It might seem a stretch to connect the Arctic to homeland security. If for no other reason than that the Departments of Homeland Security and Defense are looking at the region, homeland security education should consider preparing to expand under the Northern Lights.
- **Comparative Homeland Security.** The last issue of the JHSE published a solid study on European versus U.S. approaches to homeland security (and homeland security education).
- **Risk Management.** “Risk”—very much like “security”—is an oft-used term, but with different meaning depending on where you sit. The financial industry thrives on taking risks (or, having others bet *their* money on risk), while physicians and security officers seek to eliminate risk. This seems an area where our community both can learn from and inform colleagues in business, insurance and medical disciplines.<sup>5</sup>
- **Homeland Security Education Delivery.** Without opening a rather large can o' worms with a discussion on in-residence versus online learning, perhaps there is reason to consider the impact of the next bogey: *freeware*. Is homeland security and emergency management *education* a likely home for developing and offering degree-compatible content—for free—via the Web?

Save for the last, these topics are introduced in many homeland security academic programs. The question is whether we are delivering the depth and breadth of content that will stir the critical thinking about next-generation threats, hazards, and unknowns. And, more importantly, what is missing now from our content? The JHSE, along with its sister publications,<sup>6</sup> is a useful forum to start and *sustain* the conversation around the future of the homeland security academic discipline. To bump our “C” grade up a notch or two, the challenge will be to work the hard edges of uncertainty and create Homeland Security Version 3.0 before the next major event.

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<sup>1</sup> The author does realize that in some circles, a grade of “C” would be grounds to commit *seppuku*. In the context of this essay, the grade might best be described as the sittin’ on the fence.

- 2 This is not to say that the process of introducing homeland security in higher education was easy or simple. There clearly were some notable exceptions of intrauniversity blood-letting.
- 3 Without definitive and regularly updated research on the number of courses and degree programs in homeland security, one measure is the partner network created through the Naval Postgraduate School Center for Homeland Defense and Security. At the time of this writing, the network included 286 institutional members, with more than a 1,000 individual representatives.
- 4 As with many of the subject areas, border security education lends itself to cross-pollination of ideas and content from the more mature academic programs.
- 5 For more on homeland security, risk and business, see the book review published in this issue of the JHSE.
- 6 Homeland Security Affairs Journal ([www.hsaj.org](http://www.hsaj.org)) and the Journal of Homeland Security and Emergency Management.