

THE EFFICACY OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT CERTIFICATION TRAINING IN
GEORGIA THROUGH THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LOCAL EMERGENCY
MANAGERS

by

Jack Robby Westbrook

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenology qualitative inquiry was to understand the efficacy of the Basic Georgia Certified Emergency Manager Program curriculum on preparing local emergency managers in each of Georgia's eight geographical regions for their role.

Emergency managers are professionals tasked with helping communities and organizations to anticipate all hazards and undertake measures to deal with disasters (McEntire 2007). Demands placed on local emergency managers have increased significantly since the turn of the century. Between 2002 and 2020, the number and frequency of disasters have dramatically increased, and Georgia's social and economic demographics have undergone significant changes, presenting new challenges for local emergency managers (Rubin and Cutter 2020, 2; United States Census; NOAA 2021). Moreover, contemporary research has identified training and core competencies needed for emergency managers to be successful (Peerbolte 2010; Comfort 2005; Blanchard 2005; Kiltz 2009). Through training and experience, emergency managers must be proficient at the tasks required to lead the community through disaster preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery (Padilla 2015, 29). The research question was: How prepared do emergency managers feel they are for their role as a local emergency manager following their completion of the Georgia Certified Emergency Manager Program curriculum?

Using hermeneutic methods, the lived experiences of study participants revealed the current Georgia Certified Emergency Manager Program curriculum failed to prepare local emergency managers for their role.

Keywords: Emergency Management, Disaster, Curriculum, Certification

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the Author and Finisher of our faith, God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who died for our sins so that we may live in his presence forever. I also dedicate this dissertation to my wife Vicki. She has supported me from the time I conjured up the idea of attempting this massive undertaking, then through each class, and finally throughout the dissertation process. God has blessed me every day of my life. Even on my worst day he was there. God sent Vicki into my life at a time when I needed someone to love and that would love me back. I am thankful for her and for God, who has once again blessed my life. The Apostle James wrote that every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father whom there is no variation shadow due to change. Vicki is a good and perfect gift. I could have never completed this program without her.

Finally, I must mention yet another gift that God has blessed me with, my granddaughter Violet. Her bright eyes, sass, humor, and loving nature truly work together to shine a light on my life. I pray that my dedication to this process will someday encourage her to love the Lord with all her heart and reach as high as she can.

Acknowledgments

While this dissertation is dedicated to my wife, I must acknowledge several people who have guided me along the way and made sacrifices so that I could be successful. First, I must acknowledge my son and his wife, my daughter and her husband, and my precious granddaughter Violet. I have on many occasions been forced to decline invitations during the past three years in order to meet the program's requirements. I hope they will forgive me and understand how important it is to dedicate yourself to a commitment. I can now make it up to each of them.

Each of my professors at Liberty University have been special; however, a few stand out to me for their commitment to the program and each student. Dr. Kahlid Fischer was my very first professor. His knowledge, constant encouragement, and faithfulness to our savior Jesus Christ allowed me to move forward with the understanding that public policy must follow biblical teachings or our government will never meet its full potential or serve God and protect his people. Dr. Fischer taught me why it is important to be a champion for Christ.

I would also like to acknowledge the most patient person I have ever met, my dissertation chair, Dr. Shannon McAteer. Dr. McAteer is the most patient and technically demanding professor I have ever had. I am thankful for his persistent insistence on getting things done right. Dr. McAteer has served his country honorably and now serves the Lord as a faithful educator. Dr. Melissa Beaudoin has been caring and supportive, willing to give me the kick in the pants needed to work through tough issues. Dr. Beaudoin has demonstrated her commitment to Christ and her students constantly. Dr. McAteer and Dr. Beaudoin, I could not have had a better committee and you will always be in my thoughts. Liberty University is lucky to have both these dedicated professionals.

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List of Abbreviations

Certified Emergency Manager (CEM)

Department of Homeland Security (DHS)

Emergency Operations Center (EOC)

Emergency Support Functions (ESF)

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

Georgia Certified Emergency Managers Program (GACEMP)

Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA)

Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP)

Incident Command System (ICS)

International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM)

Local Emergency Operations Plan (LEOP)

National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)

National Incident Management System (NIMS)

Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (THIRA)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The actions of government at all levels associated with a disaster include protecting life, property, and the environment, which are forms of public policy. Over time these policies have expanded to include provisions for basic human needs and restoration of critical infrastructure. That said, we must remember that God is the ultimate source of truth, power, and authority; the creator ruler of the universe knows everything and controls all things (Fischer 1998, 13). God is clear in our responsibility to create and uphold Biblically based public policy. Romans 13:1 states: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except God, and God" has instituted those that exist. Scriptures guide us as a society to make sure our personal and public actions take care of those in need: "For you have been a stronghold to the poor, a stronghold to the needy in his distress, a shelter from the storm, and a shade from the heat; for the breath of the ruthless is like a storm against a wall" (Isaiah 25:4). Practicing emergency managers must understand the purpose of public policy related to disaster leadership and management and how those policies are likely to affect people within the community.

In practice, local emergency managers assume various responsibilities to address hazards and risks within their community. Working alongside public administrators and elected officials, local emergency managers must be subject-matter experts in developing sound disaster public policy and the community emergency management program's organization. When local emergency managers make recommendations to public administrators and elected officials who take action based on those recommendations, the emergency manager has become part of the policymaking process. Following training required for certification, emergency managers should demonstrate competency in the schema for emergency management. Emergency management

directors in Georgia come from varied backgrounds and practice within very different geographical and socioeconomic areas. Some emergency management directors are full-time paid, whereas others, often in more rural areas, are either part-time or volunteer. Georgia's statute requires all emergency management directors to complete the Georgia Certified Emergency Managers Program (GACEMP) curriculum within two years of local appointment.

Background

Disaster response and recovery are multidimensional manifestations of survivors, citizen volunteers, government organizations, the faith-based community, private businesses, and organized volunteer entities. At the tip of the spear for all things disaster is the local emergency manager. Local emergency managers often face new challenges, including increasingly catastrophic disasters and demographic changes within their area of responsibility (Coaffee and Clarke, 2015). Rubin (2020, 4) argued there are no accepted quantitative criteria for determining what makes one disaster worse than another. In some rural communities, the loss of one life or the closing due to disaster of the town's primary employer may be devastating. The threats posed to communities today require well-trained local emergency managers who demonstrate the cognitive ability to prepare the whole community.

A comprehensive local emergency management program follows a sequence of five mission areas designed to limit the loss of life, reduce damage to communities, and allow for the efficient recovery from disaster. These five mission areas include prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery, each supported by guiding frameworks published by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA 2018 see Table 1.0).

Table 1.0. FEMA framework mission areas

Prevention	Prevent, avoid, or stop an imminent, threatened, or actual act of terrorism.
Protection	Protect our citizens, residents, visitors, and assets against the greatest threats and hazards in a manner that allows our interests, aspirations, and way of life to thrive.
Mitigation	Reduce the loss of life and property by lessening the impact of future disasters.
Response	Respond quickly to save lives, protect property and the environment, and meet basic human needs in the aftermath of a catastrophic incident.
Recovery	Recover through a focus on the timely restoration, strengthening, and revitalization of infrastructure, housing, and a sustainable economy, as well as the health, the social, cultural, historical, and environmental fabric of communities affected by a catastrophic incident.

Source: FEMA 2018.

A central phenomenon must exist at the heart of qualitative research (Creswell and Baez 2020, 7). This research examined the extent to which the GACEMP curriculum trains local emergency managers to lead the community emergency management framework before, during, and after a disaster. The nationally accepted emergency management model consists of prevention, protection, mitigation strategies, response actions, and recovery operations (Kapucu 2008, 244). Emergency management practice is complex, characterized by decision-making within an environment where the issues are often ill-defined and changing, data are incomplete or unavailable, and the social and political ramifications are often intermingled (Kendra and Wachtendorf 2006, 2). Disaster response and recovery require a whole community effort, and the emergency manager must have the ability to bring very different organizations together to ensure effective outcomes.

Emergency managers must understand the natural and social sciences to understand the community's needs (Peerbolte and Collins 2013, 5). Without this knowledge, erroneous decision-making can occur. With this in mind, the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM), in conjunction with the FEMA's Higher Education Project, published the

Principles of Emergency Management. These principles provide a clear baseline of knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for emergency managers. Numerous organizations have endorsed and accepted these principles, including the IAEM and National Fire Protection Association (NFPA; Peerbolte and Collins 2013, 7).

This study investigated local emergency managers' lived experiences using hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative inquiry. This study's results illuminate the GACEMP curriculum's effectiveness in preparing the local emergency manager for their role.

Situation to Self

As a practicing emergency manager for thirty-eight years, I have experienced a wide range of disasters at the local and regional levels. The inspiration for conducting this study came from my love of the emergency management profession, combined with my passion for teaching adult learners. Furthermore, I have observed many emergency managers engaged in practice during and after major disasters. These observations revealed significant discrepancies between the actions of practicing emergency managers and the accepted principles of emergency management. During my career, I have developed an understanding of emergency management organizations and processes across the state of Georgia, enabling me to solicit participants in a nonthreatening or biased environment. I am not in a supervisory role over any of the study participants. Controls to ensure that each participant's interview results are kept completely confidential were implemented. Participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time. Ensuring that newly appointed local emergency managers have the training they need to be successful is the highest priority.

Embedded within the study's philosophical assumptions are a well-developed understanding of the world in which the researcher lives and practices (Creswell and Poth 2017).

Moreover, as a researcher, I seek to recognize perspectives other than my own and gather various positions. I have developed a strong axiological philosophy towards remaining relevant and meeting the needs of budding emergency managers. I firmly believe emergency managers must continuously improve themselves and evaluate their views as practitioners to ensure they stay relevant in their field. I also feel that the basic certification training must provide a strong understanding of emergency management foundational elements.

Problem Statement

Demands placed on local emergency managers have increased significantly since the turn of the century. Between 2002 and 2020, the number and frequency of disasters have dramatically increased, and Georgia's social and economic demographics have undergone significant changes, presenting new challenges for local emergency managers (Rubin and Cutter 2020, 2; United States Census 2019; NOAA 2021). Oyola-Yemaiel and Wilson (2005 118) argued that the lack of training in disaster preparedness, response, and characteristics can lead to poor outcomes following a disaster. Contemporary research has identified training and core competencies needed for emergency managers to be successful (Peerbolte 2010; Comfort 2005; Blanchard 2005; Kiltz 2009). Through training and experience, emergency managers must be proficient at the tasks required to lead the community through disaster preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery (Padilla 2015, 29). Peerbolte and Collins (2013, 59) argued that training and experience significantly influence local emergency managers' abilities to think critically.

Emergency management practitioners should receive basic training and engage in comprehensive emergency management, including prevention, preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery (Oyola-Yemaiel and Wilson 2005 118). Moreover, Waugh and Sadiq (2011, 2) argued that basic emergency management training must also include leadership,

problem-solving, social science, geography, and government administration. Recent research has identified gaps between the GACEMP curriculum and basic training elements. The primary research question is as follows: How prepared do emergency managers feel they are for their role as a local emergency manager following their completion of the GACEMP curriculum?

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative inquiry was to evaluate the efficacy of the GACEMP curriculum on preparing local emergency managers in each of Georgia's eight geographical regions for their role. The research has highlighted the GACEMP curriculum's effectiveness and given a voice to the local emergency manager.

Significance of the Study

Recent research has identified gaps between the GACEMP curriculum and basic emergency management training elements and core competencies. The researcher found that the current GACEMP curriculum has few of the basic training elements and core competencies emergency managers need. It is important to understand if these gaps have affected the lived experiences of local emergency managers. Local emergency managers' lived experiences were collected and analyzed through phenomenological qualitative methods including in-depth, open-ended interviews (Leedy and Ormrod 2012, 148). Through careful analysis and reanalysis, participant responses were used to identify themes related to the current GACEMP curriculum's effectiveness. Findings from this study can be used to recommend changes to the current curriculum. Additional research opportunities were also identified during this study.

Research Questions

Primary Research Question

How prepared do emergency managers feel they are for their role as a local emergency manager following their completion of the GACEMP curriculum?

Definitions

1. *Agency* - A government element with a specific function offering a particular kind of assistance (National Incident Management System [NIMS] 2017).
2. *Authority Having Jurisdiction* - An entity with the authority and responsibility for developing, implementing, maintaining, and overseeing the qualification process within its organization or jurisdiction (NIMS 2017).
3. *Certification* - The authoritatively attesting process that requires individuals to meet qualifications established for essential incident management functions and, therefore, be qualified for specific positions (NIMS 2017).
4. *Credentialing* - Providing documentation that identifies personnel and authenticates and verifies their qualification for a particular position (NIMS 2017).
5. *Critical Infrastructure* - Assets, systems, and networks, whether physical or virtual, so vital to the United States that the incapacitation or destruction of such assets, systems, or networks (NIMS 2017).
6. *Disaster* - An incident, either natural or human-made, that caused significant human and economic impacts or disrupted critical infrastructure, requiring a response beyond that of a single agency (FEMA).

7. *Disaster Recovery* - “The process of restoring, rebuilding, and reshaping the physical, social, economic, and natural environment through pre-event planning and post-event actions” (Horney et al. 2017, 126).
8. *Emergency Management* - The managerial function charged with creating the framework within each community to prepare for, mitigate against, respond to, and recover from disasters no matter the cause (FEMA).
9. *Emergency Manager* - Professionals who practice the discipline of emergency management by applying science, technology, planning, and management techniques to coordinate the activities of the wide array of agencies and organizations dedicated to preventing and responding to extreme events that threaten, disrupt, or destroy lives or property (FEMA).
10. *Federal Disaster Declaration* - A declaration made by the President of the United States following the request from any governor for federal assistance in accordance with the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (FEMA).
11. *Incident* - An occurrence, natural or human-made, that necessitates a response to protecting life or property (NIMS 2017).
12. *Local Government* - Public entities responsible for the security and welfare of a designated area as established by law: a county, municipality, city, town, township, or local public authority (NIMS 2017).
13. *Mitigation* - The capabilities necessary to reduce the loss of life and property from natural and/or human-made disasters by lessening the impacts of disasters (NIMS 2017).

Summary

The practice of emergency management at the local level can be complex with rapidly changing situations and unique geographical variations. Between 2002 and 2020, the number and frequency of disasters have dramatically increased, and Georgia's social and economic demographics have undergone significant changes, presenting new challenges for local emergency managers. Furthermore, research since 2005 has identified training and core competencies emergency managers require to be successful (Peerbolte 2010; Comfort 2005; Blanchard 2005; Kiltz 2009). The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenology qualitative inquiry was to understand the GACEMP curriculum's efficacy on preparing local emergency managers in each of Georgia's eight geographical regions for their role.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework followed by a review of the relevant literature. This literature supports the need for well-trained, proactive emergency management practitioners by describing the state of disaster in the United States, evolution of emergency management public policy, and complexities emergency managers face. A review of the current GACEMP curriculum is presented to determine if the courses offered provide the training needed by today's emergency managers as identified by recent scholarship (McEntire 2018; Rubin and Cutter 2020; Peerbolte 2010; Comfort 2005; Blanchard 2005; Kiltz 2009; Peerbolte and Collins 2013).

Theoretical Framework

Disasters are high-pressure situations that place demands on responders and the leaders who make potentially life-or-death decisions with limited information (Useem, Cook, and Sutton 2005). Emergency managers assume a role within the community, preparing for, responding to, and recovering from a disaster. Moreover, training is required to prepare emergency managers for these important roles. Emergency managers' lived experiences are important as this research sought to determine the GACEMP curriculum's effectiveness.

The theoretical framework for this qualitative study emerged from an interpretive perspective. Most qualitative research comes from an interpretive perspective, which sees the world as constructed, interpreted, and experienced by people interacting with other people or phenomena (Tolley et al. 2016, 23). Within the interpretive paradigm, phenomenology is described as the study of phenomena as they manifest in our experience, how one perceives and understands phenomena, and the meaning phenomena have in our subjective practice (Teherani

et al. 2015, 669). Leedy and Ormrod (2010, 141) argued that phenomenological studies try to understand what it is like to experience a specific phenomenon. Neubauer, Witkop, and Varpio (2019, 91) described the goal of phenomenology as seeking the essence of a phenomenon through the perspectives of those who have experienced it. Phenomenology seeks to expose the fundamentals of a phenomenon using descriptive language in such a way that it uncovers new meanings of a specific experience. Phenomenology is a powerful approach to qualitative inquiry as it focuses on an individual's lived experiences (Neubauer, Witkop, and Varpio 2019, 91).

Qualitative methods have experienced varying support across multiple disciplines, with anthropology, sociology, and political science providing the most support. Furthermore, the use of qualitative methods in emergency management and disaster research is not a new idea. The first known use of qualitative inquiry in a disaster was the Halifax Study (Prince 1920), which incorporated qualitative traditions, including survivor and first responder interviews. Qualitative methods, including the naturalist paradigm, acknowledge the existence of multiple realities, holistic investigation, and the mutual influences of the researcher and participants (Erlandson et al. 1993). Because qualitative research is grounded in people's actual experiences, the possibility of identifying new, relevant questions becomes more likely (Phillips 2002, 203).

There are numerous methods associated with phenomenological qualitative inquiry. Neubauer, Witkop, and Varpio (2019, 91) identified seven methods, including three more contemporary approaches to phenomenology: lifeworld research, postintentional, and interpretive phenomenology. However, these approaches, along with more established phenomenological methods such as transcendental phenomenology, require the researcher to stand apart and not allow their knowledge of the subject, including biases and preconceptions, to influence participants (Neubauer, Witkop, and Varpio 2019, 94).

Instead of disconnecting the researcher's subjective perspective, hermeneutic phenomenology recognizes that the researcher, like the research subject, cannot be rid of his/her lifeworld (Neubauer, Witkop and Varpio 2019, 94). Instead, the researcher's past experiences and knowledge are valuable guides to the inquiry. Hermeneutic phenomenology is a qualitative research method that not only describes a phenomenon but explores the phenomenon to convey its meaning in the context of everyday life (Bynum and Varpio 2018, 252). The goal of hermeneutic phenomenology is to seek other people's experiences and reflections to better understand the meaning of a specific human phenomenon (Bynum and Varpio 2018, 252).

Three features of hermeneutic phenomenology distinguish it from other qualitative methods. These features include interpretive nature and focus on lived experiences, data collection and analysis processes, and the dynamic, thoughtful process of reflecting and writing, which guides data analysis (Bynum and Varpio 2018, 252). Hermeneutic phenomenology research findings often reveal researchers' values based on participant interviews, including what is said, what is said between the lines, and silence (Arunasalam 2018, 2). The researcher's education, practice, and knowledge lead to the consideration of emergency management training effectiveness for investigation. To ask the researcher to take an unbiased approach to the data is inconsistent with hermeneutic phenomenology's philosophical origins. Researchers working from this tradition must acknowledge their preconceptions and reflect on how their subjectivity is part of the analysis process (Neubauer, Witkop, and Varpio 2019, 95).

Hermeneutic phenomenology is uniquely positioned as a research methodology to understand local emergency managers' lived experiences following their completion of the GACEMP curriculum. The phenomenon of interest is emergency manager certification training curriculum in Georgia, focusing on how prepared emergency managers are for their role once

curriculum requirements are met. As such, all research participants were required to have completed the GACEMP curriculum and experienced at least one presidentially declared disaster since completing the curriculum.

Related Literature

The subjects of disaster and emergency management include a wide range of research topics, including social constructs, policy, politics, personnel, and incident management, just to name a few. This qualitative inquiry focused on the need for professional emergency managers and how the GACEMP curriculum prepares these emergency managers for their role in the context of disaster management before, during, and after the disaster. A framework was used to guide the literature review through a vast collection of scholarship on disaster and emergency management to identify the importance of highly trained local emergency managers (see figure 1.0.). All of the burdens of dealing with disaster, no matter how big or small, are felt intensely at the local level (McEntire 2007, 168). Emergency managers must practice within a complex web of responsibilities and challenges due to the increased number of disasters occurring across the United States, expanding disaster-related public policy, and changing demographics at the local level. Canton (2007, 1) argued that emergency management as a science rests on three pillars: knowledge of history, an understanding of human nature expressed in the social sciences, and specialized technical expertise in response mechanisms.

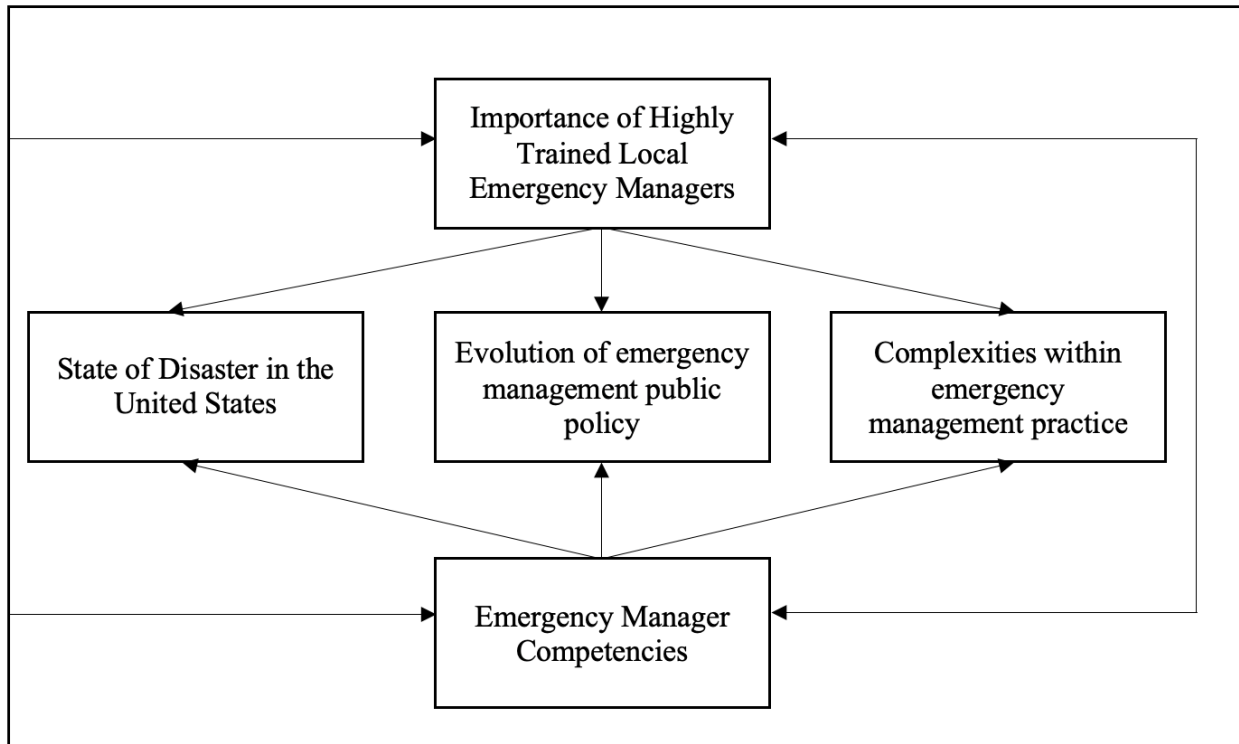


Figure 1.0. Framework for literature review.

State of Disaster in the United States

Throughout history, people have suffered from the impacts of disasters and responded in various ways. Emergencies, whether called incidents or disasters, have and will continue to affect humankind, especially in light of technological advances and increasing population densities (Padilla 2015, 6). Disasters cost the American people billions of dollars annually and place stress on both state and local governments. Rubin (2020, 1) categorized disasters into three distinct categories: human-caused deliberate, natural, and human-caused accidental. Each category has seen milestone events during the first decade of the twenty-first century (see table 2.0.).

Table 2.0. Disaster categories and milestone events

Human-Caused Deliberate	Natural	Human-Caused Accidental
September 11, 2001 Terror Attacks	August 28, 2004 Hurricane Katrina	April 10, 2010 BP Deep Water Horizon

Source: Rubin and Cutter 2020, 2.

Recent disasters, including Hurricane Sandy (\$51 billion), Hurricane Harvey (\$127 billion), and Hurricane Irma (\$51 billion), highlight an increase in the frequency of billion-dollar disasters in the United States (NOAA 2021). Lindell and Perry (2007, 8) defined disaster as “an event that produces greater losses than a community can handle, including casualties, property damage, and significant environmental damage.” Furthermore, Alesch, Arendt, and Holly (2009, 12) described disasters as extreme events that have severe adverse consequences for people and things. Disasters would not be possible without society. Ashley and Strader (2016) argued that disasters are extreme events interacting with human, social, and physical vulnerabilities. Although scholars debate the definition of disaster, the official definition used by the federal government for declaring a federal disaster, found within the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief Act (1988), states:

Any natural catastrophe including hurricane, tornado, storm, high water, wind-driven water, tidal wave, tsunami, earthquake, volcanic eruption, landslide, mudslide, snowstorm or drought, or, regardless of cause, any fire, flood, or explosion, in any part of the United States, which in the determination of the President causes damage of sufficient severity and magnitude to warrant major disaster assistance under this Act to supplement to efforts and available resources of states, local governments, and disaster relief organizations, in alleviating the damage, loss, hardship, or suffering.

Billion-dollar disasters have become the norm, with multiple catastrophic disasters occurring annually (Rubin and Cutter 2020, 4). According to the National Centers for Environmental Information, the United States has seen a dramatic increase in billion-dollar disasters between 1990 and 2019 (see table 3.0.).

Table 3.0 United States' billion-dollar disasters

Decade	Billion-Dollar Disasters	Costs	Deaths
1990–1999	53	272B	3,045
2000–2009	62	517B	3,091
2010–2019	119	807B	5217

Source: Data from the National Centers for Environmental Information.

Many of these disasters were not unexpected and stemmed from the predictable results of interactions between three major systems: the physical environment, social and demographic characteristics, and the constructed environments of a community (Mileti 1999, 3). Population growth across the United States is likely responsible for more natural hazard events turning into a disaster (Stromberg 2007, 202). The interaction of hazards with humans is a complicated matter, and local emergency managers should know how growth within the community increases risk. Not only has the number of billion-dollar disasters increased, but the number of deaths associated with all disasters in the United States has climbed as well.

The most definitive effect of a hazard, either natural or human-made, interacting with vulnerabilities is human mortality (Ashley and Strader 2016). From 1960 to 1989, the United States averaged 379 deaths annually from natural hazards; however, between 1990 and 2019, the annual average number of those killed by natural hazards increased to 573 (see figure 2.0.).

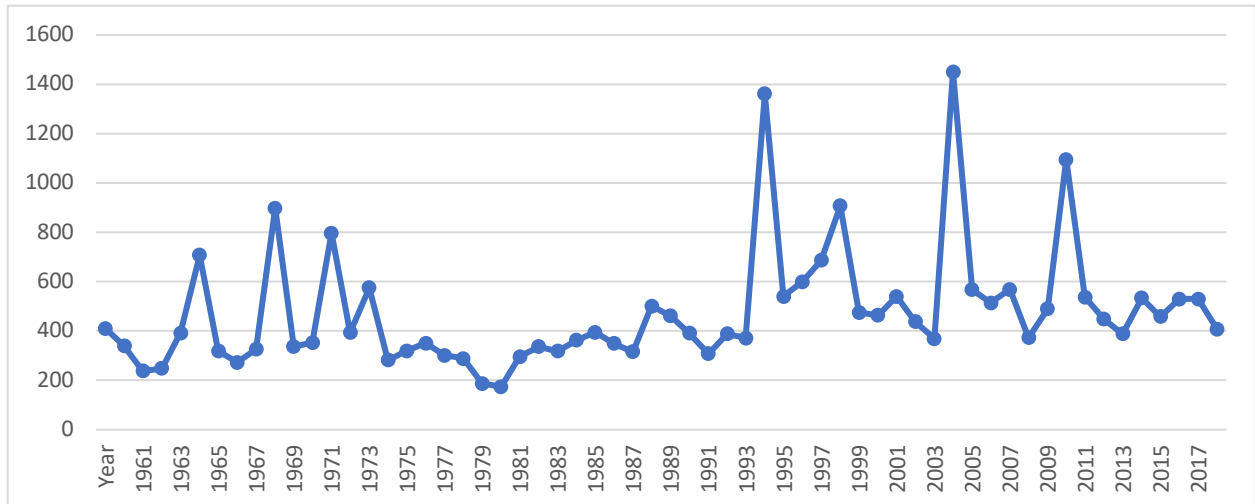


Figure 2.0. The United States' natural hazards deaths. Data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Another indicator of disaster severity is the number of federal disaster declarations approved annually. The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (1988) provides a pathway for state and tribal governments to request federal assistance for a disaster, including in-kind and monetary support. Between 2014 and 2019, all fifty states received at least one federal disaster declaration. During this same period, Georgia tied with four other states in receiving the fourth-most declarations (see figure 3.0). Since 1990, Georgia has averaged 1.6 federal declarations per year (see figure 4.0). The scope of hazards impacting Georgia between 1990 and 2019 with such destructive force to warrant federal assistance has ranged from winter storms to hurricanes (see table 4.0).

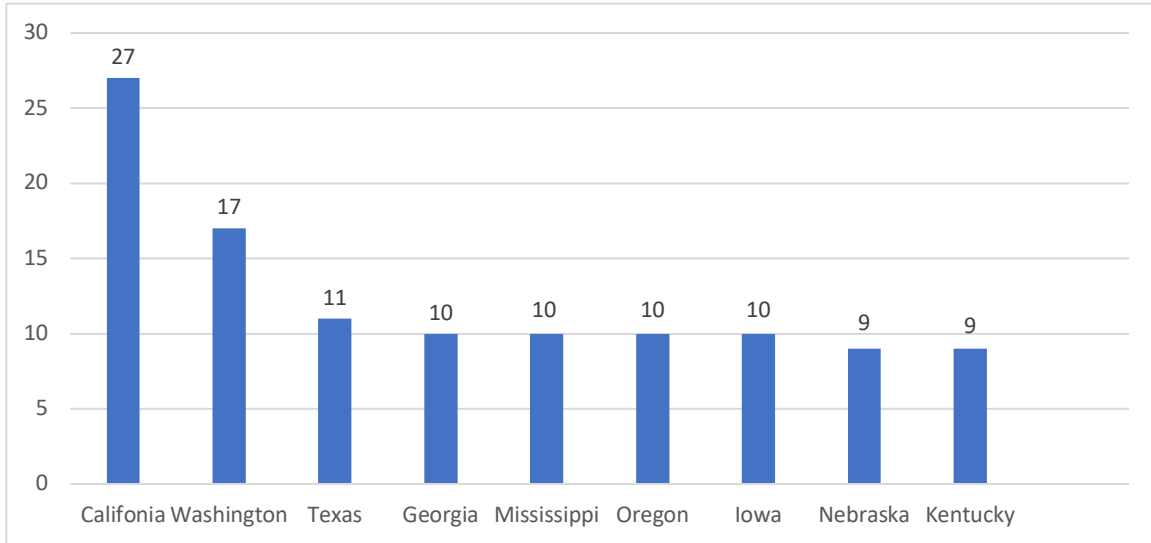


Figure 3.0. Top 10 states for FEMA disaster declarations 2014–2019. Source: FEMA.

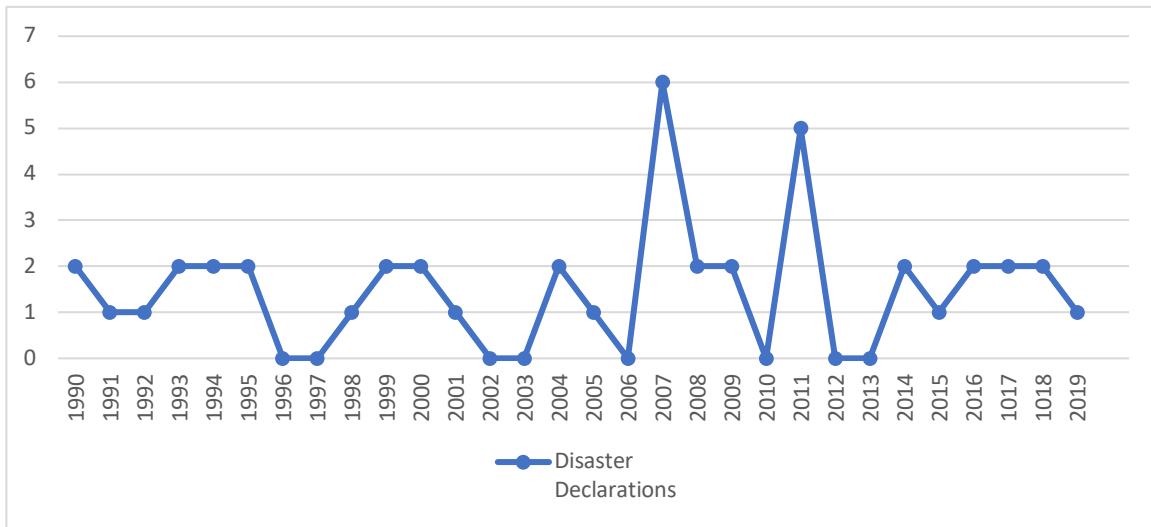


Figure 4.0. Georgia federal disaster declarations 1990–2019. Source: FEMA.

Table 4.0. Georgia disaster declarations 1990–2019 by hazard type

Severe Storms	Flooding	Tornadoes	Winter Storm	Wildfires	Hurricanes
2	6	13	4	12	11

Source: FEMA.

The United States is vulnerable to a wide range of hazards. Rubin (2020, 3) argued that Americans, including state and local emergency managers, expect the federal government to play

a dramatically expanded role in responding to disasters; however, Rubin found these expectations to be unrealistic. Georgia has received many federal disaster declarations; however, it is important to understand that these declared disasters only represent a small percentage of the local disasters and smaller incidents managed by the county emergency manager. Most local disasters and incidents fail to meet the requirements to qualify for federal assistance, leaving the local government with some state assistance to manage all disaster aspects. According to the National Weather Service, more than ten thousand storm-related damage incidents occurred in Georgia between 1990 and 2019. During this same period, Georgia only received forty-eight federal disaster declarations.

Evolution of Emergency Management Public Policy

It is common to look at an institution such as emergency management and simply assume it sprang into existence. In reality, emergency management has evolved due to many influences, including severe disasters (Canton 2007, 2). As with many other forms of public policy, disaster public policy began at the local and state levels, where communities came together to provide the needed aid during both response and recovery (Sylves 2020, 9). Initially, the response to a disaster in the United States was in an ad hoc manner where individuals and communities reacted to the emergency. As time has progressed, more formalized responses occurred with the development of departments and organizations. In the beginning, many of these organizations were fire departments in the United States, with almost no independent disaster organization standing alone. As the complexity of disasters increased, fire departments often formed emergency management functions, becoming dual-role organizations. During the 1950s, the emergency management paradigm shifted into a more cyclical paradigm of preparedness,

response, recovery, and mitigation (FEMA, 2010). Similarly, emergency management shifted to the community as a whole instead of an individual department (Rubin 2007).

From 1803 to 1947, governmental disaster relief was almost exclusively a state and local responsibility as the federal government had minimal standardized statutes to offer assistance. Congress authorized the first disaster assistance from the federal government in 1803, which provided financial aid to Portsmouth, New Hampshire following a devastating fire. In 1947, Congress ordered the War Assets Administration (WAA) and the Federal Works Agency (FWA) to deliver surplus federal supplies to areas impacted by disasters. Before 1950, Congress funded disaster recovery on an incident-by-incident basis, delaying help to those in need. In 1950, Congress acted in a more permanent way to provide disaster assistance by passing the Disaster Relief Act of 1950 (hud.gov).

In 1958, Congress ordered the Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization to assume responsibilities for disaster assistance, followed in 1961 by establishing the Emergency Planning Office, whose mission was to coordinate civil defense and disaster-related emergency efforts. In 1988, Congress passed and signed into law a robust disaster relief statute. The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act established authority for presidential disaster and emergency declarations and defined how federal agencies would assist states in times of disaster. These foundational changes to public disaster policy allow federal, state, and local officials to anticipate the unexpected to reduce the risk to life posed by natural and human-made hazards (Petak 1985, 3).

All disasters are local, but some disasters require emergency managers to request assistance from the state government, and in turn, the state, at times, must request assistance from the federal government. These situations require extensive intergovernmental relations to

ensure the most effective and efficient response and recovery. Federalism highlights the constitutional framework of shared and autonomous decision-making involving the federal and state governments (Caudle 2011, 2). Federalism and intergovernmental relations are interchangeable (Landy 2008, 187). Scholars, including Stephens and Wikstrom (2007), defined intergovernmental relations as the interactions between different government levels in a complex, layered system. Several different federalism types have been described, including dual cooperative, opportunistic, and coercive (McGuire 2006, 678). Caudle (2011, 2) argued that all three federalism types often overlap in practice depending on the events and interests during disasters. Moreover, regardless of the types of federalism used, each government level's decision-making roles represent how the national interest is perceived. A call for nationalization of a disaster occurs if the victims believe local or state resources are failing.

Posner (2008, 299) described several salient factors that support an increase in centralized mandates and policy pertinent to emergency management, including that relevant federal officials are unified and mobilized to advance new national goals and state and local governments are not united or effectively mobilized to protect their interests, leading federal and state decision-makers to agree with the mandate. State and local governments do not enjoy the support of politically influential interest groups or partisan allies. These same concerns led President Carter to take action at the federal level in 1979 to consolidate federal disaster response by creating the FEMA.

Often when elected officials or public administrators think of disaster policy, they think only of the response, neglecting to consider the other essential components of adequate emergency management, including preparedness, mitigation, and recovery (McLoughlin 1985, 166). The impact of natural hazards on communities, many of which are unprepared,

dramatically increases recovery costs as there are no plans to mitigate or recover from disasters (Comfort et al. 2012, 541). Reacting after the disaster occurs is costly in terms of lives and the length of time required for communities to recover fully. Wyatt-Nichol and Abel (2007, 568) argued that managers and public administrators must become interested in examining the emergency discourses of politicians, political appointees, and the media to establish relationships between these groups and other emergency management stakeholders.

Rubin and Cutter (2020, 11) argued that four key historical themes have emerged from emergency management policy in the United States, including reactive legislation focused on a single event; the positioning of emergency management across the federal government; lessons from past disasters are often not learned; and disasters and impacts continue to increase, affecting the most vulnerable within the community. Disaster victims often feel they are suffering due to failed public policy or local emergency management leadership actions' ineffectiveness. Many people found the response to Hurricane Katrina to be unacceptable. There was plenty of scapegoating as locals blamed the state in the aftermath, and the state accused the federal government of the inadequate response (Wyatt-Nichol and Abel 2007, 567). At the same time, Hurricane Katrina resulted in multiple investigations and changes to federal disaster policy. DeSalvo (2018, 440) argued that the blame for a failed response to Katrina rests on the numerous sets of policy and political constraints that make effective disaster management systems at the local, state, and federal levels inherently difficult.

The story of the Katrina disaster points to more profound obstacles to effective policymaking and administration. These issues include organizational changes such as FEMA's move into the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which has diminished its capabilities in dealing with natural disaster events; institutional federalism, which creates essential policy goal

and incentive inconsistencies between levels of government; and behavioral challenges as Americans do a relatively poor job of individually preparing for disasters (Canton 2007, 24). Today, as human activity increases and becomes more centralized, creating new and realistic disasters, public policy has become more difficult as the population and congress are divided (Rubin and Cutter 2020, 13).

All levels of government have responsibilities within emergency management. During a disaster, some responsibilities fall on each level of government; however, each level has its own unique responsibilities and resources (McLoughlin 1985, 165). These responsibilities are guided by public policy, which is often changed following a major disaster, making it even more difficult for emergency managers to adapt. The terror attacks of 2001, Hurricane Katrina, and Super Storm Sandy generated a high demand for national policy changes and actions focused on homeland security, a national response plan, and better overall coordination (Caudle 2011, 1). Today, local emergency managers have additional resources and standards to guide local emergency management program development. The most recognized of these standards are the NFPA Standard 1600 and Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP; Peerbolte 2010, 47). These standards are voluntary and there is no national requirement for local governments to follow.

Complexities within Emergency Management Practice

In a single county, the rapid succession of independent events or the accumulation of cascading events triggered by a single hazard can stress the local emergency manager (Cutter 2020, 17). Moreover, societal shifts in demographics, income, and the urban-suburban interface add to the problems local emergency managers face as more households are unable to prepare for and recover from disasters (Rubin and Cutter 2020, 14). The effects of urban sprawl, population

growth, deterioration of critical infrastructure, and widening socioeconomic cultural gaps further complicate the practice of emergency management (Peerbolt and Collins 2013, 49). Because of the complexities found within most communities, emergency management programs must have effective and knowledgeable leadership as lives, property, and the environment are at risk. Emergency managers must be proficient at the tasks required to lead the community through disaster preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery (Padilla 2015, 29).

Samuel and Siebeneck (2019, 102) found that few studies offer more in-depth insights into the multiple roles emergency management practitioners assume within each phase of disaster management, nor how certification training prepares them for duty. However, Waugh (2007) argued that the practice of emergency management is more about being an effective organizer and having the skills to build effective relationships. Today's emergency management is a function of public administration with a clear imperative to integrate the science of hazards and human behavior (Thomas and Mileti 2003). Individual organizations respond successfully to small emergencies such as building fires and auto accidents daily. However, major disasters bring unique challenges, often requiring assistance from other organizations (Perry and Lindell 2003, 337). The theory of interagency collaboration during emergency management processes is a basic factor in the success or failure of disasters, either natural or human-made (Kano and Bourque 2007, 202). However, communications and meaningful collaboration between independent organizations who must work together to prepare for and respond to disasters can prove to be difficult (Comfort, Ko, and Zagorecki 2004, 297). In most cases, organizations from different jurisdictions and different disciplines within the same jurisdiction do not share common goals, missions, or policies that help create strong working relationships (Quarentelli 1997, 41).

Most local emergency management directors base their policy on five areas: prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery. FEMA has categorized each of these foundational elements as mission areas. To determine the best methods for developing policy within these mission areas, local emergency managers must understand risk, vulnerability, and community demographics and have the ability to lead. Furthermore, Waugh and Streib (2006, 132) argued that broad perspectives and effective leadership skills in emergency management are not radically different from other public administration jobs; however, the hazards faced are often much more emergent, requiring fast and effective decision-making.

Disasters are social phenomena impacting people and their cultures, and by nature require decentralized decision-making, coordination, and intensive human interactions within an established system or framework. A formalized framework is needed to ensure these interactions occur and do so in a productive way to ensure positive outcomes. However, Kapucu and Van Wart (2006, 292) argued that excessive formalism can result in excessive reliance on a centralized authority for all answers, which may not solve all local problems. Coordination is the most fundamental element of disaster response. Coordination under disaster conditions is demanding, creating intense pressure and urgency (Chen et al. 2008, 87). Identifying effective coordination methods and training to manage disaster response is one of the most critical challenges for local communities (Abbasi et al. 2018, 4).

Within the scope of emergency management practice, there exists a wide range of required functions within the frameworks of the preparedness, prevention, mitigation, response, and recovery mission areas. To achieve community readiness, the local emergency manager must have the ability to bring together all community stakeholders to develop and implement local disaster policy, including establishing a unified response framework and applying the

Incident Command System (ICS) and NIMS. Furthermore, local emergency managers must develop relationships with nearby jurisdictions to ensure mutual aid availability.

Disaster management implies utilizing a broad spectrum of disciplines, including emergency management, fire, law enforcement, public works, public health, medical, engineering, social development, planning, and many others (MacFarlane, Joffe, and Naidoo 2006, 451). Any lack of coordination creates a problem for the local community, especially when preparing for and responding to any disastrous event (Hildebrand 2017, 273). Each disaster, no matter the cause, places great demand on the community. Quarantelli (1997, 4) recognized a difference between response-generated needs and agent-generated demands. Agent-generated demands are those demands specific to the type of event or disaster. In contrast, the response-generated demands are associated with the response force such as organization, resource management, and logistics. Local practitioners have reported major issues in both areas of demand following major disasters. These issues include interagency collaboration, organization, leadership, problem-solving, politics, administration, and logistics.

Disasters impact all social demographics; however, socially disadvantaged groups such as the poor, single parents, elderly, persons with disabilities, unemployed, ethnic minorities, and immigrants are more likely to suffer severe long-term impacts from major disasters (Bolin and Stanford 1998; Tierney, Lindell, and Perry 2001; Hewitt 2005; Brunsma and Picou 2008). Georgia has an increased social vulnerability to disaster. Cutter, Boruff, and Shirley (2003) constructed a United States county-level social vulnerability index for disaster. This index was developed through factor analytics using census data and eleven independent variables placed into an additive model. The results found that counties in the Delta region of the United States, extending eastward into all parts of Georgia, are very socially vulnerable to disaster (Cutter,

Boruff, and Shirley 2003, 257). These facts impact how local emergency managers function within each of the five practice mission areas; however, none are more affected by the socially disadvantaged than the recovery mission area.

People who are not affected by disaster often concentrate on the disaster response phase as media focus concentrates on rescues and other lifesaving activities. After the response has been accomplished and the media leaves town, the local emergency manager focuses on perhaps the most difficult phase of the disaster, recovery. People affected by disaster and their elected representatives want to recover quickly (Cutter 2020, 18). However, disaster can be time-consuming, disjointed, and highlight any flaws in local planning. The recovery mission area of disaster should begin before the response is complete and may last for weeks, months, or even years (see figure 5.0). The length of time required to bring a community back to its pre-disaster state is directly related to how severe the disaster impacts are.

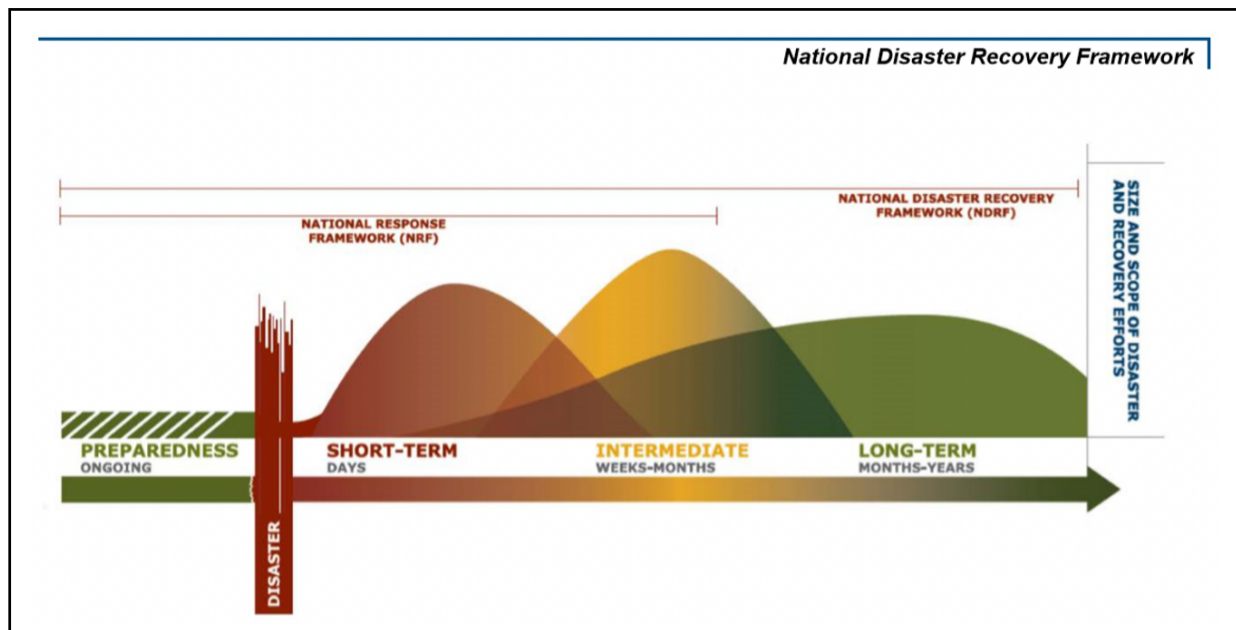


Figure 5.0. Disaster continuum. Source: FEMA.

Disaster recovery is a key capability of all levels of government, defined as “the process of restoring, rebuilding, and reshaping the physical, social, economic, and natural environment through pre-event planning and post-event actions” (Horney et al. 2017, 126). Disaster recovery presents formidable challenges to the community, requiring strong plans to restore the health and livelihoods of those affected (Garnett and Moore 2010, 1). Local emergency management disaster recovery plans must emphasize situations with high levels of uncertainty, rapid change, and complexity (Olshansky and Johnson 2010, 275). Berke et al. (2014, 310) argued that a major impediment facing emergency managers in developing disaster recovery plans is public indifference. Like all other phases of disaster, the local emergency manager must have the ability to understand the basic principles surrounding community recovery and knowledge of the whole community.

In theory, complex scientific information available to local emergency managers should aid in community preparedness (Jennings and Hall 2012). However, interpretation of such data

creates obstacles for its use at the local level (Roberts and Wernstedt 2016, 1). Researchers are advancing theory on how local emergency managers can use complex scientific information to prepare and respond. Comfort (2005, 335) theorized that “informed action” through networks developed between emergency managers and the scientific community can help solve this problem. These networks would help local emergency managers understand how networks develop and what information is available from the scientific community, implying the need for formal leadership and organizational management training.

Not only is classroom training important, but activity in the context of practice is critical for the successful implementation of community emergency management programs and successful emergency management directors. Training in the management of disasters builds competencies across all stakeholder organizations to improve disaster preparedness, response, and recovery across the community (Nazli, Sipon, and Radzi 2014, 577). Auf der (1989, 46) argued that written plans must also include training and resources. Nevertheless, many organizations have found that simply having a written plan makes them prepared (Carley and Harrald 1997, 311). Kano and Bourque (2007, 2014) supported this finding and noted that many organizations, including schools, have written plans but fail to exercise or train on the plan regularly. Even after the terror attacks of 2001 and numerous major disasters, there is still no nationwide requirement for standardized training and assessment of local community emergency management programs’ preparedness or the program’s leadership.

Effective disaster planning involves integrating a knowledge management system to understand the threats, risks, and countermeasures to reduce, avert, prevent, respond, and recover from disaster (Dorasamy, Kaliannan, and Raman 2013). There is a measurable level of chaos and complexity in a disaster, which can be counterbalanced through learned knowledge

and experience (Dorasamy, Kaliannan, and Raman 2013). Together learned knowledge and experience build situational awareness that gives emergency management professionals and first responders an advantage to eliminate the element of surprise whenever a disaster occurs (Dorasamy, Kaliannan, and Raman 2013). Planning for a disaster involves risk-reduction measures such as mitigation, prevention, and protection (Petersen et al. 2017). One of the main factors in reduced resiliency is fear caused by the community's unpreparedness, which can have lingering physiological effects after a disaster (Petersen et al. 2017).

Emergency managers can learn from each new disaster, particularly in response, mitigation, and recovery (Gardoni, Murphy, and Rowell 2016). Labib and Read (2015) argued that learning from past disasters, focusing on both failures and successes, is a valuable experience for emergency managers. Local emergency managers must become immersed in the experience of actually using concepts learned in training. Organizational theorists suggest that both individuals and groups use identifiable and stable cognitive templates to understand and engage in cognitive activities (Elsbach, Barr, and Hargadon 2005, 422). Cognitions are the processes by which sensory inputs are transformed, reduced, elaborated, stored, recovered, and used (Neisser 1967). In this research, sensory input is the training emergency managers in Georgia receive to become certified. How input is transformed, reduced, elaborated, stored, and then recovered is represented by how the local emergency manager can take the input provided, build an effective emergency management program, and recall the training when disasters occur.

Demographic Changes in Georgia

Effective disaster management is a core feature for the protection of communities against natural and human-caused disasters. Many issues can affect disaster management, including a change in local demographics (Dressler et al. 2016, 2288). Population density and economic

status are important indicators to measure the vulnerability of a county or region (Zhou et al. 2014, 616). Disasters pose a consistently uneven impact along the lines of gender, race, income, age, and disabilities, demonstrating how disasters expose social vulnerabilities (Schumann and Tunks 2019). Local emergency management programs focus on the risks posed to their community from a wide range of hazards. Risk perception refers to a psychological construct concerning an individual's subjective judgment that a particular hazard will directly impact them. Gierlach, Belsher, and Beutler (2010) argued that multiple factors influence risk perception, including culture, age, and gender.

Georgia's demographics have changed significantly since the turn of the twenty-first century. According to the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute, in 1999, only 55.8% of Georgia's population was born in Georgia, and more than one million people speak a foreign language in their home. This finding signals dramatic changes to the makeup of communities across the state. According to the United States Census Bureau, Georgia's population has grown from just over two million in 1900 to almost eleven million in 2020, with most of the increase occurring between 1980 and 2020. The most significant population changes have occurred in the 10-county Atlanta region, where more than 40% of the state's population reside (see figure 6.0). According to the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), the Atlanta region ranks fourth in total population growth in the United States. Not only has the state's population changed, but so has its racial makeup (see figure 7.0).

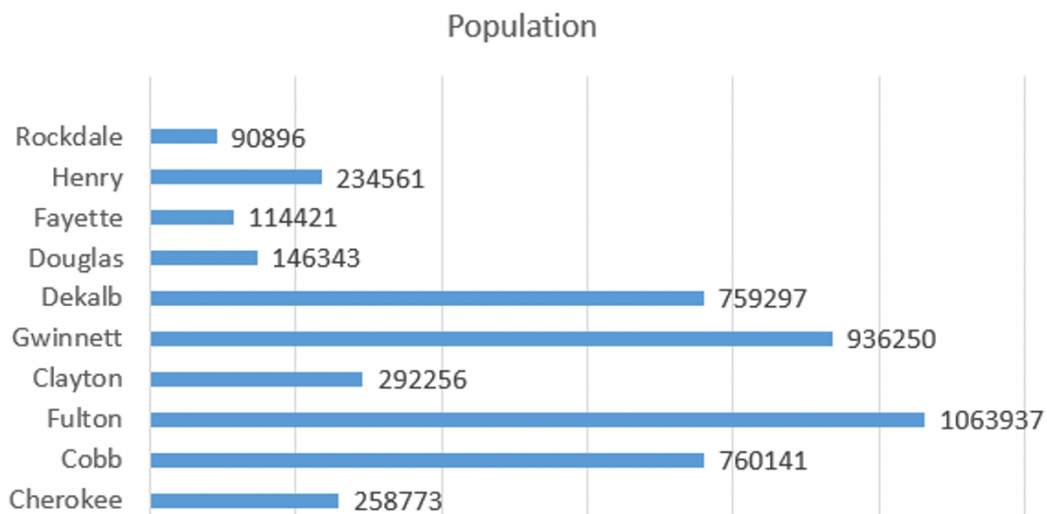


Figure 6.0. Atlanta region population 1999. Data from Atlanta Regional Commission.

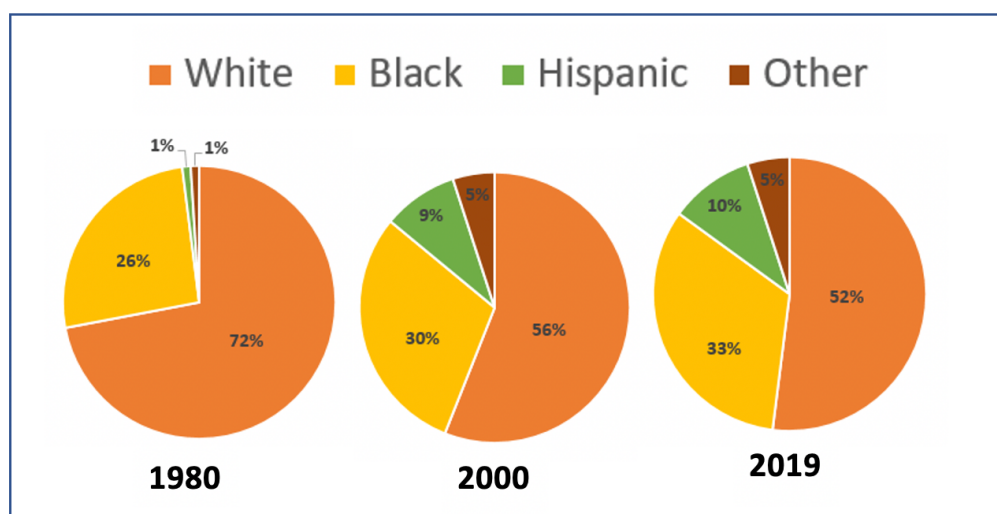


Figure 7.0. Georgia race distribution 1980–2020. Data from United States Census.

The lack of disaster planning in the minority and culturally diverse communities resulted in a much slower recovery in black communities than in white communities following Hurricane Andrew in Dade County, Florida (Zhang and Peacock 2009, 6).

To assess the overall risk, emergency managers must include the community's socioeconomic and demographic factors (Flanagan et al. 2018, 34). The Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) developed by The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention lists multiple

variables associated with community risk, including persons below the poverty level, no high school diploma, age, minorities, non-English speakers, and single-parent homes. Many of these variables exist in Georgia. According to the United States Census, the number of people in Georgia without a high school diploma is above the national average. People with a college degree are below the national average, and those in poverty are well above the national average. Across Georgia, demographic features differ across eight emergency management regions (see table 5.0).

Table 5.0. Georgia demographics by emergency management regions

Region	Population	Median Income	Housing Units	Persons in Poverty	Population per square mile
1	1,113,371	\$49,275	456,574	15%	162
2	575,947	\$38,054	258,978	24%	66
3	765,823	\$39,407	337,281	24%	77
4	1,005,338	\$43,190	426,355	20%	124
5	710,576	\$51,109	312,329	16%	121
6	1,727,946	\$54,723	683,042	13%	243
7	4,398,102	\$65,316	1,749,314	11%	1726
8	336,650	\$35,998	148,079	22%	40

Data Source: United States Census.

According to Oyola-Yemaiel and Wilson (2005, 82), a gap between social science researchers and emergency management practitioners exists in training and using demographic tools and established concepts.

GACEMP Curriculum Review

Research into the cognitive abilities and skill sets needed for professional emergency managers to be successful is plentiful. Perry and Lindell (2007, 438) defined a profession as a “collection of practitioners identified by expertise who control and apply a given body of

knowledge.” As the frequency and intensity of disasters in the United States continue to increase, the country will continue to expect effective and efficient emergency management performed by competent emergency managers (Peerbolte 2010, 2). In this era of increasing disaster frequency and intensity, Comfort (2007) argued that professional emergency managers’ cognitive critical thinking is the most important aspect of effective emergency management. Critical thinking includes both cognitive and affective domain reasoning (Kiltz 2009, 3). The cognitive domain involves knowledge and intellectual skills development, whereas the affective domain consists of how one deals with issues emotionally (Bloom 1976). Kiltz (2009, 20) argued that emergency management curriculum should emphasize critical thinking by presenting students with problems, situations, and issues rather than lectures.

Drabek (1987) found that successful emergency managers’ perceived skills include communication and human resource management, organizational astuteness, and the ability to maintain control under stress. Skill sets for local emergency managers that emphasize professional traits include leadership, management, networking, and understanding emergency management-related concepts such as comprehensive and integrated emergency management, technical systems, and social vulnerability, blending professional traits with key knowledge areas and skill sets (see table 6.0; Blanchard 2005).

Table 6.0. Blanchard skill sets for emergency managers

-
1. Comprehensive Emergency Management Framework or Philosophy
 2. Leadership and Team-Building
 3. Management
 4. Networking and Coordination
 5. Integrated Emergency Management
 6. Emergency Management Functions
 7. Political, Bureaucratic, Social Contexts
 8. Technical Systems and Standards
 9. Social Vulnerability Reduction Approach
 10. Experience
-

An important step in determining if the researcher's hypothesis is either supported or not supported is to determine if the current GACEMP curriculum contains instruction on the basic skill sets Peerbolte (2010), Blanchard (2005), and Drabek (1987) identified. To evaluate the current curriculum, a copy of the required courses for the GACEMP is reviewed through a secure data portal to which the researcher is authorized to access. Each course, broken down by unit, is evaluated to determine if the content provides training on any of the skill sets Peerbolte (2010), Blanchard (2005), or Drabek (1987) identified. Findings from this review indicate that 60% of the current curriculum contains no training related to the identified skill sets (see table 7). Furthermore, 38% of the curriculum contains limited or some training related to the identified skill sets.

Table 7.0. Georgia curriculum vs. identified skill sets

GACEMP Curriculum	Identified Skill Sets									
	Geography	Comprehensive EM Framework	Leadership	Networking	Integrated EM	EM Functions	Political, Bureaucratic, Social Contexts	Technical Systems	Social Vulnerability	Demographics
Required Courses										
Introduction to Hazardous Materials	N	N	N	N	N	L	N	L	N	N
Introduction to ICS	N	L	L	L	L	L	N	N	N	N
Introduction to Exercise	N	N	N	N	L	L	N	N	N	N
Exercise Design	N	N	N	L	L	L	N	N	N	N
ICS for Single Resources	N	N	L	L	L	L	N	N	N	N
Fundamentals of Emergency Management	N	L	N	L	L	L	N	N	N	N
Basic Emergency Planning	N	L	N	L	L	E	L	N	E	L
Role of Volunteer Organizations	N	N	N	E	L	L	L	N	N	L
NIMS 800	N	L	L	L	L	E	N	N	N	N
Disaster Recovery Programs	N	N	L	L	L	L	L	N	N	N
Basic PIO	N	N	N	E	L	L	N	N	N	N
Hazardous Weather	L	N	N	L	L	L	N	L	L	L
Programs Overview	N	L	L	L	L	L	N	N	N	N
Preliminary Damage Assessment	N	N	N	N	N	L	N	L	N	N
Resource Management	N	L	N	L	L	L	L	N	N	N
EOC/ICS Interface	N	L	L	L	L	L	N	N	N	N
EOC Operations	N	L	L	L	L	E	L	L	N	N

N = Course contained no training on the identified skill set. L = Course contained limited

training on the identified skill set. E = Course contained extensive training on the identified skill set.

Summary

The theoretical framework for this study supports the use of hermeneutic phenomenology qualitative inquiry to determine the GACEMP curriculum's efficacy in preparing emergency managers for their role. Through the established framework for this literary review, a large

volume of research offered great insight into emergency management complexities and the need for training within the identified core competencies for emergency managers. The literary review proved quite remarkable as previous research has determined a dramatic increase in the frequency, intensity, and duration of major disasters in the United States. Local emergency managers face growing complexities while practicing within the local emergency management program. Socioeconomic changes and shifts in population densities (i.e., the urban-suburban interface) have complicated all emergency management mission areas. Previous scholarship has also identified multiple skill sets a local emergency manager needs. The juxtaposition of these skill sets with the GACEMP curriculum exposes gaps between the training offered and skills needed to succeed.

This study hypothesized that the current GACEMP curriculum does not provide the training needed to prepare local emergency managers for their role. Although gaps between the curriculum and needed skill sets exist, an analysis of local emergency managers' lived experiences was critical to understanding the current GACEMP curriculum's effectiveness and determining whether the hypothesis is either supported or not supported.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative inquiry was to understand the efficacy of the GACEMP curriculum on preparing local emergency managers in each of Georgia's eight geographical regions for their role. This chapter includes an explanation of the research design, restatement of the research question, a description of the setting, and the process of selecting study participants. In addition, chapter 3 includes the procedures, researcher's role, and data analysis. Chapter 3 concludes with a delineation of steps taken to achieve trustworthiness, discussion of relevant ethical considerations, and a concise chapter summary.

Design

Qualitative methods are suitable when variables may not be obvious, and themes begin to emerge within data collection and analysis (Creswell 2015). Moreover, a phenomenological design is useful when the researcher has experienced the phenomenon in question (Creswell 2015). A central phenomenon must exist at the heart of qualitative research. This research seeks to examine the extent to which the GACEMP curriculum prepares local emergency managers for their role. A hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative approach was used because the researcher was drawn to the phenomenon due to personal experiences. Hermeneutic phenomenological methods allow participants from Georgia's eight geographical regions to express their lived experiences with the phenomenon.

Phenomenology is generally used as an attempt to eliminate prejudice and presupposition; however, in this case, the researcher's past experiences and knowledge led to a consideration of the identified phenomena. Instead of disconnecting the researcher's subjective perspective, hermeneutic phenomenology recognizes that the researcher, like the research

participant, cannot “be rid” of his/her lifeworld (Neubauer, Witkop, and Varpio 2019, 94). However, hermeneutic phenomenology consists of data interpretation in which the researcher’s preconceived notions are deemphasized and attention is directed towards the participants’ lived experiences and emergent themes (McGuire and Salter 2014). The researcher’s past experiences and knowledge are used only as a guide for the inquiry. Hermeneutics allows for a central meaning that enables one to understand the substance and essence of the participants’ experiences (Moustakas 1994, 9).

The hermeneutic method of analyzing data consists of reading, reflective writing, and interpretation (Kafle 2011). Hermeneutic research adheres to five guidelines: obligation to a long-lasting concern, concern for the question, exploring the phenomenon as it is lived, reciting the occurrence through writing and rewriting, and considering parts and the whole (Kafle 2011). In this hermeneutic phenomenological study, lived experiences of emergency managers who have completed the GACEMP curriculum and experienced at least one presidential disaster were explored to understand the efficacy of the GACEMP curriculum on preparing local emergency managers in each of Georgia’s eight geographical regions for their role.

Research Question

This hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative study focused on the lived experiences of emergency managers who have completed the GACEMP curriculum and experienced at least one presidential disaster. This study had one research question.

Primary Research Question

How prepared do emergency managers feel they are for their role as a local emergency manager following their completion of the GACEMP curriculum?

Setting

The overall setting for this study was the state of Georgia. Georgia is divided into 159 counties and is the twenty-fourth largest state in land area and eighth-most populous state with a 2019 population of 10.6 million (United States Census 2019). The metropolitan Atlanta area is the most populated region with nine of the state's most populated cities. In 2018, Georgia's gross state product was \$602 billion. Georgia is a very geographically diverse state, beginning at the southeast Atlantic coast and extending westward to the large agricultural areas of central and southwestern Georgia and northward to the metro Atlanta region. Further north, the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains create scenic vistas and agricultural valleys. According to the United States Census estimates for 2019, Georgia's median household income was \$55,000 and the number of households in poverty was 14%. The average number of persons per housing unit is 2.71.

Each county in Georgia is required by statute to appoint an emergency management director and establish an emergency management organization. The county emergency management organizations are grouped into eight geographical emergency management regions (see figure 8.0). These regions have very different demographics ranging from densely populated urban areas including Atlanta, Columbus, Macon, Augusta, and Savannah to rural mountain areas in the north and coastal plains in the extreme southeast. Southwest Georgia is mostly rural with agriculture being the dominant industry.

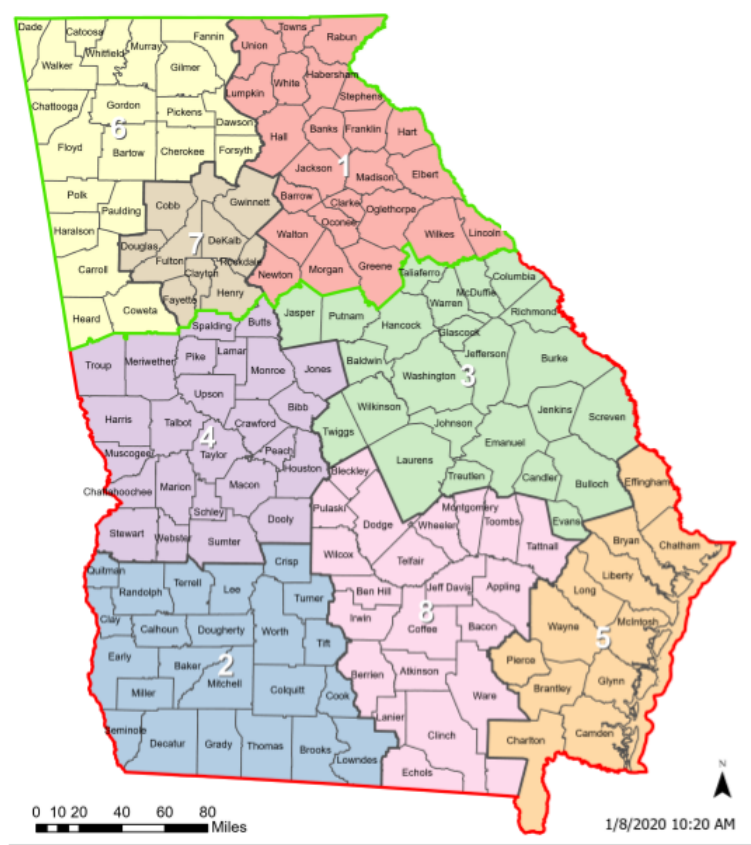


Figure 8.0. Georgia emergency management regions. Source: Georgia Emergency Management Agency.

Participants

During qualitative research, participants are selected based on their range of experiences, perspectives, and behaviors relevant to the research question (Tolley et al. 2016, 60). It was important for the researcher to understand the lived experiences of emergency managers from each of the eight geographical regions. A purposeful and criterion-driven selection process was used to select participants. The goal for this research was to obtain four participants from each of the eight emergency management regions in Georgia who met the following requirements: (a) completed the GACEMP curriculum, and (b) the emergency manager must have experienced at least one presidentially declared disaster following their completion of the GACEMP curriculum. The overall number of participants did not exceed thirty-two. If more than four emergency

managers in each region responded to the request to participate, the first four who responded and met the requirements were selected.

Procedures

Following a successful proposal defense, the application for study approval was submitted to the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Following approval from the IRB (see appendix A), participant recruitment and selection began. Two requirements for inclusion in the study were established. The emergency manager must have completed the GACEMP curriculum and they must have held their position as a local emergency manager during at least one presidentially declared disaster. To begin the recruitment process, a recruitment letter (see appendix B) utilizing the Liberty University IRB recruitment template approved for this study was mailed to all 159 county emergency managers. The first four emergency managers from each region who responded and met the study's two specific study criteria were selected. Once screening was complete, the researcher contacted the first four emergency managers who responded and met the study requirements by phone to notify them of their selection. Those who agreed to participate were asked to sign a consent form created from the Liberty University IRB template and receive IRB approval (see appendix D). All other emergency managers who responded and met the inclusion requirements were kept on a list to replace any of the original participants who withdraw from the study. Following the completion of each consent form, participants were contacted to schedule individual virtual interviews.

Validity in a qualitative study refers to the extent to which the findings can be trusted. Gibbs (2007) argued that data are valid if they are consistently repeated investigations. Four professional emergency management instructors who were not participants in the study assessed the validity of the interview instrument used in this research prior to the beginning of interviews.

The researcher used their comments to improve the interview's accuracy and measuring capabilities.

The Researchers Role

The researcher is a practicing emergency manager and instructor working in the metropolitan Atlanta area. The researcher does not hold any supervisory role over any of the participants, or a role in any participant's employment status. The researcher's role as a practicing emergency manager and instructor opened the door to conduct this study and create a trusting, open relationship with potential participants. As a practicing emergency manager in Georgia for more than thirty years, the researcher has gained insight into the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to perform the tasks associated with all phases of emergency management. The researcher's past experiences have inspired a focus on preparing local emergency managers for their role within the community. In such cases, Creswell (2015) recommended the use of bracketing in phenomenology, describing the researcher as "bracketing him or herself out of the study by discussing personal experiences within the phenomenon."

The process of bracketing allowed the researcher to describe personal experiences and view all data from a new perspective. To bracket the researcher's own experiences and biases, a process of reflective journaling was used before, during, and after the data-collection process, which allowed for the recording of thoughts before data collection and reflecting after the data collection. Journaling before the data-collection process aided the researcher in identifying feelings that could indicate a lack of neutrality (Ahern 1999, 407). Moreover, to ensure a strict, unbiased relationship with each participant, the researcher only focused on interviewing each participant and collecting data for the study. Member checking was also used to verify that what was transcribed accurately reflected the participants' lived experiences.

Data Collection

Data were gathered through semistructured, individual interviews conducted in person via a virtual platform to address Covid-19 pandemic countermeasures. A conversational technique was used and each interview was scheduled for 60 minutes. Consistent with hermeneutic phenomenology, questioning was designed to gradually probe each participant to evoke stories about their lived experiences while taking required courses for certification and acting in the emergency manager role during a presidentially declared disaster. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. The recordings, transcriptions, and journals will remain in a secure location only the researcher can access. Member checking was used to validate the transcripts. A copy of each participant's transcript was returned to the participant via email for review to ensure accuracy.

Interviews

Open-ended questions designed to induce the lived experiences of each participant were used during interviews for this hermeneutic phenomenology qualitative inquiry. Each interview was conducted using a secure virtual platform with each participant receiving their own secure link via email for their specific interview. This allowed for not only a secure and confidential interview environment but also adherence to Covid-19 countermeasures. This study's problem statement was used to develop a list of questions that reflected the information needed to answer the research question (Tolley et al. 2016, 113). The interviews began with informal conversation to create a relaxed and trusting atmosphere. Tolley et al. (2016, 108) argued that beginning an interview with informal chat is a good method for building rapport, setting the stage for a relaxed interview. Each interview then transitioned to the participant's lived experiences as a local emergency manager following their completion of the GACEMP curriculum.

The open-ended interview questions and how they related to the research question are as follows:

1. Please introduce yourself.
2. Years' experience as an emergency manager?
3. What emergency management region are you from?
4. What is your highest level of formal education?
5. What was the nature of the last disaster you responded to as a local emergency manager?
6. As a practicing emergency manager, have you encountered issues associated with demographics and/or evaluating social vulnerabilities?

(If yes, did any of the courses required for the GACEMP provide you with the knowledge and skills to deal with the issues you encountered?)
7. How well did the GACEMP curriculum explain comprehensive emergency management and/or integrated emergency management?

(If so, did you find the training useful when preparing for, responding to, or recovering from disaster?)
8. Think back over the courses you completed during the GACEMP. Which courses were most valuable in preparing you for your role as a local emergency manager and why?
9. Emergency managers are responsible for the coordination of many functions associated with disaster response and recovery. Thinking about the fifteen emergency support functions (ESFs) found within the local emergency operations plan (LEOP), please discuss how the GACEMP curriculum prepared you for your role in coordinating with each function.

10. Bringing the community together is an important role for the local emergency manager.

This requires leadership skills and a vast understanding of the community. Please discuss any of the required GACEMP courses that provided you with the leadership training needed to bring the community together to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disaster.

11. Please discuss any political or bureaucratic issues you encountered while dealing with your last disaster and explain if the GACEMP curriculum prepared you for your experience.

12. Integrated emergency management refers to an all-hazards approach to coordination, direction, and control. Please discuss how the GACEMP curriculum prepared you for integrated emergency management.

13. Thinking about your experiences as a local emergency manager, please discuss how you feel the GACEMP's required curriculum prepared you for your role as a local emergency manager.

14. What does the program lack and what should be added to the curriculum based on your experiences?

Questions one through five were knowledge questions that allowed the researcher to get to know the participants and their professional and educational backgrounds. These questions were straightforward, continuing the development of rapport between the participant and researcher. Knowing a participant's background, education, and experience assists in understanding his or her thought process.

Question six invited the participant to reflect on their lived experiences related to demographics and/or evaluating social vulnerabilities. Moreover, societal shifts in

demographics, income, and the urban-suburban interface add to the problems local emergency managers face as more households are unable to prepare for and recover from disasters (Rubin and Cutter 2020, 14). Each participant was asked to share how the GACEMP curriculum prepared them for the experience of dealing with demographic and social vulnerability issues.

Question seven asked participants to explain how the GACEMP curriculum prepared him or her for integrated emergency management and/or comprehensive emergency management. Blanchard (2005) identified comprehensive or integrated emergency management as a critical skill set for the local emergency manager. A review of the current GACEMP curriculum found a very limited amount of content related to either comprehensive or integrated emergency management. This question provided information on how the lack of integrated emergency management coursework has impacted the emergency manager's lived experiences.

Question eight invited participants to reflect on his or her lived experiences as a local emergency manager. Each participant was asked to identify which courses from the GACEMP curriculum were most valuable in preparing them for the local emergency manager's role. Participants were asked to give an example of how the individual course specifically assisted them in carrying out their role as an emergency manager.

Question nine gave participants the opportunity to reflect on their lived experiences in coordinating with other critical stakeholders within the community and how the GACEMP curriculum prepared him or her for that experience. Participants were asked to give an example including identifying the critical stakeholder. This allowed the researcher to better understand the participants' experiences in carrying out their role as an emergency manager.

Question ten allowed participants the opportunity to explain how the GACEMP curriculum prepared them to engage in bringing the community together to prepare for, respond

to, and recover from disaster. Emergency planning at the local level should always be a team effort to ensure everyone with expertise contributes to the planning process, ensuring buy-in from all stakeholders within the community (Fagel 2011, 57). The participants' responses allowed the researcher to understand how the GACEMP curriculum prepared them to deal with a wide range of community stakeholders.

Question eleven sought to determine the local emergency managers' experiences in dealing with political issues. Participants were invited to discuss any political or bureaucratic issues they encountered in their role as a local emergency manager. The researcher asked the participants to elaborate on their experiences and reflect on how the GACEMP curriculum prepared him or her for these types of issues.

Question twelve allowed participants to discuss their lived experiences with integrated emergency management. The researcher asked each participant to explain their use of the all-hazards approach and explain how the GACEMP curriculum prepared them for each phase of emergency management. More specifically, participants were asked to reflect on the all-hazards approach during the prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery phases of emergency management practice.

Question thirteen invited each participant to reflect on his or her lived experiences as a practicing local emergency manager and how he or she feels the GACEMP curriculum prepared him or her for the emergency manager's role. Blanchard (2005) argued that skill sets for local emergency managers must blend professional traits and knowledge areas such as leadership, management, and networking and understanding emergency management-related concepts, comprehensive and integrated emergency management, technical systems, and social vulnerability. Findings from a review of the current GACEMP curriculum indicated that 60% of

the current curriculum contains no training related to the identified skill sets and that 38% of the curriculum contains limited training related to the identified skill sets. This question allowed the researcher to understand the overall effectiveness of the GACEMP curriculum as seen through the lived experiences of each participant.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this hermeneutic phenomenology qualitative study began with coding each participant's identity and region to protect their confidentiality. Next, an immersion into each transcript began. This process required reading and rereading until coherent themes developed. Using Koch's (1999) methods, transcripts were interpreted through immersion within the hermeneutic circle to uncover the deeper meaning of the impact of certification training and a local emergency manager's role. Martin Heidegger's (1927) hermeneutic circle requires the researcher to envision a whole with regard to how the parts interact with each other and how the parts act together with the whole. This process allows the researcher to continuously consider whether their current understanding clashes with previous interpretations, existing beliefs, and knowledge. The researcher employed "hermeneutic of suspicion" (Koch 1999, 27) to interpret and understand the transcript's meaning and implications.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research must be trustworthy and credible (Patton 2002). Trustworthiness was critical to this study and the researcher deployed safeguards to protect participants and data during and after the study. Participants must feel comfortable, safe, and relaxed throughout the study. Hardin and Whitehead (2020) argued that trustworthiness is more than knowledge and must rely on layers of motivation, including simplicity and complexity. Qualitative research does not focus on numbers or statistics to make correlations between variables, making the

concepts of validity and reliability inappropriate for evaluating qualitative research rigors (Leedy and Ormrod 2019). Because trustworthiness is essential for qualitative research, it is achieved by ensuring credible, transferable, and dependable results (Creswell 2015). The researcher used the following strategies to ensure trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Creswell and Poth 2017; Shenton 2004).

Credibility

Credibility is the accuracy of the findings (Creswell 2015). Shenton (2004, 75) argued that credibility allows the researcher to link the research findings with reality to demonstrate the truth of the findings. Credibility depends on the richness of the information gathered and the researcher's analytical abilities, both important in establishing internal validity, which confirms that the study measures or tests what is intended (Shenton 2004, 75). Maxwell (2012) found that credibility of qualitative research is primarily focused on the context and participants' meaning. Thomas and Magilvy (2011) argued that credible qualitative studies present truthful accounts of participants' lived experiences. Member checking is used to verify the data collected to ensure the accuracy of the findings. Participants are allowed to read the transcribed interview and note any discrepancies to make changes within the text. The researcher kept reflective notes as analytic memos after interviews and while reading transcripts to further establish credibility.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability is another way the researcher established trustworthiness and is a process where the constant collection of data enhances the researcher's understanding of the data (Toma 2011). For this study, the openness of the research design and practical implementation of procedures, including details of participant selection, data collection, member checking, data analysis, and conclusions, added to the study's dependability and overall trustworthiness.

Confirmability is a method where individuals other than the researcher review and confirm the data and findings. In this study, the researcher used member checking to confirm the accuracy of interview transcripts. Furthermore, outside experts examined the overall process and findings of the research.

Transferability

Transferability is defined as the ability to transfer findings to other studies (Creswell 2015). Lincoln and Guba (1985) described thick description as a way of achieving a type of transferability. Transferability for this study was accomplished through a selection of emergency managers who completed the GACEMP curriculum and experienced at least one presidentially declared disaster following the completion of the curriculum. The researcher compiled rich, thick, detailed descriptions of the participants and data-collection process.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations must be considered during the initial planning and continued throughout the implementation of any qualitative study (Creswell and Poth 2017). Ethical considerations for this study began with each participant completing an informed consent form that included a full disclosure of the study's purpose. The signed informed consent form was obtained from each participant before data collection. Protecting each participant's identity was accomplished through coding. None of the participants are mentioned by name, rank, county, or emergency management region. The aliases are four-digit numbers randomly applied to the participants. Ensuring ethics during the data-collection and storage process is critical. Digital protections were employed to ensure anonymity. All files are maintained by password-protected documents, videos, and audio recordings with only the researcher having the passwords.

Summary

Chapter 3 included a description of the design and procedures used to conduct this study of the lived experiences of local emergency managers following their completion of the GACEMP curriculum. The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative inquiry was to understand the efficacy of the GACEMP curriculum on preparing local emergency managers in each of Georgia's eight geographical regions for their role. The research question was as follows: How prepared do emergency managers feel they are for their role as a local emergency manager following their completion of the GACEMP curriculum?

This chapter included an explanation of the research design, restatement of the research question, a description of the setting, and the process of selecting study participants. Following IRB approval, the study was conducted with data collected through interviews, and self-reflective journaling. Each interview was video and audio recorded and transcripts were created. Data analysis for this hermeneutic phenomenology qualitative study began by coding each participant's identity and region to protect their confidentiality. Data analysis included reading and rereading interview transcripts to identify themes.

Chapter 3 concluded with a description of how trustworthiness was accomplished. To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher used credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The recordings, transcriptions, and journals will remain in a secure location only the researcher can access. Member checking was used to validate the transcripts. A copy of each participant's transcript was returned to them via email for review to ensure accuracy.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The findings presented are a result of virtual interviews conducted with thirty-two Georgia emergency managers who have completed the GACEMP curriculum and experienced at least one presidentially declared disaster since completing the curriculum. The researcher examined a public list of certified emergency managers (CEMs) in Georgia to ensure participants met the inclusion criterion described in chapter 3. Furthermore, the researcher reviewed the FEMA Presidential Disaster Database for Georgia to ensure the jurisdiction where the participant practice's emergency management were actually declared. To ensure a maximum variation sample, the participant pool included four emergency managers who met the inclusion criterion from each of Georgia's eight emergency management regions.

Virtual interviews via Zoom were used to ensure compliance with Covid-19 countermeasures. Each interview was scheduled in advance for one hour. The shortest interview was 28 minutes and the longest was one hour. Audio and video recordings generated in Zoom of each interview were converted into interview transcripts using OTTER for Zoom. Each audio and video recording and all transcripts have been stored in a password-protected safe and secure location only the researcher can access.

Participants

A total of thirty-two participants, four from each of Georgia's eight emergency management regions were successfully vetted for participation following the study's inclusion criterion. Participant ages ranged from 25 to 64 and the average years of experience among participants was 12.5. Participants' formal education varied with two holding an associate's

degree, eight having a bachelor's degree, five holding a master's degree, and 17 with a high school diplomas (see table 8.0).

Table 8.0. Participant demographics

Participant	Age	Years' Experience	Highest Level Education	Last Disaster	Gender
0101	54	20	High School	Tornado	Male
0102	35	9	High School	Tropical Storm	Male
0103	33	5	Bachelor's Degree	Tropical Storm	Male
0104	58	25	High School	Tornado	Female
0201	44	17	High School	Tropical Storm	Male
0202	29	4	Bachelor's Degree	Tropical Storm	Male
0203	41	11	High School	Tropical Storm	Male
0204	36	5	High School	Tropical Storm	Male
0301	64	23	High School	Tropical Storm	Male
0302	35	10	Bachelor's Degree	Tornado	Female
0303	39	15	High School	Tropical Storm	Male
0304	42	20	High School	Flood	Male
0401	38	19	Master's Degree	Tropical Storm	Male
0402	32	6	Associate's Degree	Tropical Storm	Male
0403	36	10	Bachelor's Degree	Tropical Storm	Male
0404	51	8	High School	Flooding	Male
0501	31	3	Bachelor's Degree	Tropical Storm	Female
0502	33	13	High School	Tropical Storm	Female
0503	49	8	Master's Degree	Tropical Storm	Male
0504	32	3	Bachelor's Degree	Tropical Storm	Male
0601	35	4	High School	Tropical Storm	Male
0602	55	25	Associate's Degree	Tropical Storm	Male
0603	35	5	High School	Tropical Storm	Male
0604	62	8	High School	Tornado	Male

Participant	Age	Years' Experience	Highest Level Education	Last Disaster	Gender
0701	36	6	Master's Degree	Tropical Storm	Male
0702	44	19	Bachelor's Degree	Tropical Storm	Male
0703	51	20	Master's Degree	Tropical Storm	Male
0704	25	3	High School	Tropical Storm	Male
0801	63	20	High School	Tropical Storm	Male
0802	47	15	Master's Degree	Tornado	Male
0803	30	8	Bachelor's Degree	Tropical Storm	Male
0804	48	21	High School	Tropical Storm	Male

Participant 0101

At the time of the study, participant 0101 had been a practicing emergency manager in Georgia for over twenty years and during this time experienced a wide range of both natural and human-caused events that have dramatically impacted the community. Participant 0101 indicated that the latest disaster to impact the community was the Covid-19 pandemic, which placed a great strain on available resources and left local elected officials looking towards the local emergency management agency for answers to never-before-asked questions. Although the pandemic was the latest disaster participant 0101 faced, tropical storms and severe weather have also caused damage within the participant's jurisdictions, resulting in two presidential disaster declarations since the participant completed the required curriculum within the GACEMP.

Participant 0102

At the time of the study, participant 0102 had nine years of experience in emergency management. Participant 0102 is a high school graduate and thirty-five years old. Participant 0102 stated that the last presidentially declared disaster in their community of practice was Tropical Storm Michael. Participant 0102 stated:

After Tropical Storm Michael 100 percent of the county was without power including our hospital and three nursing homes. I had never been responsible for such a disaster and for the first several hours I was lost. The training I had received during my certification process did not give me the tools I needed to accomplish the problems facing my town. Everyone was looking at me and I was just as lost as they were. Thankfully I had developed relationships with other county emergency management directors who came to my aid.

Participant 0102 also said, “the classes in the CEM program need more simulation and less lecture, I think that would have helped me when Michael hit our county.” Many study participants refer to the GACEMP as the CEM.

Participant 0103

At the time of the study, participant 0103 was thirty-three years old and has been a practicing emergency manager for five years. Participant 0103 has a bachelor’s degree and is a full-time emergency manager. The last major disaster participant 0103 managed was a tropical storm, which, according to participant 0103, caused extensive damage all across the county with more than a few families displaced for more than a year. Participant 0103 completed the GACEMP curriculum just three months prior to the tropical storm impacting his community. Participant 0103 said, “I learned some valuable things during my training however, the most valuable thing I gained from the CEM program was the relationship I developed with other students and a few of the experienced instructor. Those relationships saved me during the tropical storm.”

Participant 0104

At the time of the study, participant 0104 was fifty-eight years old with twenty years' experience in public safety, fifteen of which as a paramedic and five as a local emergency manager. Participant 0104 is a high school graduate and the last presidentially declared disaster that impacted the participant's community following their completion of the GACEMP curriculum was a tornado. Participant 0104 expressed his appreciation for the required courses taken to become certified as an emergency manager in Georgia. However, participant 0104 felt the program needed to be more structured with care taken to have each required course build on the last course taken. Participant 0104 said, "I just didn't get a few of the courses until I completed additional training. The later classes allowed me to understand what was being presented in a prior class. I was allowed to take any required class in any order and at any time, this made things more difficult for me."

Participant 0201

At the time of the study, participant 0201 was forty-four years old with seventeen years' experience as a firefighter and emergency manager. The last declared disaster to impact the participant's county was a tropical storm. Participant 0201 is a high school graduate but stated that he had completed the requirements for several professional certifications on top of the GACEMP. Participant 0201 was concerned about the lack of training in the CEM program related to the plans required by the state to be completed by the local emergency manager.

Participant 0201 said:

Once I was certified I met with my state emergency management coordinator who gave me a list of plans that were required. I really felt embarrassed because I had never heard of half these plans and had no idea where to start. I knew what the LEOP was because I

had worked on it before but things like continuity of operations and threat analysis were new to me. It was almost like I had to start all over bringing myself up to speed on the FEMA 101 planning guide. There should be some training on what plans are required and how to at least start them in the CEM program.

Participant 0202

At the time of the study, participant 0202 was twenty-nine years old and holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice. Participant 0202 has been a practicing emergency manager for the last four years. The last presidentially declared disaster in which participant 0202 participated was a tropical storm. Not only has participant 0202 completed the GACEMP curriculum, but they also completed the FEMA Foundations in Emergency Management Program. During the interview for this study, participant 0202 constantly compared the FEMA foundations courses to the GACEMP curriculum. Participant 0202 said, "The courses required by the Georgia program provided little in the way of foundational emergency management including threat assessment and the principal elements of managing a local emergency management program."

Participant 0203

Participant 0203 was unique to the other participants, having been a certified practicing emergency manager in the state of Florida for nine years before taking a job as an emergency manager in Georgia. Participant 0203 has completed the GACEMP curriculum over the past two years. Moreover, participant 0203 has completed the FEMA Foundations in Emergency Management Program. Participant 0203 is forty-one years old and has a total of eleven years' experience in emergency management. Participant 0203 has experienced one presidential disaster declaration for severe storms since completing the Georgia curriculum.

Participant 0204

At the time of the study, participant 0204 was thirty-six years old and has been a full-time practicing emergency manager for five years and is a high school graduate. The last presidentially declared disaster in the jurisdiction where the participant works was a tropical storm. Participant 0204 indicated that he gained a great deal of knowledge while attending the required courses for Georgia certification and received little if any training related to emergency management before entering the program. Participant 0204 said he was one of four full-time emergency managers within the county jurisdiction and his responsibilities are currently limited to coordinating the community emergency response team.

Participant 0301

At the time of the study, participant 0301 had been an emergency manager for twenty-three years and is sixty-four years old. Participant 0301 had a career in agriculture prior to becoming a part-time emergency manager. The recovery from the last presidentially declared disaster participant 0301 handled is still ongoing and was due to a tropical storm. Participant 0301 is a high school graduate and has also completed several emergency management-related certifications on top of completing the GACEMP. Participant 0301 said:

I have been either a volunteer or part-time emergency manager for 23 years and only completed the courses for the Georgia emergency manager certification over the past five years. Most of the classes I took to get my Georgia emergency manager certification were useful to me as a part-time emergency manager with specific and limited responsibilities. If I were the director of emergency management the information presented would have been lacking. I was surprised by the lack of experience of some of the instructor who presented during the program. Many times, they were unable to

answer questions which left those asking without clear answers. Taking any class in any order also seemed to cause confusion.

Participant 0302

At the time of the study, participant 0302 was thirty-five years old and has ten years' experience as a combined fire chief and emergency manager in a full-time position. This participant is a high school graduate and has earned multiple certifications including Certified Fire Officer (CFO) and paramedic. Participant 0302 completed the GACEMP curriculum four years ago. The last disaster participant 0302 managed was a tornado. Participant 0302 expressed frustration with the lack of structure within the GACEMP. Participant 0302 said, "unlike fire service and paramedic certification programs, the CEM allowed participants to take courses in any order and there were no time requirements for completing all of the required courses for certification. After I took my first class it was six months before I took another, this made the overall process seem much less effective."

Participant 0303

At the time of the study, participant 0303 was thirty-nine years old and has been active within the county emergency management program for fifteen years. This participant is a high school graduate and part-time emergency manager. The last declared disaster this participant handled was a tropical storm. Participant 0303 stated that the most useful part of any of the classes within the CEM program were the stories told by experienced instructors. Participant 0303 said, "when the class was taught by an experienced instructor we learned much more because the instructor told stories about actual experiences and how the topic we were studying actually worked in real time." Participant 0303 also talked about how one-on-one time during breaks with an experienced instructor was extremely valuable.

Participant 0304

At the time of the study, participant 0304 had been in public safety for twenty years and has focused on emergency management solely for the past eight years. Participant 0304 is a high school graduate and full-time emergency manager. The last disaster this participant handled was a flood. Participant 0304 was in law enforcement before moving to emergency management. Participant 0304 expressed concern about the level of experience many instructors who taught courses in the GACEMP had in emergency management practice. Participant 0304 said:

When I took my first class I was impressed by the high level of experience and subject knowledge the instructor had, but after that first class the level of instructors went downhill. Instructors who were employees of GEMA had little in the way of experience in the subject matter from a practical matter and in fact, one of the instructors had only been out of college and on the job six months. This lack of experience was harmful to me as I was expecting to get first-hand knowledge of how to apply the topic in everyday settings. I really don't understand why more experienced and educated instructors can't be used in these classes. Experienced instructors can bring their past into the class helping the students better understand how to apply what we learned and maybe more importantly, understand what doesn't work.

Participant 0401

At the time of the study, participant 0401 was a full-time emergency manager and holds a master's degree in emergency management. Participant 0401 was very passionate about emergency management as a profession, stating, "emergency management should be like any other profession requiring a combination of education, training and experience to become certified by the state or any other organization." Participant 0401 argued that the basic CEM

program should be no different than the fire or police academies. Participant 0402 has been practicing emergency management for nineteen years and the last disaster this participant managed was a tropical storm.

Participant 0402

With six years of experience as a full-time emergency manager at the time of the study, participant 0402 is still engaged in recovery from the last disaster to affect the community, a tropical storm. Participant 0402 is thirty-two years old and has an associate's degree in emergency management. Like many of the study participants, participant 0402 expressed concerns related to the lack of training in topics such as hazard analysis, social science, and state laws related to emergency management. Participant 0402 said, "during the entire CEM program I never was given guidance related to the laws governing emergency managers in Georgia." Participant 0402 also voluntarily expressed concerns about the lack of experience in local operations held by some of the state instructors.

Participant 0403

At the time of the study, participant 0403 was thirty-six years old and has been a volunteer in the local emergency management program for ten years. This participant holds a bachelor's degree in business administration and earns a living in agriculture. The last declared disaster participant 0403 managed was a tropical storm. Participant 0403 stated that the most useful courses taken during the GACEMP were the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) course and Resource Manager course. Participant 0403 stated:

The knowledge I gained during the EOC and resource classes were extremely useful during our last disaster. I was able to recall the information and stories told by the instructors to help me manage a wide assortment of challenges. The other classes in the

CEM program were useful but none as much as these. It may have been the instructors for these classes and how they presented a combination of course curriculum and real-life experiences. I didn't feel ready when I finished the CEM program, but I was able to rely on these two classes to get through the worst of it.

Participant 0403 is now enrolled in the FEMA Basic Academy and has taken one course thus far.

Participant 0404

At the time of the study, participant 0404 was fifty-one years old and has been an active emergency manager for eight years, with the first four years serving as a volunteer firefighter. This participant is now part-time in the county emergency management program serving in a leadership position. Participant 0404 has a high school diploma and is a full-time farmer. The last presidentially declared disaster participant 0404 worked was flooding. Participant 0404 also is a very active member of the state emergency management association. Participant 0404 said:

I own my farm and it is hard work but, giving back to the county where I was born is important too. When I decided to go part-time with emergency management time became even more of an issue. When I attend training, it has to be worth the time commitment but, most of the classes I had to take for CEM were a waste. They didn't teach us anything about hazard or risk which is something we are required to do as part of our state funding requirements. We also didn't get any information on state laws or how to deal with the elected officials, unless I slept through it.

Participant 0501

At the time of the study, participant 0501 was thirty-one years old and has been a practicing emergency manager for three years. Participant 0501 has experienced two presidential disaster declarations during that time, with both disasters being tropical storms.

Participant 0501 is a full-time county emergency manager and has earned a bachelor's degree in public administration. Participant 0501 was very animated while giving responses to each question with respect to the Georgia program curriculum. Emergency management is a family affair for participant 0501, with several family members either volunteering with emergency management organizations in Georgia or being full-time emergency managers in Florida.

With knowledge of the emergency manager certification process in Florida, participant 0502 said, "Several of my relatives are certified emergency managers in Florida and they had told me about the courses and process there. I was prepared for a similar experience when I began the certification process in Georgia but was very surprised at the lack of formal organization and course content." Participant 0501 expressed gratitude towards some specific instructors who presented during the GACEMP, stating, "A couple of the instructors really went above and beyond to make sure every question was answered and that examples of practical experience was offered, my hats off to these guys."

Participant 0502

At the time of the study, participant 0502 was thirty-three years old and has been a practicing emergency manager for thirteen years and has earned a high school diploma. This participant is currently enrolled in an online emergency management degree program. The last disaster to affect the community in which this participant practices was a tropical storm. Participant 0502 said, "I started off as a volunteer in emergency management and when one of the full-time emergency managers retired, I applied and got the job. I didn't begin the CEM classes until I was full time and the county paid for me to go." Participant 0502 stated that all of the classes were useful and helped with understanding more about the profession of emergency management. However, participant 0502 did find the program lacking several areas. Participant

0502 said, “I was disappointed that we didn’t hear more about the requirements to receive funding from the state or what plans were required and the timeline for updating them.”

Participant 0503

With eight years’ experience as a local emergency manager at the time of the study, participant 0503 was forty-nine years old and holds a master’s degree in public policy-homeland security. Participant 0503 served in the United States Army prior to becoming an emergency manager. The last declared disaster participant 0503 operated in was a tropical storm.

Participant 0503 said the courses required to gain the emergency manager certification were helpful but failed to provide the most basic foundational elements of emergency management.

Participant 0503 stated:

During my master’s program we learned a great deal about emergency management and the foundations of emergency management in the United States. We even covered the history of disaster response in this country. This was very helpful in building a solid base to work from as our program moved towards the area of homeland security. The Georgia CEM provided none of this type of information which in my opinion is critical to forming a solid understanding emergency management. If I had not received this knowledge in college it would have been difficult to wrap my head around some of the things the instructors were saying. Having this prior knowledge also allowed me to better understand what the Georgia program was lacking in the way of subject matter.

Participant 0504

At the time of the study, participant 0504 was thirty-two years old and has been an emergency manager for three years. After earning a master’s degree in emergency management, participant 0504 moved from law enforcement into a local emergency management program as a

full-time emergency management specialist. The last disaster participant 0504 managed was a tropical storm. The participant filled many roles within the incident command organization during this disaster, including recovery branch director. In this role, participant 0504 indicated that many issues arose concerning the convergence of unaffiliated volunteers, which the local emergency management agency had no plan for.

Participant 0601

At the time of the study, participant 0601 had been a local emergency manager for four years and holds a high school diploma. This participant is thirty-five years old and the last disaster they experienced was a tropical storm. Participant 0601 is also an adjunct instructor for the Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA) teaching courses that are not associated with the GACEMP curriculum. Prior to joining the local emergency management organization, participant 0601 was a firefighter-paramedic and rescue specialist. Participant 0601 said the CEM program would be much better if the courses were more structured and taken within a more restricted time frame.

Participant 0602

At the time of the study, participant 0602 was fifty-five years old and has been a practicing emergency manager for twenty-five years. This participant was in agriculture prior to joining the local emergency management organization as a full-time employee. The last declared disaster to impact participant 0602's area of responsibility was a tropical storm where the participant managed multiple areas of the response and recovery. Participant 0602 holds an associate's degree in an agricultural-related field. Participant 0602 said that because there were no time limits on completing the required courses, five years passed between their first class and certification. Participant 0602 stated, "It took me five years to get all of the classes needed for

certification. Looking back this was a bad thing as often I had forgotten things I had already learned.”

Participant 0603

With five years’ experience as a full-time local emergency manager at the time of the study, participant 0603 was thirty-five years old and has earned a high school diploma as well as many other emergency management special certifications on top of completing the GACEMP curriculum. Without being asked, participant 0603 volunteered a great deal of information concerning community involvement and how that helped develop relationships, which became vital during the tropical storm that recently impacted the community. Participant 0603 stated:

During the hurricane we had back a couple of years ago I had to bring together a large number of groups including many from outside our community. It was a difficult to organize so many volunteer groups and people who just walked up wanting to help. I am embarrassed to say that I had no idea what I was doing and nothing I had learned in training provided any help. It was by the grace of God that a local pastor stepped up and offered to take on this task. We had no plan and I didn’t know what I was doing. The Georgia CEM should include training on how to organize and develop volunteer programs and prepare local emergency managers on how serious of a problem this can be.

Participant 0603 held many leadership roles during all phases of this disaster, but was primarily focused on the tremendous volunteer response.

Participant 0604

At the time of the study, participant 0604 was sixty-six years old and has been a volunteer emergency manager for the past eight years. This participant has a high school

diploma and served in the United States military prior to volunteering as a local emergency manager. This participant is also a volunteer firefighter. The last disaster this participant managed was a tornado. Participant 0604 said many of the courses required by the GACEMP were interesting especially when experienced instructors presented the materials. However, following the first disaster after participant 0604 had completed the certification curriculum, the participant found that the courses may not have been as helpful as they first thought. Participant 0604 said, “once we were faced with a real disaster I found myself asking many more questions and having fewer answers particularly related to organizing the response, recovery and evaluating information before briefing the commissioner. I was not ready.”

Participant 0701

At the time of the study, participant 0701 was a full-time emergency manager and holds a master’s degree in emergency management. This participant is thirty-six years old and was a firefighter-EMT prior to joining emergency management. The last declared disaster participant 0701 handled was a tropical storm. During this disaster, participant 0701 acted as the EOC director overseeing the response phase and acting as the recovery manager during the short and long-term recovery. Participant 0701 is also an adjunct professor in emergency management at the university level and has presented at several emergency management conferences.

Participant 0702

At the time of the study, participant 0702 was a part-time emergency manager in one county and full-time firefighter in another jurisdiction. This participant is forty-four years old and has nineteen years’ experience in emergency management holding a bachelor’s degree in public safety leadership. This participant has multiple special certifications including hazardous materials technician, paramedic, and rescue specialist. The last major disaster this participant

managed was a tropical storm. Participant 0702 said many of the courses taken for certification were useful; however, there was absolutely no training on systems used by local emergency managers. Participant 0702 said, “When we get certified the state expects us to be able to use all of the reporting systems they have without providing us with any training at all.” Participant 0702 stated that he was not prepared for all of the state reporting requirements due to the lack of training and legal implications surrounding reporting between the state and local emergency managers.

Participant 0703

At the time of the study, participant 0703 was fifty-one years old and had been in public safety for twenty years and a practicing emergency manager for the last ten years. This participant has a master’s degree in criminal justice and the last declared disaster the participant handled was a tropical storm. Participant 0703 is also an instructor at a local private university and voluntarily had a lot to say about the competency of instructors who taught courses within the GACEMP curriculum. Participant 0703 was critical of some instructors and the lack of experience instructors had in actually performing tasks at the local level. Participant 0703 said, “in some classes the instructor was very experienced in local emergency management and was able to provide not only the course materials but practical application while others had no experience at all, which was disappointing.”

Participant 0704

At the time of the study, participant 0704 had three years’ experience as a full-time local emergency manager. Participant 0704 has completed high school and is currently enrolled in an emergency management associate’s degree program at a Georgia technical college. The last declared disaster this participant managed was a tropical storm, which was still ongoing at the

time of the study. Participant 0704 said, “I learned a lot while taking the classes for my Georgia certification but, I thought they would go deeper into things like the causes of disaster and how disasters impact people so I would know how to get our town ready. There was a lot of talk about different programs but nothing on how to practically apply what we were being taught.”

Participant 0801

At the time of the interview, participant 0801 was sixty-three years old and a full-time local emergency manager with twenty years’ experience and a high school graduate. Participant 0801 said, “I have completed several hours of college work but never found the time to finish my degree but, I have several special certifications in emergency management and have completed the Georgia certified emergency manager work.” Participant 0801 manages all aspects of the local emergency management program and the last disaster to be declared within the participant’s jurisdiction was a tropical storm. Participant 0801 went on to say he had not attended any emergency management specific training in the past two years. When asked why, the participant stated, “Most classes offered have little to do with what I do every day as a local emergency manager.” Participant 0801 believes experience is much more valuable than education.

Participant 0802

At the time of the study, participant 0802 was involved in the recovery from a tornado and other severe storm damage, which was declared a major disaster. Participant 0802 is forty-seven years old, has fifteen years’ experience as a local emergency manager, and earned a master’s degree in emergency management. Participant 0802 said, “I was overall disappointed in the courses I attended while completing the Georgia Certified Emergency Manager Program. I was hoping to come away with more useful knowledge.” Participant 0802 had strong feelings

concerning both the quality of instructors and topics required for certification in Georgia.

Participant 0802 said, “some of the topics and instructors were a joke.”

Participant 0803

At the time of the study, participant 0803 was a full-time emergency manager with eight years’ experience. Participant 0803 is thirty years of age and has a bachelor’s degree in emergency management. The last major disaster the participant managed was a tropical storm. While answering survey questions for the study, participant 0803 had strong feelings related to topics that were not included in the GACEMP curriculum. Participant 0803 said, “I expected some of the courses to include information for local emergency managers on laws and regulations for emergency management, but we never covered any of the things I am required to follow now.” Participant 0803 also felt that being allowed to take any of the required courses at any time and in any order was a disadvantage. Participant 0803 said, “a few of the courses made no sense to me when I took them, but when I took other courses I saw how everything tied together. Course should be aligned so that they build on one another.”

Participant 0804

At the time of the study, Participant 0804 was a part-time emergency manager with twenty-one years’ experience as a volunteer in both the local fire department and emergency management agency. Over the past seven years, participant 0804 has also worked to organize volunteers for disasters within the community. Participant 0804 has a high school diploma and is forty-eight years old. The last disaster this participant handled was a tropical storm. Participant 0804 said many of the courses within the GACEMP curriculum were helpful in preparing for doing the work of an emergency manager; however, many basic elements of emergency management work were missing. Participant 0804 stated, “we were never really given any

information related to how disasters affect people of different backgrounds in different ways.”

Participant 0804 also commented on the lack of information related to state and federal requirements for local emergency managers.

Results

The researcher reviewed the interview transcripts and audio/video recordings many times and the data were analyzed in accordance with the procedures described in chapter 3. The researcher first identified all significant statements and grouped similar statements into categories, then reduced these categories into themes and subthemes associated with the research question.

Theme Development

Thematic analysis is a process in which the researcher develops connections, links, and associations between different parts (Boström 2019). The researcher identified several similarities through reading and rereading the data. The researcher reread each transcript after identifying the themes, reviewing every item circled or underlined and all bracketed statements, phrases, sentences, and passages. Journal entrees and analytical memos were again reviewed to further establish credibility to the emerging themes. Three major themes emerged following an in-depth thematic analysis of all data collected: the science of disaster, instructor competency, and foundations of emergency management (see table 9.0). An explanation of how each theme was used to answer the research question follows the discussion of each theme and subtheme.

Table 9.0. Major themes emerging from thematic analysis

Theme	Definition
Science of Disaster	An introduction of earth and social sciences, hazard analysis, impact prediction, and implications of hazards on the population.
Instructor Competency	A combination of education, experience, technical expertise, special qualifications, and certifications relevant to the topic being taught.
Foundations of Emergency Management	Emergency management legal issues, intergovernmental and interagency context, influencing, organizing, social vulnerability issues, managing stress, collaboration, preparedness, team building, mitigation, response, prevention and protection, ethical decision-making, recovery, technology, administration, and the future.

Research Question Responses

The three major themes developed from the data collected for this study reveal how local emergency managers, through their lived experiences, perceive how the GACEMP curriculum prepared them for their role. The researcher used all themes identified during the analysis of data collected during the interviews to answer the research question. The research question was as follows: How prepared do emergency managers feel they are for their role as a local emergency manager following their completion of the GACEMP curriculum?

Major Theme One: Science of Disaster

The first major theme that emerged during data analysis reflected the participants' lived experiences with the science of disaster (see table 10). The science of disaster is associated with multiple threads that allow communities to anticipate disaster (James 2011, 1014). These threads are associated with earth and social sciences, hazard identification, and community vulnerability. Thirty participants were concerned about the lack of training within the GACEMP curriculum

related to topics that, according to Blanchard (2005), are associated with the science of disaster (see table 11). Based on the analysis of data collected for this study, five subthemes supported the first major theme (science of disaster). These subthemes included earth science, social science, hazard analysis, hazard prediction, and impact analysis and vulnerability (see table 10.0).

Table 10.0. Major theme one and subthemes

Major Theme One: Science of Disaster
Subthemes
1.1 Earth Sciences
1.2 Social Sciences
1.3 Hazard Analysis
1.4 Hazard prediction
1.5 Impact & Vulnerability Analysis

Participant 0104 found that few of the courses required by the GACEMP prepared the participant for the experiences of developing local plans, including the LEOP and local hazard mitigation plan (HMP), which require basic knowledge in disaster science. Participant 0104 said, “once I was certified it was like everyone in my county expected me to be an expert on every possible thing that could happen. The fact was we received little training on identifying hazards or determining what impact they might have on our area.” Participant 0604 said that the term science of disaster was never mentioned during any of the GACEMP courses. Participant 0503 said, “If I had not had a formal education in emergency management before entering the CEM program I would have had no real understanding of the science of disaster after receiving the Georgia emergency manager certification.”

Major Theme One—Subtheme 1.1: Earth Science

As a subtheme, earth science was a concern for 30% of participants after completing the GACEMP curriculum, which later impacted their lived experiences as local emergency managers. Participant 0202 said, “I would almost say that my eight-grade science class did more to prepare me than the certification classes for questions concerning weather.” Participant 0502 said, “I have found that the information provided in the CEM program was only the tip of the iceberg in what I needed to know about answering questions about natural hazards. If it hadn’t been for my relationship with neighboring emergency managers I would have been in trouble.” Participant 0801 commented on a course offered in the GACEMP that focused on weather hazards. Participant 0801 said, “The weather class we had was taught my professional meteorologist and much of what they said was way over my head. Most of the people in my class simply tuned them out.”

Many participants were disappointed in the lack of training they received in natural hazards. Participant 0103 said, “weather is the main hazard we face in my county and the amount of time used to cover weather related issues was minimal in the Georgia CEM program.” Participant 0703 said, “the weather information presented in the CEM program is good but there should be much more especially tropical weather and its affects well inland.” Participant 0703 also stated, “we should have been given the contact information on who to call for community training concerning weather hazards and links to the online information.” There was some disagreement on the training related to natural hazards, as participant 0502 said, “the weather part of the CEM program was great. I am a weather geek and I thought this was the best part of the entire CEM program.”

Major Theme One—Subtheme 1.2: Social Science

Participants identified social science as the second subtheme to emerge under major theme one. According to 45% of study participants, the lack of training in the social sciences has impacted their lived experiences as local emergency managers. Within the practice of emergency management, social science is an emerging, yet important aspect of disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. According to Oyola-Yemaiel and Wilson (2005, 81), social science must be merged with the practice of emergency management curriculum just as it has in nursing and social work. Several participants commented on their lack of self-confidence in understanding how special groups within the community would complicate disaster response and recovery. Participant 0804 said, “I had no idea how different cultures within my community would complicate my planning and decision making.” Participant 0801 said, “Understanding how people react or not to warnings would have been helpful as we crafted messages to the public. I found that simply forgetting to add one or two words to an evacuation order would influence a person’s decision to evacuate.” Participant 503 said, “I wish that I would have had a better understanding of how process messaging before tropical storm Michael hit. I made a lot of mistakes that could have been avoided.”

Cultural issues also impacted participants’ lived experiences. Participant 0301 said, “I had no idea how different cultures reacted to disaster preparedness.” Participant 0601 said, “When it came to disasters I thought everyone would react the same, but that wasn’t the case at all which complicated my plans and ability to respond in a meaningful way.” Participant 0202 found the GACEMP curriculum lacking in the area of social sciences. Participant 0202 said, “If I had not completed the FEMA basic academy prior to attending courses for the Georgia CEM, I

would have had no idea of the importance of understanding the social sciences and the relationship between science and disaster.”

Major Theme One—Subtheme 1.3: Hazard Analysis

The third subtheme identified under major theme one is hazard analysis. Identifying and analyzing threats is a cornerstone of emergency management; however, many participants commented on the lack of training or information they received on hazard analysis or Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (THIRA). Participant 0203 said, “I had never heard of THIRA before or after attending the certified emergency manager courses.” The completion of THIRA is a requirement for all counties. Participant 0203 completed the GACEMP curriculum in 2020. Participant 0504 had a similar experience, stating, “The only mention of hazard analysis was made by one of the emergency managers who was an instructor in the EOC course. I ended up learning on the job to complete my communities THIRA.” Participant 0404 said, “Hazard analysis was never mentioned in any of the courses I took to get certified and this really hurt me when I found myself facing the forecast of a major storm.”

Major Theme One—Subtheme 1.4: Hazard Prediction

Hazard prediction was identified as a fourth subtheme under major theme one. Emergency managers are often asked to predict the potential impacts of various hazards once they are forecasted. Participant 0402 said, “the board of commissioners called me to the front of the meeting room and began asking questions concerning potential impacts of different disasters on the community and wanted me to explain my answers in detail. I was able to talk my way out of the situation, I felt ill prepared for the surprise list of pointed questions.” Participant 0603 also felt the certification curriculum lacked important information that would have better prepared the emergency manager for encounters with the public concerning the impacts of

natural hazards. Participant 0603 said, “after completing the emergency manager certification process I was no better prepared to answer questions from the public concerning how specific natural disasters could affect them.” This was a common subtheme among 55% of participants.

Major Theme One—Subtheme 1.5: Impact Analysis and Vulnerability

The fifth subtheme identified under major theme one is impact analysis and vulnerability. The lack of training on hazards and how they may impact a specific community, including the vulnerability of specific groups, were concerns found during the interview data analysis.

Participant 0103 said,

I was shocked at what I didn't know once I completed the Georgia certification process. My first assignment was to develop an updated local emergency operations plan and hazard mitigation strategy. I had no clue about hazard vulnerability, how to determine the implications of disasters if they affect my town or how cascading events unfold from the main event. I only received notice from the state that the plans were due by a certain date and that they must be approved by our Board of Commissioners. I needed help and found that nothing I had learned during the emergency manager certification process prepared me for figuring out how a major disaster might impact my county.

Participant 0203 stated, “Impact analysis is part of THIRA but we never received any training on the THIRA process. I even had people in my county who had read about THIRA online but never attend an emergency management course knowing more than me.” Participant 0803 said, “I was pretty clear on what hazards could affect my county but I was hoping that the certified emergency manager program would help me to understand all of the potential problems that each hazard could cause. I was disappointed.” Participant 302 said, “To me, THIRA is the

foundation of everything we do as local emergency managers, it should have been its own course in the certification process.”

Table 11.0. Major theme one topics participants mentioned as missing from the GACEMP

Participant	Earth Sciences	Social Sciences	Hazard Analysis	Hazard Prediction	Impact Analysis
0103	X	X	X		
0104	X	X	X	X	X
0202	X			X	X
0203	X	X	X	X	X
0301		X	X	X	X
0302	X		X	X	X
0304			X	X	X
0401		X			
0402	X		X	X	X
0403		X	X		
0404		X	X	X	X
0502	X	X	X	X	X
0504			X	X	X
0601		X	X		
0602		X			
0603		X	X	X	X
0604			X	X	X
0703	X	X			X
Participant	Earth Sciences	Social Sciences	Hazard Analysis	Hazard Prediction	Impact Analysis
0704			X	X	X
0801	X	X	X		
0802		X	X	X	
0803	X	X		X	X
0804			X	X	X

Major Theme Two: Instructor Competency

The second major theme that emerged during data analysis reflected the participants' lived experiences while taking courses required by the GACEMP. There were no interview questions related to the competency of curriculum instructors; however, 88% of participants voluntarily identified instructor competency as an important factor in the efficacy of the GACEMP curriculum (see table 13.0). Instructor competency was an incidental finding that established an unexpected but important theme to the findings of this study. According to participants, the instructors' lack of extensive knowledge of the topic and experience in the topic at the local level reduced the curriculum's effectiveness.

Participants were outspoken concerning their displeasures with the competency of some instructors who delivered various courses within the GACEMP required curriculum. Two subthemes support major theme two (see table 12.0). These subthemes, which emerged from interview data analysis, are instructor experience and instructor knowledge.

Table 12.0. Major theme two and subthemes

Major Theme Two: Instructor Competency
Subthemes
2.1 Instructor Experience
2.2 Instructor Knowledge

Major Theme Two—Subtheme 2.1: Instructor Experience

Instructor experience was revealed as subtheme 2.1 during the interview data analysis. Participants who commented on instructors who had presented courses within the Georgia curriculum cited that the lack of experience many instructors had in deploying the subject matter at the local level affected the quality of their learning. Participant 0503 stated, "A few of the instructors were experienced local emergency managers however, many courses were presented

by state emergency management staff who had no practical experience in the topic being presented.” Participant 0202 also commented on the competency of instructors, stating, “The courses taught by full-time state staff were mostly a waste of time as they were unable to answer many of our questions related to local application of the topic.” Participant 0601 added, “a hand full of instructors were fit to deliver the required course, most were not. The instructor was not confident and neither was I.” Participant 0804 said, “I felt sorry for the instructor who presented one of our course. It was obvious that she had never taken the course and had no experience in the application of the methods being explained. Having to listen to someone reading from slides is a bummer.”

The issue of instructor competency also came up when participant 0404 was asked which courses within the GACEMP curriculum were most valuable in preparing participants for their role as an emergency manager. Participant 0404 stated:

I would have to say the emergency operations center class and the resource management class were the most valuable to me not because of the content of the student manual but because of the instructor. If it had not been for the experience of the instructors and their willingness to share stories and best practices the classes would have been a waste of time. Outside of these two courses, I was disappointed in the overall level of information I received and the experience level of the instructors. During most of the other courses the instructors were not experienced in the actual implementation of the topic.

Major Theme Two—Subtheme 2.2: Instructor Knowledge

Instructor knowledge was identified as a subtheme during the interview data analysis. According to Drabek and Evans (2005, 49), emergency managers are required to understand concepts from multiple disciplines to be successful. Theories in emergency management specify

actions that emergency managers should take to be effective. This requires knowledgeable instruction on theory and bringing concepts to practice. Several study participants found instructors' topical knowledge of curriculum subject matter to be lacking. Participant 0103 expressed concern about instructor knowledge, stating, "Reading line by line from a PowerPoint is not knowledge, it's being able to read." Participant 0401 said, "When the instructor couldn't answer a single question from the class without looking it up it was clear he knew nothing about what is was trying to teach us."

Participant 0502 found that instructor knowledge varied significantly from course to course, stating, "The person who taught EOC management knew the topic front to back and could answer any question without hesitation. There were some instructors who didn't know anything about their topic and without the PowerPoint would have been as lost as I was."

Participant 0601 agreed, stating, "The difference between instructors from class to class was worrisome, you never knew what you were going to get." Participant 0801 said, "Some of the instructors were very prepared for the course which made me feel more confident in being able to apply what we had learned once I got home but, some of the instructors made me feel less prepared than I already was."

Table 13.0. Major theme two's subthemes identified from participants interviews

Participant	Instructor Experience	Instructor Knowledge
0101		
0103	X	X
0104	X	X
0202	X	
0203	X	X
0204		
0301		X
0303	X	
0304	X	
0401		X
0402	X	
0403		X
0404		X
0501	X	
0502	X	X
0503	X	X
0601		X
0602		X
0603		X
0604		
0702	X	X
0703	X	X
0704		

Participant	Instructor Experience	Instructor Knowledge
0801	X	X
0802		X
0803		X
0804		

Major Theme Three: Foundations of Emergency Management

The third major theme emerging during data analysis reflected participants' lived experiences with foundational elements of emergency management. Foundations of emergency management comprise a mosaic of basic program elements emergency managers must accomplish for the local emergency management program to be successful. During this study, participants identified four areas that can be considered foundational elements of emergency management, including legal requirements, leadership, problem solving, and principles of emergency management (see table 14.0).

Table 14.0. Major theme three and subthemes

Major Theme Three: Foundations of Emergency Management
Subthemes
3.1 Legal Requirements
3.2 Leadership
3.3 Problem Solving
3.4 Principles of Emergency Management

Subtheme 3.1 Legal Requirements

Emergency managers at the local level are required to follow established federal, state, and local laws specific to emergency management. Many participants expressed concerns that the GACEMP curriculum did not discuss any of these laws. Participant 0804 said, "Before

attending classes for the CEM I had seen our emergency management director fumble around with resolutions and other legal documents but didn't really understand any of what he was doing. I always figured the legal requirements for emergency management agencies would be covered in CEM training but they never were." Participant 0104 also expressed concerns over the lack of training related to legal issues:

After finishing up the CEM program I was given a lot of additional responsibilities including the writing of resolutions for things like the LEOP. I have experience with our county laws related to zoning and purchasing. I really had no idea how important the legal issues related to emergency management were. After our last disaster our state EM area coordinator came down and ask to see our legal documents for state of emergency and emergency purchasing, I didn't know we need them. Why this stuff wasn't part of the CEM I have no idea. It really kinda made me mad once I realized how important it is to understand the legal requirements that I was responsible for.

In Georgia, the Emergency Management Act of 1982, as amended, sets forth a wide range of legal requirements for the local emergency manager. The act has been amended multiple times since 1982, altering the legal requirements for both the state and local emergency management organizations (gema.ga.gov). Early in the interview, participant 0204 voluntarily mentioned how the lack of training on legal requirements hindered his ability to manage the local emergency management program. The researcher asked participant 0204 if he was familiar with the Georgia Emergency Management Act and the participant said no. Further discussions with other participants found that only 25% of participants were aware of the Georgia Emergency Management Act.

Subtheme 3.2 Leadership

Leadership within emergency management is key to demonstrate vision, compassion, flexibility, and imagination (Blanchard 2005, 2). Waugh and Streib (2006, 132) argued that the lack of leadership before, during, and after disasters results in suboptimal outcomes. Leadership is considered foundational within the emergency management community. Participants of this study identified lack of leadership training as an important issue. During a review of data collected during this study, it was found that twenty-seven of the thirty-two participants commented on the lack of training on leadership while describing lived experiences of either taking required courses to become certified as an emergency manager in Georgia or in practice after becoming certified.

Participant 0304 felt the lack of leadership training during the certification process contributed to him having difficulty in collaborating with other agency heads within the community. Participant 0304 said:

After I was certified as an emergency manager, I was promoted to a leadership role and was responsible for developing plans that required input from other agency heads. I had never been at this level of leadership before and had no background or training in how to work with agency leaders at this level. Instead of me leading the meetings they were taken over by agency heads that were more interested in their own interests and not having a workable plan. I felt out of place and had not a clue how to turn things around. I really just let them walk all over me. Since that time I have attended FEMA leadership training which has given me the tools I needed to be more successful. I really don't understand why the basic CEM program here doesn't have leadership training. It's almost like their throwing us into a lion's den.

Like participant 0304, many other participants commented on the lack of leadership training, which hindered their ability to collaborate with other leaders in the community. Participant 0601 said, “I had worked with other departments before becoming certified but, now I was responsible for making sure that not only the interests of other departments were met but, that the overall plan would work. I didn’t know how to be a leader at the table.” Participant 0202 said, “One thing I was hoping to get out of the CEM program was how to lead during not only during crisis but, leadership techniques for bringing organizations together. Unfortunately, there was no leadership training at all.”

Participant 0104 had different lived experiences related to leadership, stating, “There was no leadership training in the CEM but, I have been able to rely on my years of experience to guide me in situations where I was required to take on a leadership role. Of course, younger emergency managers wouldn’t have that advantage.” Participant 0102 said, “Every local emergency manager must have leadership training end of discussion. If you can’t get it in the CEM program, go somewhere else and get it.” When asked about leadership training, participant 0302 said, “We didn’t receive any leadership training in the CEM courses and leadership skills have been an important part of my emergency manager job. I have been able to be successful due to the leadership courses I attended while completing the certified fire office program and experience as a fire chief.”

Subtheme 3.3 Problem Solving

Having the ability to recognize risk and develop action plans while coordinating with others to control an incident requires local emergency managers to make effective decisions rapidly in uncertain conditions (Comfort and Wukich 2018, 54). Decision-making frameworks and cycles exist to aid local emergency managers in processing information so information can

be rapidly accessed and disseminated (Baumgart et al. 2008, 1268). Several study participants highlighted the lack of training in the GACEMP curriculum.

Participant 0401 expressed concern about the lack of instruction on decision-making and problem solving in the GACEMP, stating, “One of the main things people look for me to do is solve problems. I do the best I can but I was hoping to learn a few tips or processes that have been used by other emergency managers in the past to solve the more difficult issues, and it never happened in any of our courses.” Similarly, participant 0303 said, “There has to be a process to help emergency managers deal with the hard questions and solve problems. I was hoping to hear about some system but it was never mentioned.” Participant 0403 was concerned with how one of the course instructors responded to a question related to problem solving:

In one of the CEM courses the instructor was describing a program that the state emergency management agency had related to public assistance. This program would require local emergency managers to work out local issues with other agencies that responded to the disaster in order for the program to be successful. I ask the instructor if she had any advice on how to go about presenting the program to other local agencies and solving any problems that came along. She said that she had never worked at the local level and had no ideas about how to solve any problems that arose related to this program. I found this response really strange.

Participant 0501 talked about the lack of decision support processes in the GACEMP courses. Participant 0501 stated, “During my bachelor’s degree program I took an eight-week course on decision making and problem solving which has proven very beneficial in my career as a local emergency manager. I was surprised that this topic was never covered in the CEM program. There are many decision support models that would have been helpful to many of the

students I attended class with.” Participant 0702 had similar thoughts, stating, “I am thankful for the college courses I have taken related to problem solving. They have really helped me as an emergency manager.”

Subtheme 3.4 Principles of Emergency Management

According to the FEMA Higher Education Working group, the principles of emergency management include areas of responsibility for emergency managers; understanding the definition, mission, concepts, and terminology used and applied in emergency management; fiscal dimensions of emergency management; promoting emergency management; and strategic planning. Participants expressed concerns relating to several of these principles. Participant 0101 stated, “One of the confusing things that gave me concern during the CEM classes was who is responsible for what. The course text books were little help and depending on the instructor, we got different answers.” Participant 0203 said, “I had trouble understanding when emergency management was in charge and when some other agency should take command. This caused a lot of issues in our county and nothing in the CEM courses helped to clear things up for me at least.”

Participant 0604 said he was disappointed in the lack of training related to the promotion of emergency management:

Looking across the state some emergency management agencies have the support of the entire community including mayors and commissioners and that is my friend is obvious just looking at the things they are able to do. On the other hand, some counties have a problem getting any support at all and if it weren't state law they wouldn't even have an emergency management agency. I had hoped that by taking the certified emergency manage program I would learn the roles and responsibilities of the emergency manager,

what does it mean to be an emergency manager, and gain some understanding of the terms and mission of the more successful emergency management agencies. I really wanted to come back as a certified emergency manager and be able to persuade my commissioner how important emergency management really was. I was disappointed in the level of information presented in the CEM courses and there were few best practices offered to help people like me.

Two participants felt they did gain some understanding of the principle elements of emergency management during the required courses; however, both felt more information was needed to better understand how community frameworks were created to identify roles and responsibilities across all disciplines. Participant 0804 said, “I knew that there were emergency support functions within our local plan, but I had always been confused about how we determined who was responsible for what. There were no classes offered in the CEM program that specifically focused on this issue.” Participant 0304 stated, “I wish someone would have taken us through an approved local plan from a county so that we could have gotten a better impression of who is most often responsible for what when it comes to the plan.”

The administration of local emergency management programs can be quite complex and time consuming. Study participants found the lack of information related to the administrative requirements for local emergency managers left them less than prepared for their role. Study participants expressed their concerns about the lack of training within the GACEMP curriculum related to strategic planning, organization, and fiscal dimensions. Participant 0701 said, “I really didn’t gain any knowledge during the CEM program related to the day-to-day administration of an emergency management program, I simply use my experience and education to guide me every day.” Participant 0402 added, “the state requirements for fiscal reporting are much

different than those in my county. I wish we could have received some training on what the state and federal governments require during the CEM.”

Participants also identified strategic planning as another issue. Participant 0102 said:

My emergency management director had retired a couple of years before I finished the CEM and once I was certified I was appointed by my commissioners as the new director. Our overall program was in bad shape and a plan was needed to get everyone organized. I had little experience in this type of thing and the courses I took for CEM never mentioned anything about how to go about developing an overall plan. I know they can't cover everything in the CEM program but, this seems like such a basic issue it should be added.

Participant 0502 agreed, stating, “We really needed a good overall plan for our program and I was looking for help during the CEM program. Unfortunately, none of the required courses covered planning.”

Many participants expressed displeasure with the lack of training they received during the GACEMP related to fiscal issues specific to grants. Participant 0101 said, “We receive EMPG [Emergency Management Performance Grant] funding annually and not one person ever mentioned during the CEM course what we could do with the money or what reports were required. It was like we were just supposed to know.” The EMPG is a grant FEMA gives to states, which passes through to local emergency management programs. Participant 0304 was also frustrated by the same issue: “If they're not going to train us on the EMPG how are we supposed to be in compliance.”

Outside of the EMPG a few participants were happy with the training they received during the GACEMP related to grant funding and reporting requirements specific to disasters.

Participant 0801 said, “The individual and public assistance course was very helpful and should always be required during the basic CEM program.” Participant 0503 was also pleased with this course, stating, “The disaster assistance course was very helpful in spelling out the differences between individual and public assistance.”

Table 15.0. Major theme three’s subthemes identified from participant interviews

Participant	Legal Requirements	Leadership	Problem Solving	Principles
0101	X		X	X
0102	X	X		X
0103		X		X
0104	X			
0201		X	X	
0202		X		X
0203	X			X
0204	X		X	X
0301		X		
0302	X			X
0303				X
0304			X	X
0401	X	X	X	X
0402				X
0403		X		
0404		X	X	
0501		X		X
0502	X			X
0503	X		X	X

Participant	Legal Requirements	Leadership	Problem Solving	Principles
0504		X	X	X
0601				
0602	X	X		X
0603	X	X	X	X
0604				
0701	X	X	X	X
0702	X	X		X
0703		X		X
0704	X	X	X	X
0801	X	X	X	X
0802	X			X
0803	X	X	X	X
0804	X	X	X	X

Data Analysis by Management Level

Although this study was qualitative, exploring the lived experiences of local emergency managers who had completed the GACEMP curriculum and experienced at least one presidentially declared disaster, it is important to understand if those lived experiences differed between participants' management levels. Kaiser et al. (2011) argued that job requirements, managerial roles, attitudes, observations, and even opinions vary greatly among managers within an organization's hierarchy. Through ethnographic observations of managers at different levels, the empirical literature finds that managerial roles differ across organizational levels (Luthans, Rosenkrantz, and Hennessey 1985, 89). Thus, a statistical analysis model was constructed in Microsoft Excel to determine if participants' lived experiences were unique based on their management levels.

Participant responses were once again analyzed and coded based on individual participant comments or lack of comments about identified themes. Participants were divided into three management levels based on their position at the time of the interview (Emergency Management Director, Emergency Management Manager, and Multidisciplinary; see Table 16.0).

Table 16.0. Participant management categories

Management Category	Definition
Emergency Management Director	Has been appointed by the county legal authority as the emergency management director and has been successfully vetted by the Georgia Emergency Management Agency.
Emergency Management Manager	Individual within the emergency management program assigned managerial responsibilities reporting to the county emergency management director or deputy director.
Multi-Disciplinary	Legally appointed as the county emergency management director and simultaneously holds the position of chief executive within one or more of the following public safety entities: fire, police, E-911, or other public safety agency.

A review of participant demographical information and interview transcripts found that eighteen participants met the definition for emergency management director, nine for emergency management manager, and five for multidisciplinary. Interview transcripts were then analyzed and sorted by management levels within each major theme. In keeping with the strict ethical considerations of this study found in chapter 3, none of the participants' management levels are linked to their aliases or other demographical information.

Science of Disaster by Management Level

The science of disaster is associated with multiple threads that allow communities to anticipate disaster. These threads are associated with earth and social sciences, hazard

identification, and community vulnerability. There were no statistical differences between management levels as all participants expressed concerns related to lack of training in the science of disaster (see table 17.0).

Table 17.0. Experiences by management level—Major theme one: Science of disaster

Major Theme One: Science of Disaster				
Management Level	N	Training Adequately Prepared Participants	Training did not Prepare Participants	No Comments
Emergency Management Director	18	0	18	0
Emergency Management Manager	9	0	9	0
Multidisciplinary	5	0	5	0

Instructor Competency by Management Level

There were no interview questions related to the competency of curriculum instructors; however, 88% of study participants voluntarily identified instructor competency as an important factor in the efficacy of the GACEMP curriculum. There were no statistical differences between management levels for this theme (see table 18.0).

Table 18.0. Experiences by management level—Major theme two: Instructor competency

Major Theme Two: Instructor Competency				
Management Level	N	Training Adequately Prepared Participants	Training did not Prepare Participants	No Comments
Emergency Management Director	18	0	16	2
Emergency Management Manager	9	0	8	1
Multidisciplinary	5	0	4	1

Foundations of Emergency Management by Management Levels

Foundations of emergency management comprise a mosaic of basic program elements that emergency managers must accomplish for the local emergency management program to be successful. During this study, participants identified four areas that can be considered foundational elements of emergency management, including legal requirements, leadership, problem solving, and principles of emergency management. There were no statistical differences between management levels for this theme (see table 19.0).

Table 19.0. Experiences by management level—Major theme three: Foundations

Major Theme Three: Foundations of Emergency Management				
Management Level	N	Training Adequately Prepared Participants	Training did not Prepare Participants	No Comments
Emergency Management Director	18	0	17	1
Emergency Management Manager	9	0	8	1
Multidisciplinary	5	0	5	0

Summary

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative inquiry was to understand the efficacy of the GACEMP curriculum on preparing local emergency managers in each of Georgia's eight geographical regions for their role. Each participant shared their lived experiences while attending the required curriculum for certification and carrying out their responsibilities as local emergency manager. Chapter 4 provided the results of the lived experiences of thirty-two local emergency managers who had completed the GACEMP curriculum and experienced at least one major disaster.

The researcher discovered three major themes from the data while examining participants' lived experiences. The three major themes included science of disaster, instructor competency, and foundations of emergency management. Major theme one revealed participants' lived experiences with respect to the science of disaster, which included five subthemes. The five subthemes were earth sciences, social sciences, hazard analysis, hazard prediction, and impact/vulnerability analysis. Study participants voiced concerns about the lack of training in these areas, which left them unprepared for their role as a local emergency manager. An examination of the participants' lived experiences while responding to a major disaster after completing the certification process supported these concerns and the need for training in the science of disaster.

Major theme two was an incidental finding, which became important to answering the research question. Most participants (90%) expressed concerns about the competency of instructors who taught courses within the GACEMP. Specifically, participants were concerned about the lack of practical experience and topic knowledge possessed by instructors presenting required courses within the GACEMP. Two subthemes were identified under major theme two: instructor experience and instructor knowledge. Study participants voluntarily expressed concerns about instructors presenting courses within the curriculum, citing the instructors' lack of knowledge on the topic being presented and lack of experience in the practical application of the topic at the local level. According to study participants, the lack of instructor competency left many with a lack of self-confidence in bringing theory to practice.

Major theme three, foundations of emergency management, included four subthemes: administration, legal requirements, leadership, and problem solving. Participants described their lived experiences while responding to disasters and the difficulties experienced based on the lack

of training in legal issues, leadership, and problem solving. Moreover, participants described the lack of training they received in the administration of emergency management and how this lack of knowledge adversely affected their day-to-day activities associated with managing the local program. Participants found that after receiving certification and being placed into leadership roles within the local emergency management program, they were required to complete state-required administrative activities they had never received training on. This left many participants frustrated and wondering why they did not receive training on these administrative requirements while completing the certification curriculum.

Through the emergent themes and subthemes identified, study participants expressed concerns that the curriculum required for certification as an emergency manager in Georgia lacked content that left them unprepared to perform in their role as a local emergency manager. Furthermore, the lack of instructor experience led to a failure by the instructors to convert theory to sensible application, leaving participants unprepared to implement basic methodologies. There were no statistical differences found across participants' three identified management levels.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenology qualitative inquiry was to understand the efficacy of the GACEMP curriculum on preparing local emergency managers in each of Georgia's eight geographical regions for their role as a local emergency manager. In chapter 5, a summary of the study's findings are further discussed along with the theoretical framework and empirical findings in the existing body of literature. Furthermore, implications for emergency managers who complete the current GACEMP curriculum are presented. Chapter 5 concludes with delimitations and limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and a final summary of the study.

Summary of Findings

The focus of this study was on lived experiences of local emergency managers who had completed the GACEMP curriculum and then responded to a major disaster that required a presidential disaster declaration. The study was conducted through virtual interviews via Zoom to ensure compliance with Covid-19 countermeasures. Each interview was scheduled in advance for one hour. Audio and video recordings generated in Zoom of each interview were converted into interview transcripts using OTTER for Zoom. Each audio and video recording and all transcripts have been stored in a password-protected safe and secure location only the researcher can access. A total of thirty-two participants were interviewed, four participants from each of Georgia's eight emergency management regions. Each participant was vetted to ensure compliance with the study's inclusion criterion.

During the interviews, participants shared their lived experiences while taking courses within the required curriculum and as local emergency managers after completing the GACEMP

curriculum and experiencing at least one presidentially declared disaster. Throughout the study, the researcher used journaling to document the overall data-collection process. Themes were developed as the researcher read and reread interview transcripts. After identifying the themes, the researcher reread each transcript, reviewing each item circled or underlined and all bracketed statements, phrases, sentences, and passages. Journal entrees and analytical memos were again reviewed to further establish credibility in the emerging themes. Three major themes were identified: science of disaster, instructor competency, and foundations of emergency management. Each major theme was supported by subthemes that emerged during data analysis.

The research question guiding the study was as follows: Does the current GACEMP curriculum prepare local emergency managers for their role? Major theme one, science of disaster, and major theme three, foundations of emergency management, were derived from this research question. Major theme two, instructor competency, was an incidental finding that emerged during data analysis and reflected the participants' lived experiences while taking courses required by the GACEMP. There were no interview questions related to the competency of curriculum instructors; however, 90% of participants voluntarily identified instructor competency as an important factor in the efficacy of the GACEMP curriculum.

Discussion

This study was designed to understand the lived experiences of Georgia emergency managers who had completed the GACEMP curriculum and experienced a major disaster that received a presidential disaster declaration to determine the efficacy of the curriculum on preparing the emergency managers for their role. The following section presents the relationship between the themes identified during data analysis and theoretical and empirical literature.

Theoretical Literature

Most qualitative research comes from an interpretive perspective, which sees the world as constructed, interpreted, and experienced by people interacting with other people or phenomena (Tolley et al. 2016, 23). Within the interpretive paradigm, phenomenology is described as the study of phenomena as they manifest in our experience, how one perceives and understands phenomena, and the meaning phenomena have in our subjective practice (Teherani et al. 2015, 669). Leedy and Ormrod (2010, 141) argued that phenomenological studies try to understand what it is like to experience a specific phenomenon. Neubauer, Witkop, and Varpio (2019, 91) described the goal of phenomenology as seeking the essence of a phenomenon through the perspectives of those who have experienced it.

Because qualitative research is grounded in people's actual experiences, the possibility of identifying new, relevant questions becomes more likely (Phillips 2002, 203). During study interviews, additional questions emerged when participants began to voluntarily express concerns surrounding the competency of course instructors. A new theme emerged from participants' lived experiences that directly impacted the answer to the research question. Hermeneutic phenomenology recognizes that the researcher, like the research subject, cannot be rid of his/her lifeworld (Neubauer, Witkop, and Varpio 2019, 94). Instead, the researcher's past experiences and knowledge are valuable guides to the inquiry. As an instructor, the researcher was led to ask participants who were concerned about instructor competency to expand on their initial statements to better understand the participants' lived experiences. This allowed the researcher to better understand how course instructors contributed to the participants' lived experiences after completing the certification curriculum.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a qualitative research method that not only describes a phenomenon but explores the phenomenon to convey its meaning in the context of everyday life (Bynum and Varpio 2018, 252). Hermeneutic phenomenological methods allowed study participants to tell their story in such a way that the researcher was able to identify themes and subthemes associated with the research question. The phenomenon of interest for this study was the GACEMP curriculum and how it prepared local emergency managers for their role during a disaster. Hermeneutic phenomenology proved uniquely positioned as the research methodology for this study. Open-ended research questions allowed each participant to talk freely about their lived experiences, painting a vivid picture for the researcher.

Empirical Literature

Study participants provided fascinating empirical ground by expressing their lived experiences while completing the GACEMP and in local practice. The empirical evidence from this study supports the literature reviewed regarding the training needed for emergency managers to be prepared for their role. Within the scope of emergency management practice, there exists a wide range of required functions within the frameworks of preparedness, prevention, mitigation, response, and recovery mission areas. In a single county, the rapid succession of independent events or the accumulation of cascading events triggered by a single hazard can stress the local emergency manager (Cutter 2020, 17). Study participants noted their lack of readiness in these frameworks after completing the GACEMP. Participant 0703 said, “After finishing the Georgia CEM I no more confidence in my ability to function as an emergency manager than I did before I entered the program. The only good thing was that I met other emergency managers that I could ask for advice.”

Training in emergency management builds competencies across all stakeholder organizations to improve disaster preparedness, response, and recovery across the community (Nazli, Sipon, and Radzi 2014, 577). In fact, emergency managers are typically considered experts by members of their communities due to the training people assume they have received (Roberts and Wernstedt 2019, 295). However, during the analysis of data collected during this study, participants felt the required curriculum failed to provide the training needed to be successful. Participant 0603 said, “I was really no more confident as an emergency manager after completing the CEM program than before I attended the courses.” Victims of disaster often feel they are suffering due to failed public policy or local emergency management leadership actions’ ineffectiveness (Wyatt-Nichol and Abel 2007, 567). Participant 0704 felt the same way about the CEM curriculum, stating, “I really felt that the state let us down by not providing the training we needed to be good and effective emergency managers.” Participant 0303 also expressed similar thoughts: “I was disappointed that the CEM program did not include many of the things I need daily. It’s like no one from the state ever ask any local EM what training they needed.”

All disasters are local, but some disasters require emergency managers to request assistance from the state government, and in turn, the state, at times, must request assistance from the federal government. This supports the argument of Wyatt-Nichol and Abel (2007, 568) that managers and public administrators must become interested in examining the emergency discourses of politicians, political appointees, and the media to establish relationships between these groups and other emergency management stakeholders. Participant 0402 stated, “I was hoping that one of the courses required for CEM would have covered the interaction between people in my position and elected officials, this is one of the hardest things I do.”

Emergency managers are required to understand concepts from multiple disciplines to be successful (Drabek and Evans 2005, 49). Theories in emergency management specify actions that emergency managers should take to be effective. This requires knowledgeable instruction on theory and bringing concepts to practice. Participant 0104 expressed concern that the GACEMP curriculum failed to provide any overview of the juxtaposition of federal, state, or county responsibilities, stating, “I never received any sort of training during CEM that prepared me on what to expect when local, state and federal agencies were needed. During our last disaster this left me feeling out of place, a certified emergency manager having to ask the most basic questions in the middle of a response.”

Waugh (2007) argued the practice of emergency management is more about being an effective organizer and having the skills to build effective relationships. Today’s emergency management is a function of public administration with a clear imperative to integrate the science of hazards and human behavior (Thomas and Mileti 2003). This was supported by the concerns of many participants who indicated the need for courses within the curriculum that related to the administration of emergency management. Participant 0102 expressed displeasure with the lack of any administrative training in the curriculum, stating, “The paperwork required by the state is very complicated yet, we never received any instruction before becoming certified.”

The fact that study participants felt many of their instructors were not knowledgeable about the application of course content to the field is remarkable. Combining theory to practice is difficult and complex and requires highly experienced and effective instructors and methodologies (Dettlaff 2008, 157). Knight (2002, 118) argued that an instructor’s practical experience is critical to the instructor’s ability to help students integrate theory with practice.

Participants' lived experiences identified the lack of instructor experience, which resulted in suboptimal demonstrations of conveying theory to practice. According to many participants, this had a direct negative impact on their ability to perform in their role as a local emergency manager. Participant 0104 said, "If the instructor didn't know the answer, how as I suppose to know."

In this current study, participants constantly expressed concerns that the GACEMP curriculum did not prepare them for their role as a local emergency manager. Participants identified many subjects the empirical literature identified as important to the success of local emergency management programs as missing from the Georgia curriculum. The empirical findings of this study and past research support the hypothesis that the GACEMP curriculum does not prepare local emergency managers for their role.

Implications

Successful certification programs for local emergency managers require effective curriculum organization, knowledgeable and experienced instructors, and courses that present the core concepts and their applications at the local level. The results of this study, which examined local emergency managers' lived experiences to determine the efficacy of emergency management certification training in Georgia, found that the current curriculum fails to prepare local emergency managers for their role. These results provide state emergency management officials with information that can be used to make changes to the curriculum for the GACEMP and evaluate instructor competency.

Delimitations and Limitations

There were both delimitations and limitations in this study. As the researcher, I made purposeful decisions to limit and define the boundaries of this study. The study's design was

qualitative with a hermeneutic phenomenology approach (Bynum and Varpio 2018, 252). This design allowed for participants' lived experiences to be researched through open-ended interview questions. The first delimitation was the participant criteria for inclusion in the study. Each participant must have completed all required curriculum for the GACEMP and participated in a declared disaster since the completion of all required curriculum for the GACEMP. The disaster must have been of such magnitude that it received a presidential disaster declaration. The second delimitation was the number of participants. The researcher limited the study to four participants from each of Georgia's eight emergency management geographic regions, limiting the study to thirty-two participants who met the inclusion criteria.

The first limitation was each participant's educational level. The study design required the researcher to accept the first four emergency managers who met the established study inclusion criteria. This resulted in seventeen of the thirty-two participants having no college education at the time of the study. The lack of experience at the college level could have led to a difference in lived experiences than those who had completed college. The second limitation was that most participants were male. Of the thirty-two participants, only four were female. The third limitation was the years of experience as local emergency managers. The years of service ranged from three to twenty-five years. The fourth and final limitation was that two of the participants had completed emergency management certification in states outside of Georgia before taking the required curriculum in the Georgia program.

Recommendations for Future Research

Understanding the training and educational needs of local emergency managers will continue to be a topic within the emergency management community. The first recommendation for future study is to determine the structural makeup of emergency management certification

training. Although the participants of this study identified areas that need improvement, additional studies are needed to determine the most effective curriculum and order of delivery. The second recommendation is to explore the qualifications of those who enter the emergency management certification program. Should local emergency management candidates for certification have a college education? The third recommendation for study is to explore what levels of training, education, and experience should be required for emergency management instructors.

Summary

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative inquiry was to understand the efficacy of the GACEMP curriculum on preparing local emergency managers in each of Georgia's eight geographical regions for their role. The research question that guided this study is as follows: How prepared do emergency managers feel they are for their role as a local emergency manager following their completion of the GACEMP curriculum? Each participant shared their experiences while completing the required curriculum for certification and carrying out their responsibilities as a local emergency manager. Three major themes emerged following an in-depth thematic analysis of all data collected: the science of disaster, instructor competency, and foundations of emergency management.

The lack of content related to established foundational elements of emergency management and the science of disaster in the GACEMP curriculum has resulted in local emergency managers feeling unprepared for their role after completing the required curriculum. During both the administration of the local emergency management program and while responding to disasters, the lived experiences of study participants demonstrated the lack of efficacy in the Georgia program's curriculum in preparing participants for their role. Moreover,

the lack of competency in some course instructors exacerbated study participants' negative experiences.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval

Date: 3-31-2021

IRB #: IRB-FY20-21-592

Title: THE EFFICACY OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT CERTIFICATION TRAINING IN GEORGIA THROUGH THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LOCAL EMERGENCY MANAGERS

Creation Date: 2-9-2021

End Date:

Status: **Approved**

Principal Investigator: Jack Westbrook

Review Board: Research Ethics Office

Sponsor:

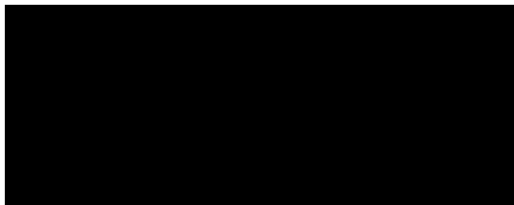
Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Limited	Decision	Exempt - Limited IRB
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Key Study Contacts

Member	Shannon McAteer	Role	Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	
Member	Jack Westbrook	Role	Principal Investigator	Contact	
Member	Jack Westbrook	Role	Primary Contact	Contact	

Appendix B: Recruitment letter



Dear [REDACTED]

As a graduate student in the Helms School of Government at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Ph.D. in Public Policy. The purpose of my research is to determine the efficacy of the Georgia Basic Certified Emergency Manager curriculum in preparing local emergency managers for their role, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must have completed the Georgia Basic Certified Emergency Manager curriculum and be practicing local emergency managers who have responded to at least one disaster since completing the Georgia Basic Certified Emergency Manager curriculum. Participants, if willing, will be asked to take part in a voluntary, one-hour audio- and video-recorded interview, which will be conducted via Microsoft Teams to ensure COVID-19 countermeasures. The interview will be scheduled at your convenience and will last no longer than one hour. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential. You will be asked to review your transcript for accuracy, making any clarifications and returning the transcript to me within 7 working days via email.

To participate, please contact me by email at [REDACTED] to schedule an interview.

A consent document is attached to this letter. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, please sign the consent document and return it to me by email before your scheduled interview.

Sincerely,

Jack Robby Westbrook, MS, CEM
Graduate Student



Appendix C: Participant Criterin

All participants must meet each of the following inclusion requirements:

1. The participant must have completed all required curriculum for the Georgia Certified Emergency Manager Program.
2. The participant must have participated in a disaster since the completion of all required curriculum for the Georgia Certified Emergency Manager Program that received a presidential disaster declaration.

Appendix D: Consent Form

Consent

Title of the Project: THE EFFICACY OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT CERTIFICATION TRAINING IN GEORGIA THROUGH THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LOCAL EMERGENCY MANAGERS

Principal Investigator: Jack Robby Westbrook, Doctoral Candidate, Helms School of Government, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must have completed the Georgia Basic Certified Emergency Manager curriculum and be a practicing local emergency manager who has responded to at least one disaster since completing the Georgia Basic Certified Emergency Manager curriculum. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to determine the efficacy of the Georgia Basic Certified Emergency Manager curriculum on preparing local emergency managers for their role.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Take part in a voluntary, one-hour, audio- and video-recorded interview, which will be conducted via Microsoft Teams to ensure COVID-19 countermeasures. The interview will be scheduled at your convenience and will last no longer than one hour.
2. You will be asked to review your transcript for accuracy, making any clarifications and returning the transcript to me within 7 working days via email.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from participating in this study.

Benefits to society include identifying training needs for the local emergency manager to ensure that the most effective and efficient disaster mitigation, response and recovery strategies are developed for the community. Society will benefit through the protection of life, property, infrastructure, and a rapid return to normal for the impacted community.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

Liberty University
IRB-FY20-21-592

Approved on 2-20-2021

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of codes.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Jack Robby Westbrook. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Shannon McAteer, Ph.D., [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date