PROJECT SUMMARY

Overview:
Institutions that successfully adapt their internal organization to their external threats will be more effective at performing emergency preparedness tasks, which is important to keep people safe. This study will analyze natural disasters as external events that occur as a part of the environment in which higher education institutions exist. This study addresses the following questions: 1) Does organizational structure significantly relate to how prepared universities are for natural disasters? 2) Does the presence of adaptive organizational measures significantly relate to how prepared universities are for natural disasters? 3) Do adaptive measures significantly interact with the organizational structure and natural disaster preparedness relationship? 4) Is there an ideal arrangement within the institutional structure of American universities and colleges for a natural disaster preparedness unit? This research proposes four hypotheses that follow: H1: How prepared an institution is for natural disasters varies indirectly with the vertical differentiation of the organizational structure. H2: The presence of adaptive measures directly alters the level of natural disaster preparedness of an institution. H3: The presence of adaptive measures interacts with the organizational differentiation-natural disaster preparedness association. H4: There is an ideal organizational structure of universities to prepare for natural disasters that varies by organizational characteristics.

This exploratory and analytical research will be conducted using both qualitative and quantitative methods. During the first phase that is currently underway, the researcher will conduct telephone interviews with university personnel responsible for natural disaster preparedness. These interviews will be used along with current literature and theory to develop an online survey. During the second phase, the survey will be distributed using Qualtrics online survey software to a contact list developed by the research team. The contact list will include persons responsible for natural disaster preparedness at universities and colleges in the United States. Follow-ups will be made via telephone to as many nonresponses as possible.

Intellectual Merit:
Prior research directly studying higher education emergency management has mostly been descriptive and has relied on electronic mailing list software applications for distribution of surveys. This method of survey distribution leads to a coverage bias. The direct contact method will reduce the coverage bias and allow researchers to access those universities that were omitted from previous research efforts. By reducing the coverage bias, direct contact also increases the generalizability of the findings.

Broader Impacts:
Findings from this study will benefit university and college administrators in the United States. First, it will give an updated overview of the extent to which American universities and colleges are prepared for natural disasters. Second, the study will consider whether organizational design affects how well-prepared universities are for natural disasters. With this information, universities and colleges can explore the potential for the restructuring of business units and adaptive measures to attain the level of preparedness for natural disasters to meet their safety goals for their campus. The study will be disseminated to participating universities, at professional conferences such as the annual International Association of Emergency Manager's conference, and specialized journals such as Journal of Homeland Security and Emergency Management and Disasters. Strategic planning departments can also utilize information from this study. In addition, the information learned and study results can be used for grant applications and other funding sources such as donors. By providing information about what makes a university prepared and how well their university is prepared can provide incentives for donors to give, and points in a grant application process.