Welcome to our first newsletter. We hope to prepare and distribute new issues once each semester. I want to thank Teresa Tackett, our graduate secretary, for her work in putting the newsletter together. I hope that you agree that she did a great job!

One important purpose of the newsletter is to establish a line of communication between the program and our alumni. Therefore, we would like to encourage alumni to contribute information that we can include in future issues. We especially want to highlight your accomplishments to let others know what you are doing, which will also help us make the case that your FEMA degree has contributed to your success.

Another purpose is to help us recruit the best students possible. As stakeholders, it is important to all of us to continue building on the outstanding reputation our program has earned. We can do this by recruiting students who will prosper and bring credit to the program.

A third purpose is to provide news and information to potential donors and others who may be interested in supporting the program. We believe that outreach activities such as a newsletter can attract positive attention to what we are doing.

We hope that you find this first issue worthwhile. We invite you to submit comments and suggestions on how we improve the newsletter to make it more interesting and valuable to you.

**SELECTED PROGRAM FACTOIDS**

- Program established in 1996 as a Fire and Emergency Management specialization in the Political Science Master of Arts degree program; first graduate in 1997
- Master of Science degree in Fire and Emergency Management Administration established in 1999
- Doctor of Philosophy degree created in 2009; first graduate in 2013
- 110 graduates as of May 2013
- Current enrollment is 123 (38 doctoral students, 85 masters students)
- Anticipate graduating 21 students in 2013, which is the largest graduating class in our history
- Have taught FEMA courses in Turkey and Korea; may soon set up programs in Brazil and Saudi Arabia

Go Pokes!
Will Focht
Hewett Earns First Ph.D. Degree from Program

Dr. Paul Hewett is the first student to earn a Ph.D. in Oklahoma State University’s Fire and Emergency Management Administration program.

The title of his dissertation is “Organizational Networks and Emergence during Disaster Preparedness: the Case of an Emergency Assistance Registry.” Hewett successfully defended his dissertation on April 15, 2013. His committee consisted of Dr. Phillips (Chair), Dr. Neal, Dr. Webb, and Dr. Wikle.

Dr. Hewett will walk across the stage on May 3 to be formally “hooded” with the colors of his alma mater, wearing academic regalia with the three official armbands that recognize the doctorate.

According to the Oklahoma State University’s commencement website, academic dress was formally adopted near the end of the 19th century but dates back to colonial times. The color and design of the hood indicates the wear’s degree and institution at which that degree was earned.

The lining of Paul’s hood will incorporate the colors of Oklahoma State University in an orange and black chevron pattern. His gown will have black velvet panels and sleeve chevrons and the hood will have a blue velvet collar representing his decorate degree.

Please feel free to join us on May 3 for this momentous occasion in the history of our program, department, and university.

Congratulations to Dr. Paul Hewett!
Oklahoma State University graduate students attended the National Tornado Preparedness Summit in Oklahoma City at the Cox Convention Center on March 10, 2013. Students in the Fire and Emergency Management Administration Graduate Program as well as the International Studies Graduate Program were responsible for organizing and staffing a booth representing their graduate programs, Oklahoma State University and the Center for the Study of Disasters and Extreme Events (CSDEE). According to the Summit's website, "The National Tornado Summit improves disaster mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery in order to save lives and property in the United States."

Brenda Phillips, could not have been happier with the outcome. "I had numerous people stop me and say how impressed they were with our OSU students. A number of alumni mentioned they had stopped by the booth... and they were quite pleased that OSU is still turning out such quality graduate students." Phillips said.

While attending the Summit, students had the opportunity to meet Reed Timmer, star of the Discovery Channels "Storm Chasers" television show, reconnect with academic mentors, network with professionals across the field of emergency management, and attend informative research presentations.

Barbara Russo, Ph.D. candidate in Fire and Emergency Management Administration, under Dr. Brenda Phillips supervision received the Summer 2013 Dissertation Fellowship from the OSU Graduate College.

The competitive Fellowship is a $5,000 award and comes with a 3 credit hour tuition waiver applied during the summer. Barb is recognized by the Graduate College as an outstanding post-comp, doctoral student. She is currently an Assistant Professor and Director of the Fire Science Program at Fayetteville State University in North Carolina.

Congratulations Barb!

Daniel Ellis, who graduated from Oklahoma State University with his M.S. degree in Fire and Emergency Management Administration in 1999, was promoted to First Deputy Director for the Office of Emergency Management and Communications in Chicago.

According to the City of Chicago website, “The Office of Emergency Management prepares Chicago for emergencies, provides assistance to people and institutions for disaster recovery, mitigates the effects of these events, and, whenever possible, prevents emergencies and disasters from occurring or worsening. The OEM is also Chicago’s liaison with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the Illinois Office of Emergency Management, as well as federal and state emergency management agencies.” The promotion is a great achievement in Daniel’s career.

Congratulations Daniel!
Wildfire Service Project

In 2012, the boiling temperatures and a persistent drought were an unfortunate recipe for a nationally devastating wildfire season.

More than nine million acres were scorched in the United States, making 2012 one of three years surpassing nine million acres burned due to wildfires according to the National Interagency Coordination Center. In Oklahoma, 1,595 wildfires scorched 232,579 acres during 2012.

Due to the record-breaking fire season, Dr. Brenda Phillips and Dr. Dave Neal, Professors in the Political Science Department at Oklahoma State University, conducted wildfire research that uncovered many unmet needs in the communities near Stillwater. When the folks at Hesston College in Kansas got word of the devastation, a group volunteered to come to Oklahoma to support the Mennonite Disaster Service.

“It felt like a disservice to not give back after people were so kind to share their experiences,” Dr. Phillips said.

In an effort to do just that, OSU employee Tim Schlais, who is a member of First Presbyterian church in Stillwater, partnered with the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM) student chapter at Oklahoma State University, the Mennonite Disaster Service, and Hesston College to organize the Wildfire Service Project. The project focused on two properties that fell victim to the wildfire in an affected area close to Stillwater. Volunteers met at the First Presbyterian Church in Stillwater on March 30 at 8:15 a.m. and arrived on-site at 9 a.m., working until late afternoon.

“It was a cross university partnership you might say,” Phillips said.

When the fire raged in Glencoe on August 5, 2012, the city was evacuated. The intensity and agility of the fire forced the owners at many homes to choose between saving their livestock or their house. In one service site, a concrete foundation marks the spot where their home once stood.

Like many people in the area, people at the first site earn their livelihood raising livestock. For this reason the volunteers restrung 300 feet of wire fence to keep the cattle and sheep in place. Not only did volunteers help rebuild what the fire destroyed but the project aided in an economic upturn for the wildfire victims.

Joel Billings and Andrew Gipson, both graduate assistants in the FEMA graduate program, were two of the fifteen or so volunteers to spend their Saturday working at the properties. Billings had never witnessed the damage of a wildfire until volunteering for the Glencoe Service Project.

“When I walked through it, I smelled the charcoaled grass. The trees and the ground were completely dead. It really affected me,” Billings said.

After speaking to the property owners, Billings learned that aerial firefighting was necessary to combat the wildfire. Luckily, a pond located on the property was large enough for the helicopter to retrieve adequate amounts of water in the attached buckets, but nearly all of the land was burned.

“I’m more of a structural fire guy, not wildfires – it was sad to see how destructive the fire was. Their house, pictures, memories, everything was gone. They only saved the cattle,” Billings said.

Continued on the next page.
When asked how the service project validated his studies in the Graduate Program in Fire and Emergency Management Administration Billings said volunteering gave him a perspective a textbook does not offer.

“I learned the practical side of (wildfires). We learned firsthand how this affected people,” Billings said. “When you read about it in a book, it’s a lot different than seeing it in person.”

Billing believes turning a tragedy into a learning experience is beneficial, especially for students involved in IAEM at Oklahoma State University.

“It’s good to help people. It’s the field we’ve chosen,” Billings said. “And I’d do it again.”

Graduate Assistant, Andrew Gipson, spent most of the day working at a different site. Similar to the needs of the first site, the property owners were in want of new fencing. Gipson spent the majority of his time tearing down barbed wire that had grown around trees, rendering the fence useless.

An Eagle Scout since youth, Gipson said he had never experienced such loss in relation to wildfires.

“It was surreal. You got to points where you couldn’t see areas that weren’t burned,” Gipson said. “Eight months later, it still smelled like a campfire.”

When he arrived on the site, Gipson was not sure what to expect. Seeing the damage for the first time was a humbling experience for him.

“It was strange because some parts were untouched. But a hundred feet away it was down to the dust with bark exploded off trees.”

Gipson also said the experience expanded his knowledge concerning how emergency managers react to certain situations. He was able to implement the concepts he has learned in graduate courses, such as Disaster Recovery.

“I’m now a part of the cycle.”
Graduation Time — Who’s Walking?

Congratulations to all Fire and Emergency Management Administration students who are graduating this spring or summer.

**Ph.D. Students**
- Bennett, Deedee Georgia
- Hewett, Paul Maryland

**M.S. Students**
- Blythe, Howard New York
- Brezler, Jason New York
- Burkhead, Joshua Texas
- Fisher, Rick Oklahoma
- Foster, Rodney Oklahoma
- Groom, Caci Texas
- Hansen, Jeff Florida
- Liu, Hongtao China
- Mahoney, Patrick Texas
- McCrary, Matthew Oklahoma
- Myrick, Bryan Oklahoma
- Parker, Brent California
- Renzella, Nathan Tennessee
- Rhem, John Texas
- Shin, Youngshix South Korea
- Strickland, Chad South Carolina
- Thaxton, J.W. Georgia
- Webster, Cindy Oklahoma