Letter to the Editor: Homeland Security Education

Michael W. Collier

"Homeland Security Education: A Way Forward," by William Pelfrey and William Kelley and published in the February 2013 issue of *Homeland Security Affairs* provides some valuable insights but only a partial view of the overall situation with homeland security education.

The methodology used by Pelfrey and Kelley does not support their inference of the research to the larger homeland security community. Their data collection included a survey of graduates of the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) program in National Security Affairs, Homeland Security and Defense and Homeland Security, a survey of NPS faculty, and a survey and panel data collected from homeland security community leaders. While the NPS program is highly respected in academic circles, the instruction is focused on mid-career homeland security administrators and leaders. The NPS program's graduate and faculty member enthusiasm for their program is commendable, but they are mainly from the US public sector and are likely influenced toward seeing homeland security education within a public sector framework defined primarily by their NPS experience. The article does not mention education in the US private sector, nor appear to collect data from this sector, where there is a growing demand for homeland security specialists to implement and manage security programs mandated by federal, state and local laws and regulations. The failure to address the US private sector adds bias to the article's findings. The authors do not provide the number of survey or panel members for the data collection from homeland security leaders. The reader is therefore unable to assess the validity of this data. In reviewing the professional disciplines listed for their survey and panel data obtained from homeland security leaders, it does not appear the entire homeland security community is represented. The authors do comment on some of the limitations of their data collection; however, based on the information they provide it appears they should only be generalizing their findings to their samples and not to the larger homeland security community.

The article does not address the latest efforts in homeland security curriculum development, an area closely related to their fundamental questions. A recent Congressional Research Report highlights the lack of a consistent definition of homeland security within the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) (see CRS R42462, January 2013). This lack of a good definition hampers efforts to create homeland security curriculums, both at the graduate and undergraduate levels, but this has not stopped the community of homeland security educators from making progress toward establishing curriculum standards. A team of homeland security educators and DHS and Department of Defense officials met in Monterey, California, in June 2009. This meeting, co-sponsored by NPS and the Homeland Security and Defense Education Consortium Association (HSDECA), developed a model homeland security undergraduate curriculum. HSDECA also published in November 2009 the latest draft of specialized accreditation standards for graduate and undergraduate homeland security programs. These efforts to establish homeland security curriculum standards reveal a growing consensus of both the academic and professional communities.

Pelfrey and Kelley dismiss undergraduate education as being primarily technical in nature, as if undergraduate students are incapable of complex thought. The authors' findings identify the most important learning objectives for homeland security leaders as strategic collaboration, critical thinking and decision-making, foundations of homeland security, analytical capabilities, leadership, legal issues, and strategic planning. These are all learning areas covered in the NPS and HSDECA model undergraduate curriculum development efforts and in the latest draft HSDECA accreditation standards, for both graduate and undergraduate students. The latest theories in postsecondary teaching and learning do not relegate undergraduates to merely learning technical matters or facts as was once common in the United States. For example, at Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) our undergraduate education challenges students to become critical and creative thinkers throughout their degree programs. The EKU undergraduate

homeland security program starts students freshman year learning critical thinking techniques and by the time they graduate they have mastered all the learning objectives identified by Pelfrey and Kelley. It is probably time to recognize that the most recent approaches to undergraduate teaching and learning ensure graduates have the substantive knowledge and professional skills which were in the past mainly developed in graduate programs.

Demand for homeland security specialists is not fully represented in the article. In a broader sense, graduate and undergraduate homeland security programs are producing security managers and disaster preparedness specialists who are qualified to seek employment in either the US public or private sectors. At EKU, graduate students are usually already employed in the homeland security field or find employment as mid-career managers or analysts, depending on their previous education and career experience. EKU undergraduate students seek employment at the entry level as project or program managers, program or intelligence analysts, and in a variety of other security or disaster preparedness positions. Due to the recent US recession and its corresponding higher unemployment rates in most occupational fields, some EKU undergraduates find initial employment as security guards, Transportation Security Administration screeners, Border Patrol agents, state and local law enforcement officers, and in a variety of other jobs where their undergraduate degree is not a necessity. However, most EKU undergraduates see these as temporary positions while they wait to either be promoted into or find positions where their degree is needed.

When discussing the state or future of homeland security education, consideration of the entire homeland security community is required, including the demand for graduates from both the US public and private sectors.

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