

Sound Practice No. 1

Postgraduate Programs on Disaster Management at BRAC University

Overview

There has been an important need for disaster management education in Bangladesh context where disasters are a part of life. A few institutions run some courses related to this field within their regular curricula, but there was no specialized program of study or training on disaster management. Most people active in this field are either trained abroad or learn from work experience, often painstakingly.

BRAC University is situated within a broader organizational framework of nation-wide social and community development and thus it is a nationally important institution. Hence it is deemed to be an appropriate place to begin an academic program that might inform policy and practice in the disaster management field, which is significant in the Bangladeshi national context.

Significant background information

The concept of this course arose principally from the demand expressed by several non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The course is expected to satisfy the need for training staff members of national and international NGOs involved in disaster management in Bangladesh. Other possible sources of students could be government departments relating to health, environment, fire service, armed forces, etc. Over the long term, the course may attract students from other countries, particularly in the South Asian region.

Because the course is multi-disciplinary in nature, students are drawn from a broad range of disciplines that produce graduates working in the field of disaster management in various capacities and roles, including the social sciences, public administration, law, engineering, architecture, planning, geology, geography and meteorology. Additionally, as the course is practice-oriented, in lieu of academic qualifications, professional and practical experience of prospective students is taken into consideration for admission.

Sound Practice Details

Program Structure

Presently there are three programs, namely: Certificate, Diploma and Master's. After completing the first semester one will get a Certificate in Disaster Management; after completing first two semesters one will be awarded the Diploma in Disaster Management and when one accomplishes the whole three semesters along with the dissertation he/she will be qualified for the Master's Degree. Each of the semesters comprises of 15 credits. In each of the first two semesters there are two 2 credit foundation courses, two 3 credit core courses, one 3 credit elective course and one field study that carries 2 credits. In the third semester, for the students who will pursue the Master's Degree, there are two 3 credit core courses and a 9 credit dissertation.

Course Contents

The contents of the courses have been designed with emphasis on three main aspects:

1. Pre-disaster preparedness and vulnerability reduction.
2. Post-disaster response, relief and rehabilitation.
3. Disaster mitigation and long-term development
(Pre-disaster + Post-disaster).

These aspects are presented and reviewed from the perspectives of various disciplines in the form of foundation courses, core courses, field studies, electives and individual student projects. Because this program is run in Bangladesh, which is a particularly disaster-prone region, most of the course contents are based on experience and information relating to this context. A wide variety of case studies on disasters and disaster management particularly from Bangladesh are covered within the course contents.

Schedule

At the certificate and diploma levels, students have to attend 13 contact hours per week @ 3 hours per day for 3 days a week and 4 hours on another day. Classes are held in the evening for the convenience of active professionals for whom this course has been primarily targeted. For the field study, contact hours are based on field visits. Part-time enrollment is also considered. For students undertaking dissertation at the master's level, the schedule consists of personal tutorials with supervisor, attending core courses and working outside class.

Courses Offered

The following list shows courses that are offered:

Preparatory Courses

	<u>Credits Equivalent</u>
1. Foundation Course in English Language	3
2. Basic Course in Computing	1.5

Foundation Courses (Each course carries 2 credits and is compulsory)

1. Introduction to Hazards and Disasters
2. Fundamentals of Disaster Risk Management
3. Organizational and Policy Context of Disaster Risk Management
4. Research and Analytical Methods

Core Courses (Each course carries 3 credits and is compulsory)

1. Disaster Response and Recovery Strategies
2. Disaster Preparedness and Vulnerability Reduction
3. Assessment of Risk, Vulnerability and Capacity
4. Independent Study in Disaster Management I
5. Independent Study in Disaster Management II
6. Dissertation Seminars

Elective Courses (Each course carries 3 credits and at least 2 elective courses must be completed. A student may focus on a specific field of interest by selecting the relevant elective courses)

1. Riverine Disaster Risk Management
2. Cyclone and Tornado Preparedness and Rehabilitation
3. Earthquake Vulnerability Reduction
4. Community Based Approaches to Disaster Management
5. GIS and Remote Sensing Techniques in Disaster Management.
6. Building Design and Construction in Disaster-Prone Areas
7. Urbanization and Disasters
8. Risk Communication, Training and Public Awareness
9. Gender Issues in Disaster Management
10. Disaster Risk Reduction and Development Planning

Dissertation

All students continuing to the master's level are required to complete a dissertation (maximum 20,000 words, minimum 15,000 words) on a topic related to disaster management and agreed with their supervisor(s). The core course 'Dissertation Seminars' will have to be taken during this stage to supplement dissertation writing skills and techniques. The dissertation will have to be presented and defended at a committee composed of at least two faculty members and one external examiner.

Relevance to Megacities

Postgraduate Programs in Disaster Management at BRAC University offer the opportunity of in-depth understanding of disaster and its management. It provides a good institutional support for education towards disaster management. The special urban characteristics that Megacities hold/posses and the inherent vulnerabilities associated with them can be better understood through these programs since there are certain relevant courses. The resource persons for the programs are chosen from all across disaster management fields, which include renowned academicians, researchers and practitioners so that students get the best orientation to all the prospective sectors of their contribution. The programs are currently run under the department of Architecture, which can also be regarded as positive since the connections between disaster management and built environment are likely to be better understood here. Above all, introduction of such programs can be regarded as taking the whole disaster management activities in Bangladesh one step ahead by helping produce qualified disaster managers.

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