

Board of Visitors for the National Fire Academy
Fiscal Year 2016 Annual Report
August 30, 2016

Meeting Schedule
April 7, 2016
August 29-30, 2016

The U.S. Fire Administration's (USFA) Board of Visitors for the National Fire Academy (Board) reviewed the National Fire Academy (Academy) in three areas of responsibility and submits the following report for Fiscal Year (FY) 2016.

“An examination of Academy programs to determine whether these programs further the basic missions which are approved by the Administrator, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).”

The Academy continues to be a mission-critical organizational unit within Department of Homeland Security (DHS)/FEMA in supporting FEMA's USFA mission to support citizens and first responders to ensure that as a nation we work together to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from and mitigate all hazards. The Academy serves the whole community in developing core capabilities and has a proven track record of performance in fulfilling this mission.

In FY2016, the Academy continued to work with the Board on two subcommittees established in FY2015. The “whole community” subcommittee identified venues for sharing critical disaster planning information and anticipates submitting its report in FY2017. Since the current version of the National Fire Incident Reporting System is almost twenty years old, a second subcommittee was established to identify needs for updates in both the system and training. This ongoing effort will help support fire departments nationwide as they harness the power of advanced data analytics for their communities.

The Academy continues to play a vital role by serving as a single point of contact for national, state, local, tribal, and territorial fire and emergency services stakeholder groups by soliciting their input on course development, delivery and outreach. The Academy also supports federal partners, including: Department of Transportation/Federal Highway Administration; Department of Justice/Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; Federal Bureau of Investigation; other Department of Homeland Security components; and the five federal wildland agencies.

The Academy supports the work of the Department of Labor, Department of Justice and Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to analyze and support work place diversity in the fire, EMS, and emergency service communities. The Board continues to actively encourage evaluative research and targeted efforts that positively and significantly impact workplace and student diversity.

The Board continues to support the USFA Professional Development Initiative through USFA’s three major networks – Training Resources and Data Exchange (TRADE/training), Prevention Advocacy Resources and Data Exchange (PARADE/prevention), and Fire and Emergency Services Higher Education (FESHE/higher education). The third unified Professional Development Symposium was held in June 2016. In conjunction with the TRADE, PARADE, and FESHE leadership, the Board will continue to monitor the refinement of this symposium.

Building on the successful Executive Fire Officer Program (EFOP) model, in December 2013, the Board recommended the development of a new Managing Officer (MO) program to serve mid-level managers in fire and emergency services organizations, including EMS. The first cohort graduated in April 2016. Managing Officer classes are scheduled quarterly and co-scheduled with EFOP classes when possible.

Academy Overview

Resident classes are reserved for those requiring: high level discussion/interaction; specialized simulation or modeling capabilities; close supervision and counsel; or the introduction of new subject areas. The Academy continues to leverage its resources through delivery of regional and state courses and a growing number of distance education course offerings through the Internet. The following chart reflects the student enrollments in each of the program areas. Data for 2016 will be available after December 1, 2016:

	2014	2015		
On-campus	6,866	7,458	Increase:	9%
ACADEMY Sponsored Off-campus	4,391	5,030	Increase:	15%
State Sponsored	26,890	25,312	Increase:	6%
State/Approved	10,512	9,825	Increase:	6%
Colleges/Universities	1,558	3,413	Increase:	50%
On-line	34,047	35,318	Increase:	3%
Total:	84,264	86,356	Overall Increase:	2%

The Academy staff continues to pursue new applications for technology in course delivery, administration, and information dissemination. The Academy’s automated course call process to State Fire Training Agencies contributed to the higher student enrollments in Academy-sponsored off-campus deliveries. The Academy continues to add courses to the materials download feature, giving State Fire Training Agencies and contract instructors, direct access to Academy 2-day and 6-day course materials. This provides users with real-time access to Academy course materials - there are currently 44 courses available in the State Dashboard. In

January 2016, the Academy further expanded its reach by entering into an international agreement with a new training partner, the Nova Scotia Firefighters School. They now have direct dashboard access and can download Academy course materials and deliver them to students in the Canadian provinces.

The Academy continues the Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) program for downloading student manuals for resident courses. Since FY 2014, the Academy has realized an average saving of \$20,000 per fiscal year in printing/supply costs which also includes cost-savings for classroom supplies such as paper, pens, etc. The BYOD program is currently being used in 53 resident courses. Additionally the NFA has begun to test the use of an online instructional platform in several of its resident classes to increase collaboration and information sharing and enhance the learning. While 100% BYOD conversion is the goal, the Board recognizes that there are limitations with some courses and not all can be fully converted to the BYOD format. The Board supports the Academy's use of technology to expand its reach and believes continued progress in this area will be essential to address future challenges and opportunities. In education, however, one size does not fit all. There are appropriate uses for online training, off-campus classroom based training, and resident training. The Academy takes great effort to assure that finite resources are used effectively and efficiently by carefully assessing the student population, desired outcomes, and performance evaluation before a delivery method is chosen.

The EFOP continues to play a crucial role in the preparation of the next generation of fire and emergency services leaders. The 28th Annual EFOP Graduate Symposium was held September 8-10, 2016, and included 195 participants. This year's symposium had no central theme and featured an eclectic mix of presentations that echoed the EFOP community's studied needs. It included sessions on leadership in large organizations and large disasters, a report from a recent active shooter response (Dallas police ambush), lessons learned from planned event management (The Papal visit), an update on the things learned from the Charleston firefighter deaths, a panel discussion of "messaging" and community communications; a half dozen TED-like talks; and the presentation of the four Manno Award papers. The Fire Administrator provided his update on the organizations activities and outlook.

The Academy continued utilizing FEMA's Student Volunteer Service Agreement program, which affords eligible student volunteers from colleges and universities to complete an internship on the National Emergency Training Center (NETC) campus. The Board believes this program is extremely useful for developing citizens' knowledge about the fire and emergency services, with added potential to attract future leaders from the whole community.

The Academy awards Continuing Education Units for all Academy courses through the International Association of Continuing Education and Training. This remains beneficial to a growing number of Academy students who are required to meet continuing education requirements for certification. The Academy has been approved as a "Preferred Provider" with the International Code Council (ICC); this program recognizes and promotes ICC-approved educational opportunities as they relate to codes, standards, building construction and other subject areas.

The American Council on Education (ACE) conducted two reviews of Academy courses in FY2016 – October 20-21, 2015 (20 existing and 10 new) and September 20-21, 2016 (21 existing and 4 new). The ACE review process provides an independent and objective third-party assessment of the Academy’s program quality, as well as a tangible benefit for students who can use the credits to pursue higher education through other academic institutions.

The Academy continued a systematic study of resident courses with students and their supervisors to determine long-term training effectiveness. During FY 2016, 454 students and 404 supervisors responded. As with previous years’ responses, students indicated they were able to transfer the training skills and learning to their jobs, and supervisors reported improved performance as follows:

Long-Term Evaluation Reporting Elements	2013	2014	2015	2016
Students reporting they were able to apply Academy training at home	97%	96.6%	95.9%	91.2%
Students reporting Academy training improved their job performance	96.7%	95.1%	96.2%	94.4%
Students reporting they shared Academy training with their peers	98.3%	97.9%	97.9%	97.7%
Students reporting they conducted formal courses with Academy material	34.9%	26.7%	27.4%	24.4%
Students reporting they established new policies and procedures based on Academy training	74.9%	73.5%	84.4%	75.2%
Supervisors reporting improved performance from Academy training	89.6%	87.2%	90.5%	90.9%
Supervisors reporting improved departmental performance	89.4%	87.9%	88.5%	86.6%
Supervisors who say they will recommend Academy training to others	97.3%	95.2%	97.2%	96.7%
Supervisors reporting Academy benefits outweigh costs	93.9%	92.9%	92.2%	91.6%

Note: Data reported was derived from Academy Long-Term Evaluation Forms sent to both students and their supervisors 4–6 months after the Academy training class ended.

“An examination of the physical plant of the Academy to determine the adequacy of the Academy facilities.”

The size, age, and scope of the NETC campus facility continues to offer both challenges and opportunities. On behalf of students and other stakeholders, the Board appreciates the tremendous support FEMA has provided to address capital improvement and maintenance issues on campus.

While much progress has been made, particularly relating to Americans with Disability Act compliance and energy efficiency, deferred maintenance continues to be a crucial issue. Currently, there remains about \$15 million in deferred maintenance. The Board recommends that FEMA establish an annual \$5 million deferred maintenance budget as suggested by the Office of Management and Budget. The Board commends FEMA and NETC staff in their ongoing efforts to upgrade and maintain the physical infrastructure.

Although campus facilities including the Library and the Publications Center continues to provide essential support for the Academy, there remains a long documented need to expand the NETC facilities to accommodate the addition of 300 students per class cycle. While the NETC maintains one of the highest utilization rates in DHS, additional classroom, lodging and support space will be required for the Academy to continue fully supporting the broader DHS/FEMA mission.

Enhancements in technology are providing instructors with the necessary tools to use contemporary adult learning principles and practices. Computer support for students has been provided in the form of a newly designed classroom, along with Internet access and Wi-Fi connections in dormitory rooms and classrooms. To meet current technology requirements, the Academy upgraded the classroom environment. However, students and Board members experience significant issues with internet connectivity and access campus wide. As an example, the FEMA firewall prevents access to many sites necessary for research, collaboration and storage. The Board recommends appropriate funding to improve internet access on campus and the campus information technology infrastructure to support the growing number of courses that are delivered.

“An examination of the funding levels for Academy programs”

The USFA and the Academy continue to demonstrate commendable stewardship with respect to the limited resources they are allocated, particularly in these tight fiscal times. Still, by providing the critical foundation for our Nation’s fire, EMS, and emergency service providers, it remains imperative that Academy receive necessary funding in accordance with its mission and the expected role it plays within DHS/FEMA.

The Academy is unique in the Federal Government because its specific mission is to train state, local, tribal, and territorial first responders and their leaders, not primarily Federal employees. A reduction in resident classes at the Academy would result in a degradation of incident management capabilities, community risk reduction, hazardous materials response, and arson detection and prosecution.

While there is a cost to both on-campus and off-campus training, it’s important to recognize that every emergency, every disaster starts locally. To the extent that a community has a well-trained, well-lead cadre of first responders, that emergency stays local. If it is poorly handled, or if it is so large that the local forces are overwhelmed, it may trigger a state and federal response. It is in the interest of both DHS and FEMA to try to keep local emergencies local; as of August 2016, there were 23,929,326 local incidents reported to NFIRS for 2015 and 65 Presidentially-declared disasters reported in 2016 per the FEMA website – <https://www.fema.gov/disasters/grid/year>.

While training may have a cost, the lack of training is even more expensive in terms of life loss (both civilian and firefighter), property damage, economic impact, and societal effects. According to USFA data, in calendar year 2015 there were 90 on-duty firefighter fatalities and in calendar year 2014 there were 3,275 civilian fatalities. While specific data do not exist, the National Fire Protection Association estimated there were 63,350 firefighter injuries in calendar year 2014. Reports from the National Institutes of Occupational Safety and Health state that some of these deaths and injuries could have been averted through training. Above all else, the Academy was created to prevent those tragedies. The Board recommends a continued emphasis on firefighter health and safety as a part of its training mission.

In closing, throughout 2016, visionary leadership was provided by the U.S. Fire Administrator Ernest Mitchell and Deputy Fire Administrator Denis Onieal. The dedicated and passionate staff and leadership of the Academy and the other USFA units support this work. Acting Superintendent Kirby Kiefer led this talented staff. National Fire Programs Director Alex Furr and Management, Operations and Support Services Director Al Fluman and their staffs deserve much credit for USFA's success.

Fiscal Year 2016 Board of Visitors

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