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# Understanding of Basic Preparedness Among First-Year College Students

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UNDERSTANDING OF BASIC PREPAREDNESS AMONG FIRST-YEAR COLLEGE  
STUDENTS

By

DIANA CHRISTY HENDRICKS

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the

Degree of

Masters of Science in First-Year Studies

Faculty of First-Year and Transition Studies

Accepted by:

Jennifer Wells, Chair

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	ii
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	v
<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>Summary</b> .....	1
<b>Purpose and Significance of the Study</b> .....	4
<b>Research Questions</b> .....	4
<b>Limitations</b> .....	5
<b>Definitions</b> .....	5
<b>Overview</b> .....	6
<b>Literature Review</b> .....	8
<b>Overview</b> .....	8
<b>Moral Development Among College Students</b> .....	8
<b>First-Year College Student Population</b> .....	9
<b>Emergency Preparedness</b> .....	10
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	15
<b>Methods</b> .....	16
<b>Research Design and Data Collection</b> .....	16
<b>Methodology</b> .....	17
<b>Setting</b> .....	17
<b>Participants</b> .....	18
<b>Validity and Reliability</b> .....	19
<b>Data Analysis</b> .....	19
<b>Protection of Subjects</b> .....	20
<b>Results</b> .....	21
<b>Introduction</b> .....	21
<b>Participants</b> .....	21
<b>Research Question 1: How much do students know about emergency preparedness on a college campus?</b> .....	23
<b>Research Question 2: What emergencies do they expect to experience during their time in college?</b> .....	23
<b>Research Question 3: Are students prepared for emergency situations?</b> .....	24
<b>Severe Weather</b> .....	24
<b>Active Shooter</b> .....	25

<b>Fire</b> .....	25
<b>Feelings of Safety</b> .....	26
Figure 1 .....	26
<b>Basic/Common Emergency Preparedness Knowledge</b> .....	27
Figure 2 .....	28
<b>Thinking About Emergency Preparedness/Knowing Available Resources</b> .....	28
<b>Discussion, Recommendations and Implications</b> .....	31
<b>Introduction</b> .....	31
<b>Discussion of Results</b> .....	31
<b>Limitations</b> .....	33
<b>Recommendations for Future Research</b> .....	34
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	35
<b>References</b> .....	36
Appendix A.....	42
Appendix B.....	44

## ABSTRACT

There is a growing focus on emergency preparedness on college campuses. Millions of students attend colleges and universities across the United States and emergencies will most likely occur during their time in college. To measure the understanding of basic emergency preparedness among first-year college students, this study used a qualitative exploratory research design and was conducted by way of open-ended interviews in order to gain an initial understanding of a decision-making environment and to help develop appropriate courses of action. It focused on collection of data from a small number of respondents by asking questions and observing behavior. As a result of this study, it was found that students have some basic preparedness knowledge, feel safe on their college campus, and have confidence in their campus public safety and emergency management officials to maintain continued emergency preparedness efforts across campus. This study also found that colleges and universities must continue to recommend and offer classes and programs for students, faculty and staff so that more people are prepared for emergencies. The results implicate that university administration and emergency management personnel must continue to support students in their preparedness efforts and to promote proactive preparedness behavior.

*Keywords:* emergency preparedness, emergency management, first-year students

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

#### Summary

Emergency preparedness among first-year students is a significant topic in higher education and emergency management officials continue to focus on preparing students for emergencies on college campuses. There are more than 4,000 two - and four-year institutions of higher education (IHEs) in the United States that serve more than fifteen million students; ensuring their safety and welfare of is a vital function for emergency management officials (National Higher Education Emergency Management Program Needs Assessment, 2016). Most college campuses across the United States have dedicated emergency management teams that are engaged in developing policies, programs, and systems to reduce risks and create disaster-resilient institutions (Kapucu, Khosa, 2012). Resiliency is the ability to quickly recover from or, adjust easily to misfortune or change (Barishansky, 2015) In this case, misfortune or change draw a parallel to emergencies. An emergency is a sudden, unexpected, or impending situation that can cause injury, loss of life, damage to property, and/or interfere with the normal activities and requires immediate attention or action (What is an Emergency, n.d.). For the purposes of this study, the emergencies discussed are severe weather, fire, and acts of violence (active shooter). In addition, a first-year student is a student who has completed less than thirty semester hours in a 120-hour degree program (Decision Support Gateway, n.d.).

Depending on the geographical location, some emergencies are inevitable on a college campus. Rather it be severe weather events (tornadoes, snow/ice storms, severe drought, floods, etc.), fires, or acts of violence. Previous research was conducted to address increasing emergency preparedness levels; however, one population that is left understudied is post-

secondary college students (Tanner and Doberstein, 2015). College students have lower levels of resilience than the general population, due to a minimal culture of preparedness, therefore making them an important population to study (Tanner & Doberstein, 2015).

For the purposes of this study, research focused on emergency preparedness knowledge among first-year college students. The researcher sought to find out what students knew about emergency preparedness at one university.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Research indicates that college students are an unstudied group in the area of emergency preparedness (Tanner & Doberstein, 2015). There is a lack of research relating to emergency preparedness knowledge among first-year students, and this study aimed to fill the gaps and add to the literature for future research and problem solving. Tanner & Doberstein (2015) found that little is known about specific emergency preparedness of college students.

For many students, college is the beginning of their independence and they often focus on new commitments and priorities (Altizer, Lynn, & Murray, 2018). “Emergency preparedness is likely not on one of the average college student’s list of priorities” (Altizer et al., 2018). Furthermore, students may not be aware of the need to prepare or they are not convinced of the efficacy of preparation (Paek, Hilyard, Freimuth, Barge, & Mindlin, 2010). “The analysis of a statewide survey in Georgia revealed that self-efficacy is positively associated with the respondents’ stages of emergency preparedness (Paek et al., 2010). Paek’s study explored the extent to which efficacy, perceived norm, and attention to emergency-related news media are related to levels of emergency preparedness. The efficacy hypothesis set forth by Paek et al. (2010) states that in order to take action, a person must first recognize the existence of the

problem. The media effects hypothesis (Paek et al.) states that people can learn from news media about current disasters and emergencies and how to prepare for them.

It is important for first-year students to understand basic emergency preparedness while in college. If a student lack the baseline emergency preparedness knowledge (how to shelter-in place, secure-in place, evacuate, etc.) then during an emergency, they could experience injury and/or stress by making the wrong decision and ultimately putting their safety and the safety of others at risk. Altizer et al. (2018) explain that the first few minutes of an emergency can mean the difference between life and death.

### **Emergency Preparedness.**

Emergency management is broken up into four phases: mitigation, planning/preparing, response, and recovery (Welcome, n.d.). Planning and preparing for emergencies is a crucial phase for students to engage. According to FEMA, students may be on their own for a period of time following a disaster until first-responders can arrive. Part of the planning and preparedness phase includes knowing what to do, where to go, and who to call for help if an emergency occurs. In 2016, The National Center of Public Safety surveyed 380 colleges and universities in the United States. The results indicated that fifty-nine percent (224) of the campus emergency management programs had a public education or awareness program for students and sixty-nine percent (262) had awareness programs for faculty and staff (National Higher Education Emergency Management Program Survey, 2016). Thus, a little over half of the colleges and university have emergency preparedness and awareness programs for students. Colleges and universities must continue to recommend and offer classes and programs for students, faculty and staff so that more people are prepared for emergencies.

## **Purpose and Significance of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to determine the knowledge first-year students have of emergency preparedness on their college campus. K-12 students rely on parents, teachers, administrators, and other adults to guide them during emergencies and keep them safe. K-12 faculty lead students in a variety of emergency drills such as tornado drills, fire drills, active shooter drills, and in some parts of the country, earthquake drills. The United States has approximately 55 million elementary and secondary school students, and school systems are entrusted to provide a safe and healthy learning environment in public and nonpublic schools. Families and communities expect schools to keep their children and youths safe from threats (human-caused emergencies such as crime and violence) and hazards (natural disasters, disease outbreaks, and accidents) (Duncan, 2013).

Due to the varying locations in which students are from, some have never experienced emergency drills or different weather events based on their geographical location. For example, a student who lives in California may be accustomed to earthquakes since they are more prominent in that state. Tornadoes are the number one weather-related killer in the state of Georgia (Georgia Emergency Management, n.d.). A student who lives in Oklahoma may be accustomed to tornado drills and actual tornado events, so the likelihood of them knowing the proper preparedness actions in Georgia are higher. The State of Florida had four major hurricanes strike in 2004 (Kapucu, Berman, Wang, 2008). A student from Wyoming may have never experienced a hurricane in their area, so by attending college in Florida, they may not be aware of proper preparedness skills in dealing with impending hurricanes.

## **Research Questions**

This research study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. How much do students know about emergency preparedness on a college campus?
2. What emergencies do they expect to experience during their time in college?
3. Are students prepared for emergency situations?

### **Limitations**

There were limitations during the research and data collection. First, the research was limited to one university, using fifteen participants. The researcher targeted an emergency preparedness learning community for research subjects, therefore potentially skewing the results towards more knowledge about the topic. Another limitation was the amount of time the participants spent answering the questions. The researcher allocated a thirty-minute timeframe for each participant; however, the actual interviews took less than ten minutes to complete. The participants limited their answers to the questions by only providing a few sentences, at most, for each question.

### **Definitions**

For the purposes of this study, the following terms, phrases, and acronyms are used throughout this thesis:

**Active Shooter:** An individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area. In most cases, active shooters use firearms and there is no pattern or method to their selection of victims (Glasofer, Laskowdki-Jones, 2019).

**Disasters:** A man-made or natural event that results in death, injury, and property damage, which cannot be managed through normal, routine, channels (Defining a Disaster, n.d.).

**Emergency Management:** The managerial function charged with creating the framework within which communities reduce vulnerability to hazards and cope with disasters (Blanchard, 2007).

**Emergency/Mass Notification System:** A system designed to send rapid emails, text messages, and/or phone message announcements to a large population (oem.kennesaw.edu/mitigation.php, n.d.).

**Emergency Preparedness:** The steps a person takes to make sure they are safe before, during and after an emergency or natural disaster (Department of Health, 2008).

**Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA):** FEMA is an independent agency of the United States government that provides a single point of accountability for all federal emergency preparedness, mitigation, and response activities (FEMA - Dictionary Definition, n.d.)

**Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA):** GEMA coordinates the state's preparedness, response, and recovery efforts to disasters. As part of the Office of the Governor, GEMA operates under the authority of the Emergency Management Agency of 1981. (About, n.d.)

## **Overview**

The following thesis is comprised of five chapters: Introduction, Review of Literature, Methods, Results, and Discussion. Chapter 2 begins with an examination of the research and literature that provide a foundational understanding of the need for student preparedness knowledge, understanding college students as a vulnerable population, the value of campus emergency management programs, and emergency preparedness essentials for new students. Next, Chapter 3 describes the methodology used in this exploratory, qualitative study to explore

emergency preparedness knowledge amount first-year students. Chapter 4 describes the findings, including the common themes that emerged from the analyses of the qualitative data collected from one-on-one interviews with participants in the study. Finally, Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the results obtained and implications on professional practice and future research. A discussion of study limitations and recommendations for future research are also included.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Overview**

This chapter examines three areas of research related to the current study. The first section explores moral development among college students. The second section discusses the first-year college student population. The last section examines preparedness, with a focus on preparedness knowledge among college students.

#### **Moral Development Among College Students**

Moral development is a central purpose of higher education (King & Mayhew, 2004). King and Mayhew said that, “College mission statements today continue to refer to purposes that include a moral dimension, such as preparations for citizenship, civic engagement, character development, moral leadership, service to society, and responsible participation in a diverse democracy” (p.375). Students should gain an appreciation of the civic duty to become prepared citizens, take responsibility for their personal safety, and have increased awareness of public safety and resources on their college campus. Doing so will prepare students for emergencies and disasters (Lynn, 2015).

Feeling safe is a fundamental human need (Maslow, 1971). Humans are unable to meet higher-level needs until lower-level, survival based needs are met (Lynn, 2015). The first four levels of Maslow’s (1971) Hierarchy of Needs include physiological needs, safety/security needs, belongingness and love needs, and esteem needs. Universities and colleges have various resources on campus to meet students’ deficiency needs (Lynn, 2015). In level two, the safety and security need, police and other safety departments can meet this need for students by

providing and maintaining safe environments. A person must meet level two before moving to level three, belongingness and love (Lynn, 2015).

Mathes (1981) stated that for the security hierarchy, the satisfiers included security against dying of hunger; security against physical attack or murder; security against death as a result of extreme heat, cold, or natural disaster; and security against injury or death as a result of foreign invasion.

### **First-Year College Student Population**

The demographics of college students are becoming more diverse and colleges and universities are serving students of different ages, races, ethnicities, nationalities, genders, disabilities, etc. (Ishler, Upcraft, 2005). Students today are becoming one of the most diverse groups in history (Turner, 2015). In this respect, many aspects of college can affect the success of a first-year student; areas like academic readiness, encouragement and support from family members, feeling a sense of community, familiarity with campus life and campus resources, and self-discovery (Ward, Siegel & Davenport, 2012).

Today's first-year students are moving from the Millennial generation, born between 1980 to the early 1990's, to Generation Z born between 1995 and 2010 (Seemiler & Grace, 2016). Seemiler and Grace (2016) said that students have information readily available via wireless devices, a constant, 24/7 communication connection, and more than 70% are motivated by advancement rather than tangible gifts. Generation Z live their lives in a post-9/11 society and during a time when mass shootings are becoming more common. Seemiler and Grace (2016) said that Generation Z students are highly concerned about campus safety and the potential for violence. Research lacks in the area of student preparedness and why they are not

better prepared. It is important to understand the characteristics and aspects of the first-year student generation.

### **Emergency Preparedness**

Natural disasters caused over \$190 billion in financial loss worldwide between 2000 and 2015 (Tanner & Doberstein, 2015). Tanner and Doberstein conducted studies to address disaster risk reduction and increasing levels of emergency preparedness. According to Tanner & Doberstein, “One population that has been left unstudied is post-secondary university students, a group that is thought to have a lower level of resilience than the general population, in part, due to minimal cultures of preparedness” (p. 409). Students generally have higher levels of vulnerability, lower senses of responsibility for preparedness, and higher dependence on family members (Tanner & Doberstein). In addition, they found that students generally have limited experience with disasters, and have lower levels of disaster preparedness and knowledge (p. 410). “Universities should recognize the importance of providing direct and specific information about appropriate emergency preparedness actions” (Tanner & Doberstein).

The state of Arkansas is prone to a multitude of emergencies such as severe winter weather, earthquakes, tornadoes, fires, and other weather-related disasters. The University of Arkansas, like many others, is susceptible to bomb threats, active shooters, food contaminations, infectious diseases, and others (Gadberry, 2018). A study was conducted to determine the level of student emergency preparedness at the University of Arkansas, and the findings were alarming. “Only fifty percent of students were concerned with health threats and socioeconomic issues...and less than half of students were concerned about disasters. Only sixty percent of students had a three-day supply of food and less than thirty-five percent had water (Gadberry,

2018). The study found that students are less concerned about natural disasters and lack the preparation knowledge to be prepared for emergencies and disasters.

According to Gadberry (2018), university officials need to tailor to the needs of the underprepared students, as they are leaving home for the first time to attend college and lack the obvious skills they need to survive for at least three days following an emergency. When disaster strikes, one may have to be able to survive on one's own for 72 hours or more without access to power, food, or transportation (Roth, 2017). The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) recommends having an emergency supply kit with at least three days of water, food, etc. for when an emergency takes place. Researchers Tanner & Doberstein (2015) conducted an online survey with eighty college students. The study found that the majority of students felt that they were the most important actors in personal wellbeing during the first 72 hours post-incident; however, most were not prepared to deal self-sufficiently with a disaster for the recommended 72-hour period. The students reported they had some basics supplies, but not full emergency preparedness kits as recommended by FEMA. Students reported that there were barriers preventing them from being properly prepared. The barriers identified were short-term accommodation, lack of previous experience, and feeling that some emergency items would not be used (Tanner and Doberstein, 2015).

In a study at the University of Texas, “students felt that emergency preparedness should be covered in orientation and that students should be provided with checklists on what to include in the 72-hour emergency kit” (Tanner & Doberstein, 2015). Fifty-eight percent of students at the University of South Florida reported they are not ready for a hurricane even though seventy-seven percent of them had experienced a hurricane previously (Tanner and Doberstein, 2015). Overall, the various studies showed that students are not prepared for major emergencies.

Lovekamp and Tate (2008) researched college students at universities located in tornado- and earthquake-prone areas of the United States. They wanted to know what the “patterns of perceived risk, fear, perceived preparedness, and preparedness activities of college students who are vulnerable to earthquakes and tornadoes” (Lovekamp & Tate, 2008, p. 70). They concluded that perceived risk and fear is higher for women for a variety of unrelated reasons, and the research indicated that resident students expect their universities to take care of them in emergencies and disasters. As a result, they take limited preparedness actions for themselves. Overall, Lovekamp and Tate determined that more research is needed to examine college students’ definitions of preparedness and their perceptions of personal responsibility (2008).

In a 2015 survey, thirty-one percent of participants said their institution did not have any staff dedicated to emergency preparedness efforts (Blake, Briggs, & Corner, 2019). Two-year institutions reported forty-one percent did not have any full-time staff or person dedicated to emergency preparedness (Blake et al., 2019). The question then becomes how do these institutions handle emergencies? How do they alert students and stakeholders of potential or imminent danger? Who does the work? It may vary from place-to-place, but oftentimes it relies on staff who have limited knowledge of emergency management.

There are solutions and recommendations to increase interest, visibility, and strategic alignment. The bottom line is that there must be buy-in from decision-makers. Through forums and focus groups, the researchers (National Higher Education Emergency Management Program Needs Assessment, 2016) created three value statements that can aid higher education community decision makers in establishing best emergency management practices:

1. The value of emergency management to IHEs is improving organizational agility.

Collaborating with campus and community partners, there is effort to further reduce risk

and liability while preserving the brand. Ultimately, a culture of resilience within our campus community must be established

2. A dynamic emergency management program will serve the community, reduce risk, build resiliency, protect lives and assets, enhance reputation, promote positive change and instill confidence and trust in [the institution].
3. A dynamic emergency management program will apply a broad structure that guides institutional preparedness, mitigation response, and the recovery process in order to minimize risk. The program will leverage campus stakeholders and external partners with the goal of preserving lives and assets in order to build more resilient institutions.

Students arrive on campus with a variety of anxieties, both academic and non-academic, but rarely do new students worry about disasters. Altizer, Lynn, Murray (2018) said that new students will likely approach their collegiate experience with either complete naivety of what could go wrong on a college campus or the feeling of invincibility. Throughout students' formative school years, they were most likely exposed to different emergency drills such as tornadoes or fire, but have always been led by a teacher or administrator. "...given the ratio of faculty and staff to students [in college], particularly on larger campuses, would it not be beneficial to train students in order to increase the number of prepared individuals on campus by hundreds, even thousands" (Altizer et al., 2018)? Getting preparedness information to students is difficult; student and parent orientations are crammed with other important information, so emergency preparedness often gets put at the bottom of the agenda, or sometimes, not at all. Altizer et al. suggested that colleges and universities could distribute a preparedness packet that includes information such as a list of emergency service organizations on campus, an introduction to the campus emergency notification system, a quick reference guide with potential

risks and what to do if an event occurs and a checklist for building emergency kits (p. 268). A list and schedule of emergency preparedness training classes could be included since in-person training presentations may be more effective in student learning and understanding.

It is important that students get the basic preparedness information so that they can learn what to do in case of an emergency. Some colleges and universities infuse it in college introductory courses, first-year seminars, or learning communities. For example, Kennesaw State University offered six sections of an emergency preparedness learning community titled, *Emergency! Are you prepared?* in fall semester 2017. (Learning Communities Spring, 2017) Social media can also be a useful and powerful tool if used properly. Police and campus emergency management departments can push information to students through popular social media sites. This can be an effective way to provide quick tips to students such as how to prepare for tornado season or when and how to properly use a fire extinguisher, or provide weather updates that may affect their campus. Universities owe it to their students to help them be and stay as prepared as possible. The continual push of preparedness information is crucial in maintaining a knowledgeable student base.

The 2007 Virginia Tech shooting deaths of thirty-three people was the impetus for administrators to create better emergency procedures for colleges in the United States. In a study of 161 US colleges, only twenty-five percent agreed that students understand their college's emergency procedures (Seo, Torabi, Sa, and Blair, 2011). While violence is not a new phenomenon, violence on college campuses has increased, therefore making it one of the most serious social problems in higher education (Seo, et al, 2011). Seo, Torabi, Sa, and Blair said, "In the aftermath of the Virginia Tech shootings, it is imperative to examine the emergency preparedness of college campuses across the nation to prepare and plan to

minimize the possibility of such a tragedy occurring. Furthermore, given the technology used during a crisis is becoming more of a necessity for rapidly disseminating information to all college constituencies, and it is essential to assess the currently status of emergency notification or communication systems of US colleges” (p. 200).

Of the colleges surveyed, eighty-one percent of the public schools reported having appropriate emergency procedures to respond to dangerous situations, but only nineteen percent of the public college students understood the emergency procedures of their campuses (Seo et al, 2011). It is essential to have quality emergency preparedness initiatives for every student, faculty and staff member. The more information people have about potential emergencies, and how they will react to them, the better off the college will be if something catastrophic were to occur. It is important to note that having a reliable mass notification platform is crucial in getting the information out in a timely manner.

## **Conclusion**

Much of the existing research on emergency preparedness among college students extends beyond the first year of college. Although limited, the previous research discusses the lack of preparedness knowledge, lower levels of resiliency and minimal culture of preparedness among college students. Feelings of safety and security is vital for every human being, according to Maslow’s Hierarchy Needs (1971).

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methods

The purpose of the study was to determine the knowledge first-year college students have of emergency preparedness. The researcher wanted to determine if students knew what to do in certain emergencies and if they knew what emergency resources their university offered.

This study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. How much do students know about emergency preparedness on a college campus?
2. What emergencies do they expect to experience during their time in college?
3. Are students prepared for emergency situations?

### Research Design and Data Collection

This study used a qualitative exploratory research approach to gain a preliminary understanding of a decision-making environment and to help develop hypotheses or appropriate courses of action (Erickson, 2017). A qualitative research project starts with situations, finds patterns or themes in data, establishes a hypothesis, and then develops theories or conclusions based on the research conducted (Bui, 2014). In this study, qualitative methods allowed the researcher to explore narratives of first-year students in relation to emergency preparedness.

### Role of the Researcher

At the time of the study, the researcher was an employee of Kennesaw State University as an emergency manager, therefore prompting the focus on emergency preparedness among students. It was important for the researcher to focus on potential influences for subjectivity, which included some biases such as the researcher's employment status and area of expertise.

## **Methodology**

For this study, the researcher used interviews as the strategy for data collection from the first-year student participants. An interview technique was used to gather descriptive data in the subjects' own words so that the researcher could develop insights on how subjects interpret emergency preparedness (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The researcher did not know the participants; the interview was the first and only interaction. The research utilized an exploratory study in order to gain insights on students' emergency preparedness knowledge and allowed them to answer questions accordingly. The interview schedules were semi-structured in thirty-minute intervals. Fourteen, open-ended questions were asked to each participant (see Appendix A).

The researcher aimed to build rapport with the students by briefly explaining the reasoning for the interviews and telling students that it was part of a graduate degree requirement. Every subject was informed that the answers would remain confidential. The researcher sought to make the interviews as comfortable as possible by encouraging the subjects to talk freely about their points of view (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The researcher remained attentive throughout the interviews by communicating non-verbal affirmations of personal interest (head nod, smile, etc.) There were only a few occasions where the researcher had to ask for clarification from the respondents.

## **Setting**

The research study was conducted at Kennesaw State University (KSU), one of the 50 largest universities in the United States, located in Kennesaw, GA, roughly thirty miles northwest of Atlanta. To gain a better understanding of this study, it is important to understand KSU. There are thirteen academic colleges and over 36,000 students between its two main

campuses. Southern Polytechnic State University and Kennesaw State University consolidated into one university (KSU) in 2015. KSU is a comprehensive, liberal arts, public four-year university, with over 6,000 freshmen in the fall 2018 term (Enrollment Profile, n.d.). KSU is part of the University System of Georgia (USG) and recently received a Carnegie doctoral research institution R2 designation.

The research interviews for this study were held on the Kennesaw Campus in the Student Center, as it was a central place on campus with which most students were familiar. Conducting the interviews at this location allowed the researcher to explore students who were residential and non-residential/commuters.

## **Participants**

The participants for this study were first-year college students attending Kennesaw State University. The participants were recruited by means of student email and a flyer sent to professors of the first-year emergency preparedness learning communities. The participants were provided a link to a sign-up webpage where they could choose the day and time that was most convenient for them. They were to provide their name and phone number so the researcher could confirm their participation and give specific details on the location of the interviews. The participants were guaranteed a ten-dollar gift card for their participation. Fifteen of the twenty interested students participated.

Prior to beginning each interview, the participants signed an IRB-approved (Study #19-434) consent form (Appendix B). The interviews were recorded and the researcher used a semi-structured interview protocol. This means all participants were asked the same questions (Appendix A), but the researcher asked follow-up or clarification questions as needed.

## **Validity and Reliability**

The primary strategies used to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the findings was by limiting the researcher's personal biases, allowing sufficient time and opportunities for data collection, and providing rich and thick descriptions of the results (Bui, 2014).

The research involved qualitative data collection by means of in-person, one-on-one interviews with fifteen first-year students, over the course of three days. There were no preconceived ideas or procedures before conducting the data collection, leaving the design flexible (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

## **Data Analysis**

“Phenomenological research uses the analysis of significant statements, the generation of meaning units, and the development of . . . an essence description” (Creswell, 2007, p. 184). The first technique used was epochal, which means that the researcher was aware of personal assumptions and viewpoints (Merriam, 2009). The researcher approached the study with prior knowledge of emergency preparedness and first-year learning communities centered on emergency preparedness. Second, data analysis began with verbatim transcription of the interviews. Interview responses were examined line by line. The researcher then used a coding system in order to organize the data (Appendix C) It was “used to break up and segment the data into simpler, general categories and [was] used to expand and tease out the data, in order to formulate new questions and levels of interpretation” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 30). As the researcher continued to analyze the data, a second list of codes were identified as recurring themes emerged (Appendix C), putting data into “meaningful chunks” (Bui, 2014; Coffey & Atkinson).

## **Protection of Subjects**

Per the parameters of the consent form and IRB approval, the data was recorded through means of a word processor and audio recording device and later transcribed by the researcher.

Quotations from the interviews were selected and used to backup the research questions.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results

#### Introduction

For this study, qualitative data was collected through interviews to answer the three research questions related to emergency preparedness among first-year college students. This chapter will review the data as it relates to the research questions and the outcomes related to the themed data that presented itself in the data analysis. The primary themes identified were feelings of safety on campus, basic/common emergency preparedness knowledge, and not thinking about emergency preparedness or knowing available resources.

This chapter will start with a short description of the students who participated in the study, then address the research questions, and end with results as they relate to the identified themes. The research questions in this study were:

1. How much do students know about emergency preparedness on a college campus?
2. What emergencies do they expect to experience during their time in college?
3. Are students prepared for emergency situations?

#### Participants

This study focused on first-year students at Kennesaw State University who were either resident or non-resident students. Of the fifteen interviewed participants, six were on-campus, resident students, with the other nine living off-campus. The researcher assigned randomly-generated pseudonyms for each participant to ensure anonymity. See Table 1 for additional details regarding the participants.

Table 1				
<i>Participants' Identifying Information</i>				
Name	Age	Gender	On or Off Campus Resident	Home State
Ash	18	Male	Off	Georgia
Colby	18	Male	On	Georgia
Joel	18	Male	Off	Oklahoma
Aaron	18	Male	Off	Georgia
Flora	23	Female	Off	Georgia
Leah	18	Female	On	Georgia
Amanda	23	Female	Off	Georgia
Sara	18	Female	Off	Georgia
Makayla	18	Female	On	Georgia
Jessica	19	Female	Off	Georgia
Joanne	19	Female	Off	Georgia
Gina	19	Female	Off	Georgia
Carmen	19	Female	Off	Georgia
Monica	18	Female	On	Georgia
Lelia	18	Female	On	Georgia

For this study, the population included first-year students during the spring 2019 semester at Kennesaw State University. The researcher asked the same set of questions to each student regarding emergency preparedness on campus (Appendix A).

**Research Question 1: How much do students know about emergency preparedness on a college campus?**

When asked how often they were thinking about emergency preparedness, many said “not very often”, “not at all” or “hardly at all”, while others said they were “pretty prepared” and always thinking about their “wellbeing.” For example, Colby said, “I’m always thinking about my wellbeing [and] thinking about how I can survive...the best way to survive.” Jayda said, “I usually think about it [emergency preparedness] twice a month. [I’m] thinking about weather conditions that could affect the campus, or someone on campus carrying a gun.” Three students said they do not think about preparedness unless “something is going on” or until a “situation comes up” that would jeopardize their safety. Carmen said, “After the incident a few months ago, I am thinking about it more. Before that [incident], I was not thinking much about it.” Joel’s response was, “Not at all, unless something is happening, like bad weather.”

Based on the answers provided for the subsequent questions pertaining to specific actions to responding to certain emergencies, it is evident that students have very basic knowledge of emergency preparedness. Students do not spend much time thinking about basic preparedness and because of that, they acknowledge they are not well-informed on what to do.

**Research Question 2: What emergencies do they expect to experience during their time in college?**

The students were asked research question number two. Ten out of the fifteen students referenced a weather-related emergency. Carmen responded, “Weather, floods, and tornadoes.” Jessica referenced “storms or bad weather” to include a snow storm. Monica replied, “Mostly weather emergencies, but nothing snow related.” Amanda thought a natural disaster, “like a tornado.” Gina mentioned tornadoes and “hurricane weather.”

Four students said they expect to experience a fire while in college. Leah said, “I expect a fire in my building [dorm] because we had a fire in the trash shoot before.” Makayla said she also expects a fire, and “I hope that’s it, but maybe something weather related.” Amanda also said, “maybe a fire or a natural disaster.” Flora responded, “Maybe a fire drill or small fire.”

### **Research Question 3: Are students prepared for emergency situations?**

The fourth question asked during the interviews was, “When thinking about major emergencies happening at KSU, things like severe weather (tornadoes), a major fire, or an active shooter situation, do you know what to do if one of these things happen? If so, what?”

#### **Severe Weather**

Nine of the fifteen students knew to seek shelter on the lowest level of the building they are in, away from doors and windows, in the event of severe weather. This is not to say the other students did not know this action, they just did not mention it in their answers. Makayla said, “I would go to a safe room for a tornado.” Leah replied, “For severe weather, you go down to the basement.” Gina said she knew to go to a lower level away from windows. Joanne said, “I would stay in the building far away from windows.” One student, Jessica, said when weather issues arise, she stays home and emails her professors. Joel, one of the four male students, said he would go to a “well-structured building” or go home if “something was coming.”

Overall, 60% of the participants knew what do to do in a severe weather situation.

The study found that students think about emergency preparedness during or just before an emergency is about to occur. The participants had experienced some weather-related emergencies (severe weather, snow/ice events) which compelled them to think about their actions before or during the event. Some students indicated they stay home if weather is occurring during their commute or during the time of their classes. Kennesaw State University is

located in northwest Georgia, a region known for its risk of meteorological hazards. Due to this and the risk of other disasters, students are encouraged to know and understand the proper preparedness actions to remain safe during a weather event.

### **Active Shooter**

Thirteen out of the fifteen participants said they knew what they would do in an active shooter situation. Many of the students knew to lock doors, turn off lights, stay away from doors and windows, hide, call the police, remain quiet, turn off or silence cell phone, and run/leave campus if they can. Lelia indicated she did not know what to do for an active shooter, but later, during another question, said she would, “Turn off the lights, stay away from doors and windows, and wait like they taught us in grade school.” Amanda said she would try to leave the area, but that she was “not really sure.” Colby said, “I will make sure if anyone is out in the open, I would help shelter them, or if I’m nowhere near the shooter, I would leave campus.”

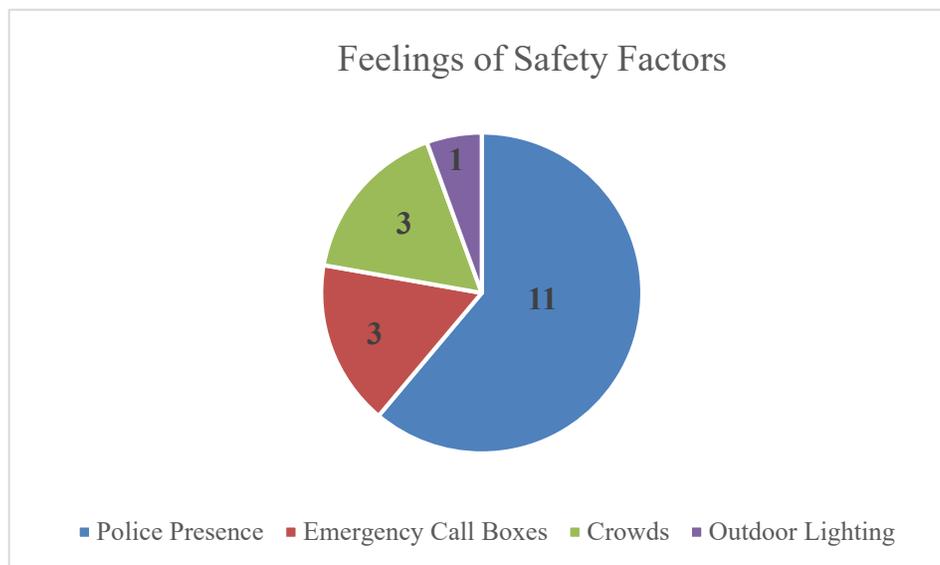
### **Fire**

Twelve students indicated they knew what actions to take in a fire incident. Most said they knew to find the nearest exit and leave the building. Only one student indicated they would call an emergency number. Leah indicated she knew not to take the elevators during a fire evacuation, and to go to a “designated area.” Two students indicated you should “run” to exit a building, but only one student said to remain calm. Aaron and Sara both indicated they knew to take the staircase and not the elevator during an evacuation. Only one student, Joanne, mentioned “building layout maps” [evacuation maps] with “red arrows [pointing] to the exits. Carmen indicated a firm, “no” when asked if she knew how to evacuate a building, but said she would “get a text message” if there was an evacuation. Joel indicated that he did not “know the most efficient” way, but would “find the quickest way” if informed of an evacuation.

## Feelings of Safety

The first question asked during the interviews was, “Please describe how safe you feel in general at KSU?” All fifteen participants indicated that they feel safe, pretty safe, or very safe. The second part of the question pertained to factors that increase or decrease their feelings of safety. The chart below indicates the number of students who feel safe by having police presence, emergency call boxes, crowds on campus, and outdoor lighting (Figure 1).

Figure 1



Some students indicated more than one factor. For example, Lelia said, “Generally, I feel safe. I feel pretty safe [because] there are a lot of lights and emergency [call] boxes. Lights, emergency call boxes, and campus police patrolling [increase feelings of safety.]” Makayla, an on-campus resident, responded, “I feel pretty safe...an eight out of ten. I see lots of police officers on campus, and when campus is extra busy, that makes me feel extra safe.” Makayla indicated that she is an on-campus resident. Joanne reported that she feels “pretty safe” but at night, “there’s not many people here [and] if I hear a voice or something unusual, I feel unsafe. During the day I feel safe.” Joanne’s feelings of safety increase when she sees KSU Police

“patrolling around the parking decks at night time” and “having them around.” “[Feelings of safety decrease] when there’s not a lot people around or if there aren’t any classes going on.”

The last question of the interviews was, “How would you describe KSU to friends and family if they asked you about campus safety?” All students except for one indicated that they would tell family and friends that KSU is a safe campus. One student answered, “I would refer to webpage for emergency issues.” The researcher believed that there was a slight language barrier and the participant may not have understood the question. Some of the responses from participants were, “Overall [KSU] is a pretty safe campus.” “It [safety] is taken seriously and they are effective and act quickly and that I feel safe on campus.” “Pretty safe. I’m not here at night, but I would warn them [family and friends] of your car getting broke into.” “I would say it is a very safe campus. Nothing dangerous usually goes on, we are very well protected. In the likelihood of something happening, it is handled in a respectful fashion.” Leah said, “It is a good, safe campus and there’s usually a KSU officer walking around.”

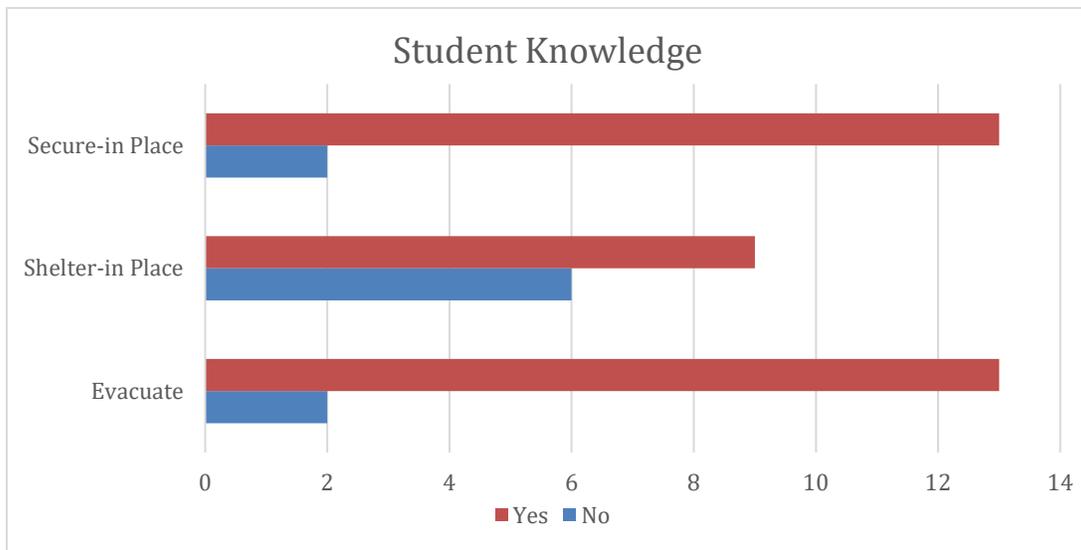
### **Basic/Common Emergency Preparedness Knowledge**

The basic emergency preparedness knowledge that needed to be identified during the interviews were if the students knew where to shelter-in place, how to evacuate, and how to secure-in place during an active shooter situation. The researcher asked participants if they knew where the shelter-in place areas are in the buildings that they frequent, and how are those areas identified. Nine students said they knew where to shelter-in place. Lelia indicated that she looked at the “map layout” in the buildings and that they indicate the tornado shelter areas. Makayla said, “Usually there is a sign indicating a tornado refuge [area].” Monica responded, “There are little signs everywhere.” Leah also mentioned the “yellow signs with tornado shelter” on them. Gina knew that some tornado shelter areas are in bathrooms and “on the lower level

away from windows.” Joanne knew that the areas are usually “basements, in the middle of the building...with no windows”, but did not know how the areas are identified. Amanda, Aaron, Ash, and Sara all indicated that they did not know where the shelter-in areas are and that they did not know how they are identified.

The following chart (figure 2) indicates the data regarding student knowledge on how to evacuate, shelter-in place, and secure-in place for an active shooter.

Figure 2



### Thinking About Emergency Preparedness/Knowing Available Resources

When asked how often they are thinking about emergency preparedness and safety at their university, nine students indicated “not very often” or “hardly at all.” A few students said they thought about it occasionally, especially if “something is going on.” Lelia, an on-campus resident, indicated she thinks about emergency preparedness and safety “about twice a month.” She did not specify what prompted her to think about it twice a month, but did mention “certain weather conditions that could affect the campus”, or “if someone on campus is carrying a gun.” Lelia is an on-campus resident. Monica indicated that she is a “pretty prepared person in

general” and is “always on the lookout [for emergencies].” Monica indicated that she is an on-campus resident. Gina said, “I do [think about it] unconsciously, but not every day.” Sara indicated she usually does not think about emergency preparedness or safety unless a situation “comes up where my safety is jeopardized.” Joanne admitted that she does not think about emergency preparedness or safety, but that she should because “I freeze up and don’t know what to do.” Carmen said, “I was not thinking about it [emergency preparedness and safety], but after the [recent incident], I am thinking about it more.” Joel also indicated that he does not think about it unless “something is happening, like bad weather” and “I do not worry about students on campus because of campus police.”

Participants were asked what resources are available to students that aid in emergencies or preparing for emergencies. Six students said they did not know what resources were available to them. Nine students responded the following resources: text messages, emails, alarms, outdoor warning sirens, emergency call boxes, police station, fire extinguishers, emergency alerts, the LiveSafe app, campus safety events, campus police, emergency contact numbers, classroom posters, fire evacuation maps, and intercom systems. The responses given for this question were relatively comprehensive. While there are many other resources available to students that aid in emergencies and for preparing for them, the students were able to provide many of the components that encompass emergency preparedness efforts.

## **Conclusion**

The themes present in the participants’ narratives indicate overall, basic knowledge of emergency preparedness. The results showed that the participants know what types of emergencies to expect during their time in college. Fourteen of the fifteen participants indicated that they are originally from the state of Georgia and ten of the fifteen indicated that they expect

to experience some type of weather-related emergency. The participants are not, however, thinking about emergency preparedness that often, unless something is currently happening that would prompt them to prepare. These interviews serve as a basis to gain perspective on the three research questions and allow the researcher to assess evidence of emergency preparedness knowledge among first-year students.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Discussion, Recommendations and Implications

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore emergency preparedness knowledge among first-year students at Kennesaw State University. Specifically, the study focused on what students knew about emergency preparedness on their college campus, what emergencies they expected to experience, and if they were prepared for emergency situations. The following research questions were used to guide the study:

1. How much do students know about emergency preparedness on a college campus?
2. What emergencies do they expect to experience during their time in college?
3. Are students prepared for emergency situations?

In order to measure the knowledge students had about emergency preparedness, a qualitative exploratory study was used, and participants' responses were analyzed to identify consistent themes. The themes that were revealed during the analysis were as follows:

1. Feelings of safety
2. Basic/Common Emergency Preparedness Knowledge
3. Thinking About Emergency Preparedness/Knowing Available Resources

#### Discussion of Results

The findings of this study indicate that first-year students have feelings of safety on their college campus, have a basic understanding of emergency preparedness, yet they do not think about emergency preparedness that often. Although this study cannot be generalized across all first-year students at KSU, the findings from this exploratory study provide evidence that the participants are aware of the potential emergencies that could occur at or near their campus.

At the time of the interviews, some of the participants had experienced an incident on campus where they felt their safety had been compromised. Because of this, they discussed the incident and voiced their opinions of how the university should manage future incidences. They indicated that they were thinking about preparedness actions for future events. Universities can use current emergencies and disasters to educate their campus community through classes, training, social media posts, and other methods.

Some students indicated they expect to experience a fire during their time in college. One student said there was a fire in her dorm and everyone had to evacuate. “From 2011-2015, U.S. fire departments responded to an estimated annual average of 4,100 structure fires in dormitories, fraternities, sororities, and other related properties. These fires caused annual averages of 35 civilian injuries and \$14 million in direct property damage” (Campbell, 2017). Fire is one of the most likely emergencies on a college campus. Colleges and universities can offer fire safety classes with hands-on components through their emergency management or environmental health and safety offices. Students can learn how to put out small fires with fire extinguishers. Faculty and staff should express how important it is for students to participate in fire drills. Evacuation is always recommended during a fire alarm.

### **Implications for Practitioners**

Existing research indicates that college students are often an unstudied population in terms of finding levels of preparedness (Tanner & Doberstein, 2015). Finding out what students know can guide university practitioners in creating preparedness programs and classes available to students. University administrators should recognize the importance of providing direct and specific information about appropriate emergency preparedness actions. This includes building awareness of the hazards students may face and correct actions to take. Information about

emergency preparedness items that students should have in their residences should be provided on a consistent basis. Universities need to be consistent and constant in their outreach to students about emergency preparedness. Social media sites are a good avenue for pushing out succinct tips and videos to students. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides a detailed guide for establishing an emergency preparedness plan in higher education settings, and highlights the need to include a wide range of university community members in the planning process (Tanner & Doberstein, 2015).

University administration should be in discussion with the emergency management department regarding the responsibility of emergency preparedness among students. This would help establish stronger ties between administration and students, and allow for connections to be made prior to an emergency event. Not only would it lower student vulnerability, but it would encourage proactive preparedness behavior.

The outcomes of the study helped develop an understanding of what first-year students know about emergency preparedness at a certain university and what universities can do to increase the knowledge in the future. The current study may fill a gap in existing research on emergency preparedness knowledge among college students and contribute to future studies in similar fields.

### **Limitations**

In this study, the researcher acknowledges that there were limitations and weaknesses that may have affected the validity of the results. First, some the students were part of an emergency preparedness learning community, therefore may have had more knowledge in this area than other students. Secondly, this study was limited to one group of first-year students at a specific institution (Kennesaw State University), during one semester. The study was not

publicized to any other institutions. These few limitations to the study could impact the validity of the results for future replications of the study. It is suggested that the results be taken as a best-case scenario in terms of preparedness knowledge. It is expected that the university population as a whole is less prepared than these results show, although confirming that was beyond the scope of this research.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The results of this study provide insight to the possibly for future research in areas relating to first-year students, or expanding it to first- and second-year students. This study employed an exploratory research method as the researcher conducted interviews with the fifteen participants at a large, comprehensive public institution in the southeast United States. While the number of students in this study provided revealing information on emergency preparedness knowledge, a wider variety of diverse students and more students who are beyond the first year of college could provide further research opportunities. The study has the potential to expand to include all students at a university as well as faculty and staff. Another area for possible research could include multiple universities, using a sample of first-year students to evaluate the differences in emergency preparedness programs and/or emergency management efforts. The same approach could be taken with faculty and staff populations to find out what they know concerning emergency preparedness. The research could be narrowed to certain types of emergencies, for example, active shooters and what students, faculty, and/or staff know to do in those instances. Research could expand to students in a learning community versus those who are not.

Further research on emergency preparedness knowledge could include a mixed methodology approach including quantitative and qualitative measures. Future researchers could

focus on levels of maturity among students beyond the second year of college. Tanner and Doberstein (2015) found that students in earlier years of academic study perceived themselves to be more prepared than those in upper years. They believe the reason could be the levels of maturity and forward thinking among the upper-year students. Upper-class students possibly have more permanent living arrangements and greater experience with living on their own, thus are better able to understand what is truly needed in an emergency and can more accurately perceive how they could improve their preparedness. The theoretical work on self-authorship by Baxter Magolda may provide some insight into this.

## **Conclusion**

This exploratory study provides themes that could assist university administration and emergency management personnel in identifying the preparedness needs of the student population. While the study revealed students have basic preparedness knowledge, more needs to be done to create a preparedness mindset among all students. University students are an important population to study because of their limited emergency preparedness, lower level of resilience, and their overall exclusion from previous studies. If a disaster were to occur at a college or university, and the students were unprepared or underprepared, the wellbeing of students would be at risk and the reputation of the university could be affected.

There is potential for colleges and universities to help increase preparedness knowledge and resilience among students, therefore decreasing their vulnerability to disasters. Students must be included in emergency preparedness training and classes to become prepared citizens and to build confidence in dealing with emergencies. Activities to help build a culture of preparedness and resiliency must be conducted prior to incidents occurring.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Questions

1. Please describe how safe you feel in general at KSU?
  - a. What factors increase/decrease your feelings of safety?
  - b. How do you feel about KSU's strategies to keep students safe?
2. How often are you thinking about emergency preparedness and safety at KSU?
3. What types of emergencies do you expect to experience in your time at KSU?
4. When thinking about major emergencies happening at KSU, things like severe weather (tornadoes), a major fire, or an active shooter situation, do you know what to do if one of these things happen? If so, what?
5. Do you know where the shelter-in place areas are in the buildings you frequent? How are they identified?
  - a. How are you notified to shelter-in place?
6. Do you know how to evacuate a building if instructed to do so? If so, how?
  - a. How are you notified of an evacuation?
7. What steps would you take in an active shooter situation?
8. What resources are available to students that aid in emergencies or preparing for emergencies?
9. How can KSU improve in terms of responding to or preparing you for emergencies?
10. How would you describe KSU to friends and family if they asked you about campus safety?
11. Are you an on or off campus resident?
12. Where are you from?
13. What is your gender?

14. What is your age?

## Appendix B

### Consent Cover Letter

**Title of Research Study:** Understanding of Basic Preparedness Among First-Year Students

**Researcher's Contact Information:** Diana Christy Hendricks, dhendr16@kennesaw.edu, 678-234-2100

#### Introduction

You are being invited to take part in a research study conducted by D. Christy Hendricks of Kennesaw State University. Before you decide to participate in this study, you should read this form and ask questions about anything that you do not understand.

#### Description of Project

The purpose of the study is to better understand the basic preparedness of first-year students at KSU.

#### Explanation of Procedures

You will be asked to respond to several questions about your knowledge related to basic preparedness. Clarification questions may be asked to better understand your responses.

#### Time Required

The entire interview should last approximately 20-30 minutes.

#### Risks or Discomforts

There is minimal risk associated with the interviews.

#### Benefits

Although there will be no direct benefits to you for taking part in the study, the researcher may learn more about basic preparedness among first-year students.

#### Compensation

Each participant will receive a ten dollar gift card to a local eatery.

#### Confidentiality

The results of this participation are confidential. The data will be presented in themes and will not be attributed to any one participant. No identifying information will be tied to the responses and

opinions of the participants. The recordings will be stored on an encrypted external hard drive in a secured area.

**Inclusion Criteria for Participation**

Only participants 18 years and over may participate in the study.

**Signed Consent**

I agree and give my consent to participate in this research project. I understand that participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty.

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Signature of Participant or Authorized Representative, Date

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Signature of Investigator, Date

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PLEASE SIGN BOTH COPIES OF THIS FORM, KEEP ONE AND RETURN THE OTHER TO THE INVESTIGATOR

Research at Kennesaw State University that involves human participants is carried out under the oversight of an Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding these activities should be addressed to the Institutional Review Board, Kennesaw State University, 585 Cobb Avenue, KH3417, Kennesaw, GA 30144-5591, (470) 578-6407.

APPENDIX C

Table 1: Initial Codes	
<i>Codes</i>	<i>Description</i>
Police/Security Presence	Related to seeing a heavy police presence on campus
Weather emergency expectation	Related to expecting to experience a weather-related emergency
Rarely thinking about emergency preparedness	Related to not thinking about emergency preparedness
Seeks shelter in safe place, lowest level, away from doors and windows	Related to knowing preparedness actions for weather-related emergency
Lock doors, call police, hide	Related to knowing preparedness actions for an active shooter situation
Tornado signs and text/email alerts	Related to knowing where shelter-in areas are and notification methods
Resource availability	Related to not knowing the resources available
Fire expectation	Related to expecting to experience a fire
Notifying students	Related to how university can improve in preparing students for emergencies
Feels safe	Related to feelings of safety at KSU
Safe university	Related to what they would tell family friends about campus safety

Table 2: Emergent Codes	
<i>Codes</i>	<i>Description</i>
Safety	Related to feelings of safety
Basic/Common Knowledge	Related to having basic/common emergency preparedness knowledge
Thinking/Knowing	Related to thinking about emergency preparedness and knowing available resources