

## **ARKANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY–MOUNTAIN HOME: KEEPING YOU PREPARED**

---

Kellie Young, Arkansas State University–Mountain Home

### **BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION**

The first year of Arkansas State University–Mountain Home’s (ASUMH) *Accent on Student Success: Engaged Together in Service* (ASSETS) project focused primarily on educating and planning for a potential avian influenza (bird flu) pandemic. After Hurricane Katrina, the United States saw first-hand how important it is to have a disaster preparedness plan for a college. How will the institution resume operations? Where will students go? How will the educational process continue? Three academic disciplines approached the project from the following perspectives: Sociology students researched the history of pandemics and gathered information on other colleges’ and local and state organizations’ disaster preparedness plans. The EMT/Paramedic students researched the medical aspect of the bird flu. Lastly, the Fran Coulter Honors students put all of the information together in three separate brochures and a PowerPoint presentation to be shared with the public.

The published brochure is an informational piece that gives a brief history and description of avian influenza and the possibilities for a pandemic and discusses hygiene precautions to be taken. Two other documents are currently being vetted by administration and are 1) an insert to be included with ASUMH’s Emergency Handbook and 2) a brochure outlining the steps that will be taken by all ASUMH constituents in the event of a pandemic and how ASUMH will continue operations.

### **SCOPE OF PROJECT**

After receiving the 3-year ASSETS grant from CCNCCE, ASUMH began to explore the direction of its project. Rather than have each discipline focus on the grant independent of the other, it was decided that each of the three disciplines, Sociology, EMT/Paramedic, and Fran Coulter Honors, would work collectively to create informational documents for ASUMH and the Mountain Home community regarding avian bird flu and the impact of a flu pandemic. After the three years of the grant have concluded, the goal is to have a disaster preparedness manual that includes materials on a variety of disasters that can be shared with ASUMH and its constituencies.

### **WHAT IS AVIAN INFLUENZA AND WHERE IS IT?**

According to the Avian Influenza Fact Sheet (WHO, 2006), avian influenza is of paramount concern:

Of all influenza viruses that circulate in birds, the H5N1 virus is of greatest present concern for human health for two main reasons. First, the H5N1 virus has caused by far the greatest number of human cases of very severe disease and the greatest number of deaths.... A second implication for human health, of far greater concern,

is the risk that the H5N1 virus – if given enough opportunities – will develop the characteristics it needs to start another influenza pandemic.

“To date, human cases have been reported in six countries, most of which are in Asia: Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Thailand, Turkey, and Viet Nam. . . . All human cases have coincided with outbreaks of highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza in poultry” (WHO, 2006). Although it has taken ten years for the avian influenza virus to spread across Asia, its introduction into the United States is just a plane ride or freightliner away.

## **RELEVANCY TO NORTH ARKANSAS**

Certain geographical areas must prepare for disasters that are relevant to the region, and Arkansas is no exception. While there is the potential for other natural disasters in Arkansas, such as tornadoes and earthquakes, the impending disaster receiving the most attention is an avian influenza pandemic because of Arkansas’ poultry production. Frank Jones, Arkansas Extension poultry specialist, recounts that “Arkansas is the nation’s second leading chicken producer, third in turkey production, and eighth in table egg production. We produce more than 1.2 billion chickens, 29 million turkeys and 3.4 billion eggs per year” (Delta Farm Press, 2006). With this booming industry comes certain precautions that must be considered by a number of organizations, including higher education.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

Institutions of higher education felt the impact of a disaster after Hurricane Katrina devastated parts of the Gulf Coast in 2005. Campuses were closed, students were displaced, and learning ceased while arrangements were made to continue educational operations. After Hurricane Katrina, social scientists who specialized in risk and disaster met at Mississippi State University to discuss and craft disaster research (“Post Katrina,” Social Science Research Center, 2006), and they made the following recommendations to improve preparedness in the face of a disaster:

1. Reduc[e] vulnerability of populations to disaster, promot[e] the sustainability of human and ecological systems, and enhanc[e] the resiliency of communities.
2. Understand social impacts of the particular events on affected populations, beginning with reconstructed baselines and continuing through a full assessment of the consequences over time.
3. Develop policies and emergency practices to effectively prevent and mitigate disaster consequences.
4. Us[e] comparative analysis that allows for a particular disaster to be compared with other disasters.
5. Facilitat[e] recovery of individuals and communities.
6. Collect data and disseminat[e] findings in a timely manner.
7. Enhanc[e] stakeholder participation, collaboration, and empowerment.
8. Develop new knowledge on understudied disaster-related issues.

## **GUIDING + TEACHING + LEARNING = PREPAREDNESS AT ASUMH**

In accordance with these recommendations regarding disaster preparedness, the students of ASUMH embarked on a service learning project that would help educate the constituents of ASUMH about avian influenza and the potential for a pandemic. Over the course of the Fall 2006 semester, the 30 students involved in the service learning project began the research phase of the plan.

The Sociology students researched the history of pandemics. Their research examined the Pandemic of 1918 and the devastation that occurred. They explored the sociological implications and the possible interruption of public services in the Mountain Home area. They also invited the local director of the Office of Emergency Services to the campus and listened to the local disaster preparedness plans available through OES.

The EMT/Paramedic students took a medical approach with their research. These students studied the nature of avian influenza and learned of the physical characteristics of the disease. They provided tips on how to avoid contracting bird flu and when to seek medical treatment should symptoms of bird flu appear.

Lastly, the Fran Coulter Honors students researched state and local disaster plans and developed an outline for ASUMH's disaster preparedness based on the collection of research. They compiled all of the material in an informational brochure entitled "Avian Influenza Facts" and began working on an insert for the ASUMH Emergency Handbook and a detailed plan of operations for ASUMH in the event of a pandemic. A Cisco Networking student created a logo for the ASUMH Disaster Preparedness Plan, and the materials were prepared for dissemination. All of this material was used in the creation of an informational PowerPoint that was shared with ASUMH in March 2007 at a luncheon.

With the theme of guiding, teaching, and learning, the coordinators of service learning at ASUMH hosted a luncheon to which all administration, faculty, and staff were invited, as well as three community members. Several students gave PowerPoint presentations reflecting their research and what they had learned, and the general information brochure was distributed at that time.

## **CONCLUSION**

ASUMH now comprehends the potential risks of avian influenza and the threat it poses to the normal operation of an institution of higher education. In the fall of 2007 semester, the other disaster preparedness documents will be finalized and approved by administration, and all students of ASUMH will receive the general information brochure. Students will take this information into the Mountain Home community and share it with the local hospital, Office of Emergency Services, and nursing homes. With disaster possibly a plane ride away, ASUMH will be prepared.

## REFERENCES:

- Delta Farm Press. (2006, December 1). *Arkansas poultry industry takes big share of market*. Retrieved May 28, 2007, from <http://www.deltafarmpress.com/news/061201-arkansas-poultry/>
- Social Science Research Center. (2006, June 20). *Post-Katrina Guiding Principles of Disaster Social Science Research*. Retrieved May 29, 2007, from Mississippi State University Web site: <http://www.ssrc.msstate.edu/katrina/>
- World Health Organization. (2006). *Avian influenza fact sheet: The disease in humans and Countries with human cases*. Retrieved May 30, 2007, from [http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/avian\\_influenza/en/#current](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/avian_influenza/en/#current)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Kellie Young** is the Division Chair of Arts and Sciences at Arkansas State University– Mountain Home. She is also an English Instructor and provides oversight for service learning at ASUMH. **Phone:** 870-508-1698; **E-mail:** [kyoung@asumh.edu](mailto:kyoung@asumh.edu)