

Nonny Schlotzhauer

# Disaster relief

## Starting points for learning

**R**ecent disasters throughout the globe have shed new light on the vulnerability of life on earth. Whether the result of natural causes or human-induced tragedy or whether they are at the local level or on a global scale, disasters have become part of our everyday experience, sparing very few communities in our increasingly interconnected world.

According to the latest data from the *World Disasters Report*, the number of “natural” and technological disasters occurring between 1999 and 2003 increased to an average 707 disasters each year. Add to this the several devastating disaster that afflicted numerous communities in 2004 and 2005—including the killings in Beslan, Russia; the Indian Ocean Tsunami; the earthquake in Pakistan; and the damaging hurricanes along the Gulf Coast—the complexity and sheer volume seems to be approaching the breaking point.

The many national, regional, international, and private organizations engaged in the endeavor to prepare for and respond to the numerous disasters is a testament to the incredible global cooperative effort to help mitigate the effects and offer hope. The Internet provides an unparalleled opportunity for these organizations to provide immediate pleas for assistance and to make available the latest news for the increasingly interconnected global community.

The Web is populated by a wide range of organizations and sites devoted to humanitarian efforts, and this column hopes to give a flavor of the Internet’s immense role in disaster relief. It is not intended to be exhaustive, but serves as a starting point

for students, faculty, librarians, practitioners, and the general public interested in learning more about disaster relief.

### Domestic organizations

- **Center for International Disaster Information (CIDI).** With so many disasters nationally as well as worldwide, and the need for donations growing, individuals and businesses are often overwhelmed with the choices. CIDI, operated under USAID, has been established to handle public inquiries and to provide education on how to respond in a useful and productive manner to a disaster. The site has current and historical situation reports from expert agencies with operations on site or within the region of countries affected by disasters, relevant articles addressing international disaster relief, links for media organizations with up-to-date news, and a section for teachers who may want to add discussions about disasters to their curriculum. *Access:* <http://www.cidi.org/>.



- **Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).** A former independent agency that became part of the new Department of Homeland Security in March 2003, FEMA is tasked with responding to, planning for, recovering from, and mitigating against

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disasters. This site provides up-to-date information on FEMA's current activities, a list of recent disasters and emergencies by state and territory, disaster assistance, and a guide for preparedness. A fairly detailed explanation of the many types of disasters that affect the country is included, together with a listing of programs and activities for individuals and communities faced with emergencies. The recent hurricanes along the Gulf coast have provided a rather unflattering portrait of FEMA, though its work at the federal level is without equal. *Access:* <http://www.fema.gov/>.

- **U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).** USAID is an independent federal government agency that is responsible for extending assistance to countries recovering from disaster and other events that threaten their well-being. The site provides information about the agency's extensive work throughout the world. One can navigate the site by topic, such as food security or humanitarian assistance, as well as by country. The library catalog provides access to the USAID library's collection of more than 10,000 monographs and periodicals published by commercial publishers, donor agencies, and other organizations active in international development. Reports published by USAID can be identified or viewed from the Development Experience Clearinghouse site at [www.dec.org/](http://www.dec.org/). *Access:* <http://www.usaid.gov/>.

### International organizations

- **The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).** Founded in 1919, IFRC is the world's largest humanitarian organization, comprising 183 members with more than 60 delegations around the world that provide assistance to vulnerable populations without regard to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class, or political opinions. Its headquarters are in Geneva, Switzerland. The site provides a brief history of the organization, the latest news from around the world, opportunities to donate, and a list of publications for view-

ing and purchasing. The site is available in English, French, or Spanish. *Access:* <http://www.ifrc.org/>.

- **Oxfam.** Oxfam International is a confederation of 12 organizations working together with more than 3,000 partners in more than 100 countries to find lasting solutions to poverty, suffering, and injustice. The international site is available in English, French, and Spanish, and there are links to the organizations' 12 national sites. (Information on Oxfam's many publications is available from its United Kingdom site). *Access:* <http://www.oxfam.org/>.



### United Nations agencies

- **Disaster Management Planning.** This is the site for the United Nations Centre for Regional Development's Disaster Management Planning Hyogo Office. The office was established in Kobe, Japan, in the aftermath of an earthquake that claimed the lives of more than 6,000 people in 1995. This site focuses on various disaster management initiatives through multilateral collaboration at an international level; promotes effective disaster mitigation; focuses on key elements of self-help, cooperation, and educational activities; and contains publications. *Access:* <http://www.hyogo.uncrd.or.jp/>.

- **International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR).** ISDR aims at building disaster-resilient communities by promoting increased awareness of the importance of disaster reduction, with the goal of reducing human, social, economic, and environmental losses due to natural hazards and related technological and environmental disasters. The UN/ISDR headquarters is based at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, has regional offices in Costa Rica and Kenya, and maintains a presence in Asia with units in Thailand and Tajikistan. Among the many resources available on the site are contacts, disaster

statistics, hazard profiles and national reports for country, public awareness features such as the International Day for Disaster Reduction (which occurs annually in October), educational materials, and an extensive library of materials on disaster risk reduction. *Access:* <http://www.unisdr.org/>.

- **ReliefWeb.** Launched in October 1996 and administered by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), ReliefWeb is the world's leading online gateway to information (documents and maps) on humanitarian emergencies and disasters. ReliefWeb disseminates timely, reliable, and relevant humanitarian information, and is updated around the clock. The site posts some 150 maps and documents daily from more than 2,000 sources from the UN system, governments, NGOs, academia, and the media. It also contains an online library of reference materials covering humanitarian policies and issues of a global nature, listings of job opportunities and training opportunities, and a directory of humanitarian organizations. *Access:* <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/dbc.nsf/doc100?OpenForm>.

- **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).** Established in 1950, UNHCR is mandated to lead and coordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide. Its primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees. It strives to ensure that everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another state, with the option to return home voluntarily, integrate locally, or to resettle in a third country. The site is loaded with the latest information on refugees, with statistics (there are now 19.2 million refugees from 119 countries) and publications. *Access:* <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home>.

- **World Health Organization (WHO).** WHO is the UN specialized agency for health-related issues. This site is available in six languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish. It provides the latest information on health throughout the globe, with entries on the health situation for each

of the 192 UN member states. In addition to the latest news and current topics of interest to the world health community, there are links to a wide variety of health topics that provide brief descriptions, activities, reports, news, and events. Among the research tools available on the Web site is a library database (WHOLIS), which indexes all WHO publications from 1948 onwards and articles from WHO-produced journals and technical documents from 1985 to the present. There is also a guide to health-related epidemiological and statistical data (WHOSIS), access to the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10), and information on publications. *Access:* <http://www.who.int/>.

### **Regional organizations**

- **Ananda Marga Universal Relief Team (AMURT).** This is the site for one of the few private voluntary organizations of Third World origin. AMURT was founded in India in 1965 with the objective of helping to meet the needs of victims of disasters that regularly hit the Indian subcontinent. It has now expanded to 80 countries to create a network to meet development and disaster needs almost anywhere in the world. *Access:* <http://www.amurt.net/>.

- **The Regional Disaster Information Center (CRID).** CRID, the Spanish acronym for Centro Regional de Información sobre Desastres, is an initiative sponsored by six organizations that decided to join efforts to ensure the compilation and dissemination of disaster-related information in Latin America and the Caribbean. Among the items found here are publications, including specialized bibliographies and technical manuals on disaster-related issues; an extensive database providing access to a broad collection of journal articles, books, and to other information sources; technical advice and training information on disaster management to local and regional centers; a list of contacts that includes regional institutions, disaster-related organizations, and general data of each country; and news about the CRID's current projects and other initiatives. *Access:* <http://www.crid.or.cr/>.

- **DisasterInfo.** This is the front page to a collection of mirror sites or direct access to Web sites of many disaster organizations, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean. Among the sites listed here are those of the Pan American Health Organization's Program for Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Relief, the Humanitarian Supply Management System (SUMA), and several partner sites for the region and for individual countries available only in Spanish. *Access:* <http://www.disaster-info.net/>.

- **Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative (DPPI).** DPPI, founded in 2000, is a regional organization serving 12 countries of South Eastern Europe: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, FYR Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Slovenia, Turkey, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Its main aim is to assist in coordinating preparation and prevention in cases of natural and manmade disasters. The site provides a list of ongoing projects, such as earthquake monitoring, joint fire fighting exercises, and disaster management training workshops. In addition, there are documents listing declarations of cooperation, action plans, and links to regional and European organizations. *Access:* <http://www.dppei.info/index.html>.

- **European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO).** This is the European Union's site dedicated to disaster and emergency relief. Among other items, it includes country evaluation reports; reports by theme (HIV/AIDS, water and sanitation, etc.); a collection of publications, including annual review, booklets, and multimedia documents; and information on training study initiatives in the humanitarian field, sponsored by a network of universities in Europe. Every month features an eyewitness account from one of the operations in the field. *Access:* <http://europa.eu.int/comm/echo/>.

### More disaster relief resources

For additional resources, please see the online version of this article on the ACRL Web site at [www.acrl.org/c&rlnews](http://www.acrl.org/c&rlnews).

## Health/medicine

- **International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT).** Based in Copenhagen, Denmark, IRCT is an independent professional health organization that promotes and supports the rehabilitation of torture victims and works to eradicate the practice of torture in collaboration with a global network of more than 100 rehabilitation centers and programs worldwide. This site—available in English, Arabic, French, Spanish, and Russian—contains a brief definition of torture as defined by the UN, information on rehabilitation and reparation of individuals and communities, a list of current and past projects to aid torture victims, and support information for victims. It also contains the Documentation Centre database, the world's largest library dedicated specifically to the subject of torture, prevention of torture, and the rehabilitation of torture victims. Additionally, visitors can read the latest IRCT and worldwide news, the organization's publications (including recent editions of *TORTURE Journal*), and the IRCT Annual Reports. *Access:* <http://www.irct.org/>.

- **Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF).** MSF is an international humanitarian aid organization that provides emergency medical assistance to populations in danger in more than 70 countries. This is the international site, with access to 21 national sites for the organization. Here, one can get advocacy information on key issues, such as refugees, water and sanitation, women and violence, and, of course, health. There is a medical information section on many of the world's devastating diseases and illnesses, such as cholera, HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis. Also included are publications and press releases about the organization's activities throughout the world. *Access:* <http://www.msf.org/>.

## Mental health

- **The Centre for Humanitarian Psychology.** This is the site for an international organization whose aim is to provide psychological support to humanitarian workers in the field. We work through a network of

professionals who are both psychologists and familiar with humanitarian work, trainers, partners, and volunteers in Europe and in the field. The site is available in English, French, and Spanish versions. The center offers a wide array of programs and services, many which can be found on the site, including training course materials, information sheets on disaster-induced mental health issues, testimonials from humanitarian workers, and opportunities for individuals and groups to get involved in relief work. *Access:* <http://www.humanitarian-psy.org/>.

- **Disaster Psychiatry.** The objective of this site from the American Psychiatric Association's Committee on Psychiatric Dimensions of Disaster is to provide information to working psychiatrists involved in disaster work. Included here is the full-text of the committee's *Disaster Psychiatry Handbook*, links to several publications on disaster psychiatry, as well as recommendations for broader involvement of psychiatrists in disaster work. *Access:* <http://www.psych.org/disasterpsych/>.

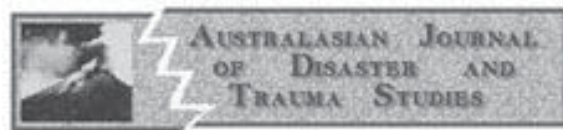
- **The International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS).** ISTSS is an international, multidisciplinary, professional membership organization that promotes advancement and exchange of knowledge about severe stress and trauma. This knowledge includes understanding the scope and consequences of traumatic exposure, preventing traumatic events and ameliorating their consequences, and advocating for the field of traumatic stress. *Access:* <http://www.istss.org/>.

- **The National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).** The center, established within the Department of Veterans Affairs in 1989 by a Congressional mandate to address the needs of veterans with military-related PTSD, has a mission "to advance the clinical care and social welfare of America's veterans through research, education, and training in the science, diagnosis, and treatment of PTSD and stress-related disorders." The Web site is intended as an educational resource concerning PTSD and other enduring consequences of traumatic stress for a variety of audiences. Among the site's features are

facts about traumatic stress and associated disorders, issues of the center's two quarterly publications, assessment instruments designed to provide clinicians and researchers with information about child and adult trauma exposure and responses, and videos and satellite broadcasts available for viewing. The site also sponsors PILOTS Database, the largest interdisciplinary index to worldwide literature on traumatic stress in the world. This freely accessible database is available via NISC's BiblioLine interface. *Access:* <http://www.ncptsd.va.gov/>.

### Online journals

- ***The Australasian Journal of Disaster and Trauma Studies.*** This is a peer-reviewed electronic journal published at Massey University in New Zealand. It provides a forum for the publication of original research, reviews, and commentaries on disaster and trauma mitigation and prevention, response, support, recovery, treatment, policy formulation, and planning. The journal is



interested in events of natural, technological, and human-induced origin and their effects at the individual, group, organizational, and community level. Contributions are from academics and practitioners from diverse professional backgrounds, including those in mental health, physical and geological sciences, social sciences, and health and welfare services. *Access:* <http://www.massey.ac.nz/%7Etrauma/welcome.shtml>.

- ***Journal of Humanitarian Assistance.*** The purpose of this journal is to facilitate communication between the many diverse practitioners and analysts who comprise the humanitarian community. The journal encompasses all aspects of humanitarian assistance, from early warning and emergency provision to post-conflict peace-building and the transition to development. Contributors from the fields of law, politics, military studies,

and practitioners are welcome. The journal is entirely open access and published by the Department of Peace Studies at Bradford University in England. *Access:* <http://www.jha.ac/>.

• ***Forced Migration Review (FMR).***

FMR is published by the Refugee Studies Center at Oxford University, in association with

the Norwegian Refugee Council. It appears three times a year in English, Spanish, and Arabic and provides a forum for the regular exchange of practical experience, information, and ideas between researchers, refugees, and internally displaced people and those who work with them. *Access:* <http://www.fmreview.org/>. *~*

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*(“And today we’ll be serving . . .” continued from page 82)*

a work in progress and not set in stone, consensus was much easier to attain. We make an effort to distribute print copies of the menu at every opportunity, but we believe that including the menu’s URL in e-mail sent to faculty has been most effective. Professors click on the link and then can learn about the variety of instruction choices. From the menu, they can click on a link that brings them directly to an online request form. We try to make it as easy as possible—and it works.

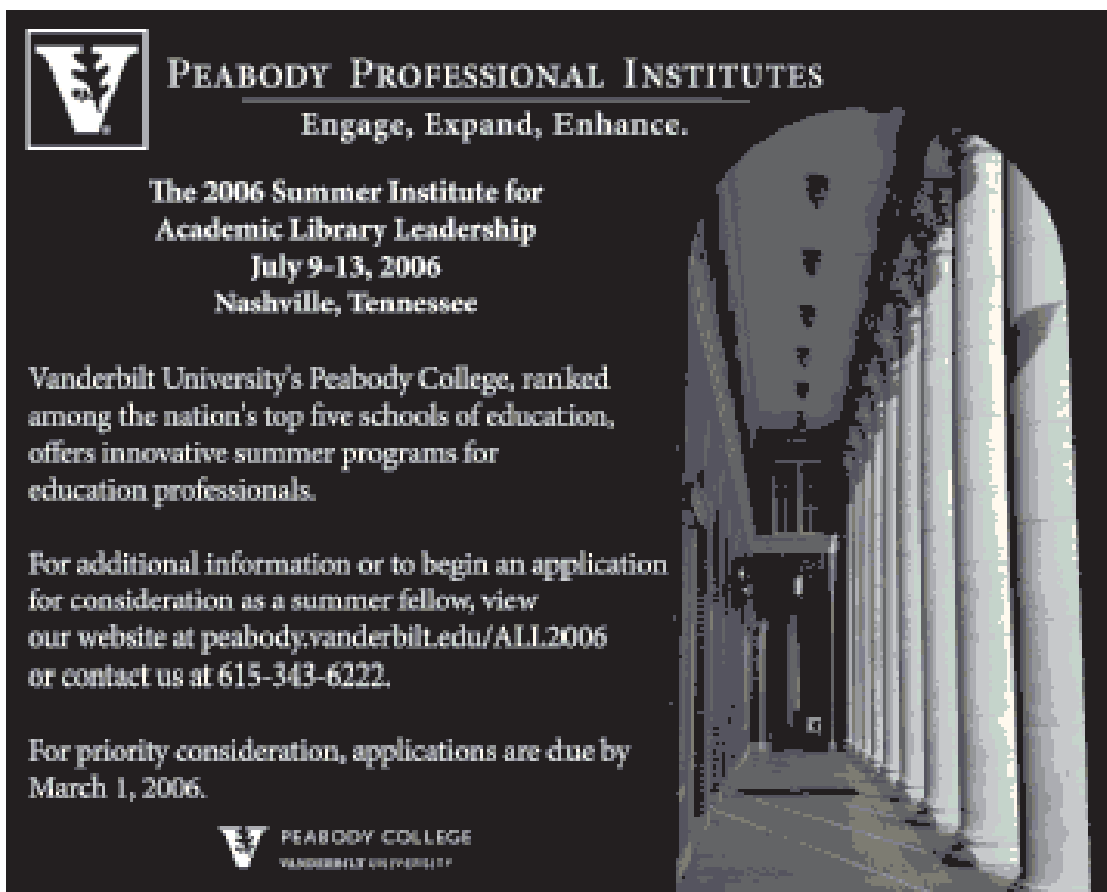
A future goal is to incorporate the menu directly into the online request form. In our


vision, there would be a checkbox next to each item, and as a professor checked each box, a running total of minutes needed would appear. Integrating the menu in this fashion seems like the next logical step in making instruction requests as simple as possible.

**Notes**

1. This paper is based on a poster presentation given at the 2005 ACRL National Conference, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

2. The Web menu can be viewed at [lib.radford.edu/Instruction/menu.asp](http://lib.radford.edu/Instruction/menu.asp). *~*




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