

UCL INSTITUTE FOR RISK AND DISASTER REDUCTION (IRDR)

The UCL Institute for Risk and Disaster Reduction aims to provide a focus for activities that span the disciplines of architecture, planning, sociology, psychology, earth sciences, statistics, engineering, development, population health, anthropology, ethics and laws. By promoting novel multidisciplinary research and its translation into practice, the Institute aims to establish a role of international leadership in risk and disaster studies. In order to develop world-class research of a highly practical nature, we seek to appoint outstanding individuals to our research studentships.

IRDR PhD Studentship

Project Title: The Potential of New Technologies to Assist in Managing and Recovering from Disasters and Major Incidents

Primary supervisor: Prof. David Alexander (UCL-IRDR)

Secondary supervisors: Dr Rosanna Smith, Dr Joanna Faure-Walker (UCL-IRDR),

External supervisor: Dr Fausto Marincioni (Marche Polytechnic University, Italy)

Research Question

Social networking, personal notification, cellular communication and citizen journalism are beginning to revolutionise the process of responding to major emergencies. They also have the potential to contribute substantially to the phases of recovery after catastrophe, and to processes of mitigating disaster risk. A revolution in personal communication is in progress but its full implications for disaster risk reduction have yet to be explored in full.

Many studies have shown that a participatory approach to disasters is beneficial to society, especially if ways are found to involve the weakest and most marginalised members of the community. It is clear that social networking sites (SNSs) have considerable potential to influence response and recovery, and to increase citizens' sense of involvement in these processes.

The research will have several aims. The first is to take a critical look at modern means of communication, assess their potential to contribute to the response to emergencies, crises and disasters and examine how they are currently being developed in this respect. This will include assessment of the ways in which, and the degrees to which, the new technology is being used to improve communication between the authorities and citizens at risk from disaster. The second aim is to study the ways in which social networking sites can contribute to the process of recovering from disasters and major incidents. This will involve assessing how SNSs are used by citizens and the authorities, what potential they have, and whether they meet citizens' needs. A central question will be the extent to which these communication and knowledge-sharing systems have differing potentials for different types of disaster.

The researcher will be expected to use appropriate social theories, forms of network analysis and models of behaviour, governance and social interaction. It is expected that he or she will enrich the theories, models and analyses by deriving theoretical and methodological gain through the applications used in this study.

The researcher will be expected, not only to develop the theoretical and methodological basis of the study, but also vigorously pursue some field applications with data. These may include recent earthquakes in Italy (L'Aquila in 2009, Emilia in 2012) and the Japanese earthquake and tsunami of 2011. Other cases may include areas, such as Athens, Greece, where there is considerable scope for the use of social media for disaster risk reduction. In each case, UCL-IRDR has appropriate institutional links and in-house expertise to assist the researcher.

Expected Impact of the Research

By combining theory, methodology and applications, the researcher will be able to make a solid contribution to the study of how the new media have been used in disaster, and how they could be employed in the future. This will involve developing practical recommendations, monitoring developments and disseminating useful information to practitioners and potential end users.

The work will complement other UCL-based research on protection against earthquakes, the consequences of major disasters and planning risk reduction measures. It will also contribute to collaboration processes with a variety of institutions within and outside the United Kingdom.

Student Prerequisites

The successful candidate will have a good honours degree (or equivalent) in any of the many disciplines that contribute to disaster risk reduction, especially those with a focus on society or with social implications. Applications from British and European Union students will be welcomed. Experience of social analysis in disaster situations will be considered a valuable, but not indispensable asset.

Career prospects

Research conducted under the auspices of this studentship will help qualify the graduate for a career in higher education or in any of the modern agencies that deal with disaster risk reduction. The topical nature of the project will be particularly attractive to employers seeking a candidate who is well versed in the societal implications of new technology, in emergency and disaster management and in media communications.

Supervisory team

David Alexander is Professor of Risk and Disaster Reduction at University College London.

Rosanna Smith is Deputy Director of the Institute for Risk and Disaster Reduction at UCL.

Joanna Faure-Walker is Lecturer in Risk and Disaster Reduction at UCL.

Fausto Marincioni is lecturer in civil protection and emergency management at the Marche Polytechnic University in Italy.

For further information, please contact:-

Prof. David Alexander, UCL-IRDR, david.alexander@ucl.ac.uk.

Application and Deadline

Interested students should apply on-line to

<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/prospectivestudents/graduate-study/application-admission/apply-online/>

no later than 15 April 2013 and they should send an electronic copy of the application to Professor David Alexander (david.alexander@ucl.ac.uk). It is hoped that the student will be able to start soon after the interview.