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Professors Study Evacuation Practices

January 15, 2021

By Marcus Coles

Nicole Hutton and Jennifer Whytlaw, assistant professors in the Department of Political Science and Geography, and Saige Hill, a Ph.D. student in public administration and policy, were recently awarded a \$4,000 grant to create a [webapp](#) showing changes in vulnerability and transportation needs during the hurricane season and throughout COVID-19.

The trio incorporated surveys conducted by the ODU and USF CONVERGE Hurricane + Pandemic research team, ODU Social Science Research Center's Life in Hampton Roads 2020, and VMASC's Hurricane Florence, in addition to holding focus groups with local and national stakeholders.

The study was made possible with a Quick Response Grant from the [Natural Hazards Center](#) specifically focused on transportation, vulnerable populations and COVID-19.

With the coronavirus pandemic, new guidelines were established to prioritize health and safety.

"Instead of having people evacuate long distances, emergency managers suggest for people to stay locally with friends or family with a residence that can withstand expected winds and is above expected flood levels," Hutton said.

"Emergency managers are working with Uber and Lyft to develop a voucher system to get non-congregate transportation resources available instead of buses," Hutton added.

"The voucher would be made available to households in need of evacuation assistance."

"Public sheltering is typically a last resort," Hutton said. "So, they typically serve the most vulnerable populations."

According to Hutton, researchers found more people intend to evacuate this year than in previous years. She stated there may be possible financial issues linked to layoffs and business closures associated with the virus.

The study also found that potential shelters could include atypical places.



Nicole Hutton



Jennifer Whytlaw

"Different state agencies are looking at campgrounds, Airbnb's, and many other options as non-congregate shelters during the pandemic," Whytlaw said.