

The Daily Tar Heel

Panel discusses current state of affairs in New Orleans

By: [Lacey Hampton, Staff Writer](#) Issue date: 4/12/07

Despite relief efforts, much more work is needed in New Orleans.

A panel of UNC officials discussed the social, structural and political problems with which New Orleans still is dealing on Wednesday evening.

"There is now one elementary school operating out of 11 that were in district six," said Spencer Cowan, senior research associate for UNC's Center for Urban and Regional Studies.

Extended Disaster Relief, a UNC student group, hosted the panel discussion called "'What Now?' Rebuilding the Golf Coast."

The panel discussion focused on the effects of Hurricane Katrina and efforts to rebuild New Orleans.

In front of about 15 students, staff and faculty, Cowan and David Moreau, of UNC's Department of City and Regional Planning, presented some of their work involving New Orleans.

The event was part of Extended Disaster Relief's Katrina Summit Week, during which the group is hosting a variety of events related to Hurricane Katrina.

"We decided to host the events to take part in the [National Post-Katrina College Summit](#)," said Mary Small, co-chairwoman of Extended Disaster Relief.

Small said the idea behind the panel discussion was to bring together people from various University departments to discover ways in which each of them can aid in post-Katrina New Orleans.

Cowan said he was glad Extended Disaster Relief contacted him about the panel discussion.

"I chose to be on the panel because it was an opportunity to let people know what we are doing for New Orleans," Cowan said. "I'm proud of what we're doing and hope we can help them."

Students such as freshman Julie Etter and sophomore Chris Williams said they were

eager to hear what the panelists had to say.

After attending Extended Disaster Relief's screening of the documentary, "When the Levees Broke," Etter said she became interested in learning more about New Orleans and Hurricane Katrina.

"I think it's an underrepresented issue," Etter said.

Williams said he wanted to learn more about Gulf Coast issues post-Hurricane Katrina.

"I think it's really important for people to understand and reflect on the past and how to improve on the future," Williams said.

During the discussion, Moreau focused on New Orleans' lack of hurricane protection at the time of Hurricane Katrina and the lessons learned from it, while Cowan emphasized the effects of the hurricane on New Orleans communities.

Cowan works with the New Orleans Recovery Initiative, which is a project of the UNC's Center on Poverty, Work and Opportunity.

The initiative brings together University experts with the needs of community groups in New Orleans.

Cowan also discussed problems residents had with the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Cowan said that New Orleans needed many improvements before the hurricane hit.

Although there is an opportunity to rebuild the city and make these improvements, Cowan said FEMA is unwilling to foot the bill.

"FEMA will not pay to upgrade. They will rebuild what you already have."

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