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How Reliable Is Brown's Resume?

A TIME investigation reveals discrepancies in the FEMA chief's official biographies

By DAREN FONDA AND RITA HEALY

When President Bush nominated Michael Brown to head the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in 2003, Brown's boss at the time, Joe Allbaugh, declared, "the President couldn't have chosen a better man to help...prepare and protect the nation." But how well was he prepared for the job? Since Hurricane Katrina, the FEMA director has come under heavy criticism for his performance and scrutiny of his background. Now, an investigation by TIME has found discrepancies in his online legal profile and official bio, including a description of Brown released by the White House at the time of his nomination in 2001 to the job as deputy chief of FEMA. On Friday, Brown, who became director of FEMA in 2003, was [relieved of his duties handling the Katrina response](#) and was replaced in that role by Coast Guard Vice Adm. Thad W. Allen. Before joining FEMA, his only previous stint in emergency management, according to his [bio posted on FEMA's website](#), was "serving as an assistant city manager with emergency services oversight." [The White House press release from 2001](#) stated that Brown worked for the city of Edmond, Okla., from 1975 to 1978 "overseeing the emergency services division." In fact, according to Claudia Deakins, head of public relations for the city of Edmond, Brown was an "assistant to the city manager" from 1977 to 1980, not a manager himself, and had no authority over other employees. "The assistant is more like an intern," she told TIME. "Department heads did not report to him." Brown did do a good job at his humble position, however, according to his boss. "Yes. Mike Brown worked for me. He was my administrative assistant. He was a student at Central State University," recalls former city manager Bill Dashner. "Mike used to handle a lot of details. Every now and again I'd ask him to write me a speech. He was very loyal. He was always on time. He always had on a suit and a starched white shirt." In response, Nicol Andrews, deputy strategic director in FEMA's office of public affairs, insists that while Brown began as an intern, he became an "assistant city manager" with a distinguished record of

service. "According to Mike Brown," she says, "a large portion [of the points raised by TIME] is very inaccurate."

Brown's lack of experience in emergency management isn't the only apparent bit of padding on his resume, which raises questions about how rigorously the White House vetted him before putting him in charge of FEMA. Under the "honors and awards" section of his [profile at FindLaw.com](#) — which is information on the legal website provided by lawyers or their offices — he lists "Outstanding Political Science Professor, Central State University". However, Brown "wasn't a professor here, he was only a student here," says Charles Johnson, News Bureau Director in the University Relations office at the University of Central Oklahoma (formerly named Central State University). "He may have been an adjunct instructor," says Johnson, but that title is very different from that of "professor." Carl Reherman, a former political science professor at the University through the '70s and '80s, says that Brown "was not on the faculty." As for the honor of "Outstanding Political Science Professor," Johnson says, "I spoke with the department chair yesterday and he's not aware of it." Johnson could not confirm that Brown made the Dean's list or was an "Outstanding Political Science Senior," as is stated on his online profile.

Speaking for Brown, Andrews says that Brown has never claimed to be a political science professor, in spite of what his profile in FindLaw indicates. "He was named the outstanding political science senior at Central State, and was an adjunct professor at Oklahoma City School of Law."

Under the heading of "Professional Associations and Memberships" on FindLaw, Brown states that from 1983 to the present he has been director of the Oklahoma Christian Home, a nursing home in Edmond. But an administrator with the Home told TIME that Brown is "not a person that anyone here is familiar with." She says there was a board of directors until a couple of years ago, but she couldn't find anyone who recalled him being on it. According to FEMA's Andrews, Brown said "he's never claimed to be the director of the home. He was on the board of directors, or governors of the nursing home." However, a veteran employee at the center since 1981 says Brown "was never director here, was never on the board of directors, was never executive director. He was never here in any capacity. I never heard his name mentioned here."

The FindLaw profile for Brown was amended on Thursday to

remove a reference to his tenure at the International Arabian Horse Association, which has become a contested point.

Brown's FindLaw profile lists a wide range of areas of legal practice, from estate planning to family law to sports. However, one former colleague does not remember Brown's work as sterling. Stephen Jones, a prominent Oklahoma lawyer who was lead defense attorney on the Timothy McVeigh case, was Brown's boss for two-and-a-half years in the early '80s. "He did mainly transactional work, not litigation," says Jones. "There was a feeling that he was not serious and somewhat shallow." Jones says when his law firm split, Brown was one of two staffers who was let go.

— *With reporting by Jeremy Caplan and Carolina A. Miranda/New York; Nathan Thornburgh/Baton Rouge; Levi Clark/Edmond; Massimo Calabresi and Mark Thompson/Washington*