

# 7th Annual Conference of the Association of Caribbean Higher Education Administrators (ACHEA)

## **Resource Management: Information Management as part of Campus Crisis Management**

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# Introduction

## **This presentation:**

- Briefly recounts 5 campus crisis incidents Highlights the lessons to be learned
- Examines the implications for educational administration
- Recommends strategies for managing communication in crisis situations



# Campus Crisis Incident

“A significant disturbance in the University attracting extensive news coverage and public scrutiny, and which has the potential for long term public relations damage.”

***Crisis Communication Plan (2007) University of Western Kentucky***



# Types of Crisis

## Sudden

unforeseen, requires immediate action

## Bizzare

unusual, threatening to personal safety

## Smoldering

begins small and grows as information unfolds



# Some examples of campus crisis incidents in the United States and in Jamaica 1994 – 2007

Table 1

Incident	Brief Description	Year
Fatal shooting	32 persons killed and 24 injured	2007
Unethical behaviour in sports	Unauthorized withdrawal of athletic team from competition	2007
Demonized students disturbed the campus	Outburst by allegedly demonized scared staff and students	2006
Staff protest	Campus closed by protesters	2006
Violent threats by student	Disgruntled minority student Issued violent threats to classmates	2005
Destruction of property	Hurricane destroyed most of the Campus facilities	2004
Student protest	Campus closed by protesters	2004

## Table 1(cont'd)

SARS scare	1 student hospitalized following arrival of returning Asian students	2004
Drowning	1 person drowned in campus facility	2003
Loss of electrical power in winter	Power failure posed a challenge for communication in winter	2000
Fatal shooting	15 persons killed	1999
Sexual misconduct	Occurrence of sexual misconduct Among professionals reported	1995
Racial tension	Race related incidents on campuses	1994

# Five campus incidents investigated

1. Student fatally shot 32 persons then killed self
2. Unethical behaviour in sports
3. allegedly demonized students disturbed the campus
4. Two students shot 13 persons and then killed themselves
5. Violent threats by a disgruntled minority student



# Shared experiences and lessons to be learned

## **Incident 1:**

- Student fatally shot 32 persons and then killed self
- E-mail message circulated to campus community, “A gunman is loose on the campus. Stay in buildings. Stay away from all windows” (Shepherd, 2007).
- This e-mail message notified students and faculty approximately two hours after two persons were killed.
- Prior to the e-mail notification, approximately 1,400 persons were enroute to the campus that morning.





# Lessons to be learned from Incident 1

- Too little information communicated to internal constituents too late might not be of any help for safety.
- How to alert the campus that something dangerous is happening so that people are able to make their own decisions.
- The telephone emergency system is considered one of the fastest ways that all students and faculty could be notified of an emergency situation on campus (Pellegrino, 2007).



## Lessons to be learned from Incident 1 (cont'd)

- An effective internal communication system is critical in an emergency situation. In his statement to the crisis review panel, the institution's President stated:

“In addition to understanding the incidents, we will be looking at three broad areas: telecommunication infrastructure, the physical infrastructure as it relates to safety and security, and most importantly, the internal protocols for information exchange”

(Steger, 2007).

- Without an active crisis communication plan, reactions during a campus crisis could be just a series of one-off activities.



## Lessons to be learned from Incident 1 (cont'd)

- The institution having a documented detailed but inactive crisis communication in place could create the belief that the institution is always in a state of preparedness because the plan exists.
- The institution where this incident occurred had a detailed crisis communication plan that was last updated February 2002.
- A crisis communication plan should be constantly revisited and be treated as a living changing organism (Levick Strategic Communications, 2004).



## Incident 2: Unethical behavior in sports

- Athletic coach withdrew the University's athletic team from competition without consultation with the sports department and without the knowledge of the University President.
- The matter attracted negative media coverage
- The University made public apology



## Lessons to be learned from Incident 2

- Establish protocols for communicating different types of information internally and externally
- Document the procedures that are to be followed



## **Incident 3: Demonized students disturbed the campus**

- On a Sunday night resident students made outburst that they were possessed with demons.
- Their outrageous behaviour scared the entire campus community
- The principal was called to the scene
- Help for the students was sought from available key staff members



## Incident 3 Continued

- The Principal held different levels of meetings with students in an effort to maintain calm and minimize rumours
- Parents were contacted based on permission given by individual students
- On Monday morning the Minister of Education and the Chairman of the Board of governors of the institution were contacted.
- Meetings at different levels were held with parents, students, senior staff, and the general staff body.
- On Thursday the media called and a press release was prepared.



## Lessons to be learned from Incident 3

- Use internal communication mechanisms like meetings with affected internal constituents as quickly as possible after occurrence of the incident.
- Handle student information so that confidentiality is protected.
- Take every necessary action to obtain accurate information in an effort to minimize rumours because as Barton (2001) pointed out, unfortunately most people listen to rumours.





## Lessons to be learned from Incident 3(cont'd)

- Be selective of the personnel with whom to share information
- Be timely with media intervention, if accurate information is not yet available, and give the media personnel a stated time to return.
- Identify a link person at each media house.



## **Lessons to be learned from Incident 3(cont'd)**

- Debriefing sessions with affected constituents helped persons to regain self confidence.
- Be proactive, that is adopt the attitude that it can happen on any campus.
- Never adopt an 'it will never happen at this campus' attitude.



## **Incident 4: Shooting in which two students fatally shot 13 persons and then killed themselves**

- At the time of the shooting, students and staff were scattered over the campus and were not in communication with each other on a corporate level.
- Media personnel arrived on the campus approximately one hour after the shooting happened



## **Incident 4: Shooting in which two students fatally shot 13 persons and then killed themselves**

When the media team arrived, instructors and administrators were busy helping parents to locate students.

Campus leaders had no experience in working with the media.

Stories carried painted the picture that something was wrong with the institution's administration, there was outrageous bullying among students, instructors were oblivious about student needs, and administrators were not in control of the situation.



## Lessons to be learned from Incident 4

The need to alert the campus that something dangerous is happening so that persons can make decisions to protect themselves

- An effective internal communication system is critical in an emergency situation
- Without an active crisis communication plan, reactions during a campus crisis could be just a series of one-off activities.



## Lessons to be learned from Incident 4

- A crisis communication plan should be constantly revisited and be treated as a living changing organism (Levick Strategic Communications, 2004).
- Anticipation of crisis incidents is now a reality and campus leaders should be prepared to work with the media (Crisis communication Plan 2007, Louisiana State University).



## **Incident 5: Disgruntled Minority Student threatened Classmates**

- During a two-week period a student issued racially-charged notes with violent threats to three students of the same institution
- The disgruntled student tried to manufacture a false sense of racial unrest on the campus in an effort to be removed from the institution.
- The student was charged with disorderly conduct



## **Incident 5: Disgruntled Minority Student threatened Classmates (cont'd)**

- As a precautionary measure, all minority students were taken from the campus for a certain period of time
- The incident attracted much media coverage and was of national interest.





## Lessons to be learned from Incident 5

- Use internal communication mechanisms like meetings with affected internal constituents as quickly as possible after occurrence of the incident.
- Handle student information so that confidentiality is protected.
- Take every necessary action to obtain accurate information in an effort to minimize rumours because as Barton (2001) pointed out, unfortunately most people listen to rumours.



## **Lessons to be learned from Incident 5**

- Be selective of the personnel with whom to share information
- Be timely with media intervention, if accurate information is not yet available, and give the media personnel a stated time to return.
- Identify a link person at each media house.



## Lessons to be learned from Incident 5

- Debriefing sessions with affected constituents helped persons to regain self confidence.
- Be proactive, that is adopt the attitude that it can happen on any campus.
- Never adopt an 'it will never happen at this campus' attitude.
- The positions of crisis anticipation and preparedness for media reaction taken by Louisiana State University could be adopted.



## Implications of lessons to be learned

Effective communication of information as part of managing campus crisis becomes an institutional imperative based on reasons as follows:

- The principal is usually the person targeted for providing information or comment on the incident and he or she may not yet have accurate and sufficient information on the incident.



## Implications of lessons to be learned (cont'd)

- Media houses may seek information with the objective to make headline stories while the institution seeks to ensure safety of its members, restore calm, and protect its public image through the provision of timely, accurate, and honest information.
- When and where the incident happened could affect how information is managed. For example, the incident might have happened during the weekend or on a public holiday. The incident could have happened on a satellite campus from where it could be less easy to obtain information in a timely manner.



- Decisions made on incomplete or inaccurate information could be difficult to correct.
- If the institution speaks out too early or too late, problems could be created.
- Bad news travels faster than good news and getting ahead of it requires quick and coordinated responses in order to shorten the duration of negative news coverage.
- Permission to take photographs of campus scenes may need to be monitored.



- The use of communication technology tools could blow an incident out of proportion within minutes with possibilities for making national and international headlines. However, inspite of such technology, information to internal constituents may neither be timely nor adequate.
- There is the need to establish principles that guide statements to be made to the media.
- Depending on the nature of the incident, there could be the need to cooperate with the civil authorities and hence to know when all comments are to be made by such authorities.
- There is the need to document all publications on the incident for future reference



# Recommendations for information management to survive a campus crisis

## Preparedness

Crisis communication plan

Designated spokes person

## Training

campus leaders and Senior Administrators

front line communication staff

persons studying educational Administration

## Debriefings after an incident





## Recommendations (cont'd)

### Strategic communication

Vision

Mission

core values

Social strategies

- Informal social activities
- Information about students



## Research

Cultural backgrounds

Cultural barriers encountered on campus

The extent to which the institution meet students expectations

