

**Crisis
Communication
Plan**

**SOUTHEASTERN LOUISIANA UNIVERSITY
Office of Public Information & Publications**

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

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I. Introduction

A crisis in a university setting is generally defined as an event or incident that presents a significant threat to operations and/or the safety of students and personnel that can have negative consequences if not handled properly. A crisis has the potential to create three interrelated threats: impact on public safety, such as injury, illness or loss of life; financial loss through disruption of operations or lawsuits; or loss or damage to the reputation of the institution.

A major crisis almost always generates media interest and the need to communicate accurate information in an expeditious manner. A common factor governing all major crises is the requirement of detailed and continually updated information. In a crisis situation, the manner in which the investigation and subsequent release of information is conducted will often cement the image of the institution in the eye of the public.

The Southeastern Louisiana University Crisis Communications Plan is designed to supplement the university's **Emergency Management Plan** by establishing general communication guidelines for dealing with a variety of situations. The plan ensures coordination of internal and external communications for the university and ensures that campus officials are familiar with these policies and procedures and their role in the event of a crisis.

II. Plan Objectives

The objective of the Southeastern Crisis Communications Plan is to provide the policies and procedures in a crisis situation for the coordination of communication within the university and between the university, the media, and the public. The objectives include:

- To work with the university's Emergency Response Team or Emergency Response Core Team in the case of a major incident or the Administration in the case of other crises to factually assess the situation and determine whether a communications response is warranted.
- To assemble a crisis communication team that will make recommendations on appropriate responses. This team should include specific university officials with key knowledge about the incident (e.g., department head or chief contact in area affected) and may also include representatives of Human Resources, Division of Student Affairs, University Police Department, university legal counsel and others depending upon the nature of the crisis.
- To implement immediate action to:
 - Identify constituencies that should be informed about the situation;
 - Identify appropriate communication vehicles;
 - Communicate facts about the crisis;
 - Minimize rumors;
 - Help restore order and confidence in the institution.

III. Identification of a Crisis

A crisis can be of varying severity and nature, ranging from minor to severe. Different types of crisis call for different responses, and the university's response will depend upon the nature of the crisis or incident.

- **Sudden** -- An immediate or unforeseen crisis that requires a rapid response. (Examples: natural disaster, major fire or explosion, shooter on campus, murder or other death on campus, disease outbreaks, sexual assault, any major criminal activity).
- **Smoldering** – A smoldering crisis is one in which the institution becomes aware of a problem or potential crisis in advance and has some time to develop a communications action plan. (Examples: impending audit citation; NCAA investigation, lawsuits, student issues, impending layoff of personnel).

IV. General Guidelines

In the event of a crisis impacting Southeastern, the following general guidelines will be employed.

- The university will employ a policy of open, honest communications delivered in a timely manner to university employees and students, to the news media and to the general public.
- Only officially designated spokespersons for the university should address media inquiries to ensure consistency of message and actions. Spokespersons may include, but are not limited to, the President or a designated Vice President, the Director of Public Information, and others as needed.
- Except as noted elsewhere in this plan, all releases of information will be conducted through the Office of Public Information.
- All inquiries from the news media should be directed to the Office of Public Information.
- The university will remain sensitive to the issue of personal privacy and the need to avoid releasing any information that could jeopardize a police or other internal investigation.
- The university will take control of the issue by initiating communications that present the facts of the crisis and articulate the university's positions and actions. Regular updates will be part of this action plan.
- The university will place a priority on guarding its long-term credibility and reputation by responding quickly to legitimate requests for information. By timely release of information to employees, students and media, the university will limit the

development and spread of rumors and will serve as the primary source of accurate information on the crisis as it affects the institution.

- The university will make every attempt to accommodate the logistical needs of the media, including the possibility of maintaining a news conference location and providing on-campus work space for the media. In a major emergency, the media can assist the university by spreading accurate information to the public.

V. Crisis Communications Preparation

In anticipation of a significant, sudden crisis, the basic framework of the crisis communication plan should be in place. This preparation includes:

- **Appointment of the Crisis Communication Team**

The team should consist of specific university officials appointed by the President. (See suggested team on page 2.)

- **Designate a Crisis Communications Center**

The center should be in close proximity to the general Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and should include access to several telephone lines, a fax machine, and the Internet. In many cases, the offices of the Public Information Office in East Stadium will suffice. In cases where generating power is necessary for operations, the Communications Center will need to be housed in a building that has an emergency generator, such as the Police Department or other nearby facility.

- **Designate a media center, if necessary**

If the crisis is expected to be of some duration or to attract a large number of media representatives, a separate center should be identified to serve as a media center where reporters can work and file stories and receive regular updates and press briefings. Possible locations could be the Pennington Student Activity Center or the University Center.

- **Maintain and update lists of university contact information**

List should include all officers of the university, department heads, and other staff who may need to be contacted in the event of an emergency or crisis. List should be reviewed and updated periodically.

- **Maintain and update media contact lists**

The lists will include, when possible, cell phone and home numbers as well as e-mail addresses of the most frequently contacted media representatives in the area, including the Associated Press and other statewide networks.

- **Prepare and maintain the crisis communications kit**

The Office maintains a portable trunk that includes a copy of the university's Emergency Management Plan, the Crisis Communications Plan, all appropriate contact lists, general office supplies, Southeastern stationery, the Office's two-way radios, a digital camera, a video camera, and laptop computers.

VI. Emergency Notification Systems

In the event of an emergency or crisis that impacts the university, the following notification systems are in place to keep the campus community and the public informed. These systems will be activated according to the university's Emergency Management Plan.

Public Address System/Siren – The unit, located in the central part of the campus, can broadcast emergency messages or a siren alert to notify the immediate campus of an emergency. The system can accommodate pre-recorded messages or customized messages. Responsibility: University Police

Text messages – Southeastern is contracted with FirstCall to send text messages to individuals who have registered to receive the messages. Authorization is by the President. Responsibility: VP for Administration & Finance, Executive Assistant to the President

Computer e-mail Alerts – Time sensitive emergency messages in the form of e-mail can be sent to all Southeastern e-mail recipients (faculty, staff and students) through the FirstCall system. Responsibility: VP for Administration & Finance, Executive Assistant to the President

Telephone System Phone Tree – The campus phone system will be used to send time-sensitive emergency messages in the form of voice messages to digital telephones on campus. The message comes through the phone speaker. Individuals receiving the message are charged with the responsibility of notifying others on their prescribed list. Responsibility: University Police (???)

Fire Alarm System – Most of the buildings on campus are equipped with fire alarm systems. Building occupants are trained annually in the appropriate manner of response. Responsibility: University Police

Web Alerts – The university will post emergency alerts and emergency information updates on the front page of the university's Web site homepage. Special templates have been prepared to display information in a prominent red box. Responsibility: Public Information

News Dissemination – News releases and updates of information will be distributed to area news media as needed. Responsibility: Public Information

VII. Communications Action Plan

In the event of a university crisis or emergency and depending on the urgency of the situation, the President or his/her designee will call for a meeting of the university's

Emergency Response Team to brief everyone on facts and to determine initial courses of action. Action steps include:

- **Alert communications partners**

Contact will be made to the following:

- University Police Department and Telephone Services to ensure that any media calls are routed to the Office of Public Information.
- Office of Technology to initiate activation of the telephone answering system and to prepare for mass e-mails and text messaging.
- University Webmaster and University Web Coordinator to initiate plans for the front Web page alert and the internal pages for storing additional information.

- **Fact gathering**

Public Information staff will gather all available facts into written form. Having accurate information will enable university officials to respond to inquiries.

- **Prepare background and other statements**

- Develop an initial media statement tailored to the specific crisis and any actions being taken by the university.
- Review and update (if necessary) a pre-written backgrounder that will provide basic information about pertinent university policies and procedures (e.g., Student Code of Conduct, Judicial Procedures, housing policies, etc.) If time allows, prepare a specific backgrounder addressing the issue at hand.

- **Notify key audiences**

Review list of the university's key audiences and determine which need to be informed about the situation directly and in what order. Key audiences include:

- UL System Office and Board of Supervisors (by President or his/her designee)
- Faculty, staff, students
- Parents of students
- News media
- General public
- Alumni

- **Provide general notice of the situation**

Southeastern's Emergency Management Plan includes a number of communication methodologies designed to reach the maximum number of individuals. If appropriate to the crisis, the university can use any or all of the following communication tools:

- **Exterior public address system** – located in the middle of campus, the unit can broadcast a horn, siren, or brief audio message. The system is connected to University Police.
 - **Telephone system** – The campus phone system will be used to send time-sensitive emergency messages in the form of voice messages to digital phones on campus. The message comes through the telephone speaker. Several key offices on campus are charged with passing the information on through a telephone tree.
 - **E-mail alerts and text messaging** – As part of the FirstCall system, Southeastern can send e-mail alerts and text messages to individuals who have signed up for the service. Text messaging to cell phones will go only to subscribers who have opted for this service.
 - **Web alerts** – The University will post emergency alerts and information updates on the front page of the Web site's homepage. Alerts will be posted in a prominent red box. (See Appendix B.)
 - **News dissemination** – News releases and updates of information will be distributed to the area news media as warranted. The Office of Public Information will coordinate any interviews or other communications with members of the media.
- **Designate university spokesperson(s)**
Ideally, only one individual will serve as the primary spokesperson for the university so that a unified and consistent message is delivered. Likely spokespersons are the President, the Provost, and the Director of Public Information. Other individuals with specific technical, medical and health expertise may also be used. The spokesperson(s) must be kept fully informed of all latest developments.
 - **Message development**
Available staff from the Public Information Office will develop key messages for stakeholders. Messages should be clear, simple, and as specific as possible. The message should express the concern of the university about the situation and its impact on the people involved and should state what the university is doing to address the situation. Basically, the university will need to have answers to several basic questions:
 1. What happened (to the extent that is known) and when?
 2. How did it happen (to the extent known)?
 3. What is being done about it?
 - **Quick response**
The university will make every effort to respond quickly in the event of a crisis, within the first hour if at all possible. A quick, early response positions the organization as the primary source of information and shows the institution is in control. Silence is too passive and allows others to control the story. The news

media will fill an information vacuum with whatever information it can obtain, whether that source is completely reliable or not.

- **Message control**

- In all of its messages to its various audiences, the university will stick to facts as they are known and spokespersons will avoid any speculation. Information will be completely truthful and will include any “bad news” to avoid negative coverage that may be associated by withholding information.
- If erroneous information is inadvertently given out, the university spokesperson will follow up with the media to correct any mistakes.
- Frequently, in crisis situations, rumors can run rampant. University officials and official spokespersons should address rumors as they develop and make every attempt to separate fact from fiction. If the requested information is unavailable, the reporter(s) should be told this with a promise that the correct information will be obtained and conveyed.

- **Controlling access**

In situations where members of the media are likely to come to the campus (a crime, major accident, fire, etc.) Public Information Office personnel will work with University Police to control access to the scene and maintain order. The media, as well as any spectators, must be kept at a safe distance from the area to allow investigators time to evaluate the area. The university has a responsibility to maintain the integrity of any crime or accident scene and to ensure the privacy of its students, faculty and staff. It may be necessary to limit access to certain parts of the campus during a crisis.

- **Privacy concerns**

- The university will not release an individual’s name who has been involved in an injury or fatality until his/her family has been notified.
- The university will not give the media access to the families of anyone injured or killed, unless the families expressly grant permission.

- **Coordination with hospitals**

- The university will release the location or locations treating injured persons (e.g., North Oaks Medical Center). Hospital media professionals are trained to answer media questions regarding treatment and status of patients and understand all related medical privacy concerns.
- The university will work in conjunction with hospital spokesperson(s) when releasing any information regarding an injured person’s condition.

- **Media monitoring and rumor control**

To the extent possible, PIO staff will monitor news coverage of the situation and correct misinformation or rumors as quickly as possible.

- **Additional assistance**

In the case of a major emergency or crisis, it may be necessary to tap the services of other communications professionals on campus, including media relations personnel in the Athletics Department's Sports Information Office.

- **Media follow-up**

- Following initial dissemination of a news release or advisory to the media, the university can expect telephone calls from members of the media seeking additional information or clarification. The Office of Public Information will handle these calls by sticking to the facts as originally outlined and avoiding any speculation.
- Members of the Public Information Office staff will follow up with key media representatives to ensure that messages are delivered and that reporters know whom to contact for reports and updates.
- Public Information staff will maintain a log of all incoming media requests through the use of the Media Contact Form (Appendix A) that details information requested and how the request was addressed.
- Public Information staff will respond to any media inquiries quickly and fairly keeping in mind reporters' deadlines.

- **Information flow**

The university should control the flow of information by trying to update telephone messages, the emergency webpage, and the news media at set times as the situation requires.

- **Photography**

The university may request the Office of Public Information to assign a photographer to take pictures and/or video of the scene of an incident, which may prove useful in responding to media inquiries, for documentation purposes, and for possible later litigation.

VIII. Evaluation

Evaluation of a crisis and how it was handled is essential to determine what has worked and what actions may need to be reviewed and revised to operate more smoothly in the future. Evaluation may take various forms, including debriefing of team members, viewing and reading media coverage of the situation, and reviewing any feedback received from faculty, staff, students, parents, the public and others.

Plan reviewed and updated: September 25, 2008

CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLAN

APPENDIX A

MEDIA CONTACT FORM

Date: _____ Time: _____

Call received from:

Reporter or Contact: _____

Organization: _____

Telephone: _____

E-Mail: _____

Message or Question:

Call back by: _____

Follow-up Notes:

CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLAN

APPENDIX B

EMERGENCY WEB SITE EXAMPLE

Brief Alert

SOUTHEASTERN LOUISIANA UNIVERSITY

ABOUT SOUTHEASTERN | ACADEMICS & RESEARCH | ADMINISTRATION | LIBRARY | NEWS & MEDIA | ATHLETICS GO

Fire Alert

A fire has broken out on the second floor of Fayard Hall. The building is being evacuated. Please avoid this part of the campus until an ALL CLEAR has been issued. Continue to check this Web site for updates.

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Choose Southeastern
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Campus Life at Southeastern
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FACULTY & STAFF
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COMMUNITY & VISITORS

Fire Alert

A fire has broken out on the second floor of Fayard Hall. The building is being evacuated.
Please avoid this part of the campus until an ALL CLEAR has been issued.
Continue to check this Web site for updates.

NEWS & EVENTS
Graphic design exhibit at Clark Hall...
New look for Roomie's suit...
Will Power at SU Theatre April 22...
'Spring Daze' offers fun, food...
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APPENDIX C

PIO STAFF CONTACT INFORMATION

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Cell: 985-320-8170

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CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLAN

APPENDIX D

MEDIA CONTACT INFORMATION

Refer to “Finder Binder,” LPA Directory, and other directories for general contact information. Finder Binder is on the desktop of each office laptop computer.

IMPORTANT MEDIA/REPORTER CONTACTS

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nrle@ap.org

O: 504-523-3931

O: 800-662-7717

F: 504-586-0531

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F: 504-483-1543

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F: 225-379-7880
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jfeller@wafb.com

Daniel Brown
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C: 225-715-3946

WVLA-TV
P: 225-766-3233
F: 225-768-9191

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F: 225-297-7539

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Sue Lincoln, Asst. News Dir.
sue@la-net.net

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O: 504-593-6376
F: 504-593-2285
F: 504-529-6472

WGSO Radio (NO)
O: 985-639-3820
F: 985-639-3869
news@wgso.com

WIST Radio (NO)
AM 690 Talk
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comment@wistradio.com

WJBO Radio (BR)
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F: 225-231-1879

WIBR Radio (BR)
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F: 225-928-1606

WHMD / WFPR (Hammond)
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