

Brevard College
Crisis Communications Plan
Standard Operating Procedures

INTRODUCTION

The Office of Communications and Media Relations has been charged by the President of the College with collecting and conveying all information during a crisis. The purpose of this plan is to outline communications procedures during a crisis, including communications with the College community and with the media and the public. These procedures complement the Campus Emergency Response Plan. In every crisis the primary goal of the College is to protect the safety and wellbeing of students, faculty and staff.

For the purpose of this document, the term “crisis” shall be defined as any event or situation that has a significant harmful impact on the Brevard College community. Examples of such include an act of physical or sexual violence on campus; death of a student, faculty or staff member; major fire; or the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact the College’s performance and generate negative outcomes. The term is not intended to include isolated criminal incidents such as theft that are routinely handled by campus Public Safety. The Director of Communications and Media Relations has been designated as the official spokesperson for the college, including the period during or after a crisis or disaster that generates interest from local, regional and perhaps even national news media.

Described in this document is the role of the Director of Communications and Media Relations and other staff members in collecting and conveying information to the public during or immediately after a crisis.

I. OBJECTIVES OF THE PLAN

- A. To be able to assess situations and determine whether a communications response is warranted.
- B. To assemble a Crisis Communications Team that will allow the College to respond quickly, accurately, sensitively, and responsibly with campus and off-campus constituencies and media outlets
 - i. Communicate facts and updates about the situation in a timely manner
 - ii. Make affected audiences aware of potential emergency situations and protective actions
 - iii. Identify audiences that should be informed about the situation (students, parents, faculty, staff, Board of Trustees, alumni, donors, media, general public)
 - iv. Coordinate cooperation with responding agencies (police, federal bureaus, hospitals, etc.)

- v. Minimize rumors
- vi. Restore order and protect confidence in the College

II. SITUATION

- A. Each crisis will require a unique media relations response. The extent of the response will depend on the nature of the crisis.
- B. The Director of Communications and Media Relations' contacts include print and electronic news media. During a crisis the Director also will serve as a liaison with various campus units, including the President's Executive Leadership Team.

III. ASSUMPTIONS

A. The news media typically provide much of the information the public receives about a crisis. Consequently, media relations is an essential element of any crisis plan. Because time is critical, an accurate response must be made – or at least be available – as soon as possible after the event has occurred and/or the crisis has developed.

B. A crisis usually is considered major news by the news media, and may result in more public exposure for the college than any number of "good news" stories.

IV. ASSESSMENT

- A. The individual who encounters or learns about a potential crisis should gather as much accurate information as possible and then contact the President and/or appropriate Vice President, and the Director of Communications and Media Relations. These "first-responders" will determine whether an immediate response is needed and if it is necessary to convene the Crisis Communications Team. If the team is not called together formally, members will establish an informal calling tree to contact other team members. This will be done both to inform all team members about the situation and to gather as much information as possible. This team will be composed of members from these areas, as appropriate:
 - i. Office of Communications and Media Relations
 - ii. Office of the President
 - iii. Student Affairs
 - iv. Academic Affairs
 - v. Athletics
 - vi. Human Resources
 - vii. Legal Counsel
 - viii. Public Safety
 - ix. Student Health and Counseling
 - x. Office of the Chaplain

- xi. Affected academic department

*This list is not exhaustive and is likely to vary by situation.

(Please see Appendix for a list of Crisis Communications Team members and their contact information. This information will be updated every quarter.)

V. PROCEDURES

The Crisis Communications Team will continue gathering information, assess the situation and develop a plan of action. Necessary steps are to:

- A. **Get the facts.** The Campus Emergency Resource/Response Team will meet as soon as possible in special session with the Director of Communications and Media Relations and other pertinent staff members (or their designees) to discuss what is known and being done about the crisis.
- B. **Designate a spokesperson.** Generally, this is the highest-ranking individual who has direct knowledge of the events.
 - i. In cases of significant crisis, the President or appropriate Vice President should take the lead in conveying the administration's response to the crisis. The Director of Communications and Media Relations may also be designated a spokesperson.
 - ii. Faculty, students and staff should be instructed to refer all requests for comment to the designated spokesperson.
- C. **Prepare facts, official statement.** The Director of Communications and Media Relations will compile a fact sheet/draft a news release or official statement for on- and off-campus constituencies and the media. Information will include a statement of the situation with all known details that can be released.
 - i. This information will be approved by the President or appropriate Vice President.
 - ii. This information must be time-stamped and updated frequently.
 - iii. In all instances, the College must strive to protect student/faculty/staff members' right to privacy, as outlined in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).
 - iv. When inquiries are directed to the College concerning a criminal charge or pending criminal investigation, caution must be exercised not to compromise these proceedings. Legal Counsel may need to provide input in these circumstances.
 - v. In the event of injury or death, the College will not release names of involved parties until the family has been notified. Again, FERPA guidelines will be followed.
- D. **Briefing.** Spokesperson will brief and provide talking points to any other staff members who are assigned to answer the phone or have contact with the news media.

E. **Notification.** In cases involving employee or student injuries or deaths, families will be notified by appropriate staff members before the information is released to the public.

F. **Release information.**

- i. Official statement regarding the situation will be conveyed to internal audiences via email, Brevard's website, and by voicemail or text alert if necessary.
- ii. The Crisis Communications Team will keep information circulating to senior officials to ensure they are kept up to date as the crisis unfolds.
- iii. External audiences will be notified through press releases/official statements/individual interviews. A press conference may be convened in extreme situations.
- iv. All information that is released to external audiences and the media will be coordinated with the information released by responding emergency agencies to ensure accuracy. No information will be given out off record.
- v. The Director of Communications and Media Relations will conduct all communications with the media and set up interviews as requested.
- vi. If extreme situations, an emergency media center may need to be established. All media will be directed to assemble at the center to work and receive information.
- vii. The Director of Communications and Media Relations will determine whether it is appropriate to allow location shooting by TV and newspaper photographers. The team member will accompany photographers as necessary. Additionally, he or she will determine if an internal photographer or videographer is necessary, either to help media or to document events for campus archives/information or for potential litigation.
- viii. In general the College will welcome reporters and allow them as much access as public safety and decorum dictate. Every effort will be made to insulate students, faculty, and staff from invasive newsgathering.

G. **Ongoing period.** In a crisis, the Director of Communications and Media Relations will:

- i. Provide the public, primarily via the college's website and the news media, with basic information about an emergency or threatened emergency.
- ii. Keep the Brevard community informed via the Internet, emergency information line and other means. Advice will be conveyed on what community members should or should not do to prevent further damage or loss of life, panic or interference with emergency response efforts.

- iii. If pertinent, help keep the public, media and college community informed about where people can seek temporary housing, food, etc., and how more information can be obtained.
- iv. Recovery period: The Director of Communications and Media Relations or the Director's designee will issue media updates as long as necessary. Once the crisis has ended, the Director will schedule a meeting of all key personnel to review all actions taken and possible lessons learned.

H. Post-Crisis Protocol

- i. Grief counseling, mental health services, support groups, memorial services, safety seminars may need to be established based on the nature of the crisis. The Associate Dean of Students and Coordinator for Counseling Services will notify the campus community as necessary.
- ii. Within a week of the crisis, the Crisis Communications Team will convene to debrief.
- iii. The Director of Communications and Media Relations will monitor (and correct errors as necessary), assess, and archive coverage of the situation.

APPENDIX

A. **Dealings with the news media** should be honest and courteous in order to foster confidence in, and respect for, the entire Brevard College community. But neither staff members nor students should feel compelled to answer news media questions they are not comfortable with or knowledgeable about.

B. Crisis team

Depending upon the nature of the crisis, certain people will work directly with the Director of Communications and Media Relations and the President's Office in order to aid the release of information. In most cases only one or two of the following will be directly involved.

1. Dean for Students, as events pertain to student affairs.
2. Director of Public Safety, as events pertain to campus safety.
3. Vice President of Business and Finance, as events pertain to finance, construction and related areas.

4. Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of Faculty, as events pertain to academics and faculty.
5. Vice President of Admissions and Financial Aid, as events pertain to recruitment of students.
6. Vice President of Philanthropic Development, as events pertain to alumni and fundraising.
7. Athletic Media Relations Director, as events pertain to Athletics.

(Adapted, drafted and revised on 7/20/2015 from crisis plans made available by Warren Wilson College and Goucher College.)