

Section: Communication Guidebook
Subject: Crisis Communications
Approved by: Cabinet
Applies to: Faculty, staff, students, volunteers
Effective date: April 29, 2005

COLLEGE POLICY

The role of the Communications and Marketing Office during and immediately following a crisis is to collect and convey appropriate information to both internal and external constituents. In every crisis, the primary goal of *all* College employees is the security and well-being of students, faculty and staff.

A crisis situation is defined as any circumstance or event identified by the President as having a real or potential major impact on the campus community as a whole. Examples include explosions, hazardous chemical spills, fire, a hostage or firearm situation, major accidents, violence, unexpected deaths and natural disasters. It does not include incidents of isolated crime, which are routinely handled by the Student Life Office and the LaGrange Police Department.

Crisis communications most frequently occur during the period immediately following a situation that has widespread interest among the local, regional, state and national community, thus generating greater media focus and requiring the College's full attention for the duration of the situation.

When a crisis occurs, decisions often have to be made without the luxury of examining every aspect of a situation. Surprise, insufficient information and an escalating flow of events should be anticipated.

Each crisis or emergency will require a unique communications response. Two key elements, however, are universal:

- In many cases, the only information the public receives about an emergency is through the media; therefore, media relations is an essential element of any crisis plan.
- A crisis situation is "big news" and is likely to result in more public exposure for the College than hundreds of "good news" stories.

PROCEDURE

General

- I. If a situation requires immediate police, fire department or ambulance response, College personnel should dial 911 to advise authorities of the situation. Then, they should dial campus extension 8000 to ensure that College administrators are advised of the situation. (After normal business hours, the caller should make every effort to notify College administration of the situation.)
- II. At the President's request, the Communications and Marketing Office will set up a Crisis Communications Center on campus. The Crisis Communications Center will remain open 24 hours a day for the duration of the crisis.

- III. During an emergency, the Director of Communications and Marketing, Vice President for Advancement, President or his/her designee will serve as the College spokesperson with the media. The name and telephone number of the spokesperson will be provided to all staff for referral of media phone calls.
- IV. At the onset of a crisis, key points of contact (switchboard operator, campus emergency response team, etc.) will be reminded to direct reporters' calls to the Communications and Marketing Office. They should not comment on the incident, but get the reporter's name, media outlet he/she represents, phone number and questions, and report the inquiry immediately to Communications and Marketing.

Phases of Communications Response

- I. **Immediate:** In consultation with the campus emergency response team, the President, Vice President for Advancement and the Director of Communications and Marketing will determine if an official statement or fact sheet should be prepared and released. If warranted, they also will develop answers to specific questions that may be asked by the media. Once approved by the President, these materials will form the basis of the College's response to the media.

In cases of significant crisis, a press conference may be called. In such situations, the President, Vice President for Advancement or highest ranking representative available will convey the College's response and address public concern. The recommended site is the Student Center Assembly Room at a time no later than 3:30 p.m.

In cases involving employee or student injuries or deaths, families will be notified by appropriate personnel before information is released to the public.

Internal College audiences must also be included in the communications response to a crisis. The College Web site and e-mail and voice-mail systems will be used to convey accurate and timely information to faculty, staff and students.

The Communications and Marketing Director will decide whether photographers/videographers need to be assigned to document the scene. He/she also will determine whether it is appropriate to allow location shooting by TV and newspaper photographers and will decide who should accompany them.

- II. **Ongoing:** As a crisis or emergency situation unfolds, the Communications and Marketing Office will keep the public and constituents up to date with factual information and appropriate response measures.
- III. **Recovery period:** As long as necessary, the Communications and Marketing Office will issue updates, then will scale back activities as warranted. At the end of the crisis situation, the Director will schedule a meeting of all key communications players to review actions taken and lessons learned. These will be included in a report to be forwarded to the Cabinet.

Other

Aspects of responding to a crisis or emergency not directly related to communications are addressed in the Disaster Response Plan portion of the campus health and safety policy, available at <http://home.lagrange.edu/healthandsafety>.

SUMMARY

A crisis situation can result in more public exposure for the College than countless “good news” stories. In such situations, only the Director of Communications and Marketing, the Vice President for Advancement, the President or his designee can serve as the College spokesperson. Reporters’ calls or invitations for comment should be reported immediately to the Communications and Marketing Office.