

Public Relations Crisis Communication Procedure

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I. Purpose

A crisis communication plan provides policies and procedures for the coordination of communication within the College, the media, and the public in the event of an emergency or controversial issue. Emergencies may include fires, bomb threats, natural disasters, or major crimes. Controversial issues may include police investigations, protests, or other situations that demand a public response. The plan is not intended to change the way emergencies are initially reported. **All emergencies on campus should be reported immediately to 911.**

This plan not only addresses media relations and communication issues, but also includes procedures for the rapid identification of potentially harmful situations and the methods for responding to these situations quickly and effectively.

It is the goal of this crisis communication plan to establish guidelines for dealing with a variety of situations, and to ensure that campus officials and communicators are familiar with those procedures, and their roles in the event of a crisis. The plan is designed to be used in conjunction with the normal decision-making hierarchy of the College and does not supplant that decision-making process.

II. Objectives of the Plan

1. To be able to factually assess situations and determine whether communications responses are warranted.
2. To assemble a Crisis Communication Team that will make recommendations on appropriate responses.
3. To implement immediate actions to:
 - Identify constituencies that should be informed about the situation
 - Communicate facts about the crisis
 - Minimize rumors
 - Restore order and/or confidence

III. Procedures Assessment — the individual who encounters the potential crisis should gather accurate information from the appropriate sources. A potential crisis is defined as an event or situation that could affect or has affected the health, safety, or welfare of students, faculty, staff, or campus visitors. After fact gathering, the appropriate individual should determine whether an immediate response is necessary, and if so, should consult: Vice President for Institutional Advancement, Marketing, and Public Relations. (Backup: President) The Vice President for Institutional Advancement, Marketing, and Public Relations will determine whether or not to convene a Crisis Communication Team and will immediately inform the President.

Assembling Core Crisis Team — Composition of the crisis team will include at minimum (President’s Leadership Cabinet):

Presidents Leadership Cabinet
Program Director or Supervisor of area affected
Chief of Campus Police

*Other personnel will be added to this President’s Leadership Cabinet to form the larger Crisis Communication Team, which will then formulate a response based on the nature of the crisis.

The Core Crisis Team, after assessing the nature and scope of the situation, should call together all members of the Crisis Communication Team to develop a plan of action including some, or all, of the following:

1. **Designate a spokesperson.** In most cases, the spokesperson should be the Vice President for Institutional Advancement, Marketing, and Public Relations. The person possessing the direct knowledge of the crisis (for example: the Campus Safety and Security Officer in the event of a campus crime) can be designated as spokesperson by the Vice President for Institutional Advancement, Marketing, and Public Relations. Additional back-up spokespersons include: Vice President for Student Services and Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs.

In cases of a significant crisis, the president or the highest ranking College administrator must take the lead in conveying the administration’s response to the crisis, showing that the College has control of the situation, calming public concern, and setting an example for the entire campus.

2. **Draft a fact sheet.** The fact sheet should contain a summary statement of the situation including all known details to be released to the media. This information should be made available to (and approved by) the President, and appropriate Dean or Vice President. This fact sheet should be analyzed with respect to the public’s right to know.

3. **Notify key constituencies.** Determine key constituencies that should be informed of the crisis. It is important to keep administration, faculty, staff and students informed of appropriate details and actions taken by the College during an emergency. Effective communications will help control rumors, maintain morale, and ensure continued orderly operations of the College. Among the groups that should be considered for communication in a crisis situation are:

Commissioner
TCSG
Law enforcement agencies
Administration, faculty, and staff
Students
General public
Mass media
Board of Directors
Foundation Board of Directors

4. **Assign member of the Crisis Team** to communicate the facts of the situation (contained in the fact sheet) and the College’s intended response. Among those that may be notified, depending on the situation, are:

Law enforcement agencies — should be notified by the Chief of Police

Faculty and Staff — Information to faculty and staff other than those selected to serve on the Crisis Team should be provided via email. This should be handled by the office of public relations.

Students — all student email, Alert Now messages, and through faculty.

Local community and General Public — Place alert in red bold type on the home page of the website that will link visitors to more information (provided from the fact sheet) about the crisis. If the situation has an impact on local residents, use mass media. If appropriate, meetings can be arranged with leaders of the community.

Mass media —Public Relations may prepare news releases for distribution. All media inquiries should be directed to the marketing and public relations office.

5. **Alert the media.** Determine whether a news conference and or news release is an appropriate means of conveying information to faculty, staff, students, the news media, and the public. The Vice President of Institutional Advancement, Marketing, and Public Relations will determine logistics of the news conference including when, where and how the media will be contacted, which media will be contacted, who will supervise the news conference, who will appear, etc.

6. **Establish Crisis Command Center.** Determine whether the magnitude of the crisis merits establishing a Crisis Command Center (for police and College officials) and/or a media briefing center (for larger gatherings of the media for briefings or press conferences). Location should be determined depending on the incident and in conjunction with the police department.

7. **Photography.** Decide the need to assign videographers and photographers to take pictures of the scene. This may prove helpful in responding to media inquiries, to possible later litigation, as well as documenting events. Determine need to supply video footage and photographs from files. Decide whether to provide TV footage for immediate distribution. Determine whether it is appropriate to allow location shooting by TV and newspaper photographers. Determine when, where, and who will accompany the media.

8. **Radio Responses.** Discuss need to produce a script for a PSA on local radio stations, or who to make available for radio sound bites.

9. **Internal communications.** Determine strategy of internal communications to be used if the crisis affects College students and employees, working closely with the Human Resources Coordinator, campus news, mass emailing, and the web site.

10. **Alternative communications.** Discuss alternative or additional means of conveying information including letters to students or selected constituencies of the College, letters to newspaper editors, and mass media. Where appropriate, the Vice President for Institutional Advancement, Marketing, and Public Relations will work with local news media, asking them to offer a “hot link” on their web sites to SRTC’s web site for viewers wanting more information regarding a crisis.

11. **Switchboard-** The following locations, which receive high volumes of incoming telephone calls to the College, should be notified regarding the key facts of the crisis (fact sheet) and where to refer calls pertaining to the crisis: Location/ Contact Person Phone

Bainbridge - (229) 243-6000

Moultrie – 229-891-7000

Thomasville – 229-225-4096

Tifton – 229-391-2600

12. **Rumor control.** Consider establishing a rumor-control hotline and/or a dedicated call-in line for media use. A web page with a hot link from the College home page can also be used posting up-to-date information and FAQ.

13. **Loss of telephone service.** Cellular phones should be used in the event that land-lines are down. The President's office will maintain a list of cellular phone numbers for key College officials.

Aftermath Component

Following any crisis, appropriate action must take place to ensure that members of the College community, and others as necessary, receive needed information and assistance to help bring closure to the crisis as well as relief from the effects of the event. Attention also should be placed on identifying and implementing measures to improve the action plan used during the crisis.

Communications

1. Whenever possible, a public forum should be scheduled and coordinated by the Vice President for Institutional Advancement, Marketing, and Public Relations to communicate details of the incident and events to all interested members of the College. The timeliness of this meeting is critical and every effort should be made to see that it occurs within three work days from the close of the crisis. Representatives from Human Resources, as well as the College Counselor should attend and be prepared to answer questions and share pertinent information. Specific departments and/or individuals also may be requested to attend and participate depending upon the nature of the crisis.

2. Immediately following a crisis, it is imperative that the College be sensitive to the needs of faculty, staff, and students who may have been personally affected by the disaster. There may be a need to assist a victim or victims by obtaining information and/or a referral to available resources. The President's Leadership Cabinet will be responsible for notifying appropriate employees and Student Affairs for students. Also, representatives from the President's Leadership Cabinet and Student Affairs should follow up with their respective constituents to ensure their needs are being addressed and offer further assistance.

3. It is not unreasonable to expect that rumors would follow a crisis, further creating an atmosphere of anxiety. One means of combating rumors would be to take full advantage of electronic mail, rumor-control hotlines, etc. and report facts as appropriate.

4. Depending upon the nature of the crisis, services and assistance may have been rendered by agencies, companies and/or individuals from outside the College. The Vice President for Institutional Advancement, Marketing, and Public Relations should ensure that applicable follow-up information and thank-you letters are forwarded to appropriate persons.

5. The President's Leadership Cabinet shall meet within 10 days following a crisis and review all actions taken as a result of the crisis to determine effectiveness and efficiency of operations and make any needed changes to the Crisis Management Plan.

Clean Up

The Vice President for Operations is responsible for overseeing and implementing services necessary to clean and repair areas and facilities damaged as a result of a crisis. The Vice President for Institutional Advancement, Marketing, and Public Relations will support this effort by working with the Vice President for Operations and the Facilities Director(s) to communicate necessary clean-up information to the community.

Facility Evacuation/Operational Shutdowns

It may become necessary to evacuate buildings and/or areas surrounding facilities to protect and ensure the safety of people. If such a situation occurs, decisions regarding work space accommodations and/or leave requirements for faculty and staff as well as class schedules and other accommodations that would need to be addressed.

Student questions should be directed to the Vice President for Student Affairs, and the faculty should address any concerns with their respective Dean.

Southern Regional Technical College Evening Administrators

Bainbridge

- 24 Hour Campus Security (229) 726-9371

Cairo

- Brian Childree (229) 977-7747

Moultrie Veterans Pkwy/Industrial Drive

- James Perry

Thomasville

- Zack Clark – Mon (229) 421-0982
- Sharon Poitevint – Tues (229) 421-9082
- Tony Turpin – Wed (229) 421-0982
- Zack Clark – Thurs (229) 421-0982

Tifton

- Mickey Bentley (229) 850-0850