

Oxnard College

Crisis Communication Plan

I. Purpose

A crisis communication plan provides procedures for the coordination of communication within the college, and between 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 Campus Police (805)678-5805 and 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 Communications Team that will make recommendations on appropriate responses.
3. To implement immediate actions to:
 - o Identify constituencies that should be informed about the situation.
 - o Communicate facts about the crisis with one voice.
 - o Minimize rumors.
 - o 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 Campus Police who will immediately inform the President and Vice President of Business Services. These individuals will determine whether or not to convene the Crisis Communications Team.

Emergency Notification – When a significant event occurs that immediately endangers the safety and welfare of students, faculty, or staff, an emergency notification will be sent to all affected campuses and college community members. An emergency notification does not require any filtering of messages through the Crisis Communications Team. The emergency notification can be authorized by Campus Police or President’s Executive Cabinet members. The emergency notification can be distributed through Blackboard Connect.

Timely Notification – In accordance with AP6530:
The District shall publish warnings to the campus community about crimes that are considered to represent continuing threat to other students and employees in a manner that is timely and will aid in the prevention of similar crimes. The information shall be disseminated by Chief of Police in a manner that aids the preventions of similar crimes.

Nothing in this precludes the Incident Commander from sending communication to the college to manage an incident.

Assembling the Crisis Communications Team – The Crisis Communications Team will formulate a response based on the nature of the crisis. Composition of the core team will include at minimum:

- College President
- Vice President of Business Services
- Vice President of Academic Affairs & Student Learning
- Vice President of Student Development
- Director of Technology
- Dean of Institutional Effectiveness
- Director of Facilities, Maintenance & Operations
- Campus Police Lieutenant

Depending on the nature of the crisis situation, other individuals may be added to the Crisis Communications Team.

Plan of Action – The Crisis Communications Team, after assessing the nature and scope of the situation, should develop a plan of action including some, or all, of the following:

1. Designate a spokesperson – In most cases, the spokesperson should be the college president (or president's designee). The person possessing the direct knowledge of the crisis (for example, the campus police lieutenant in the event of a campus crime) may be designated as spokesperson for the team by the college president (or president's designee). In most cases, in the absence of the college president, the vice president of academic affairs and student learning will be the spokesperson. In the absence of both the college president and vice president of academic affairs and student learning, the vice president of business services will be the spokesperson.

In cases of a significant crisis, the president or the highest ranking college official 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 and key messages – 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 prepared by the President's Office in consultation with the incident commander and made available to the president and appropriate vice presidents. This fact sheet should be analyzed with respect to the public's right to know and concerns for privacy and security.
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 quell 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:
 - o administration, faculty, and staff
 - o students
 - o VCCCD Chancellor's Office
 - o VCCCD Chief of Police
 - o VCCCD Marketing & Communications
 - o general public
 - o Oxnard Police
 - o social media
4. Assign member of the Crisis Communications Team to communicate 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 a campus Police Department representative.
 - College reception and PBX – by the representative of the Crisis Communication Team.
 - Administrators, faculty, and staff – Information to administrators other than those selected to serve on the Crisis Communications Team can be provided through text message, electronic mail, voice mail, and/or campus forums. This should be handled by the Office of the President in conjunction with the incident management communications officer. Information Technology should be consulted if a college-wide broadcast e-mail is utilized.
 - Students – Notices to students can be submitted to Information Technology or VCCCD Marketing & Communications for posting on Blackboard, on the Web, or via e-mail. Campus forums can be coordinated by the vice president of student development, if needed.
 - Ventura County Community College District Chancellor – May be reached via telephone or e-mail. The Office of the President should coordinate any correspondence with the Chancellor.
 - Local community – If the situation has an impact on local residents, fliers can be distributed or mass media can be used. If appropriate, meetings can be arranged with leaders of the neighborhood associations near the college.
 - Social & mass media – VCCCD Marketing & Communications may prepare news releases for distribution. All media inquiries should be directed to the college Office of the President.
 - Government agencies – If government entities (mayor, county administrator, governor’s office, etc.) need to be informed, this should be handled by the college president and/or VCCCD Marketing & Communications.
5. Alert the media – Determine whether a news release and/or news conference is an appropriate means of conveying information to faculty, staff, students, the news media, and the public. VCCCD Marketing & Communications 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 Joint Information Center (JIC) – Determine whether the

magnitude of the crisis merits the establishment of a Joint Information Center for police, college officials, and media. The JIC location will be determined based on the incident.

7. Photography – Identify an individual who can take pictures of the scene. This may prove helpful in responding to media inquiries, to possible later litigation, as well as to documenting events. Determine need to supply video footage and photographs from files. Decide whether to provide video 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 taped response for radio, or who to make available for radio sound bites.
9. Other spokespersons – If in the event VCCCD Marketing and Communications is not available, all news media should be referred to the college president.
10. Internal communications – Determine the internal communications strategy to be used if the crisis affects college students and employees, working closely with vice presidents of academic affairs & student learning, student development, and Information Technology.
11. Alternative communications – Discuss alternative or additional means of conveying information, including letters to parents of students or selected constituencies of the college, letters to newspaper editors, and consultation with editorial boards. During a major crisis, the VCCCD Marketing & Communications will redirect social media to an emergency website that provides updates throughout the duration of the crisis.
12. VCCCD Marketing & Communications – VCCCD Marketing & Communications should be notified regarding the key facts of the crisis (fact sheet) and where to refer calls pertaining to the crisis.
13. 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 for posting up-to-date information and FAQs.
14. Loss of telephone service – Cellular phones should be used in the event landlines are down. The Chancellor's Office maintains a confidential list of district and college numbers, as well as numbers for key district officials. The college Incident Command has a list of cell

numbers for key campus individuals. In addition, the campus has emergency radios available for communication.

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.

Post-incident Communications

1. Whenever possible, a public forum should be scheduled and coordinated by the college president to provide an update 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 for the forum to be held within three (3) working days from the end of the crisis. Representatives from the President's Executive Cabinet and Campus Incident Command should be available for the forum. Other departments and/or individuals may also be requested to attend and participate depending upon the nature of the crisis.
2. Immediately following a crisis, it is imperative that the college is sensitive to the needs of faculty, staff, and students who may be personally affected by the crisis. There may be a need to assist the victim(s) by obtaining information and/or a referral to available resources. The director of human resources will be responsible for notifying appropriate employees and the vice president for student affairs will be responsible for notifying students of available resources.
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 VCCCD Marketing & Communications should ensure that applicable follow-up information, as well as letters of appreciation, is sent to appropriate persons.
5. The Crisis Communications Team will meet within ten (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 Communications Plan.

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