Strengthening Crisis Communications
Amid Real-World, Real-Time Challenges
Chris Gonyar, Director of Emergency Management
Christy Jackson, Director of Communications for Business Affairs
Buffie Stephens, Director of Issues Management and External Media Relations
Stephen Ward, Executive Director of University Communications
UNC Charlotte: Nearing 30k enrollment; Urban research university; Fastest-growing in UNC System; In one of America’s fastest-growing cities
Life Before a Crisis Communication Plan

• Silos
• Low collaboration
• Unclear lines of reporting and decision making
• No set crisis communication protocols
• What did this look like?
BREAKING OVERNIGHT

VIOLENT PROTESTS ERUPT IN CHARLOTTE
TENSE STANDOFF IN WAKE OF DEADLY POLICE SHOOTING
Building a Crisis Communication Plan

Key issues to address

Definitions: What's a crisis?

Roles: Who does what?

Reporting: Who makes decisions?

Process: What do we do?

Channels and Principles: How should we communicate?
Building a Crisis Communication Plan

- Imperative to base plan on research
  - Understand audiences’ expectations and needs

- Assess current practices and performance

- Identify how and when to communicate in emergencies

- Evaluate organization’s need for external support
Highlights of the New Plan

Decisions Guided by Clear Principles

- Compassion
- Honesty
- Leadership
- Agility and Responsiveness
- Collaboration
- Accountability and Accuracy
- Timeliness and Consistency
Definitions: Crisis Levels

A situation that has the potential to impact the health and safety of the institution or its reputation. As risk escalates, so does decision making.

**Routine**
Handled by Standard Operating Procedures

**Escalating**
Considered by Crisis Communication Advisory Team

**Crisis**
Led by Crisis Communication Advisory Team

Potential Impact to the University and its Reputation, Potential for University Community Interest, and Degree of Predictability
Highlights of the New Plan

Clear Decision Making and Collaboration

Key Roles and Functions

Crisis Communication Advisory Team to lead decisions
  • University Administrator to provide subject matter expertise and operational leadership
Crisis Communication Manager to lead execution
JIC Roles to write, monitor, respond, and manage relationships
  • Content Creation
  • Media Relations
  • Social Media Monitoring and Response
Points of coordination to ensure consistency
  • Call Center
  • Stakeholder Network
  • Emergency Operations Center
    • Family Assistance Center
Crisis Communications Plan Model

Clear Reporting Lines in Crisis Situations
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example Situation</th>
<th>NinerAlert or NinerNotice</th>
<th>Communication Method</th>
<th>Suggested Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active Assailant</td>
<td>NinerAlert</td>
<td>Text, Email, LiveSafe, Other Alert Systems</td>
<td>Run, Hide, Fight Campus is on lockdown.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus Delay or Closing</td>
<td>NinerAlert</td>
<td>Text, Email, LiveSafe, Other Alert Systems</td>
<td>Do not come to campus until specified time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tornado Warning</td>
<td>NinerAlert</td>
<td>Text, Email, Sirens, Other Alert Systems</td>
<td>Immediately seek shelter in an interior room of a building.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter Storm Warning or Severe Thunderstorm Warning</td>
<td>NinerAlert</td>
<td>Email</td>
<td>Seek shelter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Assault, No Arrest Possible Threat to Campus</td>
<td>NinerAlert</td>
<td>Text, Email, LiveSafe</td>
<td>Be mindful of your surroundings. Report any suspicious activity to the police.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Assault, Arrest No Threat to Campus</td>
<td>NinerNotice</td>
<td>NinerNotice website, Email to subscribers</td>
<td>No action needed. NinerNotice sent for information only.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Remember:** These are only examples and not exhaustive of all situations that may require a NinerAlert or NinerNotice.
2017 Issues

- Student Shooting Off Campus
- Anti-Muslim Flyer on Campus
- High-Profile Athlete Sex Assault Arrest
- DACA Coal Ash Research Targeted
- Professor Murdered in Charlotte
- Sexual Battery and Arrest on Campus
- Ex-employee Whistleblower Case
- Racist Sign Found on Campus
- Social Justice Course Content Targeted
- Diversity Course Content Targeted
- Professor Arrest for Child Porn
- Anti-Muslim e-mails About Major Alumnus Donor
- Student Climbs Crane for Selfie
- Arson Fire in Res Hall
- Hazing Investigative Reporting
- Alumni Groups Turn Against Athletics Director
2018 Issues

- Sexual assault near campus
- Forced fondling at Greek Village
- Alleged sexual assault Witherspoon Hall
- Waffle House chase and shooting
- National high school walk out
- Weather closures
- Light rail security concerns
- Student threatens gun violence on campus community
- Sexual assault reported, victim declined to file charges
- Stolen car driven onto campus
- Request for Trustees’ closed session minutes
- UNC Chapel-Hill basketball sign near our campus
- Racist flyer on campus
- Sex Week
- Arrest of robbery suspect, weapon recovered
- Armed robbery of students
- Sexual assault at apartment complex
# University Communications – A New Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>News &amp; Information</th>
<th>Digital Communications &amp; Technology</th>
<th>Creative Services</th>
<th>Issues Management &amp; Media Relations</th>
<th>Communications Operations</th>
<th>Advancement Comms</th>
<th>Special Projects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Susan Messina, Director</td>
<td>Craig Berlin, Senior Director</td>
<td>Ryan Honeyman, Director</td>
<td>Buffie Stephens, Director</td>
<td>Jenny Matz, Director</td>
<td>Jennifer Howe, Director</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Written Content for:**
  - Emergency/Crisis
  - Inside UNC Charlotte
  - Events
  - Magazine
  - Paid Media
  - Social Media
  - Web
  - Written-content standards

- **Video Content for:**
  - Inside UNC Charlotte
  - Events
  - Magazine
  - Paid Media
  - Social Media
  - Web
  - Social Media Communications
  - Channel 22 programming and management
  - Communications Technology
  - Video standards

- **Visual Design Content for:**
  - Inside UNC Charlotte
  - Events
  - Magazine
  - Paid Media
  - Social Media
  - Web
  - Web Comm
  - Photography
  - Graphic Design
  - Brand/visual standards

- **Emergency/Crisis Comm Management**
  - External Media Relations, Charlotte Market
  - External Media Relations, broader markets

- **Point of contact for distributed communicators**
  - Content Flow Oversight
  - Communication about UComm

- **Applied Data from Analytics; User Experience Management**

- **Constituent Relations Communications**
  - Development Communications
  - Capital Campaign Communications
  - Marketing Campaigns

- **University Initiatives**
  - UComm Initiatives
  - Marketing Initiatives

- **UComm Initiatives**
  - University Initiatives

- **Marketing Campaigns**
  - Capital Campaign Communications
  - Marketing Campaigns
Some Objectives, 2018 and Beyond

- Assess Court of Appeals ruling on campus sexual assault case records and FERPA
- Onboard new and future key players in University’s crisis response plan:
  - New athletic director
  - Student Affairs division communicator
  - Academic Affairs division communicator
- Continue to proactively consult with student leaders
- Continue to build team depth, particularly in JIC roles
- Build relationships with area agencies