

Addendum (I)

Crisis Communication Plan

Introduction:

Crisis communication is a vital tool during an emergency condition that is essential to preserve the safety and security of the Bethlehem University (BU) community and protect its image and reputation. The “**Crisis Communication Plan**” (CCP) provides the general framework for responding to major emergencies that may threaten the health and safety of the university community, or disrupt its programs and operations, through coordination of communications within the campus, and among the University, the media and the public in the event of an emergency or other critical incident. Some crises can be predicted and possibly prevented, and those that cannot be avoided can be minimized if handled properly. Aside from tangible damage, a crisis can also destroy an institution’s reputation. The longer a crisis goes on, the more damage it can do to public support, employee and student morale, enrollment and fundraising. Therefore, it is necessary to handle crises in a swift, honest, accurate and organized manner.

Purpose of the CCP :

Many crises occur quickly, without notice and may require immediate communication, particularly to students, employees and others on campus who are threatened or impacted by the crisis. The purpose of the CCP is to outline the roles, responsibilities and procedures that will guide the University in sharing information with all of its stakeholders during an emergency. This plan solely describes the crisis communication roles, responsibilities, and procedures that will be followed by the University’s Crisis Communication Team (CCT), and does not address other response or recovery procedures or measures that likely will also be implemented in response to an emergency incident and which fall under the responsibility of the Crisis Management Team (CMT).

This CCP is to be flexible in nature and used in conjunction with other emergency decision-making procedures of the University administration. This plan is a supplement to BU Communication Policy and provides more specific action details regarding the crisis communication protocols.

Definitions:

Crisis: is a significant emergency, dangerous situation or disturbance in the University's activities which has the potential to have a significant impact on the University’s operations and public image or reputation, and results in internal and/or external scrutiny and most likely extensive news coverage.

For the purpose of BU crisis communication plan, crisis may fall into one of the following two categories:

- a. Sudden unexpected incident, an abrupt emergency situation; such as large fires, terrorist attacks, kidnaping actions, natural disasters (earthquake), martial actions (curfew, closure, assault), outbreaks of pandemics and health threats..., and the like.
- b. Foreseeable controversy incident, being an ongoing and expanding dispute/conflict which begins small and grows larger by time releasing more information and actions; such as racial conflicts, lawsuits, unethical acts, civil disturbances, uprisings, strikes

or major protests either by students, faculty & staff or other persons on/near the campus..., and the like.

Crisis Management Team (CMT): is managed by the Vice Chancellor (VC) and is composed of all the Vice Presidents (VPs) (i.e. the Executive Council).

Crisis Communication Team (CCT): is managed by the Vice Chancellor (VC) and is composed of the Executive Vice President (EVP), Director of Marketing and Communications (Ex-Officio), a BU expert in journalism and media (preferably the Chairperson of the Journalism and Media department), a designated superlative spokesperson (VC and/or the EVP), and any other professional person deemed necessary by the VC.

BU Stakeholders: are individuals and/or organizations and/or agencies considered to have a genuine direct influential relationship with BU activities and progress. They may include faculty, staff, students, alumni, former staff, Members of the University Boards, current students' parents, prospective students and parents, donors, suppliers, contractors, the community, the media, local government agencies, and others affiliated with the University.

Applicability and Scope:

This CCP applies to all Bethlehem University community, and others affiliated with the University. It covers the protocol that BU concerned personnel will follow in order to notify key university constituents - primarily students, faculty & staff and news media - about events that affect them.

Considerations While Implementing the CCP:

1. The primary consideration is to ensure and protect life safety of all the employees and students of the university and to protect the integrity and reputation of the university in any crisis.
2. This plan must be implemented in conjunction with the normal decision-making hierarchy of the university and does not substitute that decision-making process.
3. This plan must be used in conjunction with the university's other operational crisis response plans managed by other parties of the University.
4. When the CCP is activated, the entire university community must be aware of the plan and of the roles everyone plays in its execution.
5. All crises must be reported to the CCT.

Procedures for the Management of Crisis Communication:

Principles of Crisis Communication:

In the event of an occurrence that causes significant disturbance to the University's activities which has reputational damage, the crisis communication in accordance with the following principles is required:

1. Whenever possible, crisis communication must be undertaken preemptively in order to prevent or minimize a crisis.
2. Crisis communication must be open, accountable and accessible to all BU stakeholders.
3. Speedy, proactive and regular communication of crisis information must be maintained as circumstances change, while ensuring control of the message and flow of information.

4. Effective continuous relationships with media must be maintained, in view of the importance of the media in times of crisis as media provides a way for the University to get its message to the general public.
5. All the different traditional and new media channels must be used to communicate with stakeholders, considering that different media are relevant for different stakeholders.

Process of Crisis Communication:

The following steps must be taken to effectively manage crisis communication by the University administration:

STEP 1. Identify, assess and report a crisis:

In case any member of BU community believes a crisis is pending or is under way, it must immediately be reported to the EVP, upon which the EVP must collect as much accurate information as possible, gathered from appropriate and credible sources. Based on a proper assessment of the nature and scope of the situation, the EVP must decide regarding the severity of the situation and make one of two choices:

- i. devise and implement a response to deflate the situation after informing the VC, or
- ii. immediately requests a meeting for the CCT and confer with them regarding the nature and severity of the crisis.

STEP 2. Respond to the crisis:

1. In the case of a sudden and unexpected crisis: The VC must, after assessing the seriousness of the situation with the CMT, officially declares a state of emergency, the activation of the CCP, and with the CCT develops a communication strategy, typically involving a short and simple first statement disseminated at the earliest possible time to the university management, employees, students as well as other concerned stakeholders:
 - i. acknowledging the crisis,
 - ii. stating facts surrounding the crisis, and
 - iii. providing contact details for further enquiries (if needed).
2. In the case of a foreseeable controversy crisis: the CCT must devise a simple strategy to forestall the crisis, and if needed, implements the strategy forthwith.
If the nature of the crisis concerns issues and events require input from several constituents of the university, or if a simple strategy is not likely to be effective, the CMT must convene and provides the suitable instructions to deal with the situation.

STEP 3. Actions to be Taken:

In the event of a sudden crisis, the CMT must be convened at the earliest possible time same day of the occurrence of the event. If all its members cannot attend immediately, the available members may proceed with actions designed to use the available time optimally. The following actions must be taken once the VC declares a state of emergency:

1. Firstly, the safety of students, employees and others on campus must be ensured and the activation of all applicable safety measures should be carried out immediately.

2. The CCT must devise a strategy and way forward to implement, establish and communicate a clear line of communication strategies for internal and external communication.
 - a. As a first priority, disseminate a notice to all employees and students identifying the lines of communication with internal and external target audiences, clearly indicating:
 - i. who are authorized to gather and verify information,
 - ii. where new and critical information must be forwarded to,
 - iii. who are authorized to release information,
 - iv. where media enquiries must be directed,
 - v. where public enquiries must be directed,
 - vi. where student enquiries must be directed.
 - b. Gather as many details as possible surrounding the crisis. Develop and maintain a fact sheet highlighting all known detail surrounding the crisis.
 - c. Develop several key messages for each of the BU stakeholders. Messages must:
 - i. be clear and simple for its stakeholders and the media,
 - ii. demonstrate concern about what is happening and for the people involved,
 - iii. explain what the university is doing to tackle the crisis,
 - iv. evolve as circumstances change and always aim to restore and maintain confidence and calm, balancing a sense of concern with resolve and action.
 - d. Write press releases for audiences and media, and drafting follow-up statements in response to public enquiries as more information becomes available.
 - e. Prepare standby statements according to the unfolding of events, and prepare background information for the media. Statements must be factual, not be speculative and would typically include:
 - i. facts surrounding the crisis,
 - ii. the University's stand in response to the crisis,
 - iii. what the University recommends the audience to do or not to do,
 - iv. confirmation of who the official spokesperson is (VC and/or the EVP),
 - v. contact details for media enquiries (if needed).
 - f. The statement must be disseminated as soon as possible to university management, employees, students and other stakeholders via various communication channels. The CCT must keep the following in mind:
 - i. **Control the flow of information:**
The CCT should control the flow of information by holding a series of press briefings depending on the nature of the crisis to enable the University to operate in a proactive manner, while providing the media with a timetable for when they can expect an update.
 - ii. **Control the message:**

The university should stick to the facts and to its main messages, thus controlling what information is disseminated. This information should be completely truthful and forthcoming. All "unpleasant" news should be told up-front and all at once in order to prevent it to trickle out slowly leading to protracted negative media coverage.

iii. **Release information first internally:**

Whenever practical, the CCT should attempt to inform employees and students of crises before details are released externally. The timeliness of this action is critical and every effort should be made to see that it occurs within two workdays from the occurrence of the crisis.

iv. **Respond to the media quickly and fairly:**

The media shapes public opinion about how the university is responding to the crisis, and it is therefore important to cooperate with the media, to be sensitive to media deadlines and to provide all reporters with the same, not exclusive, information. Distribute press releases and statements to the news media as rapidly as possible.

- g. Determine whether a news conference is an appropriate mean of conveying information to employees, students, the media, public and other stakeholders. If so, it may become necessary to schedule periodic news briefings. The university should also direct the public on where to go for more information; hot line numbers, web sites etc.
 - h. Activate a crisis hotline number, if necessary, that can be updated to include a specific message or to take calls from concerned stakeholders, such as parents and students. This number should be publicized in the event of a crisis.
 - i. In certain incidents, develop a plan to assist those who have been affected by considering what the university can do to help with, for instance; grief counselling, support groups, memorial services, safety seminars, distribution of safety tips, and hotline numbers that provide information to family members.
 - j. Implement, update and evaluate the plan's effectiveness continuously.
3. As far as possible only one superlative spokesperson (VC and/or the EVP) must be designated so that the university provides a unified, consistent message to the public. In cases of a significant and severe crisis, the VC must take the lead in conveying the University's response to the crisis. The spokesperson must work closely with the official(s) that has the most direct knowledge of the crisis, and must be kept informed of the most current and critical information and developments, and must be assigned one or more communication officers to aid especially in:
- i. keeping an up-to-date media contact list,
 - ii. overseeing all web changes and regular updates in consultation with the CCT,
 - iii. keeping abreast with the prevalence of false news and rumors in order to be able to forward information and to dispel the rumors publicly,

- iv. maintaining a separate log to record all calls and interviews requests from members of the media, ensuring that all calls are returned by the relevant people, and maintaining information files on the ongoing crisis,
- v. monitoring all media (broadcast, print, radio, social media, etc...) coverage of the incident/event and anticipate any problems in the way information is flowing to the news media, providing daily summaries of relevant media coverage to the CCT.

The spokesperson must connect with information providers on the ground, such as emergency personnel, civil defense, police and campus administrators, and maintain contact and good relations with them for the duration of the crisis. If the crisis involves a possible evacuation, the spokesperson should in conjunction with local authorities, inform the public about areas to be evacuated and time lines for the evacuations.

4. Identify key BU stakeholders/target audiences, and determine which of the University's internal and external stakeholders need to be informed of the situation and in what order. CCT must develop detailed plans and checklists to reach the designated audience
5. Messages must be delivered repeatedly and clearly and by one voice.
6. Coordinate the communication with the legal advisors of the university if necessary, in order to allow for the release of as much information as possible without jeopardizing any possible investigations or potential litigation.

STEP 4. Post-Crisis Event Evaluation and After-Action Report:

The VC will determine when a crisis has ended and provide an “All Clear” message to the key audiences and routine communication process can be resumed. The CCT must meet within 10 workdays following a crisis’ termination and review all actions taken as a result of the crisis to determine effectiveness and efficiency of operations and make any necessary changes to this plan. The following steps must be included in the evaluation:

1. The resolution of the crisis must be communicated appropriately to the audiences concerned. In case of any changes introduced surrounding the crisis, Website and social media accounts must be updated and all media contacts must be double-checked for completed interaction.
2. Following any crisis, appropriate action must take place to ensure that members of the university community receive needed information and assistance to help bring closure to the crisis as well as relief from the effects of the event. The possibility of helping the community recover, to return to normal and, if needed, to regain faith in the university after the crisis is over must be considered.
3. The media coverage of the crisis must be reviewed to determine how each of the University's actions was covered by the press in order to improve media strategies. Assigned role players who documented and monitored the news coverage surrounding a crisis, including internet publicity, newspaper articles, radio and television

broadcasts and social media must supply the CCT with a summary of news coverage, and the CCT must note:

- i. overall success or failure of the crisis communication effort,
 - ii. problems to be avoided in the future,
 - iii. appropriate follow-up measures.
4. Depending upon the nature of the crisis, services and assistance may have been rendered by agencies, companies or individuals from outside the university, the CCT must ensure that applicable follow-up information and letters of appreciation are forwarded to the persons and institutions concerned.
5. After finishing the evaluation phase, a report must be prepared and submitted to the CMT. The report should assess the university's handling of the situation, make recommendations to streamline and improve its procedures, and evaluate communication tools. The report should include:
- i. overall combined efforts of all involved stakeholders,
 - ii. any deficiencies observed or detected,
 - iii. recommended actions that should be taken to improve effectiveness,
 - iv. report findings and observations, evaluate media coverage and any follow-up activities as needed,
 - v. conduct debriefing of involved personnel, Web and social media staff and made fixes/improvements as recommended,
 - vi. assess the situation to determine the need for post-crisis interventions for employees, students, families and possibly others,
 - vii. evaluate effort and report; consider updates/changes to CCP,
 - viii. create a file, log of events and a timeline of the events.

STEP 5. Availability and review of this CCP:

This plan must be made available to internal stakeholders. This plan must be tested, evaluated and updated at least once a year by the EVP to ensure understanding of and commitment by all role-players to their responsibilities.