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Office of General Counsel

Crisis Management

Gary Cunningham,
General Counsel

MINNESOTA STATE

Noelle Hawton
Chief Marketing and Communications Officer

Crisis Management

Colleges and universities are the subjects of public attention on a daily basis. Crisis management is comprised of two main concerns:

- The problem or incident giving rise to the crisis must be addressed and resolved. This, of course, depends upon the problem.
- The campus must address the ensuing public stakeholder and media attention because of its responsibility to the public and because of possible harm to reputation.



Recognizing and Anticipating the Existence of a Crisis

- Ideally, campus responses to a crisis begins before there is media attention. College and university administrators and key communicators have the responsibility to recognize the emergence of a potential crisis.
- You all know the types of problems on college campuses that currently trigger public attention and scrutiny: campus violence including sexual assault, and especially gun violence; bomb threats; student protests; racial and other discrimination incidents; data breaches and scandal involving campus administration, coaches or athletes.
- Every year brings new forms of opportunities for crisis. This year, of course, it's COVID-19 outbreaks and unpopularity of COVID-19 protection measures.
- Using campus email address to send pornography to Canada.
- It doesn't have to be your campuses' conduct.

Communicate

- It is important that persons who learn of a potential crisis communicate with those campus employees who are responsible for the particular type of problem. It is everyone's responsibility to know who to call.
- In addition, campus officials must communicate with appropriate contacts at Minnesota State such as the General Counsel's Office and Marketing and Communications.

Respond to the Incident

- Of course, response to an incident depends upon the subject matter. Because the character of crises are predictable, response teams featuring campus experts should be created so that response can be immediate.
- Response teams must have periodic practice sessions. This is increasingly important as acceptable response time grows shorter.
- Campus leadership must speak with one voice.
- Inconsistent or changing responses or factual errors erodes stakeholder trust
- Solutions and communication of solutions must reflect institutional values.
- You are not alone.



Campus Violence/Active Shooter Scenario

- Safety of students and employees is paramount. Every campus should have an Emergency Operations Plan dealing with the active shooter scenario involving training of students and staff, exercises and responding to emergencies.
- Participation of local law enforcement.
 - Local law enforcement must be alerted
- Mass communication strategy should be in place – text, email, other messaging.

Sexual Assault

Federal and state law require that every campus have procedures in place for the reporting and for addressing sexual assault including an agreement with law enforcement.

- Take all allegations seriously and follow Board Policy 1B.3 and System Procedure 1B.3.1.
- Faculty, staff and students should know where to file a complaint and the identity of the Title IX officer.
- Keep investigations moving – 60 day time limit by policy in typical case.
- Consider/offer services to complainants and respondents (if appropriate) in all cases even if no investigation or discipline.
- Form a relationship with local law enforcement.

Student Protests

- Identify and analyze state and local laws and ordinances including local safety restrictions, such as Fire Marshal's limits on occupancy
- Consult policies on speech
- Time, place and manner restrictions
 - Protestors must leave by close of business day
 - Some buildings should be off limits because of no public access, threat of injury
- Written permit requirements
- Student Code of Conduct
- Follow existing policies and procedures
- Advice from General Counsel's Office on First Amendment issues

Racial Discrimination, Sexual Harassment or Other Significant Discrimination Incidents

- Racial, sexual harassment or other discrimination incidents can involve student on student, employee on student, employee on employee or unaffiliated member of the public on student or employee.
- Student-on-student problems are addressed through the 1B.1 procedures and the student Code of Conduct.
- Employee on student is addressed in the 1B.1 procedures. An investigation should be started as soon as possible.
- Off campus events, even events in other states can have effects on our campuses.

Racial Discrimination, Sexual Harassment or Other Significant Discrimination Incidents

- Examine social media.
- Involvement of athletes, liquor.
- Coaches.
- The third scenario (unaffiliated person as respondent) is much more difficult since the perpetrator is not subject to campus remedial processes. Several possible remedies exist:
 - Involve local law enforcement
 - No trespass notice
 - Student education– reaching out to students
- Should student or employee remain on campus during an investigation?

Administrator Controversy

- Types
 - Sexual harassment
 - Financial impropriety
 - Ethical lapse
 - Academic fraud
 - Racial or other protected class slurs
 - Prior employment
- Transparency is good, head in the sand is bad.
- Address problems when they are small, before they grow up.

In the Event of a Data Breach

Security Breach Data Notification Guideline 5.23.1.13

- All system employees must immediately report known or suspected breaches of security to their supervisor or the designated system individual or office (Local Campus Authority “LCA”).
- If suspected breach involves a potential computer virus or other malware, disconnect affected equipment from the internet and turn it off until Minnesota State IT Security has been contacted.
- LCA must notify IT Security immediately (Craig Munson).



In the Event of a Data Breach

- The Department of Education requires notification of data breaches and suspected data breaches within 24 hours of discovery. IMMEDIATE coordination with System Office IT Security and OGC is essential.

In the Event of a Data Breach

- OGC, with consultation of other personnel, will determine if a data breach has occurred.
- The MGDPA (Minn. Stat. § 13.055) requires notice to affected individuals of a breach of security (unauthorized access) for any private or confidential data (not just SSN or financial information) in any medium (not just computerized).
- OGC will assist in determining whether notice is required, how it must be done and other details.
- If notice is required, Internal Audit will notify the Legislative Auditor as required by Minn. Stat. § 3.971.

Social Media

- Types of Problems
 - Threats of violence and harassment/discriminatory comments.
 - Impersonation of campus officials, departments, or student groups.
 - Copyright/Trademark infringement.
- Discovering a Problem
 - Monitoring: If you have specific information about a threat, it is appropriate in order to facilitate campus safety.
 - From a Communication standpoint, monitoring is essential.
 - Tools are available to all campuses to monitor social media.
 - Reports from the community.

Social Media

- Ways to Respond?
 - Distinguish between official accounts (e.g. @minnstate.edu or a college's official Facebook page) and non-system owned accounts
- For Official Accounts
 - Rely on the Acceptable Use Policy (5.22.1)
 - Users may not engage in harassment, threats to or defamation of others, stalking and/or illegal discrimination
 - An institution may limit who creates official pages and uses campus logos and trademarks
 - Users may not forge the identification of the person using system information technology
 - Fight speech with more speech



Crisis Communication Concerns

- Consider whether and what type of information should be sent to interested groups
 - Stakeholders
 - Employees
 - Students
 - Alumni
 - Local Community
 - Key or Local Legislators
- Identify a spokesperson for the issue. It is of vital importance that the college or university speak with one voice.



Crisis Communication Concerns

- Media
 - Plan for communication in advance, may develop templates based upon past occurrences.
 - Opt to be as transparent as possible and as responsive as possible.
- Social Media
 - Planning should take into account social media channels, monitoring and protocol regarding how and if to respond.

What Standards Apply?

- Minnesota Government Data Practices Act
 - All government data
- Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)
 - Student records
- Other laws, standards depending on content, defamation
- Sanctions for violations – to institution, individuals

You are a Steward

- You are authorized to access/use private data to the extent you need it to do your work.
- You are ONLY authorized to access/use private data for assigned work purposes.
- You are responsible to protect non-public data from improper disclosure.

Existence and Status of a Complaint Against an Employee is Public

- Status is open, pending, under investigation, closed.
- Existence does not include nature of complaint or identity of complainant.

Final Disposition of a Disciplinary Action is Public and the Reasons for Discipline are Public

- Discipline is final only if arbitration is complete or time limit has passed.
- Discipline for administrators is complete upon imposition of discipline.
- If no discipline is imposed, data is not public (unless subject is public official).
- Investigation data on public official is public even if official resigns or is terminated before discipline is imposed.

Handling a Media Inquiry

- Capture the question accurately
- Tell them you will have to get back to them
- Ask for their deadline
- Refer the inquiry to your campus communicator to handle.
- Respond within their deadline whenever possible, even if it is to tell them you don't yet have the information or can't obtain the information because it isn't public
- In a crisis (and as a part of crisis planning) instruct non-spokespeople how to handle a surprise media interaction

Questions & Answers

Please Chat in your questions to the host or the panelists.



How To Access Today's Materials

- Within a few business days, the recording link and PDF will be available

OR

- If you would like a PDF copy of the PowerPoint right away, contact Liz Hegman at liz.hegman@minnstate.edu



Minnesota State Contact Information

Gary Cunningham
General Counsel
gary.cunningham@minnstate.edu
651-201-1818

Noelle Hawton
Chief Marketing and Communications Officer
noelle.hawton@minnstate.edu
651-201-1801

Office of General Counsel
<https://www.minnstate.edu/system/ogc/index.html>

Marketing and Communications
<https://www.minnstate.edu/system/marcomm/index.html>

