

Goucher College Crisis Communication Plan

Standard Operating Procedures

I. INTRODUCTION

The Office of Communications has been charged by the president of the college with collecting and conveying all information during a crisis. The purpose of this plan is to outline communications procedures during a crisis, including communications within the college community and with the media and the public. These procedures complement the Campus Emergency Procedures Guide (http://www.goucher.edu/documents/Safety_Security/EmergencyProcedures.pdf). In every crisis the primary goal of the college is to protect the safety and wellbeing of students, faculty, and staff.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE PLAN

1. To be able to assess situations and determine whether a communications response is warranted.
2. To assemble a Crisis Communications Team that will allow the college to respond quickly, accurately, sensitively, and responsibly with campus and off-campus constituencies and media outlets.
 - a. Communicate facts and updates about the situation in a timely manner
 - b. Make affected audiences aware of potential emergency situations and protective actions
 - c. Identify audiences that should be informed about the situation (students, parents, faculty, staff, Board of Trustees, alumnae/i, donors, media, general public)
 - d. Coordinate cooperation with responding agencies (police, federal bureaus, hospitals, etc.)
 - e. Minimize rumors
 - f. Restore order and protect confidence in the college.

III. ASSESSMENT

1. The individual who encounters or learns about a potential crisis should gather as much accurate information as possible and then contact the president and/or appropriate vice president, and the director of communications. These “first-responders” will determine whether an immediate response is needed and if it is necessary to convene the Crisis Communication Team. If the team is not called together formally, members will establish an informal calling tree to contact other team members. This will be done both to inform all team members about the situation and to gather as much information as possible. This team will be composed of members from these areas as appropriate:
 - a. Office of Communications
 - b. Office of the President
 - c. Student Affairs
 - d. Academic Affairs

- e. Human Resources
- f. Legal Counsel
- g. Public Safety
- h. Student Health and Counseling
- i. Office of the Chaplain
- j. Affected academic department

*This list is not exhaustive and is likely to vary by situation.

(Please see appendix for a list of Crisis Communications Team members and their contact information. This information will be updated every quarter.)

IV. PROCEDURES

The Crisis Communications Team will continue gathering information, assess the situation, and develop a plan of action. Necessary steps are to:

1. **Designate a spokesperson.** Generally, this is the highest-ranking individual who has direct knowledge of the events.
 - a. In cases of significant crisis, the president or appropriate vice president should take the lead in conveying the administration's response to the crisis. A member from the Office of Communications may also be designated as a spokesperson.
 - b. Faculty, students, and staff should be instructed to refer all requests for comment to the designated spokesperson.
2. **Prepare facts, official statement.** A team member (Office of Communications) will compile a fact sheet/draft a new release or official statement for on and off-campus constituencies and the media. Information will include statement of the situation with all known details that can be released.
 - a. This info will be approved by the president or appropriate vice president.
 - b. This information must be time stamped and updated frequently.
 - c. In all instances, the college must strive to protect student/faculty/staff members' right to privacy, as outlined in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).
 - d. When inquiries are directed to the college concerning a criminal charge or pending criminal investigation, caution must be exercised not to compromise these proceedings. Legal Counsel may need to provide input in these circumstances.
 - e. In the event of injury or death, the college will not release names of involved parties until the family has been notified. Again, FERPA guidelines will be followed.
3. **Release information.**
 - a. Official statement regarding the situation will be conveyed to internal audiences via email, Goucher's website, and by voicemail or e2 alert if necessary.
 - b. The Crisis Communications Team will keep information circulating to senior officials to ensure they are kept up to date as the crisis unfolds.

- c. External audiences will be notified through press releases/official statements/individual interviews. A press conference may be convened in extreme situations.
- d. All information that is released to external audiences and the media will be coordinated with the information released by responding emergency agencies to ensure accuracy. No information will be given out off record.
- e. A member of the Crisis Communications Team (Office of Communications) will conduct all communications with the media and set up interviews as requested.
- f. In extreme situations, an emergency media center may need to be established. All media will be directed to assemble at the center to work and receive information.
- g. A member of the Crisis Communications Team (Office of Communications) will determine whether it is appropriate to allow location shooting by TV and newspaper photographers. The team member will accompany photographers as necessary. Additionally, he or she will determine if an internal photographer or videographer is necessary, either to help media or to document events for campus archives/information or for potential litigation.
- h. In general, the college will welcome reporters and allow them as much access as public safety and decorum dictate. Every effort will be made to insulate students, faculty, and staff from invasive newsgathering.

V. Post-Crisis Protocol

1. Grief counseling, mental health services, support groups, memorial services, safety seminars may need to be established based on the nature of the crisis. The Office of Communications will notify the campus community as necessary.
2. Within a week of the crisis, the Crisis Communications Team will convene to debrief.
3. The Office of Communications will monitor (and correct errors as necessary), assess, and archive coverage of the situation.