

## **CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLAN**

**PURPOSE:** To provide a clear and effective communications plan for the internal management of University emergencies or crises.

**POLICY:** Franklin Pierce University shall be prepared to effectively protect itself from any emergency or crisis situation.

**DATE APPROVED:** JULY 7, 1999

**REVISED:** SEPTEMBER 1, 2005

**REVIEWED:** JULY 1, 2010; SEPTEMBER 1, 2007

### **PRACTICES & PROCEDURES:**

#### Relationship to Other Incident Response Plans:

The Crisis Communications Plan is a companion strategy to (1) the *Critical Incident Response Plan* administered by Campus Safety and (2) the *Response to Death in the Franklin Pierce Community* protocol administered by Human Resources. Responsibility for managing and executing the *Crisis Communications Plan* resides with the Marketing and Communications function within College Relations.

The *Critical Incident Response Plan* (CIRP) is designed to ensure the physical safety of students, employees and participants in the College community. A “critical incident” is defined by the CIRP as any condition, man-made or natural, which results in a significant disruption to the operation and institutional mission of Franklin Pierce.

The *Response to Death in the Franklin Pierce Community* is designed to ensure correct, effective and sensitive response to the loss of life. Its scope of concern is generally limited to the individuals immediately affected by the death of a community member and interaction with the appropriate public officials.

The *Crisis Communications Plan* addresses the need for Franklin Pierce to speak clearly and appropriately to all audiences when a critical incident or condition occurs. Its scope of concern is broader than that of the CIRP, as it assists the College in managing both short- and long-term communications with a diverse audience that includes the general public. Therefore, *The Crisis Communications Plan* will most often be implemented along with the *Critical Incident Response Plan* and *Response to Death* plan.

Purpose: In a time of crisis, clear, accurate and appropriate communication to all constituencies is important. Therefore all non-emergency or non-procedural communication to all constituencies will follow the guidelines of the Crisis Communications Plan

Examples include...

- Incidents of death or injury on campus or affecting a College community member
- Incidents of campus infrastructure failure such as a building collapse or equipment malfunction
- Occurrences or allegations of misconduct by a student or employee
- Health threats such as communicable disease, food or water contamination, and hazardous spills or releases
- Conflict between campus factions
- Public accusations against the College or one of its community members (regardless of whether these are unfounded)
- A negative report about the College in the media (regardless of its accuracy)
- Natural disasters and particularly the College's response to such
- Current events that might cause the media to revisit a negative past incident (e.g. Sentencing of Dennis Kozlowski might have invited calls for comment from media who recalled his gift to the College; a suicide at another college might cause the media to cite the Franklin Pierce incident as a supporting example for a trend)

The above list is far from comprehensive. It is not possible to imagine or plan for every contingency. The test for determining when to implement the Crisis Communications Plan will be an affirmative answer to the question "Is this an out-of-the-ordinary incident or event." The practice will be to err on the side of caution and preparedness.

### **STAGE ONE – Assembling the Crisis Team**

1. The individual closest to the incident or condition, at the time of its occurrence, will be considered the "first responder." Proximity to the incident or condition is determined by physical distance or time elapsed (i.e. the first person notified). It will be the responsibility of the "first responder" to notify his or her immediate superior who will, in turn, notify the senior manager (Vice President) of the appropriate division.
2. The Vice President will notify the Director of Communications and the President. A conversation between the Vice President, Director of Communications and the President will determine who else needs to be brought into the discussion as a member of the Crisis Communications Team. These individuals will be persons who have important information pertinent to the situation and/or have a liaison role with external groups that gives them insight on the communication needs of such groups.
3. A time and location will be set for a meeting of the Crisis Communications Team. This should take place on campus and as close to the incident or conditions as possible, to aid in fact gathering. If necessary and in the interest of time, one or more members of the team may participate in this meeting by phone.

### **STAGE TWO – Determining Facts and Communication Strategy**

1. Team members will seek to establish the facts of the crisis. In some cases, this may require making calls and interviewing individuals involved.
2. Team members will determine a basic communication strategy. This will consist of deciding (a) what audiences need to be informed, (b) what media are appropriate to convey those messages and (c) what key messages should be communicated. Audience

- may include (but are not limited to) students, faculty, staff, parents, trustees, alumni and residents living near the College. Particular attention will be given to the appropriate timing and path of communication to the Board of Trustees and the Alumni Association Board of Directors.
3. It will also be determined whether the Crisis Communications Team should call on outside counsel for guidance concerning legal issues or media relations strategies.
  4. The Director of Communications will immediately begin drafting messages for review, refinement, approval and issuance. He or she will also serve as the College's primary spokesperson (*see also 5a below*).
  5. In the course of the meeting, team members will also address the following questions:
    - a) Will there be a condition where an individual other than the Director of Communications offers a statement to the media? There may be cases where someone other than the institutional spokesperson should issue a public statement for purposes of credibility. An example might be an eyewitness to an incident or someone who can address a complex question in sufficient detail so it does not appear the College is hiding behind a spokesperson.
    - b) What will the College do if the media arrive on campus – either announced or unannounced? What steps are necessary to manage visual impressions if this occurs?
    - c) Is it advantageous for the College to hold a press conference to gain control of the message? If so, who will participate? Where and how will this be conducted? What facility or logistical support is required?
    - d) What information are we prepared to share up front? What information will we respond to only if asked? What information will not be shared outside the Crisis Team or beyond the institution?
    - e) What will be our reasons for withholding comment? Is it to protect an individual's or family's privacy? Is it because information is still being gathered and is currently incomplete? Is it because an investigation is continuing? Is it because we are legally constrained from sharing information? The goal is to avoid a "no comment" statement to a reporter and a "College refused to comment" remark in a news story.
    - f) When will the crisis team reconvene to gauge the success of its communication strategy and decide what additional steps may be necessary in light of changing conditions?
  6. The Director of Communications will inform members of the Crisis Communications Team of any media inquiries, responses to the incident or reactions by members of College constituencies. He or she will also keep a written record of such, in a format consisting of (1) the nature of the inquiry followed by (2) the nature of the response. This will be used to inform decisions made in STAGE THREE and to help the institution learn from experience.

**STAGE THREE – Assessing Whether Goals Have Been Met, Need for Additional Steps**

1. The team will reconvene to discuss whether the goals of the crisis communication plan have been met or if further statements are necessary – either to the media or key College constituencies.
2. If the story has run its course in the media and key audiences have been sufficiently informed, the team will determine whether additional strategic messaging / damage control should take place. If so, a course of action will be decided. This could consist of a meeting with a news outlet’s editorial board, a letter to the editor, a clarification or full story in a campus publication or a series of media pitches centered on positive accomplishments that place a single negative incident in context.

## **FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES**

- The only person authorized to speak to the media on behalf of the College is the Director of Communications – unless otherwise directed by and approved by a member of the senior staff in discussion with the President. The appropriate response by anyone else to a reporter is: “Our Director of Communications is handling that information. I’ll put you in touch with him / her.”
- The media are always treated with professionalism and respect. An unauthorized reporter on campus is politely escorted to the office of the Director of Communications. The threat of calling Campus Safety is only used if the reporter becomes confrontational (either verbally or physically) or will not accompany the employee to the office of the Communications Director.
- An employee should NEVER run from a film crew, close a door on a film crew, place a hand or article of clothing over a camera lens, hang up on a reporter or say “no comment.” The appropriate response is to react calmly and state that “Our Director of Communications is handling that information. I’ll put you in touch with him / her.”
- The College will NEVER offer false or misleading information in order to promote a positive public image. In the course of constructing messages to external audiences, members of the Crisis Communications Team will ask themselves “could this information stand the scrutiny of our harshest critics?”
- All correspondence and news coverage related to crises will be maintained in indexed folders by the Director of Communications so future incidents can be handled in a context of prior experience and collective learning.
- Department heads are responsible for sharing Crisis Communication procedures with their staff.