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The Impact of Crisis

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Thanks to the variety in institutions of higher education today, opportunities abound for enriching student lives and enhancing our society by educating and preparing the next generation of leaders and citizens. Regardless of their background, precollege preparation, interests, or social status, students have opportunities to interact, learn, and experience life in all its wonder and intricacies. *Urban*, *rural*, *public*, *private*, *large*, *small*, *faith-based*, *secular*, *commuter*, *residential*, and other terms are used to categorize our institutions. Yet despite our tendency to separate institutions into groups that seek to establish commonalities across what appears to be a diverse array of entities, one absolute that binds them all together is their core of students, faculty, and staff who live and learn at their campuses. With this interplay of people and institutions, the inevitable reality is that incidents and events that are characterized as crises are certain to occur. The impact of crises on the facilities and the institutions' ability to accomplish their educational mission must be addressed, but it is the human side of the equation that begs our attention as educators committed to serving our communities.

Today's Ethic of Care

Historically, educational institutions' control of student behavior and ability to function in loco parentis were the standards by which we measured our relationship to students and our commitment to

the families who placed their children in our charge. That outdated legal relationship no longer guides our actions or philosophical positions. However, it did lead us to a modern institutional commitment to caring, respect, and concern for our students' growth and development (Rhatigan, 2000).

This transition from legal guardian to caring educator has been gradual, and we remain connected despite our arm's-length legal relationship with students. Bickel and Lake (1999) describe the death of in loco parentis as resulting from the civil rights movement, when students increasingly distanced themselves from universities and colleges and challenged institutions' ability either to control their behavior or to intercede in their personal lives. This distancing between students and institutions led to a period in which the institutions acted as "bystanders." As a result of increasing legal challenges and court decisions, institutions had no legal duties to students and were not responsible for harm (Bickel & Lake, 1999). Institutions seemed helpless to influence student life, and they struggled in the court of public opinion as student populations began to appear more disruptive and in need of greater direction and guidance. The need for some protection from harm, some entity to which to look for assistance, has led us to a new model, prevalent on campuses today, whereby it is believed that we have a duty to care for the students in our charge. Although some see this as a return to in loco parentis, it is more likely a period of transition, as a new relationship between students, their families, and the institutions that serve them evolves to address today's expectations. The legal decisions that continue to refine this relationship must be monitored constantly and used to update the policies and procedures we follow in serving our students. However, the underpinning of this relationship, regardless of how we characterize or label it, is the ethic of care. Caring for the individual, providing support to those who can benefit from attention to their needs, and enhancing the human experience as educators and mentors underlie much of what we do in higher education. It may be

the most important value we hold to direct our actions and responses during times of crisis, when tragedies overwhelm us as individuals and communities.

By basing our actions on an ethic of care for our students, staff, and faculty when we respond to crises, we put a human face on our institution. Although we all want our problems, concerns, and personal issues to matter to the institution, the institution as a bureaucracy tends to operate on its own set of values and priorities to accomplish its mission regardless of individuals' personal needs. If the institution is to be successful in responding to crises over the long run, it must reach out to its constituencies with compassion, concern, and sensitivity to the situation at hand. The staff charged with first response must be free to engage the community affected by the tragedy without restrictions. The spokesperson for the institution, whether it is the president, a member of the media relations staff, or any number of possible administrators, must be able to speak directly to the affected communities about the desire to help ease any suffering or loss.

At some institutions it is expected that this will occur as a matter of course. Families choose to send their children to smaller institutions with the belief that they will receive more personalized attention there. Although many assume this is a clear expectation among parents of children at private colleges or universities, public institutions are not free from this expectation either. At large institutions, although there may be a desire for personal attention, there is also likely a realization that students will be more anonymous on campus. The irony is that, in times of crisis, especially large-scale events, larger institutions are more likely to have the resources to respond to the situation whereas the small, "caring" institutions can easily be overwhelmed by the scope and complexity of the tragedy. Indeed, when the large, "impersonal" institution does respond with care and compassion, the benefits of this unexpected response are dramatic. Inability to respond compassionately may be expected from a large bureaucracy, but it is totally unacceptable at a small

institution, especially if it has presented itself in its recruitment of students as a supportive environment.

Regardless of the size of the institution or expectation of the constituencies, the impact of the institutional response over time is profound. Did the college or university reach out to the student and his or her family and friends? Did the institution assist the academic department, and was the staff able to work through a difficult loss? Was there a sense of support and compassion among the staff? The emotions that arise out of these interactions go home with families and are shared with neighbors and friends. Stories of care and concern are told in residence halls and other living units, passed between students, and handed down to next generations. They are conveyed in the departments and help form a network of support among the staff and faculty as they return to their normal routines.

The converse is, of course, also true. The families who are helped but not cared for, interacted with but not embraced, responded to but not engaged, will return to their homes with a much different sense of what happened. The faculty or staff member who returns to the classroom or office with no sense of concern from the institution has no opportunity to enlarge the institution's role as a community that cares for its members, one that reaches out to others in time of need and responds with compassion and dignity.

Lessons Learned from Experience

Over the past fifty years, as advances in technology have expanded the reach of televised media and communications, campus tragedies have become more prominent in our lives, regardless of where they occur. Our understanding of what can occur on college campuses affects our planning and preparation. Several specific incidents stand out—not so much for their uniqueness as for the impact they have had on our thinking and response to subsequent events, even when they are relatively minor in comparison. Neither the size nor the location of the institution, nor the scope of the crisis, has been

as important as the impact of these crises on our collective communities of higher education.

University of Texas at Austin, 1966

The Texas Tower at the University of Texas at Austin stands as one of the most dominant landmarks on a college campus in the United States. At 307 feet, its height, in comparison to other buildings in the area, draws your eye to it immediately. Although not as tall as the nearby state capitol building, it is built on higher ground and thus gives the appearance of being taller (MacLeod, 2005). Constructed in 1936 as a centerpiece of the campus and community, it has, unfortunately, since 1966 been indelibly linked to the actions of Charles Whitman on August 1 of that year. After murdering his mother and wife earlier in the day, at approximately 11:30 A.M. he entered the tower with a footlocker full of weapons and ammunition and proceeded to the observation deck on the twenty-eighth floor. Over the span of the next ninety-six minutes, he killed fourteen people and injured dozens, using skills that had earned him a sharpshooter's badge while serving in the U.S. Marine Corps (MacLeod, 2005).

Although neither the first nor the last shooting on a college campus, this incident stands out for its undeniable impact on the community and the nation. On-site television coverage of news events was still developing. In 1966, a television camera was a bulky and cumbersome apparatus to use and most television crews were still using film to capture images for delayed broadcasts, but with an incident of this magnitude in a state capital with established local media, details were provided immediately to the local population by way of on-site radio coverage ("KLBJ: The Story of Austin Radio," n.d.). Students and area residents recall tuning in to the radio and hearing about the tragedy as it unfolded (Preece, 1996). Despite being warned to stay away by local radio reporter Neal Spelce, who was crouched behind his mobile broadcast unit in the shadow of the tower, area residents, including students, instead

loaded their high-powered deer rifles and headed to campus to return fire alongside local police officers (Preece, 1996; MacLeod, 2005). Later, film shot by Gordon Wilkinson, a reporter from KTBC, captured the definitive images of the tragedy, including images of the wounded and interviews with students who risked their lives to rescue fellow students (Brown, 2006).

Just one week earlier, it had been discovered that Richard Speck had killed nine student nurses in their dormitory in Chicago. With this event still in mind, the media's on-site coverage of the Austin killings turned the nation's attention to that campus. The August 12, 1966, cover of *Life* magazine—one of the standards by which we as a nation gauged the importance of an event in that era—showed a photo of the Texas Tower taken by Shel Hershorn through the bullet-shattered glass of a store window in Austin; it connected us all to the incident ("Texas Store Window Shattered by Sniper," 1966).

In addition to an increasing sensitivity to this type of tragedy on campuses, police agencies across the nation began developing a new type of response. The first Special Weapons and Tactical Teams (SWAT), created at that time, were believed to be a direct response to this incident (Snow, 1996). These teams forever changed our university security operations.

Kent State University, 1970

Reaction to the military draft of college-age men was beginning to manifest in larger and more violent disruptions on college campuses in some communities. The internal conflict between their ambivalence toward the war in Vietnam and a desire to serve their country as their parents had during World War II was growing. On the campus of Kent State University in Ohio over a four-day period in May 1970, the demonstrations escalated in violence and destruction. Windows in local businesses were smashed, the ROTC building on campus was burned to the ground, and the National Guard was brought in to control the situation. On May 4, the university

banned a planned noon rally, believing that the National Guard's presence made the demonstration illegal. Shortly after noon, the demonstrators (described as a core group of about five hundred and as many as two thousand "cheerleaders" who came to show support) began to throw rocks at the National Guard troops, who had ordered them to disperse. Through clouds of tear gas, the troops moved forward to disperse the crowd with loaded weapons, and after retreating to the top of Blanket Hill, turned and fired into the crowd. Four students were killed and nine wounded in a period of thirteen seconds (Lewis & Hensley, 1998), and the now-famous Pulitzer Prize–winning photo of Mary Vecchio, a fourteen-year-old runaway, screaming over the body of Jeffrey Miller was splashed across the front pages of newspapers and magazines around the country (Tuchman, 2000).

Campuses would never be the same again. Antiwar efforts expanded, students who had previously been ambivalent about the issue were galvanized to action, and new allies of the core antiwar demonstrators added their support. Campuses closed or canceled classes for varying periods of time to minimize additional disruption, but the trust between the students and the institutions they attended was damaged significantly and would require years to repair. In some cases, it never has been repaired.

Lehigh University, 1986

In April 1986, Jeanne Clery, a nineteen-year-old freshman, was brutally raped and murdered in her residence hall room on the campus of Lehigh University. The person accused of the crime and ultimately convicted and sentenced to death in the state of Pennsylvania was a student at Lehigh who had entered through a series of propped-open doors in the girls' residence hall (Clery & Clery, 2001). This personal tragedy of the Clery family became the centerpiece of a national initiative by her parents to require colleges and universities to report the occurrence of crimes in their campus communities to prospective students and families. Their efforts were

fueled by the belief that colleges and universities were routinely hiding and covering up violent crimes to protect their institutions' reputations. Sympathetic legislators agreed with them, and through the lobbying efforts of Campus Security Inc., a nonprofit organization founded by the Clerys, created the Crime Awareness and Campus Security Act of 1990. This legislation and its evolution since 1990 into what is now known as the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act, has changed the nature of the discussion on college campuses at orientation programs, putting front and center the expectations of today's parents regarding the responsibility of institutions to protect and warn their children about potential harms.

That doors are sometimes propped open in a residence hall should come as no surprise to anyone who has ever lived or worked in a living unit on a college campus. Helping young people understand the security risks of living away from their families for the first time is an ongoing challenge for student affairs and campus safety officers. It was the Clerys' position that many of our colleges and universities did not take this responsibility seriously before their daughter's death. Whether colleges and universities were doing a good job or not in this area is no longer an issue. The personal tragedy of the Clery family, which initially affected only a small circle of family and friends, now affects us all as all campuses, and especially student affairs professionals and public safety officers, are required to be accountable to families and students as risk managers. This incident lives on with us every day on college campuses since 1986. Connie and Howard Clery have achieved their goal: their daughter lives on in our collective memory and has helped avert subsequent tragedies like theirs.

Pan Am Flight 103, 1988

In the early evening of December 21, 1988, international terrorism first touched U.S. college campuses when Pan Am Flight 103 exploded at thirty-one thousand feet and crashed to the ground in

pieces in and around Lockerbie, Scotland. Among the dead were eleven citizens of Lockerbie and 259 passengers, including students from numerous institutions returning home for the Christmas holidays from study abroad ("Bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 Over Lockerbie," 2000). Syracuse University had the largest contingent, with thirty-five students, but others studying through the Syracuse program brought the tragedy home to their campuses and homes outside the spotlight shining on Syracuse (*Victims of Pan Am Flight 103*, n.d.). As at Kent State and UT-Austin, the power of the media and the visual images of the horror of an airplane crash connected us all. Video of smoking wreckage, the seared earth in Lockerbie where the fuselage had hit, and the largest piece of the 747 fuselage lying in a field near the town, demanded our attention and sympathy. The latter image continued to be shown repeatedly on the cover of news magazines and as backdrops in subsequent news stories and is so closely identified with the tragedy that it has become an icon of this sort of event. The story took on a life of its own, with theories of conspiracy and collusion by governments, mismanagement, and poor security on the part of Pan Am, and numerous human interest stories featuring mistaken notifications of death, changed travel plans that resulted in survivors who had taken other flights, and the unending pain and suffering of the families who lost their loved ones so unexpectedly due to a terrorist act.

Once again, the scale of this tragedy and its impact on our campuses changed the way we view our off-campus experiences but also affected our sense of safety from forces in the world that until this incident seemed far away. Although new and dreadful terrorist acts have occurred more frequently in the years since, we can still look back at this incident as the beginning of a new era in the American realization of international terrorism and its effects on our country. Where since the end of World War II we had felt impervious to attacks, we were now entering a period of highly visible, high-impact, media-conscious terrorism that targeted our citizens, and by relation, our students and learning communities.

The University of Florida, 1990

The age of the twenty-four-hour news channel and satellite television trucks that allowed any story of local significance to immediately become a national story dawned in August 1990, when the bodies of four students at the University of Florida and one from nearby Santa Fe Community College were discovered over a five-day period in Gainesville. The ensuing onslaught of media attention in the midst of a police investigation to identify and capture what appeared to be a serial killer led to widespread panic among students and families connected to Gainesville. The attention brought to bear on the institution forced it to spend significant financial and staff resources to respond to a public only loosely connected to the university. What had been the cover of a magazine and a series of newspaper articles immediately following the 1966 incident in Austin in 1990 turned into two weeks of daily news conferences, false arrests, repeated broadcast of videotape of bodies on gurneys being removed from apartments, human interest stories about fear and panic in the community and university, sensationalized television talk shows, and law enforcement efforts to stop rumors of secret morgues and unreported additional deaths ("Students at University of Florida," 1990).

The university's use of the media to communicate with the public was also new. It took advantage of the massive interest by the national and state media. Coordination of official responses by the central administration allowed the university to tell its story of concern and support to all who wanted to listen and ultimately allowed the students to return to campus and resume normal operations despite an unresolved police investigation. The national media was forever tied to subsequent events on college campuses, regardless of their scope. No photo opportunity or sound bite was out of reach, and in fact, all were available for immediate broadcast and publication as events unfolded. This was in marked contrast to the response to a similar incident at Florida State University that had occurred back in 1974, when one Saturday night Ted Bundy mur-

dered two women in a sorority house on that campus. The university staff had all day Sunday to prepare before the national and state media descended on Tallahassee on Monday. But in 1990, it became clear that this kind of time to plan a coherent and consistent response was no longer available. The planning now had to become part of any campus's general preparation for responding to tragedy and crisis.

The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1991–92

Not all crises come in forms visible to the naked eye. Over a fifteen-month period spanning 1991–92, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) and surrounding communities were stalked by a sinister yet invisible killer: *meningococcemia*. A bacterial infection that begins with flu-like symptoms causes an inflammation of the lining of the brain and the spinal cord or blood infections. Treatment with antibiotics during the earliest stages of the infection are usually successful, but because the symptoms resemble those of the flu, effective treatment may be delayed, causing devastating results in some cases ("University of Illinois," 1991). The group living conditions of many student populations, such as in residence halls or Greek letter chapter houses, exacerbate the potential for transmittal of the infection. Coupled with substantial misinformation about meningitis, the fear of contagion and harm resulted in a health crisis for the institution that required a large-scale response. Meanwhile, eight students at UIUC and one at neighboring Parkland College were infected with meningococcemia, and tragically, three died. Yet fifty-seven hundred students at UIUC were given oral antibiotics after the first two students died in 1991, and over the next year, eighteen thousand more were given free vaccinations in an attempt to stop the spread of the infection and ease the tension in the community ("Meningitis Scare Prompts Vaccinations," 1992).

Subsequent to this incident, some states, under focused lobbying by drug companies and interest groups, have required colleges

and universities to inform incoming students of the increased risk of infection associated with living in high-density communities like residence halls in an attempt to have more of them vaccinated prior to enrollment. As new vaccines are developed, this particular type of large-scale health crisis may disappear. However, the ability of institutions to mobilize their resources to respond to health crises remains an important piece of any crisis preparation. With bioterrorism now a strong concern at the Department of Homeland Security, large-scale events and high-visibility populations of young people at colleges and universities make attractive targets for release of toxins and viral agents that could quickly cause widespread health crises.

California State University-Northridge, 1994

Each region of the world has its own unique natural disasters to which local residents must respond. The U.S. Gulf Coast and East Coast must prepare for hurricanes, whereas parts of the Midwest must be ready to respond to tornados or heavy snow. The West Coast is forever linked in the public's mind to earthquakes and their devastation.

On January 17, 1994, Southern California experienced a 6.7 magnitude earthquake with its epicenter only a mile from the California State University-Northridge (CSUN) campus. At the time considered the most costly natural disaster in U.S. history, with damage estimated at up to $40 billion (Rodrigue, Rovsi, & Flace, 1997), this tragedy is viewed as a case study in how to recover effectively. Over the next eight years, in the words of former CSUN President Blenda Wilson, the university was "not just back—better" (Sodders, 2004).

Throughout Los Angeles the devastation was overwhelming, with over 114,000 buildings damaged, nine thousand injuries, and seventy-two deaths, including two CSUN students. Particularly hard hit (though not suffering the greatest damage in the area) was the CSUN campus: all 107 buildings were either damaged or

destroyed, at a resultant cost of $400 million. Despite the damage, CSUN opened the spring semester only four weeks late with classes being taught in tents, trailers, inflatable buildings, even on fields. Extraordinary actions and a total commitment to recovery were necessary for this to occur in so short a time span. For example, at one point, Susan Curzon, dean of the library, rode a cherry picker to the fourth floor of the condemned computer center and rescued the only set of complete computer tapes containing the registration records of all CSUN students ("Northridge Quake Anniversary," 2004). Over sixty-thousand books had to be reshelved in the main library building, which had been heavily damaged.

The emotional impact on the community and the campus was substantial, forcing many residents to leave the area and placing heavy debt burdens on those without insurance who chose to rebuild. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) played a big role in helping fund the recovery, with all the usual bureaucratic complications of documenting need and recovery costs. FEMA provided $63 million as the federal share of the $320 million needed to restore the campus. The financial impact of a crisis can put at risk an institution's future ability to function at any level, or at best, can affect it negatively by draining resources for growth that must be used just to rebuild to status quo.

University of Wyoming, 1998

Sometimes personal tragedies transcend an incident and become the basis for a new awareness about unresolved problems in our society on a national scale. Much like the events surrounding Jeanne Clery's death, this is how the events in Laramie, Wyoming, played out over the weeks surrounding what at first glance seemed a single act of bigotry and violence against a young man named Matthew Shepard. Shepard died after being brutally beaten, tied to a fence, and then abandoned in a remote area outside of Laramie. During the course of the investigation, the public would discover that two men who had masqueraded as gay men to gain the confidence of the

openly gay Shepard had given him a ride from a local bar (Hurst, 1999). The subsequent explosion of grief and anger, coupled with the onslaught of homophobic reactions from across the nation, brought this horrible act to the forefront of our collective consciousness. Inside of a few days, this deeply personal family tragedy became a cause for the LGBT community to rally around and point to as an example of the ongoing prejudice against gay and lesbian Americans.

The institution became subject to a media problem of different proportions. Now, in addition to the television and print media seeking photos or video and sound bites to fill the twenty-four-hour news channels, the public weighed in across the Internet, overwhelming the computer and human resources of the University of Wyoming. Thousands of e-mails, both in sympathy for Matthew Shepard and expressing hatred and bigotry toward homosexuals, inundated the institution's mail servers. The overload served as a de facto denial of service attack on users of the university network. In the first twenty-four hours alone, Shepard's parents received over two thousand e-mails ("Murder Charges Planned," 1998). As a result, the institution was unable to respond effectively using the resources that many of us had come to rely on as our default communication methods to share information and respond to our constituents. Electronic mail and Web sites lost their usefulness during this crisis and this affected the institution's ability to respond effectively.

Texas A&M University, 1999

When our students share cherished traditions, we assist in maintaining them as opportunities to develop teamwork and leadership and provide a connection across time for our campuses to establish a sense of belonging. Many traditions are intimate and personal for those involved, others based on legends or folktales from the institution's past. Others still may be highly ceremonial, requiring direct engagement by the community as participants or on-site observers.

Until 1999, one of the most profoundly unique traditions on a college campus was the annual Bonfire, held at Texas A&M University during the week leading up to the football game with the University of Texas. Hundreds of students would organize into highly structured units to share in the honor of participating in a ninety-year-old tradition that was without equal.

As is often the case with campus tragedies, they happen despite the best efforts of dedicated and well-meaning professionals to avoid them. Preparation for different contingencies and thoughtful and carefully managed risk management reviews provide us with a sense of security. But in the early morning of November 18, 1999, all the planning and careful preparation by generations of students, faculty, and staff came crashing down when twelve individuals lost their lives in the tangle of logs that had been the Bonfire construction site.

The ubiquitous availability of cell phones spread word of the tragedy quickly through the campus and the state. Recovery and identification of the injured and killed took place under the glare of emergency lighting and curious and concerned bystanders. Electronic intercepts of communications between students and among university staff by local media caused information to be released prior to notification of kin, further damaging the university's image. As at the University of Wyoming, communication systems including e-mail and telephone lines were overwhelmed, putting yet more stress on the campus community's support system ("Bonfire Collapse," 1999). With this increasingly frenetic intrusion by outside media, the institution's ability to respond effectively and in a timely manner was eroded. Resources had to be reallocated from direct service to the community to focus instead on communicating with the many constituencies that demanded attention. The loss of the twelve individuals at Texas A&M led to the loss of a very special student experience, the Bonfire, for future generations of students, and it took something away from the institution that it will probably never regain.

New York City–Washington, D.C.–Shanksville, Pennsylvania, 2001

Planning, training, and preparing for campus crises require an ongoing and inward focus on available resources that can be brought to bear on foreseeable incidents. No one imagined that what we all saw on our television sets on September 11, 2001, would ever happen. How could we have prepared our country or our students for the trauma inflicted on New York, Washington, and the Pennsylvania countryside? What was a clear and immediate danger and horror to the citizens directly affected by these terrorist acts became a crisis of faith in our personal and national security when the towers of the World Trade Center collapsed as rubble right before our eyes on live television.

Not in two generations—and then with a one-month delay before film of the attack on Pearl Harbor became available to the public—had the U.S. citizenry been shocked in this manner (Schoenherr, 2001). It appeared on that day that "everyone was a New Yorker" and the nation grieved together. College campuses across the United States became places of mourning, with traumatized individuals and hurriedly organized ceremonies of remembrance arranged by staff as worried and concerned as all other citizens. Fearful families struggled to reunite while airline service was totally disrupted with the uncertainty of our safety. There appeared to be no end in sight from an enemy characterized as far away and at the same time living among us. A war with an enemy we did not understand had begun, and we began to realize it would affect us for the rest of our lives, and most likely the lives of our children too. Our society entered a permanent state of crisis, with color-coded warnings and dire predictions of subsequent terrorist acts. University campuses were no longer islands of scholarship and learning for our best and brightest. They were now "soft targets" in a war without traditional battle lines, and our crisis plans became immediately obsolete.

Hurricane Katrina, 2005

The hurricane season that runs from July to November of each year has taken on increased national interest with the advent of twenty-four-hour weather stations and news coverage. Watching a disaster approach for weeks via satellite imagery, with hourly updates of the destruction it causes along the way, becomes mesmerizing to the residents in its path. After Andrew (a Category Five hurricane) hit South Florida in 1991, campuses had become more conscious of the impact a major storm could have on their lives. The devastation to Miami and three of its higher education institutions (the University of Miami, Florida International University, and Miami-Dade Community College) have been studied since that time to help us prepare for the possibility of another event of this magnitude. Little did we know that the benchmark we used as the worst possible situation would be surpassed.

Katrina began as a Category One hurricane, striking the Florida coast just north of Miami and killing twelve people on August 25, 2005. After crossing the Florida Peninsula, it gained strength, and after briefly becoming a Category Five storm, struck the central Gulf Coast near Buras-Triumph, Louisiana, on August 29, 2005, as a Category Three, with sustained winds of 125 miles per hour. Possibly the largest hurricane of its strength ever recorded, it caused destruction all along the Gulf Coast from Mississippi to Louisiana, in some cases obliterating entire communities (*Hurricane Katrina Timeline*, 2005). But Katrina will forever be remembered for the impact it had on New Orleans as a storm surge breached the levee system that protected the city from Lake Pontchartrain and the Mississippi River and flooded a significant part of the city in up to ten feet of water. Over 1 million people were displaced, destruction was estimated at as much as $75 billion, over eighteen hundred deaths occurred, and much of the city of New Orleans was abandoned as unlivable. As of December 2005, over four thousand residents were still unaccounted for, with many presumed dead. If the residents still

unaccounted for are reclassified as deaths, Katrina may ultimately be considered the second most deadly hurricane in U.S. history (Brunner, 2005; Pickrell, 2005).

The infrastructure of New Orleans was in ruins. In addition to losing such basic services as water, security, transportation, and sanitation, the educational system across the city disappeared, the result of either rising water or the evacuation of students. With the destruction so complete, the institutions of the city were unable to reopen even after the levees were repaired and the water was finally pumped back into Lake Pontchartrain. Students at the city's universities (Tulane, Loyola, Xavier, Dillard, Southern, and the University of New Orleans, to name the most prominent) sought enrollment in institutions across the country, and many institutions opened their doors to them as "walk-ins" or "temporary transfer students." The institutions themselves were left to rebuild without a significant portion of the staff and faculty, who were also unable to return to their homes. Over $200 million in damage to Tulane and the loss of tuition income for the fall semester forced the university to lay off 230 faculty and terminate five undergraduate programs and more than half of its doctoral programs. Eight nonrevenue NCAA athletic programs were also terminated (Johnson, 2005). The three historic African-American universities were hit harder than Tulane and the University of New Orleans and had fewer resources with which to recover. Dillard University, Xavier University, and Southern University shared $1 billion in flood and fire damage affecting over eight thousand students. Dillard at one point floated in upwards of ten feet of water and lost three residence halls to fire. At Southern University, Chancellor Edward Jackson conjectured that all eleven buildings on their campus would have to be replaced at a cost of $500 million (Romano, 2005).

Although all the institutions reopened for spring semester, only about 73 percent of the students formerly enrolled at the city's four-year institutions returned. Dillard University's campus remained closed, but the university was able to secure one-third of the rooms

at the Hilton to house the thousand students who reenrolled. Tulane, Xavier, and the University of New Orleans, even with repairs, used trailers provided by FEMA placed in parking lots and playing fields to house staff and students, as housing in the city remained in short supply. Predictions aside that more students will continue to return the institutions to pre-Katrina enrollment levels, all of the institutions continue to this day to face a daunting task to full recovery. The impact of this loss of fiscal and human resources will forever change them all and may indeed force the closure of the weaker ones if substantial financial assistance is not obtained. Scott Cowen, president of Tulane University, stated: "This is the most significant reinvention of a university in the United States in over a century" (Johnson, 2005). Delgado Community College had only half of its 17,400 students return in the spring, and two technical schools in the city were unable to open in spring 2006. With a student population made up primarily of local residents, it is understandable that the recovery may be longer for these institutions as the citizens of New Orleans must first return and restore some normalcy to their lives before they can begin the task of balancing work, family, and a college education (Konigsmark, 2006).

One of the few bright spots to be found in this tragedy was the remarkable level of interinstitutional cooperation and collaboration. Almost immediately, public and private institutions across the nation opened their doors to displaced students so that they could continue their education during the recovery process. The Tulane University Medical School moved to Baylor University to continue its programs, and due to the lack of patients in New Orleans in a drastically reduced city population, remained there after the reopening. Help even came from inside New Orleans, as Tulane and Loyola Universities offered space to Dillard and Xavier to assist them in their successful efforts to reopen in spring 2006. The American Council on Education (ACE) and the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO) jointly developed

CampusRelief.org. Described on this Web site as "Campus to Campus Disaster Assistance," it serves as a clearinghouse of information for students, faculty, staff, and institutions to assist in the recovery and relocation process. As college campuses face new challenges, this service may continue and possibly grow in usefulness and importance to institutions.

Despite the devastation and personal tragedy that resulted from Katrina in Louisiana and the other Gulf Coast states, this new collaboration between institutions has offered an opportunity for universities and colleges with differing missions to focus on the role they all view at their center: providing postsecondary instruction to students on a residential campus. Lessons can be shared, and now it appears that even resources can be shared, among institutions that before Katrina seemed divided by an uncrossable chasm formed through history, traditions, and culture. Tragedy and crisis have a way of changing how we view the world around us. Even universities—so set in their ways and committed to following their own agendas—can be moved to new models of service and teaching when given the opportunity.

What Is a Crisis?

History has shown that campus crises have had a significant impact on higher education—our students, their families, and society as a whole. Having just listed a series of crisis events, the temptation is to plunge forward with the assumption that everyone knows what a crisis is. But the reality is that how we define crisis varies significantly from one individual to another and from one institution to another. For example, everyone has probably heard a colleague describe a particularly difficult workday as one spent "running from one crisis to the next." In our culture we also use terms like *midlife crisis*, *identity crisis*, or *marital crisis*. In addition, the media often offers such news story headlines as "Middle-East Crisis" or "Crisis in [Insert Any Country]." But how can the same word be used to

describe one individual's workday, a challenging life transition, a war that has affected the global community for decades, and the complex and wide-ranging disaster caused by Hurricane Katrina? Although each of these examples conveys a general understanding of the concept of crisis, the specific meaning clearly varies greatly.

The same is true in the professional literature on crisis and crisis management. Although there is general agreement and understanding of the concept, there is no common or widely accepted definition of the word (Auerbach & Kilmann, 1977; Coombs, 1999; Hermann, 1972). Each author seems to develop his or her own unique definition. Some of the more frequently cited definitions of crisis are these:

- "An organizational crisis (1) threatens high-priority values of the organization, (2) presents a restricted amount of time in which a response can be made, and (3) is unexpected or unanticipated by the organization" (Hermann, 1963, p. 63).

- A crisis is "an unstable time or state of affairs in which a decisive change is impending—either one with the distinct possibility of a highly undesirable outcome or one with the distinct possibility of a highly desirable and extremely positive outcome" (Fink, 1986, p. 15).

- A crisis is "a disruption that physically affects a system as a whole and threatens its basic assumptions, its subjective sense of self, its existential core" (Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992, p. 12).

- A crisis is "a major unpredictable event that has potentially negative results. The event and its aftermath may significantly damage an organization and its employees, products, services, financial condition, and reputation" (Barton, 1993, p. 2).

Characteristics of Crisis

Although similar in concept, each of these definitions emphasizes different characteristics that the authors felt were important to explaining and understanding the concept. These characteristics often influence how organizations and individuals interpret or perceive a crisis. If we examine these definitions, we can find some common characteristics: a negative event or outcome, the element of surprise, limited response time, disruption of operations, and a threat to the safety and well-being of people. Further discussion of these characteristics can be helpful as we seek to understand the nature of crisis and develop a definition of crisis management that is appropriate for the college and university setting.

Perception of the Event or Outcome

Most people would describe a crisis as being a negative event or having a negative outcome. A crisis event often poses a threat to an organization or institution. It can threaten an organization's mission and goals, its people, its financial status, its reputation, or its continued existence.

It can also be argued, however, that a crisis can be both a positive and a negative event. Steven Fink (1986), sometimes referred to as the father of modern crisis management theory, suggests that a crisis can have either a desirable or an undesirable outcome. He claims that a crisis is not necessarily bad, but involves the elements of "risk and uncertainty" that people generally attribute to negative outcomes (Fink, 1986, p. 15). He notes that the Chinese symbol for crisis is a combination of two words—*danger* and *opportunity*. How an organization responds to and resolves a crisis can clearly have an impact on its future. Herein lies the importance of effective crisis management.

Element of Surprise

Another characteristic often associated with a crisis is the element of surprise. This characteristic, however, is frequently debated in

the literature. Some authors (for example, Barton, 1993; Hermann, 1963, 1972; Holsti, 1978; Phelps, 1986; Seymour & Moore, 2000) suggest that crises occur suddenly and without warning, making them unpredictable. Critics of these definitions (such as Billings, Milburn, & Schaalman, 1980; Irvine & Millar, 1996; Koovor-Misra, 1995) note that a situation need not come as a surprise to constitute a crisis. For example, the existence of a hurricane is known several days before it strikes and provides organizational leaders with an opportunity to prepare a response. The prior knowledge and opportunity to prepare do not make it any less of a crisis.

The element of surprise is an important part of Hermann's (1963) definition of crisis. According to his definition, surprise means not only that a specific contingency plan does not exist to respond to the event but also that there is a lack of recognition that such an event could even occur. However, it is this reference to lack of recognition or anticipation of a crisis that causes others to disagree (Coombs, 1999). Crisis is inevitable, and sooner or later all organizations will be struck by one. Although some crises do provide warning signs, crises are often unpredictable. Yet despite their unpredictability, crises should not be unexpected or unanticipated. Instead, institutions must conduct a thorough audit of their environment and identify the various types of crises that they might face as well as the impact that these crises would likely have on them.

Limited Response Time

Closely associated to the element of surprise is the idea that crisis situations provide organizational leaders with a limited time period in which to respond. In the midst of a crisis, administrators must formulate a response, make decisions, and take action quickly to avert or at least contain it. Again, Hermann (1963) articulates this aspect of crisis when he states that crisis "presents a restricted amount of time in which a response can be made" (p. 64).

It is because of this limited response time that the existence of a crisis management plan is so important. Administrators need to be

able to respond quickly and take decisive actions when a crisis occurs. These actions can have a far-reaching effect on the institution, its people, its resources, and even its existence. There is little time to carefully weigh each decision and consider the long-term impact of that action. A well-developed crisis management plan addresses the anticipated decisions that will need to be made and actions that will need to be taken during a particular type of crisis and thus allows administrators to focus on the issues or decisions that are unique to the given incident.

Interruption of Operations

Another frequently mentioned characteristic of crisis is that it interrupts the normal operations of an organization. Seymour and Moore (2000) describe crisis as "the disruption of normal patterns of corporate activity by a sudden or overpowering and initially uncontrollable event" (p. 10). Pauchant and Mitroff (1992) also describe crisis in terms of a disruption. They note that crises not only disrupt organizational systems but can disrupt an organization deep into its core.

One of the primary goals of any crisis management plan is to return the organization to normal as quickly as possible. A good crisis management plan guides the institution through the process of resuming normal operations and supports the students, faculty, and staff in their transition back to their academic routines.

Threat to Safety and Well-Being

Although crises can have a significant impact on organizations, one of the main reasons why crisis management in higher education is so important is because crises pose a threat to the safety and well-being of the members of the campus community. No matter the specific type that occurs, almost all crises pose a threat to one or more members of the campus community. Although threats exist everywhere in society, the thought that something bad can happen at an

educational institution seems to create the greatest sense of concern for us, perhaps because our campuses contain such a wealth of human capital. Students come to college to complete their education and prepare themselves to enter the real world as productive members of our society. These young, talented people have so much potential. They are just beginning their lives, and the thought that something might threaten those lives—cut them short and prevent them from ever fully reaching their potential—is something that all of society finds deeply disturbing.

In addition, college campus faculty and staff are some of the best and brightest minds our society has to offer. The faculty and researchers in our communities hold the keys to society's future. Through them, new discoveries are made that shape our lives and our way of living. Through them, our students are taught and prepared for their careers and their place in society. Again, the thought that something could happen to these brilliant teachers and scientists deeply concerns us all.

So, above all, protecting the safety and well-being of the people in our institutions is a principal objective of crisis management.

Crafting a Common Definition of Crisis

These common characteristics of crisis provide us with a better understanding of the term. Once we have a common definition and language that can encompass the array of possibilities, we have a foundation on which we can begin to plan for the uncertainties that will inevitably occur over time. As a guide for us to move forward with this discussion and for our purposes in this book we will use the following definition of crisis:

> A crisis is an event, which is often sudden or unexpected, that disrupts the normal operations of the institution or its educational mission and threatens the well-being of

> personnel, property, financial resources, and/or reputation of the institution (Zdziarski, 2006, p. 5).

The unique aspects of each crisis will require us to respond differently. The severity, location, magnitude, and visibility of an event must be addressed in the context of the institution's ability to respond. Yet also influencing an institution's ability to respond is the impact of our perception of the event. A crisis for one person or organization may be a routine situation for another. Differences between institutions and organizational units thus also shape our perceptions of what a crisis is. A large public university in a metropolitan area will likely perceive a crisis event differently than will a small private liberal arts college in a rural community. The staff's perception of a crisis adds layers of detail to how crisis is defined at each institution. In addition, the organizational structure and culture of an institution will also affect how it defines crisis.

The following list provides examples of definitions of crisis gleaned from crisis management plans from institutions around the country.

Rivier College

A "crisis" is any condition or situation that directly disrupts the College's ability to continue normal operation in whole or in substantial part and that requires immediate, dynamic action to enable the College to resume normal operation within the shortest time possible.

Indiana University

A crisis threatens:

- The integrity of the institution or its activities
- Life and/or property
- Welfare of campus community

Concordia University

A crisis event includes the following:

1. Death on campus or at a university-sponsored event
2. Any student, faculty, or staff death, any near fatal accident or incident, any serious attempted suicide; any major harassment (racial/sexual) incident or the like
3. Serious damage to college property (including arson)
4. Other incidents unique to the campus demanding special attention but not involving the above, such as serious injury to a visitor or extraordinary damage to community property by students
5. Other incidents which in the judgment of the President, Vice President of Student Life, or Executive Vice President require or would benefit from the crisis team

Indiana University–Purdue University, Division of Student Affairs

The death or severe injury to a student, or other significant crisis situations involving students while on campus. When assistance is requested [the definition also includes] incidents off campus.

Virginia Tech, Division of Student Affairs

Crisis includes the following situations:

1. Death of a student
2. Serious (life-threatening) injury or illness of a student
3. Any situation in which a parent or news reporter is already involved or will be before the next day
4. Any situation which requires immediate action by the Dean of Students' on-call staff member
5. Any emergency which is clearly out of normal limits

Conclusion

How an institution or organizational unit defines crisis has a significant impact on the crisis management system it develops. It affects who will determine when and how a crisis management plan is activated, who will be part of the crisis management team, and what the specific protocols and procedures for responding to a crisis will be. In developing a crisis management system it is important for the staff tasked with this effort to define crisis in a way that emphasizes characteristics and attributes that are meaningful and appropriate to their organizational unit and campus community.

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