



Crisis Communications Plan



Office of Public Relations and Communications

Revised October 2009

Overview

This Crisis Communications Plan is intended to provide key leaders at the University with a hands-on plan to better manage all types of crisis communications. Successful media relations begin with proactive—rather than reactive—management of messages, also known as “strategic communications.”

A crisis is defined as any type of event(s) that could harm students, faculty/staff, etc., an emergency situation, or a crisis that could negatively impact the University’s image and/or reputation for a short or prolonged amount of time.

During an emergency/crisis situation, Gannon’s communications efforts will fulfill the following objectives: maintain a focus on known facts and positive behavior; represent Gannon University as responsible, responsive and caring; maintain stakeholder confidence in our leaders and in our institution; and effectively communicate with all employees, students, Gannon’s external key audiences, the media and the public.

A crisis usually attracts a large amount of media attention. While the University can never control what the media reports, the University spokesperson/people can and must control the University’s message, as well as the flow and content of all information released from the University. All Gannon community members can help control the University’s message by referring all media inquiries and external communication to Gannon’s Office of Public Relations and Communications.

Please note: This plan is NOT intended to serve as a tactical or procedural plan. The Gannon Campus Police and Safety Office maintains and manages the University’s Emergency Plan. This Crisis Communications Plan is intended to manage the communications process during and after the crisis.

Crisis Communications Policy

The Office of Public Relations and Communications bears primary responsibility for maintaining and safeguarding the University's public image. All media inquiries during an emergency should be directed to the Office of Public Relations and Communications, which shall adhere to these policies:

1. To work with Gannon's Office of Campus Police and Safety and to be an authoritative, reliable source of accurate information for news agencies and the public, as well as all members of Gannon's internal and external audiences. The Communications Director and the Director of Campus Police and Safety can update members of the Gannon community and the local community with updates and important information via the University's Emergency hotline number at (814) 871-5555 and can also utilize the broadcast e-mail, text and voicemail services.
2. To distribute news and safety information to all employees and students of Gannon University before or at the same time it is being released to the public/media. The primary methods for communicating to the Gannon community will be via the Intranet, Web site and broadcast emails and phone messages.
3. To issue the University's first press release soon after notification of the emergency and to provide periodic updates to the Gannon community and to the media via the University Web site and other applicable modes of communication.
4. To coordinate and arrange media updates with the President or other designated spokespeople when possible and appropriate.

Key Objectives for Spokespeople to Follow During a Crisis

**First and foremost, if you witness an emergency or crisis occurring on or near campus, please call Gannon Security at 871-7000 and/or 911 immediately!*

1. Stay calm.

Be calm, compassionate and in control at all times. Express compassion and offer assurance that the University is providing care for all members of the Gannon community involved and/or affected by the crisis.

2. Provide the media with the latest and most accurate information.

Provide the latest information to media and offer them timely updates. Assure the media and your key external audiences that you will offer them the most up-to-date information if/when it becomes available. Stress your involvement with campus/local/state/federal police/fire investigations, etc.

3. Highlight the positive when possible.

When possible, stress the positive. Highlight positive, proactive initiatives/actions occurring on campus such as safety/security efforts and/or how you will improve a situation and take restorative/positive action to prevent a repeat crisis in the future.

4. Protect the University's image and reputation at all times.

Be honest and communicate information with integrity at all times.

Eight Elements of a Successful Crisis Communications Plan

1. Identifying Goals, Objectives and Key Audiences
2. Anticipating Possible Crises
3. Identifying Members of the Crisis Communications Team
4. Message and Information Flow
5. Response: Fact-finding
6. Response: Tactics: Identify and Inform Key Audiences
7. Crisis Web Sites: Development and Implementation
8. Testing the Crisis Communications Plan

1. Identifying Goals, Objectives and Key Audiences

Key goal: University spokesperson/people must formulate proactive messages and select the University's key points or the media will select their own.

Key Objectives for Spokespeople:

1. Be calm and compassionate about the situation and offer care for those involved.
Be responsive to the media and to all other key audiences.
2. Stress only what you know for certain (confirmed information) and that you are cooperating with campus/local/state police/fire investigators, and that you will provide timely updates when available.
3. Offer assurance about security issues and stress the positive when possible.
Be open, honest and accessible.

Key Audiences:

Currently enrolled undergraduate and graduate students

Parents of currently enrolled students

Faculty, staff, administration

Alumni/Donors

Board of Trustees

Prospective students

Local community/Opinion leaders

Peer institutions/Higher Education Academy

Media

General public

2. Anticipating Possible Crises

Gannon's Office of Campus Police and Safety maintains and manages tactical responses as part of the University's Emergency Response Plan. While referring to this Crisis Communications Plan, it is wise to anticipate and prepare for crises that could occur. Types of crises that have occurred or could occur on or near Gannon's campus include, but are not limited to:

Student death

Sexual assault/rape

Fatal car accident/serious injuries

Alcohol abuse/drugs and/or overdoses

Fire in an on-or off-campus building

Building collapse

Internet scandal

Pandemic/serious health outbreak

Natural disaster/severe weather/ice storms

Widespread electricity/power/heat outage

Identity theft

Fraud/embezzlement

Student protests

HR/employee scandal

Murder

Assaults and hazing incidents

3. Gannon's Crisis Communications Team

Key Permanent Members of the Crisis Communications Team

President
Director of PR and Communications and University Spokesperson
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
Vice President for Finance and Administration
Vice President for University Advancement
Vice President for Mission and Ministry
Executive Director of University Marketing
Vice President for Enrollment Services
Director of Campus Police and Safety
Dean of Student Development
Executive Assistant to the President

***The following list of individuals will assist the key permanent members of the Crisis Communications Team when a crisis warrants their involvement and/or expertise and when they are asked to become involved in the crisis communications management process.**

Secondary Members of the Crisis Communications Team

Director of Information Technology Services
Media Relations Officer
Publications Officer/Editor
Director of Student Living
Administrative Assistant to Vice President for Finance and Administration/Risk Management Issues
University Chaplain
Director of Counseling Services
Directors of Student Health and Counseling Center
Director of Admissions
Assistant Director(s) of Campus Police and Safety
Director of Human Resources (employee issues)
Associate Vice President for Campus Services (building issues)
Dean of College of Humanities, Education and Social Sciences
Dean of Morosky College of Health Professions and Sciences
Dean of College of Engineering and Business
Dean of Graduate Studies
Director of Alumni Services
Director of Major Gifts and Annual Fund
Director of Athletics (student-athlete issues)
Director of Athletic Media Relations (student-athlete issues)
Secretary of Public Relations and Communications (provides assistance to Crisis Communications Team)
University Attorney (to provide counsel as needed and when appropriate)

What constitutes a crisis?

Critical incidents require a timely and effective communications response, and include situations that:

1. Result or may result in death, injury or health or safety threats to our students, faculty, staff or visitors to campus;
2. Result or may result in significant damage to facilities;
3. Significantly disrupt operations;
4. Call into question Gannon's workplace ethics or practices;
5. Call into question the integrity of our University, our students, faculty and/or staff, and/or our educational services.

***When do you mobilize this Crisis Communications Team?**

In the event that an emergency or crisis occurs that may affect or has affected the health, safety and/or welfare of our students, faculty, staff or campus visitors, the Crisis Communications Team will be mobilized and the Crisis Communications Plan will be implemented. **The Director of Campus Police and Safety will first alert the President and then the Director of Communications. The Director of Communications will contact all key permanent members of the Crisis Communications team via text message and will then mobilize the team by phone or text message if/when necessary.** In the event that landlines and/or cell phones are not working, the Communications Director will work with the Director of Information Technology Services to provide information via e-mail, the Intranet and the Web site.

Once notified by the Communications Director, all key permanent members of the Crisis Communications Team will meet immediately. If the team cannot meet in person, a phone conference will be scheduled promptly. Once all key members of the Crisis Communications Team are informed about the known facts of the crisis and the University's key messages, the Crisis Communications Team members can then direct their own staff members to assist accordingly in the ongoing management of the crisis both during the actual crisis and after the crisis has occurred and has been resolved. Secondary members of the Crisis Communications Team may also become involved in the process at this time. **Note: Select members of the Crisis Communications Team may also meet with Campus Police and Safety staff and others to discuss tactical plans to handle the crisis.*

Where should the Crisis Communications Team meet?

Initially, the key permanent members of the Crisis Communications Team will meet in the President's office or they will arrange a conference via telephone. If the larger Crisis Communications Team should need to meet and if it is safe to meet on campus, and if the crisis occurs during normal business hours, the Crisis Communications Team will meet in Room 219 of the Waldron Campus Center. This location will enable access to technology, if necessary. If it is not safe to meet anywhere on campus, the Crisis Communications team will meet at St. Mark's Catholic Center, located at 429 East Grandview in Erie. If the crisis occurs during non-business hours, members of the Crisis Communications Team should still report to campus when feasible. The Crisis Communications Team should not only meet when a crisis occurs, but should also meet once a semester or on an as-needed basis to share possible issues or problems on campus that could develop into a crisis. Thus, the Crisis Communications Team may be able to anticipate and prevent a crisis before it occurs.

4. Message and Information Flow

Chief Spokespersons during a crisis: President and/or Director of Public Relations and Communications

Backup Spokesperson(s) during a crisis: Provost and Vice-President for Academic Affairs and/or an appropriate administrator to be determined related to the specific nature of the crisis.

The message: As soon as possible after an incident/crisis, the Director of Public Relations and Communications will gather all known factual and pertinent information from the Director of Campus Police and Safety and/or local police and fire officials. The Director of Communications will share the information immediately with the President and will alert the Crisis Communications team(s). As more information becomes available and/or changes, the University's key messages will be revised and communicated to Gannon's key internal and external audiences and to the media by the Director of Campus Police and Safety and the Director of Public Relations and Communications.

The written messages and key objectives will be communicated and updated periodically via e-mail and text messaging to all members of the Crisis Communications team. This ensures that all members of the Crisis Communications Team receive accurate and timely information. Other methods of communication will include text messaging to faculty, staff, students and parents as well as activation of the Emergency Broadcast E-Alert System, which enables the Office of Campus Police and Safety, Information Technology Services (ITS) and the Communications Office to send out emergency e-mail, text and voicemail messages to all Gannon subscribers within five minutes.

5. Response: Fact-finding templates

To be completed by the Director of Campus Police and Safety, Director of Public Relations and Communications or responsible staff member on scene of the incident/crisis

Time and date completed:

Type of Crisis:

What occurred?

What are the known facts as of now?

When and where did the crisis occur?

Time and location of crisis, reported by whom and to whom?

What was the notification chain of command?

Were there deaths or injuries?

Were arrests made?

Is the campus safe enough to stay open?

6. Response Tactics: Identify and inform key audiences

1. Currently enrolled students
2. Faculty, staff
3. Parents of currently enrolled students
4. Community/Neighbors
5. Board of Trustees
6. Alumni/Donors
7. Prospective students
8. Academy/Other Higher Education Institutions
9. Media/General public

7. Crisis Communications Web site: Development and Implementation:

The Director of Information Technology Services, select ITS staff, Executive Director of University Marketing, University Webmaster, and Director of Public Relations and Communications will be responsible for the ongoing maintenance and implementation of Gannon's Crisis Communications Web site in the event of a crisis. Key components of the Web site will vary depending upon the nature of the crisis/incident.

Gannon's Crisis Communications Web site is www.gannon.edu/update.

Key components of the Web site may include:

Summary of known facts/Suspect description

Safety measures/precautions/instructions

FAQs

Contact information of key faculty/staff and/or hotline numbers

Message from the President

Press releases about incident

8. Action Steps and Testing the Crisis Communications Plan

Action Steps After the Crisis Ends: Members of the Crisis Communications Team should assess the strengths and weaknesses of the Crisis Communications Plan after implementation. If a media information center was set up on campus, it should remain functional until an “all clear” message can be delivered. Any damaged relationships that may have occurred as a result of the crisis should be rebuilt.

Testing and Preparedness: This plan should be periodically tested and evaluated. The Crisis Communications Team phone list will be updated with new information (phone numbers and e-mail addresses) as needed.

If you have questions or comments regarding this Plan, please contact the Director of Public Relations and Communications at (814) 871-7470.