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Legal and Ethical Issues in College Student Affairs

Due October 15, 2004

Crisis Management. Is your institution prepared for a crisis? Investigate the crisis planning of your own institution. What structures, if any, are in place and how are administrators prepared for dealing with a crisis? How do you evaluate the crisis plan of your institution in light of current trends and experiences in higher education? What recommendations would you make to the administration of your institution?

In order to help answer this question, I had the opportunity to meet with Willie Hamlett, Associate Dean of Students at Azusa Pacific University (APU). We were able to discuss some of the structures that are in place at APU in order to deal with an emergency should it happen. Emergencies may include disasters affecting the entire campus, or they may be more minor crises that impact a portion of the campus. The disaster plan that is currently in place is several years old, but it does indicate who would be responsible for what should an emergency arise. Willie also noted that there is an emergency preparedness committee who is currently revising the plans and assessing the emergency preparedness at APU. The following few pages will look more in depth at the plans and structures APU has in place regarding emergency planning.

Structures that are in place and how administrators would deal with an emergency:

I was not able to actually look through the binder of information specifically outlining the emergency planning at APU (this binder was not allowed to leave the Student Life office). But, I was able to talk with Willie about the structure that is in place. He noted that there is an operational team of people who will be the key leaders during an emergency. This group of people is currently being revised to determine who is directly responsible for what. In the event of an emergency, the Office of Campus Safety will manage decisions until a member of the operational emergency team arrives on campus. The operational team member will then become the on-site commander who is responsible for the communication and overall direction of how the emergency will be

handled. The on-site commander will work closely with an on-site administrator; the on-site administrator will mainly be available for guidance and support, as well as contacting other members of the leadership cabinet. There will also be a Public Information Officer available to talk with the media. This person will be the only person who has contact with the media in order to assure consistency in what is communicated as well as to assure compliance within FERPA regulations. There is also an expectation in place that an incident log will be maintained in any emergency at level 2 (major emergency impacting large portions of campus and possibly affects people's safety or critical functions of the university) or 3 (a disaster that involves the whole university and the community). This basic framework seems to be what APU has in place to deal with an emergency on campus.

Apart from the above general outline, APU has some information on their website regarding emergency preparedness (<http://www.apu.edu/response/preparation/>). The site begins with a general overview of emergency preparation, its importance, and who people should contact at APU if they have any questions. The direct contact person is Brian Gleason, the Risk Management Coordinator. The emphasis of this site focuses on larger scale emergencies at a level 2 or 3. This site does not address smaller scale crises.

A large section of the site includes emergency procedures for bomb threats, earthquakes, evacuations, fires, floods, medical emergencies, and power loss. This section of the site is very basic in its recommendations. For instance, in the case of a flood, some of the suggestions include seeking higher ground, not walking in the way of flood water, and avoiding fast moving water all together. In the case of a fire, people are asked to call Campus Safety, pull the fire alarm, and evacuate the building. These are

just two of the examples of the descriptions included in this section. Overall, in the case of an emergency, the site asks people to contact Campus Safety, call 911, and take care of themselves and others around them.

After explaining how to handle various emergencies, the site has a section on what to do “After a major emergency”. This section is minimal in its explanation. It simply tells people to wait for the Offices of Facilities Management and Campus Safety to assess damage and let people back into buildings. There is also a request for prayer for APU and the community in the event of any major emergency.

APU’s emergency preparedness site also includes links to resources that are available to help people better understand emergency planning. The resources include the Department of Homeland Security, American Red Cross, Southern California Earthquake Data Center, San Bernardino Fire Information, and KFWB News 980. There is also a link to the Media Relations Office at APU. This section of the site simply provides links to various offices and departments that may be helpful in the case of an emergency

The last aspect of APU’s emergency preparedness site is a compilation of phone numbers for APU offices and community centers that will be useful when an emergency takes place. The offices at APU include the Campus Pastor’s Office, the Health Center, the Counseling Center, the Office of Residence Life, and the Office of Media Relations. The numbers for community based organizations include the Azusa Police Department, the Azusa Fire Department, Foothill Presbyterian Hospital, and the Red Cross.

My Evaluation in Light of Current Trends/Experiences in Higher Education:

When exploring current experiences and trends revolving around crisis and emergency planning in higher education, I found several resources that give insight into the how colleges and universities can approach difficult situations.

The National Center for Higher Education Risk Management (NCHERM) website provides information about dealing with students in times of crisis; this site does not focus on disaster situations, rather on instances such as sexual assault, hazing, drug abuse, and psychological distress (<http://www.ncherp.org/index.html>). Brett Sokolow, the founder of NCHERM, suggests that universities use training seminars to educate students about issues surrounding them. He believes that education in crisis areas can help make a difference in the lives of students (<http://www.ncherp.org/index.html>).

When considering where APU fits in the context of the NCHERM, I have several thoughts. In terms of training, it seems that APU could pick a few specific topics to talk with faculty, staff, and students about throughout the year. Though I know various offices program events during the year, it could be useful to provide a safe place to dialogue about issues such as sexual harassment and drug use. I also think it would help students to know that APU is tackling harder issues and that the school is wants to create an open environment in which people can ask questions and process through some harder issues. Overall, it would benefit the APU community to have a better sense of awareness and knowledge about taboo topics.

In terms of larger instances of disaster, I found an article on Rollins College. This college experienced the impact hurricanes at the start of this academic year. One of the feelings that staff and students at Rollins College are experiencing as a result of the hurricanes is that of uneasiness and restlessness; people are not acting normally because

their securities such as homes and properties have been taken from them. In the midst of this, administrators are encouraging people to talk openly about their experiences. The college is also looking for ways to turn the negative energy that has come as a result of the hurricanes into a positive energy. On a whole, Steve Neilson, the Dean of Student Affairs, suggests that people need to reclaim the “normalcy” that was taken from them (Neilson, 2004).

As I read the article about the effect of the hurricanes at Rollins College, I started to think about what a disaster would do to our community. It would be great if APU could be as proactive as possible in determining appropriate steps in case of an emergency. It would also be good to have continuous conversation focusing on the mood of the campus. I imagine that in any real disaster or emergency, events will occur that no one could have predicted. By keeping conversation open, it will help in knowing how to respond to a community in need. Open conversation will also enable people to feel safer in the midst of chaos.

Recommendations I Would Make to the Administration at APU:

One of the recommendations that I would make to APU’s administration would be to better educate faculty, staff, and students on emergency and crisis planning. Until working on this project, I did not know what was in place at APU to be proactive about dealing with emergencies. With the number of students and staff at APU, it should be a priority to educate the community on what is in place and how they can help in the event of an emergency. In particular, I think it would be beneficial for the administration to conduct an information and training seminar on emergency planning for the department of Residence Life. I say this because in the event of a disaster, the Residence Directors

will be some of the first people on site. I think it would be beneficial for our department to know who we should contact, what to do, and generally what our role encompasses.

A second suggestion that I would offer to the administration in terms of training would be to host a mock disaster drill of some type. I had the opportunity to be a part of a mock disaster drill when I worked at Cal Poly Pomona. During this drill, the officers from Campus Safety, the police and/or fire departments, officials from the health center and counseling center, and other crucial departments would have the opportunity to work together and experience the dynamics of a crisis on campus. A drill would offer hands on training, which often exceeds the training that is possible from a seminar or on paper. A mock disaster would also offer the opportunity to see what it would encompass to work with officials from the city of Azusa. It would be a means of building a bridge and creating a better working relationship between APU and the Azusa community.

A third suggestion that I would give the administration is to make the information that has been planned out available for people to see in some way or form. The website gives such general information; though helpful, it is not the core of the emergency/crisis planning at APU. I would challenge the administration to make the information accessible, especially to people when they have specific questions or concerns. Even though I had the chance to sit down and talk with Willie, I do not feel that I truly got a well-rounded perspective of what is in place at APU.

Sources Used for Crisis Planning Question:

National Center for Higher Education Risk Management (NCHERM). Online, retrieved

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10, 2004. <http://www.ncherp.org/index.html>

Nielson, S. (September 28, 2004). A new normalcy: Campus struggles with relentless storms.

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