Managing the Messaging: Consolidating Communications in a Real or Perceived International Crisis

The Forum on Education Abroad 11th Annual Conference: New Orleans, LA

Friday, March 27, 2015
9:15 am to 10:45 pm
Introductions

- Julie Anne Friend, Director, Office of Global Safety and Security, Northwestern University
- William P. Hoye, Executive Vice President, Chief Operating Officer and General Counsel, IES Abroad
- Stacey R. Bolton Tsantir, Director, International Health, Safety and Compliance, University of Minnesota
Our Assumption

• Emergency response plans are in place (from the basic to the sophisticated), including the ability to know where your students are
• You have at least one method in which to communicate with your students (such as through email or social media)
  o We do not presume that just because you send or post a message that students will receive it
• That emergency contact information for your students is also collected and reasonability accessible
• You have identified a list of campus stakeholders whom you presume wish (or need) to be informed of a crisis abroad
Introductory Activity

The purpose of the activity is not to design a specific response to the incident, but instead to discuss the execution of your communication plan.

Julie Anne Friend, Director, Office of Global Safety and Security, Northwestern University
Department Store Chaos

• It’s Friday morning in the States (Friday afternoon in London) and you’ve just learned that Harrod’s Department Store was stormed by militants who have an ideological dispute with the owners, Qatar Holdings. The news confirms shots fired and the taking of hostages (which all appear to be Harrod’s employees).

• Harrods is located in Knightsbridge, an upscale area of west London. You have a study center located in Bloomsbury (which is in the other end of London) with 100 students from approximately 12 institutions in the U.S.
Stakeholders/First Steps

Select a Stakeholder Role from the stack on tour table, and identify the chief interest of each Stakeholder:

- Student
- Parent/Guardian
- Study Abroad Director (U.S.)
- On-site Resident Director or Faculty Leader
- Int’l Health, Safety and Security Specialist
- Risk Manager (U.S.) or General Counsel/Lawyer
- Media/Public Relations
- Academic Dean or Dept. Chair
- President, Provost or CEO
- Dean of Students
- Medical Director/University Physician (U.S.)
- Medical/Security Assistance Provider
Your Next Step

• In order to compose a brief communiqué about this incident, and keeping in mind the needs of your various stakeholders, work with your tablemates to:
  
a) make a list of information you have, and
  
b) the information you would like to know

Remember, you do not need to design a response, just determine what information is required for your initial response
Required Information

1. Date, time and location of incident
2. Proximity of study center/student housing/internship site to incident
3. Intended target(s) and/or purpose of incident, plus any relevant geopolitical information that could bring context to our interpretation of risk
4. Number of individuals with potential exposure to the risk based on time, place and manner of incident
5. Other steps, performed or intended, to assess risk/exposure (such as liaising with on-site third party)
6. Whether or not the incident has widespread media distribution
If your current workplace faced this situation, what challenges would your organization/institution experience carrying out these communications?

(share your thoughts with colleagues at your table)
Plan for Today

• Today’s focus will be on the Crisis COMMUNICATION plan

• You’ll work together to identify and discuss:
  o Elements of a good crisis communication plan
  o Stakeholders and their priorities
  o Communications venues/options
  o How to best communicate with various stakeholders

• You’ll compose a solid first draft crisis communiqué
Tools

• Your own experience and that of your tablemates
• Forum Standards: 6 & 8
• NAFSA Interassociational Best Practices
• Expertise of colleagues in related professions
  o Examples include: Emergency Management, Law Enforcement, Risk Management, Diplomatic Security, etc.
CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLAN

- Decide on your overarching objectives
- Define your target audience
- Select the channels of communication
- Choose your key messages
Forms of Communication

- Twitter
- Facebook
- Instagram
- Email
- Institutional/Organization website(s)
- Telephone
- Phone Calls
- Meeting
Activity Two

The purpose of the activity is **not** to design a specific **response** to the incident, but instead to discuss the **execution** of your **communication plan**

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Milanese Mêlée

• It’s Spring Break on your campus and you are looking forward to a little downtime. While watching the news during your lunch break on a Wednesday afternoon, you learn that a radical animal rights activist group has just firebombed Firenze Furs (FF), a well-known Milan design house. Since it’s Fashion Week, media attention is fierce.

• You have 25 students enrolled with small, “boutique” provider in Milan specializing in the fashion industry. Participants have internships with various design houses in the city. You know that students have been placed with FF in the past.

• It’s Wednesday evening in Milan, but students are known to sometimes work late during fashion week.
Step One: Info Gathering

• Excluding the student and the parent stakeholders, select a Stakeholder Role from the stack on your table. This group of people will make-up your crisis management team.

• Following the “checklist” provided in the introductory exercise (to be provided on the next slide) and working with your tablemates, note:
  - what information you already have, and
  - and what information you still need in order to compose a communiqué regarding this incident.
Required Information

1. Date, time and location of incident
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4. Number of individuals with potential exposure to the risk based on time, place and manner of incident
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6. Whether or not the incident has widespread media distribution
Additional Information

• Five of your students have internships with FF, but none were at HQ during the attack because they were en route to the runway shoot 10 kilometers away, although several of their Milanese colleagues have likely been killed or injured.
Step Two: Writing Practice

Each table will now tackle writing the following in relation to this incident:

1. an email to campus constituents (international education colleagues, deans, advisors, etc.)
2. a public statement for your website
3. an email to affected students’ parents
4. a Facebook post to students on the program (there is an active FB page for this tight-knit group)

(we recommend working in pairs or small groups for the composition process and then trading drafts with others at your table for review and feedback)
Step Three: Discuss

1. How did you decide what level of detail is required for various stakeholders’ messages?

2. What factors did you consider regarding the mode of your assigned communication?
Crisis Communication: Specific Topics

William P. Hoye, Executive Vice President, Chief Operating Officer and General Counsel, IES Abroad
Dealing with the Media:

- First, a senior leader must decide whether the organization will comment on an evolving crisis.
- If so, the organization should speak with one voice:
  - Make sure everyone knows where to refer media inquiries.
- Via spokesperson experienced and trained in crisis communications:
  - In training, practice on camera.
  - With cameras in your face and questions shouted.
  - Make trainees watch their videos and learn.
- Get out ahead of the story.
- It’s best for your people to hear it from you 1st.
- Disclose all of the bad news you know at once:
  - Can help avoid multiple stories on multiple days.
In a Crisis, Remember:

• Chaos and uncertainty often reign
• Initial information often inaccurate
• People on-site will be frazzled
• They should respond to the crisis, not to media
• Spokespersons: think before you speak
• Say only what you know
  o You rarely get in trouble for what you don’t say
• Avoid speculation, even under media pressure
• It’s better to be right than fast
  o “All of our students are safe and accounted for in the wake of the crisis”
  o Make sure you’re right before you say it!
  o Measure twice, speak once!
In a Crisis...

• Stay on message
• Create and follow talking points
• Don’t make your talking points technical/legalistic
  o Keep it simple
• In a major crisis, reputational issues can trump legal issues: it’s a decision for the President
  o Texas A&M Bonfire
  o OU Fraternity
  o UVA
• Protect ill or injured students from media harassment
• What, if anything, do you tell students about talking with the media?
Remember Involved Students’ Rights

- FERPA: privacy of student education records
- HIPPA and state medical records laws
- State mental health records statutes
- First Amendment
- Due Process
- Defamation
- Common law privacy rights:
  - Public disclosure of embarrassing private facts
  - Intrusion upon seclusion or into private affairs
  - Misappropriation of name, likeness or image
  - Publicity putting person in a false light in the public eye
  - Invasion of privacy
Legally Speaking…

• Consult with legal counsel and PR experts before you speak
• Have crisis communications firm on retainer
• Strive to avoid admissions of liability or fault in public statements
• Avoid admissions against your institution’s interest unless they are undeniable (e.g., OU video)
• Admit what you cannot afford to deny
• Deny what you cannot afford to admit
• Make sure the Big Dogs know in advance
Don’t Forget What Your Mom Said...

- In all crisis communications:
- Be honest
- Be truthful
- Be candid
- Don’t play word games or parse words (Avoid being Clintonesque)
- Tell them what you know
- Never underestimate the power of luck or prayer!
Student Communications

• Orient students on your local site-specific crisis management plan at the start of every term
  o Identify key risks on-site and planned response to each
  o Identify primary and secondary meeting points in a crisis
  o Run a crisis drill

• When a crisis looms, communicate with students concerning it and on how best to avoid, mitigate or respond to the risks or dangers posed

• If a crisis occurs, reach all students asap to:
  o Account for their location and safety
  o Advise them on what to do (e.g., shelter in place; go to designated meeting point)
Parent & Campus Communications

- Once all students have been located by on-site staff/faculty and are safe following a crisis, write messages of reassurance to their emergency contacts (usually parents) and key on campus officials.
- Designate someone on your team to compose messages and someone else to review and approve them (use templates/forms to save time).
- Utilize technology to push messages out quickly.
- Pre-load emergency contact information for each student into a database, by program and location.
- Inform of the crisis, and that their student has been reached and is safe despite the crisis.
- Encourage students to call their parents.
- Focus on accuracy first, then speed.
Communication within the CMT and with On-site

- Hub and spoke system with CMT Chair as hub
- Keep communications succinct, efficient, accurate, and swift
- Limit to a need to know basis to keep numbers of messages and recipients down
- Utilize technology to reach various constituencies (e.g., email list management system, Travel Tracker, group emails and texts, etc.
- Increase efficiency with clear delineation of duty and clear decision making lines
Before and During the Crisis

• Review your response plan to ensure it comports with your communication plan
• Know where all your students are and how to reach them
• Identify relevant stakeholders and their interests
• Have a checklist of “standard” information needed to compose a crisis communiqué
• Consider your exposure before engaging in a full-on crisis response (save yourself anxiety and effort)
• Practice/drill with your response team – break it down into small steps
• Save any prior messages for evaluation and potential future use – develop your brand
Question/Thank You

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