

HURON UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

Crisis Communications Procedure

Principles and Goals: The Huron University College Crisis Communications Procedure (CCP) is designed to complement the College's Emergency Response Procedures. The College's primary goal during and immediately following a crisis or emergency will be to care for the safety and well-being of those who are affected by the crisis. Emergency Response Procedures will be carried out by the College's Emergency Planning and Response Team in accordance with protocols established by the College for such emergencies (see Huron University College Emergency Response Procedures).

The CCP outlines the way in which the College will **communicate** during a crisis, both internally and externally, in a manner that will ensure a fair and balanced representation of events and will safeguard the College's reputation. When a crisis happens, it is essential that the College's constituencies and the general public know what has happened and know that the College has responded in a responsible, caring manner. Communications with the media will be a primary source for the public (and many internal community members) to acquire information about the crisis. The College is committed to providing the media with timely and accurate information about the crisis.

Crisis Communications Policy: The Principal of the College will be the designated spokesperson for the College in the event of a crisis. Only the Principal (or a person directly designated by the Principal, who will normally be the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Science) may comment to the media, to next-of-kin, or to others affected by the crisis. College employees and volunteers should in all cases refrain from speculating or commenting on possible causes of the crisis or on the actions that are taken by the College, and should refer all questions to the Principal. It is expected that all employees will share with the Principal any information they may have that would assist in determining the cause of the incident in question.

(In the improbable event that the Principal is both unavailable and unable to appoint a designate, the Chair of the Huron University College Executive Board will assume the responsibility of acting as spokesperson or designating a spokesperson.)

Communications Procedures

- In the event of a crisis, the Principal shall be notified immediately.
- The Principal will convene the Emergency Planning and Response Team to ensure that all appropriate and necessary steps are being taken to deal with the crisis.

- The Principal will convene a Crisis Communications Working Group to assist in gathering information, informing key stakeholders, and fielding phone calls. This Working Group will normally include the Executive Assistant to the Principal; a Dean; an Executive Board member with expertise as a communications strategist; and the Huron University College Director of Communications.
- The Principal and her/his Working Group will gather the facts (who, what, where, when, why, and how); confirm the facts; clarify and verify technical information.
- The Principal will prepare a summary statement describing the crisis situation. This is not a news release. It is a brief summary of the situation that may be circulated to the media, where needed, and to College stakeholders (e.g., faculty, staff, students, Executive Board members). It should be truthful, factual, and should address the loss or needs of any victims of the crisis. The key message should be the College's concern for the people affected by the crisis, and the secondary message should be the actions that are being taken by the College.
- The Principal will consult with College legal counsel to review and approve the summary statement and to determine what further involvement of counsel will be appropriate in managing crisis communications. Legal counsel may advise the College to withhold certain information (e.g., for legal or privacy reasons).
- The Principal's and his/her Working Group will notify all people key to the organization, including the Chair of the Executive Board and other Board members as appropriate (using the list of key stakeholders and contact numbers maintained by the Executive Assistant to the Principal).
- All calls/enquiries should be routed through the Principal's office. The Executive Assistant to the Principal may listen to questions and gather information about the media's deadlines, etc. but will not answer questions or provide information. He/she will direct inquiries to the Principal and provide contact information for the Principal. He/she will monitor all requests for interviews and all media coverage. He/she will have available the media list and contact numbers (maintained by the College's Director of Communications).
- The Principal or his/her designate should follow the following "Media Response Guidelines" when communicating with the Media:

Media Response Guidelines (for the spokesperson)

1. Before communicating with the media, have the summary statement prepared and make a list of follow-up questions the media might ask and what your responses will be. If the media are already aware of the crisis, it is essential that communication from the College take place as quickly as possible following a crisis—usually within an hour or two—to avoid reporting of erroneous information or rumours.

2. Continue to communicate quickly, remain accessible, and respond promptly to the media. If you do not have complete information when initially contacted by a reporter, then advise the reporter that the College is working on it and that you will get back to the reporter as soon as the College has information or a statement. *Ensure that this follow-through takes place.*
3. Be clear about what the College wants the media to know. As much as possible, control what is said about the College and the incident. If there is internal disagreement or inconsistency about what has happened and why, the media will pursue that story first. Try to resolve any internal disagreements quickly.
4. Treat all media equally. Any information that is distributed should be shared with all key media at the same time. If you allow an interview or photo opportunity to one member of the media, it should be available to all media.
5. Always tell the truth. Establishing and maintaining the College's and the spokesperson's credibility is essential. If it is privileged information that is being sought, then explain why you cannot provide the answer.
6. Control and contain the message. It is not necessary to tell the media everything you know. Reporters are on the lookout for sound-bites that may be taken out of context and damage the College's reputation.
7. Be careful about trying to put a positive "spin" on something negative. If you say the College will take an action, be sure it is capable of doing so.
8. Remember that nothing is ever "off the record." Assume that everything that is said to the media will be reported.
9. Where possible, stick to the prepared text (the summary statement and list of anticipated questions and responses). This statement is not just a list of talking points; it is the script. The media will ask difficult and challenging questions. Listen carefully and try to answer their questions (without sounding angry or defensive), while at the same time bringing the conversation back to the key points that should be made on behalf of the College.
10. If you don't know the answer, say so and if feasible, agree to try to find the answer.
11. Be sincere.
12. Do not ignore requests from the media or evade interviews. The reporter will find someone to talk to, and it should be the spokesperson.
13. Do not use the words "no comment." If you cannot answer the question, explain the reasons.

14. Keep a media log of callers and questions.

15. Update the media as the situation develops.