Classroom Communication and National Crises: Student Information Needs in the Aftermath of the 2001 Terrorist Attacks on the United States

Robert R. Ulmer and Michael R. Hemphill

Abstract

Little is known about students' reactions to their university's attempt to manage their informational and emotional needs during a time of national crisis. A survey of students immediately following the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States found that students wanted the university to stay open and function as a place for sense making regarding the national crisis.

On September 11, 2001, while students across the United States made their way to college campuses or attended morning classes, an airplane crashed into the north tower of the World Trade Center. Media broadcasts began immediately via the radio, television, and the Internet (Greenberg 2002). Initial reports suggested that this crash was a terrible accident. However, when a second airplane struck the south tower, it was clear that the first collision was not an accident. This second crash generated a great deal of uncertainty regarding the cause and scope of the attack on the United States (Grunwald 2001; Kleinfield 2001; Shribman 2001). Critical uncertainty increased when a third airplane hit the Pentagon and a fourth crashed into a field in Pennsylvania (*Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* 2001).

At this time, all national and international airline flights were either grounded or cancelled. Federal and other at-risk buildings across the country were evacuated. Given the extent of media coverage of this tragic event and the strong emotional response that such coverage typically produces (Cantor, Mares, and Oliver 1993; Hofner and Haefner 1993; Riffe and Stovall 1989; Snyder and Park 2002; Wober and Young 1993) organizations nationwide were forced to make decisions regarding what to tell workers and how to proceed with the workday.

Universities were not isolated from the tragedy, or the issue of how to communicate about it to faculty and students. Many universities across the country closed for the day. However, the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) chose to stay open and use the university as a place for sense making, discussion, and counseling. The

university's decision to remain open during an emotional and stressful time of national crisis provided a unique opportunity to explore students' reactions to this university's response.

Universities as a Context for Crisis

Universities are information sources that communicate to their stakeholders on a consistent basis. Universities are places for discussion, learning, and information seeking. These institutions are unique due to their vast expertise on a wide range of topics. It is not uncommon for universities to employ national experts on a wide range of topics including social, political, and economic issues. In addition, metropolitan universities and their faculty are known for developing strong and consistent instrumental communication channels with stakeholders such as students, businesses, government, and community leaders among others (Holland 2001). As a result, these institutions are often seen as credible sources for accurate information regarding important issues. In many ways, the purpose of any university is to provide cutting edge information on topics of importance to society.

Although academic institutions are unique, like other organizations they are susceptible to and impacted by many types of crises. For instance, universities may experience the effects of financial shortfalls, rumors, top management succession, organizational misdeeds, natural disasters, explosions, workplace violence, and terrorism (Coombs 1999b; Meyers and Holusha 1986; Mitroff and Anagnos 2001; Pearson and Clair 1998). Some of these crises may emerge on campus. For example, The University of Arkansas (*Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* 2000), Harvard University (Lawrence 1995), and the University of Arizona (Becherer 2002) are universities that have experienced workplace violence in the form of students shooting faculty. In 1999, Texas A & M was thrust into a crisis situation when a bonfire collapsed during a campus-sanctioned celebration killing eleven students and one alumnus and injuring twenty-seven other students (Beach 1999). Conversely, universities may be impacted by events started in the university's suprasystem. For example, North Dakota State University and the University of North Dakota experienced flooding that impacted their on-campus facilities, particularly their libraries (*Star Tribune* 2000). In 1994, an earthquake demolished most of the buildings on Cal State Northridge's campus (Bowles 1994). In 2005, the Gulf Coast was hit with hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Tulane University and the University of Houston, among other metropolitan universities in New Orleans and Houston, were impacted by these natural disasters. In fact, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reported that thirty-one universities were impacted by Hurricane Katrina alone (2005, A16-A17).

On September 11, 2001 universities across the country were impacted directly and indirectly by the terrorist attacks. Beyond the personal connection many students across the country had to the tragedy (e.g., friends or family that worked in Manhattan or perhaps even the World Trade Center), it is likely that students, like many other citizens, experienced significant stress reactions to the 9/11 events. In fact, Brown, Bocarnea, and Basil explain the impact of 9/11 nationally and internationally. "We

expected that those who saw the planes crash into the WTC towers would experience more grief, fear, and sympathy than those that learned about the attacks another way. This was not the case" (2002, 257). As a result, many people reported experiencing symptoms of depression, sorrow, and feeling unsafe in their home and work environment as a result of the events of 9/11 (Seeger et al. 2002; Snyder and Park 2002). Because universities serve as a credible information source for students it is likely that students would want to seek information regarding the crisis from this institution.

The role of information gatekeeper may be even more critical for a metropolitan university. If classes are closed on a residential campus during a time of national crisis, the student community remains virtually intact, merely shifted from the classroom to the dormitory or student union. In this situation, the university maintains a connection to those students. Students attending class on a metropolitan campus, where they are more likely to commute to campus, represent an interesting bridge to the community during times of national crisis. A decision to cancel classes merely releases the students back to their homes or work, i.e., back into the community at large.

Crisis-Induced Uncertainty

A key characterization of crisis situations is the increased uncertainty people experience during and after the event. In addition, crisis events typically cause people to question their most fundamental beliefs (Turner 1976). By definition, crises are most often described as low probability, high consequence events that have the ability to impact both organizations and their stakeholders (Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer 1998; Weick 1988). Specifically, crisis creates uncertainty regarding the cause of the crisis, the consequences of the event, and the level of harm organizational stakeholders may experience (Hermann 1963; Weick 1988). The impact of crisis events can create such uncertainty and stress that "people suddenly and deeply feel that the universe is no longer a rational, orderly system" (Weick 1993, 634). Cosmological episodes, which characterize the effects of crisis, often are illustrated by statements such as "I've never been here before, I have no idea where I am, and I have no idea who can help me" (Weick 1993, 634-635). As a result of crisis, people often search for information and work to make sense of the situation. Organizational leaders and other information sources can play an important role in organizational crises by providing information and creating meaning for organizational stakeholders. Because crisis creates critical uncertainty, this tendency contributes to our need for systematic inquiry and search for reducing uncertainty.

Crisis and Information Needs

Traditionally, research on crisis communication has focused primarily on how organizations should respond to stakeholders in order to protect the organization's image. For instance, some research on crisis communication emphasizes rhetorical strategies used to repair perceptions of the organization (Allen and Caillouet 1994; Benoit 1995; Coombs 1999b). In this case, leaders are equipped with rhetorical strategies such as denial, reducing offensiveness, evasion of responsibility, corrective

action, and mortification that are designed to protect the image of the organization. Conversely, depending upon the type of crisis, apologia may not be the imperative rhetorical response (Seeger and Ulmer 2002). In these cases, issues of responsibility and image restoration may play minor roles in the post-crisis discourse. For instance, leaders may use organizational value positions to create meaning about the crisis including commitment to stakeholders, organizational renewal, or express a pledge to resolve the crisis. In situations internal to the organization, creating meaning about the crisis for stakeholders becomes the key issue that organizational leaders must accomplish. Although these strategies are an important aspect of post-crisis communication, when events occur external to the organization, the organization has communication concerns beyond image restoration.

Due to the uncertainty created by crisis, individuals often need specific information in order to help them better understand and deal with the event. People typically seek information regarding the scope of the damage, the cause of the crisis, and the potential impact of the crisis on stakeholders (Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer 1998; Seeger and Ulmer, 2002). While the media can provide significant amounts of information about crisis events outside of an organization, it is often the case that during crisis people turn to each other as sources of information and comfort (Gantz and Greenberg 1993; Greenberg 1964a, 1964b). In the instance of the events of 9/11, students may have looked to each other and to their faculty to fulfill this role.

Much of the research suggests that organizational representatives have form and content dimensions to their post-crisis communication (Coombs 1999a). Form dimensions of crisis responses refer to going to the scene of the crisis and providing clear and accurate messages regarding the crisis to stakeholders. Content recommendations refer to meeting the informational needs of stakeholders following a crisis. Issues such as determining the cause of the crisis, providing information about how stakeholders should move forward, and how the organization is going to correct the problem are key content issues following a crisis. This information helps reduce the inherent uncertainty brought on by the crisis and helps restore order to people's lives.

Finally, comprehensive perspectives on crisis communication suggest that pre crisis communication and planning play an important role in crisis communication (Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt 1996; Pauchant and Mitroff 1992; Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer 1998, 2001; Sturges 1994; Ulmer 2001). One way to look at the connection between pre- and post-crisis communication is through crisis planning and preparation. Barton (2001) claimed that in a survey of 1,400 global companies only 64 percent of North American companies had a crisis management plan that was updated in the past year. Crisis preparation may involve creating crisis teams, assessing potential areas of risk, compiling lists of important contacts, running simulations, creating channels of communication, and developing ethical standards and principles of business to avert potential infractions. Much of this preparation is done so that leaders in the organization are able to respond appropriately to crisis events under the uncertainty and stress of crisis.

Much of the research on universities and crisis focuses on the need for more preparation and training for these events. Fearn-Banks (2002) examined Texas A & M's bonfire crisis. She explained that the university generally handled the crisis competently, however, the university admitted they needed more crisis training in order to better their response. Blumenthal examined Cal State Northridge's response to an earthquake that destroyed much of the campus. She argued that the university could have communicated better after the crisis had it implemented a "pro-active crisis management" plan prior to the earthquake (1995, 252). Tompkins and Anderson (1971) examined the Kent State University riots. Their analysis suggested that communication gaps between management and students served as an important instigator of the crisis. Pro-active management of this communication gap may have eased tensions and possibly avoided the crisis. Clearly, this literature suggests that crisis training and preparation are key aspects of meeting the information needs after a crisis.

A University's Response to the Terrorist Attacks

Dr. Charles Hathaway, then the Chancellor at UALR, decided to keep the university open following the terrorist attacks. UALR has an annual enrollment of approximately 11,000 students and draws from a population of about 500,000 in a mid-southern region of the United States. The university classifies itself as a metropolitan university, which means that the university is responsive to the community in its teaching, research, and service efforts. The university defines itself as an "intellectual resource" for society. As a result of this mission, one would expect that over time the university had developed strong instrumental communication channels with its environment; channels it could exploit to help students cope with the events of 9/11. Similarly, one would expect that the university's mission would impact the response strategies of the university's leadership in times of crisis. In fact, the university has a formal crisis plan that focuses on managing the flow of information concerning crisis situations internal to the campus. But, the tragic events of 9/11 presented a different kind of crisis to campuses all across the country. What follows is a discussion of how Chancellor Hathaway and UALR reacted to the national disaster.

Within an hour of the tragedies in New York, Chancellor Hathaway responded to the crisis. His response impacted faculty and staff as well as the students. The Chancellor provided two initial messages to faculty over the faculty listserv. His first message sent at 9:40 a.m. said:

> The tragic events starting early this morning will cause tension throughout our nation and likely on our campus. We have a diverse campus with students throughout the world. Please work with each other and our students to create the understanding that will be needed to prevent unacceptable accusations and actions. This is a time for the best in our character to be brought forward. I hope faculty will be open to assist students in talking through the matters surrounding this event. We do not know the dimensions of that to which we are responding. Individuals needing assistance may seek out counseling and/or assistance through health services and disability support services.

At 10:10 a.m., Dr. Hathaway issued another statement via the faculty listserv regarding the status of classes and the schedule.

> We are [an] institution of learning and teaching. This tragic event presents a teaching moment, no matter how sad. I am asking all faculty not to cancel classes. Seize this time to create enlightenment in a dark moment.

As a result, the faculty was to proceed with their courses in the aftermath of these devastating events. Instructors were given the opportunity to deal with the matter in any way they saw fit. Many of the universities in the area closed and sent their students home. At the time, some UALR faculty questioned the decision to keep the university open. Others wondered how they should talk about the event or whether they understood the event completely themselves. This study provides a unique opportunity to gauge student reactions to a significant crisis event external to their campus. The results should better inform the study of crisis in general and provide guidance to the development of appropriate institutional responses. What follows is a discussion of the method that was used to determine the perceptions of students' information needs immediately following the events of 9/11.

Student Reaction

Three hundred nineteen students voluntarily participated in a survey assessing their information needs on the morning of the 9/11 crisis. Students were enrolled in undergraduate speech communication courses, including, some sections of the department's core course, required of all students on campus, thus helping insure a broader representation of the student body. The survey instrument concentrated on student information needs during their classroom interactions on September 11, 2001. The instrument contained twelve closed-ended and two open-ended questions. Initial questions focused on demographic variables, such as whether students attended classes on September 11, 2001, how they learned about the disaster, and if they thought the university should have closed on the day of the tragedy. The next part of the survey was comprised of five-point Likert-type communication satisfaction scales that examined the nature of the information students both wanted and received in their classroom interactions. These scales ranged from 1 to 5; 1 being very little information to 5 being a very great amount of information. Variables included whether students wanted information regarding the scope of the damage, cause of the tragedy, reassurance, among others. Students also received similar questions regarding information they wanted and received from their instructors and classmates. Finally, students were asked about any personal connection they may have had to the tragedy and counseling services they may have used. Data collection took place from September 17-21, 2001.

Did Students Want the University to Stay Open?

The results of the survey clearly suggest that universities can play an important role in disseminating critical information following a crisis. Of the surveyed students, 64.2 percent wanted UALR to stay open in the aftermath of the crisis on September 11, 2001.

As Chancellor Hathaway explained in his initial email, a possible explanation for keeping the University open was to allow students the opportunity to use the University's counseling services. However, when asked whether students used the University's counseling services, only 4 of 317 respondents (1.26%) reported taking advantage of this service. However, students reported that after hearing of the 9/11 attacks they were most likely to talk to members of their family, then friends, and then classmates.

What Information About the Crisis Did Students Want?

Within the classroom the students reported they wanted more information about the crisis. They wanted the most information on the causes of the tragedy, the existence of other threats, the scope of the damage, and the larger implications of the tragedy (Table 1). They wanted the least information about other closings within the city and an academic discussion of the events. Students received the most information about the scope and causes of the tragedy. However, it is important to note that students generally were looking for considerable information from faculty regarding the crisis. For all topics, they rated their need for information quite high.

Table 1: Information Needs

Topics	Information Wanted		Information Received	
	M	SD	M	SD
Scope of damage	4.24	1.10	3.47	1.33
What caused	4.48	0.92	3.43	1.35
Larger implications	4.20	1.03	3.09	1.26
Other threats	4.24	1.14	2.68	1.26
Closings	3.73	1.38	2.60	1.37
Reassurance	3.98	1.22	2.70	1.24
How these events happen	3.98	1.20	2.71	1.31
How to deal with these events	3.82	1.25	2.77	1.29
An academic discussion	3.77	1.30	2.94	1.46

Were Students Satisfied with the Information They Received?

We determined the students' satisfaction level with their communication on that day by examining the difference between the "Information Received" and the "Information Wanted" scores for an item. The resultant score's deviation from zero indicates the absolute level of dissatisfaction, and its valence indicates that either a state of information overload (a positive value) or underload (a negative value) existed. Generally, students were dissatisfied with receiving too little information about every aspect of the crisis they discussed in their classroom (Table 2). This suggests that faculty could have and arguably should have talked more about the crisis in class and worked to provide as much meaning about the events as possible. Next, we examined the sources in which they received this information.

Table 2: How Satisfied Were Students with the Information They Received?

Topics	M	SD
Scope of damage	-.78	1.59
What caused	-1.07	1.44
Larger implications	-1.12	1.59
Other threats	-1.57	1.77
Closings	-1.16	1.75
Reassurance	-1.30	1.69
How these events happen	-1.28	1.73
How to deal with these events	-1.09	1.71
An academic discussion	-.85	1.88

Were Students Satisfied with the Information Sources?

Information sources are an important aspect of communicating in the aftermath of a crisis. Students clearly wanted more information from their professors (x = 3.88, SD = 1.12) than from their classmates (x = 3.47, SD = 1.27). But, not surprisingly, there was dissatisfaction with both classmates (x = -.17, SD = 1.57) and professors (x = -.89, SD = 1.37) as sources of information in general.

The results of this survey provide some information regarding the role of communication and information needs of university students in the aftermath of crisis events that occur external to the campus. Initially, we found that students wanted the university to stay open following the national tragedy, however, not for counseling services (although four students did use these services). Students wanted information regarding the crisis but were dissatisfied with the information they received in their classroom that day. What follows is a discussion of these findings as well as some conclusions regarding communication and crisis.

Lessons Learned About Responding to a Crisis

The purpose of our survey was not to evaluate the effectiveness of our university's response to an external crisis, but to better understand the role of colleges and universities in helping students manage informational and emotional needs during the aftermath of a national tragedy. Sheley (2002) examined the role of the metropolitan universities in leading social discussions after 9/11, but there are few examples in the literature that examine the role of the university as a contemporaneous source of information and place for discussion during a crisis. The responses of our students provide some important understandings regarding the role of universities facing a wide variety of crises.

First, it is important to note that the students strongly wanted the university to stay open. At minimum, this finding suggests that universities can play a role in the immediate aftermath of disasters. There may be a number of reasons for students wanting the university to stay open. For instance, we found that students that were attending classes while the attacks were taking place were more likely to think that the university should have stayed open than students who were not on campus that day. Greenberg, Hofschire, and Lachlan (2002) found that two-thirds of the respondents in a community survey reported talking to someone else about the events of 9/11 immediately upon hearing of them. A student, like any other person, may look to interpersonal sources of support in the aftermath of a crisis and keeping the campus open maintains those critical interpersonal connections.

The university may also be seen as an obvious source of information for students since it provides credible information to this group on a consistent basis. However, student respondents had little interest in hearing an academic treatment of the crisis on that day. Perhaps students were looking more for what Chancellor Hathaway called "enlightenment in a dark moment," and less for turning a tragedy into a mere teaching point. Regardless of the explanation, it appears that universities have an opportunity to play an important role in supporting people who are on campus in the aftermath of a crisis.

Although most students stayed on campus after the disaster and used the campus for a place to discuss the tragedy, it appears that students discussed the tragedy more outside of class than inside. Our study examined with whom students did discuss the tragedy and shows that students discussed the tragedy with family and then friends and then classmates.

If universities are to stay open following a crisis, one of the key reasons for keeping the university open would be to use classrooms as a place to discuss the crisis. However, these findings suggest that in the absence of formal direction or preparation, faculty members may not have known how to handle the situation, wondered whether it was appropriate to discuss the tragedy in class, or may have even elected to cancel their classes. In any case, students reported being generally dissatisfied with the information they received from faculty regarding the crisis. In fact, they were more dissatisfied with the communication they received from faculty than they were from their own classmates. Clearly, students wanted more information from faculty members regarding the crisis. This is important because faculty can be seen as a critical information source in reducing the uncertainty inherent to crisis situations. While Chancellor Hathaway encouraged faculty to help students cope with this uncertainty, no specific recommendation or blueprint for how to manage the uncertainty was provided. If universities are to stay open in the aftermath of events such as 9/11, they need to prepare faculty to respond appropriately in the classroom or provide faculty with the necessary information to pass on to students. If not prepared for serving this function, faculty members and the university may be minimizing their potential impact in the classroom.

Practical Recommendations

Chancellor Hathaway responded decisively and perhaps instinctively to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. The results of our survey indicate a number of ways the university could have helped faculty respond more effectively to this event. Although instinctive responses can be useful and often times necessary following a crisis, planning long before a crisis happens can help more effectively respond to these events (Seeger and Ulmer 2002). Based on the results of our survey, we make the following recommendations about crisis preparedness and response requirements we believe necessary for all metropolitan universities:

1. Develop a crisis plan that facilitates sense making. One of the largest hurdles facing the field of crisis management is getting organizations to plan in advance as much as they can for potential crises (Mitroff and Anagnos 2001). A critical aspect of preparing for and responding to an organizational crisis involves sense making and reducing equivocality. How organizations create meaning about crisis planning and responses is key to the overall effectiveness of their response. Perception plays a key role in preparing for and responding to crises (Penrose 2000). Recent, research on the discourse of renewal following organizational crises suggests that crises can be framed positively (Seeger and Ulmer 2002). Penrose explains, "Communicating the effects of a crisis in a more positive manner works to align internal thinking about the event and encourages employees to support the company's evaluation of the situation" (2000, 167). Chancellor Hathaway, following the terrorist attacks, responded by asking faculty to discuss the issue with students and to create "enlightenment in a dark moment." He took a decidedly positive approach to a devastating situation that we believe helped frame the meaning of the event. However, more functional pre-crisis communication emphasizing the university's position on crises would have helped faculty respond more effectively to the event. All universities should have crisis management plans. These plans should be comprehensive and should include responses to a wide variety of potential crises that could hit the university.

In the aftermath of 9/11, UALR updated its crisis communication plan. This new plan focuses principally on checklists, pre-packaged responses and press releases as well as key telephone numbers and contact information. These policies and procedures are useful and necessary to any crisis plan (Coombs 1999b; Lukaszewaki 1987). However, this is fundamentally a public relations plan that gets information out to the media and is most likely to be used following a crisis internal to the campus. Based upon what we learned in this study, we argue that more needs to be done in terms of managing not only how the university communicates with its external environment but also how communication will flow within the university and even in the classroom. In this case, a university crisis plan should address how administration and faculty should communicate about the event on campus and in classrooms. It may be that, due to the circumstances of the crisis, students will be asked to evacuate the campus. We believe there should be communication channels and strategies established for this in advance. In any case, metropolitan universities

need to become a place for information seeking and sensemaking during and following a crisis.

2. Establish a crisis team. Due to the inherent uncertainty of the situation, information during a crisis may not be readily available or it may be incomplete. However, as our paper addresses, both the Chancellor and students wanted the university to stay open. In this case, faculty are not likely going to be able to collect information immediately following crisis situations so some communication infrastructure is necessary to accomplish this effectively. Crisis teams can be instrumental in preparing for crisis and in solving ad hoc problems after a crisis. They can function to collect important information, monitor the information needs of different stakeholder groups and disseminate that information to those groups as quickly as possible. These teams should also make sure to develop instrumental information channels to communicate with faculty, students, and other stakeholders if a crisis should hit the university. For instance, universities may have a special listserv set up for this function or a place on the home page to provide information to faculty quickly and accurately. Preparing faculty on how to communicate with students following a crisis is another positive step toward crisis preparedness. If a university is going to be able to respond during a crisis or if it is going to stay open following a crisis, it needs to make sure faculty can pass on important information to students in a meaningful way.

3. Utilize the expertise of the faculty. A clear advantage that universities have over other organizations is their wide range of expertise from which to draw upon for preparation and response to crisis situations. If universities want to use the full extent of its impact for helping students better understand these events they need to include their faculty and use them as resources in crisis planning. For instance, universities can collect information from psychologists regarding emotion and stress, communication scholars regarding how to communicate internally and externally about the crisis, law professors regarding the legal implications of the crisis, sociologists regarding the broader impact of the event on society, business professors regarding economic impacts, and many other faculty that can inform how to deal with crisis events. Crisis planning is fundamentally about identifying resources and strategies pre-crisis in order to better respond to the event. If a university wants to promote itself as "creating enlightenment" it should draw from its specialists pre-crisis about how to better accomplish this goal. To maximize the impact in the aftermath of national crises faculty need to be prepared to handle the types of questions and facilitate any discussions that may ensue. Crisis teams based upon areas of expertise can disseminate packets to faculty on how to present or discuss the crisis, case studies can be used to examine and discuss key issues related to the crisis, and simulations can be developed to help put faculty in the position of communicating information or creating meaning following devastating events.

4. Develop simulations and identify challenges to your crisis plan. Universities may need to conduct simulations, much like emergency service personnel do, so that faculty and staff can actively participate in the kind of information triage demanded

by external crises. For instance, in the aftermath of the 2005 hurricanes on the Gulf Coast every university needed a crisis team to respond to the natural disasters. In addition, the hurricanes created some very real constraints for these universities. Tulane University's president, Scott Cowen, for example, had to relocate his entire crisis team following Hurricane Katrina 350 miles from campus. In addition, he needed to run his "$700 million operation…without financial systems, students and employee records, office space, or reliable communications networks (Selingo 2005, A18). Clearly, any university crisis plan should involve simulations and include a discussion of potential hurdles, such as relocation, that the university may have to overcome. Obviously, relocation creates a different series of problems for sense making with students and faculty following a crisis. However, simulations that focus on potential challenges can go a long way in preparing for and responding effectively to a crisis.

5. Establish a free flow of information with all stakeholders. Finally, a key aspect of crisis preparation is developing both instrumental communication channels and strong value positions with stakeholders prior to any crisis (Ulmer 2001). Organizations need to establish open communication about potential risks and develop strong value positions with stakeholders regarding crisis preparation. Internally, faculty and administration need to work together to develop strong channels of communication regarding risk and preparation for potential crises. In addition, a metropolitan university, which is an "intellectual resource" for society, should include promotion and coordination of crisis planning in its community. Communities are likely to benefit greatly from academic institutions that are well positioned to help coordinate local organizations like police, fire, and health departments along with national agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and the Federal Emergency Management Association. Universities are uniquely equipped to understand, handle, and facilitate coordination following crises. Adequate preparation in advance can help these institutions realize their potential for creating enlightenment following any crisis.

Conclusion

Metropolitan universities are in a unique position during any type of crisis. Helping the community make sense of a tragic situation weeks or months after it occurs is an expected response of the university and one that generally can be well-planned after the tragedy. But, helping the stakeholders of the university, primarily the students, make sense out of tragic events as they are occurring should also be a response of the university; however, it demands preparation prior to the occurrence of the event. The survey of our students clearly indicates there is a need and desire for information following a crisis. It is incumbent upon universities to be prepared to deliver it.

References

Allen, W. M., and R. H. Caillouet. 1994. Legitimation endeavors: Impression management strategies used by an organization in crisis. *Communication Monographs* 61:44-62.

Anon. 2005. The aftermath on 31 campuses. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (September 16): A16-A17.

Arkansas Democrat-Gazette. 2000. UA professor, student killed: Police say shooting of 2 apparent murder-suicide. August 29.

Arkansas Democrat-Gazette. 2001. How many dead? Terrorist acts stun America. September 12.

Barton, L. 2001. *Crisis in organizations II*. Cincinnati, OH: South-Western College Publishing.

Beach, P. 1999. Bonfire collapse kills 11; Rescuers still searching. *Austin American Statesman*, November 19, 1999.

Becherer, M. *Evil, grief U of A*. www.azstarnet.com/star/tue/21029EYEWITNESS.html (accessed October 31, 2002).

Benoit, W. L. 1995. *Accounts, excuses and apologies*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Blumenthal, J. 1995. Crisis management in university environments. *Journal of Management Inquiry* 4:248-254.

Bowles, J. 1994. Classes begin again at Northridge: Quake-damaged college has no library, and students gather in trailer. *The San Francisco Examiner*, February 5, 1994.

Brown, W. J., M. Bocarnea, and M. Basil. 2002. Fear, grief, and sympathy responses to the attacks. In *Communication and Terrorism: Public and Media Responses to 9/11*, ed. B. S. Greenberg, 245-259. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Cantor, J., M. L. Mares, and M. B. Oliver. 1993. Parents' and children's emotional reactions to TV coverage of the Gulf War. In *Desert Storm and the Mass Media*, eds. B. S. Greenberg and W. Gantz. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Coombs, W. T. 1999a. Information and compassion in crisis responses: A test of their effects. *Journal of Public Relations Research* 11:125-142.

Coombs, W. T. 1999b. *Ongoing crisis communication: Planning, managing, and responding*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Fearn-Banks, K. 2002. *Crisis communications.* 2nd ed. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Gantz, W., and B. S. Greenberg. 1993. Patterns of diffusion and information seeking. In *Desert Storm and the Mass Media*, eds. B. S. Greenberg and W. Gantz, 166-181. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Gonzalez-Herrero, A., and C. B. Pratt. 1996. An integrated symmetrical model for crisis-communications management. *Journal of Public Relations Research* 8:79-105.

Greenberg, B. S. 1964a. Diffusion of news of the Kennedy assassination. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 28:225-232.

Greenberg, B. S. 1964b. Person to person communication in the diffusion of news events. *Journalism Quarterly* 41:489-494.

Greenberg, B. S., ed. *Communication and terrorism: Public and media responses to 9/11.* Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Greenberg, B. S., L. Hofschire, and K. Lachlan. 2002. Diffusion, media use, and interpersonal communication behaviors. In *Communication and Terrorism: Public and Media Responses to 9/11*, ed. B. S. Greenberg, 3-16. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Grunwald, M. 2001. Terrorists hijack 4 airliners, destroy World Trade Center, hit Pentagon; hundreds dead; Bush promises retribution; Military put on highest alert. *Washington Post*, September 12, 2001.

Hermann, C. F. 1963. Some consequences of crisis which limit the viability of organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 8:61-82.

Hofner, C., and M. J. Haefner. 1993. Children's affective responses to news coverage of the war. In *Desert Storm and the Mass Media*, eds. B. S. Greenberg and W. Gantz, 364-380. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Holland, B. 2001. Toward a definition and characterization of the engaged campus: Six cases. *Metropolitan Universities* 12, no. 3 (Summer): 20-29.

Kleinfield, N. R. 2001. U.S. attacked; Hijacked jets destroy twin towers and hit Pentagon in a day of terror. *New York Times*, September 12, 2001.

Lawrence, J. M. 1995. Murder hit home many times in 1995. *Boston Herald*, December 31, 1995.

Lukaszewaki, J. E. 1987. Anatomy of a crisis. *Public Relations Journal* 43:45-47.

Meyers, G. C., and J. Holusha. *When it hits the fan: Managing the nine crises of business.* Boston: Haughton Mifflin, 1986).

Mitroff, I. I., and G. Anagnos. 2001. *Managing crises before they happen: What every executive needs to know about crisis management.* New York: AMACOM.

Pauchant, T. C., and I. I. Mitroff. 1992. *Transforming the crisis-prone organization.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Pearson, C. M., and J. A. Clair. 1998. Reframing crisis management. *Academy of Management Review* 23:59-76.

Penrose, J. M. 2000. The role of perception in crisis planning. *Public Relations Review* 26:155-171.

Riffe, D., and J. G. Stovall. 1989. Diffusion of news of the shuttle disaster: What role for emotional response. *Journalism Quarterly* 66:551-560.

Seeger, M. W., T. L. Sellnow, and R. R. Ulmer. 1998. Communication, organization and crisis. In *Communication Yearbook 2*, ed. M. E. Roloff, 231-275. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Seeger, M. W., T. L. Sellnow, and R. R. Ulmer. 2001. Public relations and crisis communication: Organizing and chaos. In *Handbook of Public Relations*, ed. R. L. Heath, 155-165. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Seeger, M. W., and R. R. Ulmer. 2002. A post-crisis discourse of renewal: The cases of Malden Mills and Cole Hardwoods. *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 30:126-142.

Seeger, M. W., S. Vennette, R. R. Ulmer, and T. L. Sellnow. 2002. Media use, information seeking, and reported needs in post crisis contexts. In *Communication and Terrorism: Public and Media Responses to 9/11*, ed. B. S. Greenberg, 53-63. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Selingo, J. 2005. Putting a university back together. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (September 15): A18-A20.

Sheley, J. F. 2002. Metropolitan university leadership roles during periods of national peril. *Metropolitan Universities* 13, no. 2 (Spring): 45-54.

Shribman, D. M. 2001. National perspective: In unfathomable way, we now know terror. *Boston Globe*, September 12, 2001.

Snyder, L. B., and C. L. Park. 2002. National studies of stress reactions and media exposure to the attacks. In *Communication and Terrorism: Public and Media Responses to 9/11*, ed. B. S. Greenberg, 177-192. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Star Tribune. 2000. Tedious process of book cleaning begins: It could be six months before the North Dakota State University library's flood-damaged materials are restored and replaced. June 23.

Sturges, D. L. 1994. Communicating through crisis: A strategy for organizational survival. *Management Communication Quarterly* 7:297-316.

Tompkins, P. K., and E. V. B. Anderson. 1971. *Communication crisis at Kent State*. New York: Gordon & Breach.

Turner, B. 1976. The organizational and interorganizational development of disasters. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 21:378-397.

Ulmer, R. R. 2001. Effective crisis management through established stakeholder relationships: Malden Mills as a Case Study. *Management Communication Quarterly* 14:590-615.

Weick, K. E. 1988. Enacted sense making in crisis situations. *Journal of Management Studies* 25:305-317.

Weick, K. E. 1993. The collapse of sense making in organizations: The Mann Gulch disaster. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 38:628-652.

Wober, M., and B. M. Young. 1993. British children's knowledge of, emotional reactions to, and ways of making sense of the war. In *Desert Storm and the Mass Media*, eds. B. S. Greenberg and W. Gantz, 381-394. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Author Information

Robert R. Ulmer is Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Speech Communication at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

Michael R. Hemphill is a professor in the Department of Speech Communication at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. Mike is also serving as the Director of Online Partnerships, coordinating online degree completion opportunities for members of the community.

Robert R. Ulmer
University of Arkansas at Little Rock
2801 South University Avenue
Little Rock, AR 72204
E-mail: rrulmer@ualr.edu
Telephone: 501-569-8253
Fax: 501-569-3196

Michael R. Hemphill
University of Arkansas at Little Rock
2801 South University Avenue
Little Rock, AR 72204
E-mail: mrhemphill@ualr.edu
Telephone: 501-569-8381
Fax: 501-569-3196