Information

Crisis Communication

Effective

July 1, 1995*

Number

OCM-1.03

Applicability

This policy applies to the University Community (administrators, faculty, staff, and students).

Administrative Authority

Vice President for Communications and Marketing

Responsible Unit

Office of Communications & Marketing

2323 S. Brook Street, Louisville, KY 40208

502-852-6171

ocm@louisville.edu

History

*This policy has been in effect since at least July 1, 1995.

Revision Date(s): June 30, 2016; November 4, 2025

Reviewed Date(s): June 30, 2016, November 4, 2025

Categories

Statement:

The University of Louisville is committed to taking a preemptive approach to public relations crises, using disclosure whenever possible as the preferred strategy for preventing or minimizing public relations crises.

No one is authorized to speak to the news media in a crisis without clearance from the Office of Communications and Marketing.

Related Information:

Crisis Prevention

Communications and Marketing will maintain regular contact with vice presidents, deans, directors, department heads, campus police, and faculty, staff and student leaders, advising the appropriate administrator(s) when internal issues or developments appear likely to lead to public relations problems.

Similarly, UofL's administration will regularly notify Communications and Marketing of internal developments that may escalate into public relations crises.

Communications and Marketing also will monitor local, state and national news coverage of higher education, advising the appropriate administrator(s) of issues and/or trends that might lead to negative stories.

Crisis Response

When crises erupt, Communications and Marketing will gather and verify information about the crisis, assess the severity of the crisis, and develop strategies concerning how information is to be released, who should speak for the institution and who is to be notified.

The office also will work out logistical details of releasing information and distribute verified information as quickly as possible to internal and external audiences.

Definitions:

For terms of this policy, a crisis is defined as "A significant disturbance in the university's activities which results in extensive news coverage and public scrutiny, and which has the potential to cause long-term public relations damage."

Procedures:

1. Foreseeable crises
    1. Crisis assessment
       The Vice President for Communications and Marketing (or his/her designee) will be notified immediately of an emerging crisis.
        1. VP will confer with the appropriate U of L official(s) to assess the nature and severity of the crisis.
            1. VP may be able to devise a simple strategy to forestall the crisis, particularly if it is confined to a single U of L unit.
            2. If issues and events are of sufficient complexity that they require input from several U of L units, or if a simple strategy is not likely to be effective, the VP will recommend to the University President (or his/her designee) that a crisis team be quickly formed.
    2. Formation of a crisis team
       VP or University President (or his/her designee) will assemble and chair a crisis team made up of the highest-ranking officials available from the units involved in the crisis.
        1. The composition of the team will vary according to the situation.
        2. The crisis team will convene virtually or in-person as specified by the President or his/her designee.
        3. At the session, the VP will:
            1. Gather as many details as possible.
            2. Recommend strategies for internal and external communication.

3. Select an appropriate spokesperson (see University Spokesperson).
4. Final approval of the recommendations will rest with the University President (or his/her designee).

2. Sudden crises
    1. When the sudden occurrence of a severe crisis precludes convening a crisis team, the following emergency procedures will take effect:
        1. VP will:
            1. Be notified immediately of the crisis.
            2. Be apprised of all known facts/background.
            3. Have direct, priority access to the President or his/her designee to develop a "first-wave" communication strategy.
        2. Communications and Marketing will implement the strategy immediately upon approval by the President or his/her designee.
    2. After implementing "first-wave" communication strategy, the VP will assist in forming a crisis team to develop ongoing strategy.
3. Establishing a clear line of communication
    1. Communications and Marketing will be authorized to gather and verify information in a crisis, and will be the only department authorized to release information to internal audiences, news media, and the general public.
    2. The academic dean and/or vice president of the unit involved in the crisis will provide Communications and Marketing with complete, accurate and timely information
    3. Communications, in collaboration with the academic dean and/or vice president of the unit involved in the crisis, will work with the university president, executive vice president/provost, legal and other members of the Executive Leadership Team to determine:
        1. appropriate information to share with internal and external audiences; timing of when to share appropriate information; appropriate deployment mechanism(s) to share the information (email, university alert system, social media, etc.).
    4. All inquiries regarding the crisis - including inquiries received by the news media - will be directed to Communication and Marketing.
4. Releasing information internally
    1. Whenever practical, Communications and Marketing will attempt to inform U of L employees of crises before details are released externally.

1. Communications and Marketing may:
    1. Issue a campus-wide alert through the UofL Alert system
    2. Issue updates through OCM's email service account and on the home page of the university's website.
    3. Post details in UofL News.
5. Informing outside parties
    1. Communications and Marketing will coordinate notification of outside parties likely to be affected by or strongly interested in the crisis.
        1. Whenever practical, attempts will be made to:
            1. Inform affected parties of impending media calls.
            2. Supply them with written information before it is distributed to the news media.
            3. Notify them of any planned U of L news briefings.
        2. The U of L officials with the closest working relationships to the parties will handle actual notification.
6. Social Media
    1. The Office of Communications and Marketing will actively monitor UofL's flagship social media accounts and keep the university's leadership and affected units and departments informed.
    2. OCM also will monitor local, state and national news coverage of higher education, advising the appropriate administrator(s) of issues and/or trends that might lead to negative stories.
    3. Additionally, the office will monitor for threats or hate speech. Comments of concern will be reported to the social media platform. Any direct threats or posts that incite violence will be elevated immediately to ULPD.
    4. Planned social media posts, including those within affected units and departments, should be paused strategically and resume as necessary and appropriate.
    5. University messages addressing the crisis may be posted to UofL's flagship social media channels in certain instances.
7. Releasing information to the news media
    1. Communications and Marketing will work to supply verifiable details to the news media as rapidly as possible.
        1. This may be done through personal contact, telephone, email, radio feed, video feed, background session or news briefing.
            1. It may become necessary to schedule periodic news briefings.

    2. After releasing information, Communications and Marketing will monitor the news coverage and request corrections for any errors that are made.
8. Evaluation and follow-up
    1. Communications and Marketing will document the news coverage surrounding a crisis, including wire stories, newspaper articles, radio and television broadcasts.
    2. When the crisis has passed, Communications and Marketing will supply the crisis team with a summary of news coverage.
        1. Members of the team will review this report and evaluate U of L's performance under fire. The team will note:
            1. Overall success or failure of the crisis communication effort.
            2. Problems to be avoided in the future.
            3. Appropriate follow-up measures.
        2. Communications and Marketing will report the findings of the team to the President's Office and other appropriate offices.

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Responsibilities:

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Final approval of these strategies will rest with the University President or his/her designee.