



Thiel College Crisis Communication Plan

Prepared by the Thiel College Office of Communications and Marketing

To be used in conjunction with the Thiel College Emergency Management Plan and *Emergency Management Reference Guide*

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Updated June 2020



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INTRODUCTION

This Crisis Communication Plan describes how Thiel College will communicate vital information to key constituents in the event of an emergency or crisis.

This plan is a guideline focused on communication only and is intended to supplement the Thiel College Emergency Management Plan and *Emergency Management Reference Guide*. **Each crisis or emergency will require a unique response depending on the nature of the crisis.**

A crisis is defined as a significant disturbance in the College's activities which results in extensive news coverage and public scrutiny and/or interest. It has the potential to cause campus disruptions and long-term public relations damage.

Examples include explosions, hazardous chemical or environmental spills, a hostage or firearm situation, major accidents, inappropriate relationships, violence, wide-spread illness, unexpected deaths and natural disasters.

It **does not include** incidents of isolated crime, which are routinely handled by Thiel's Public Safety and/or Greenville Police and/or other law enforcement agencies.

PUBLIC INFORMATION AND MEDIA RELATIONS

The role of the Thiel College Office of Communications and Marketing is to collect and convey information to both internal and external constituencies during or immediately following a crisis or emergency situation. In every crisis, the primary goal of all College employees is the safety, security and well-being of students and staff.

At the President's direction, the Executive Director of Communications and Marketing will implement the Crisis Communication Plan and:

- Work with the requesting authority and press personnel.
- Develop and clear all press releases.
- Assistant Director Communications and Marketing will lend support in these efforts.



CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

INTRODUCTION

The President of the College has designated the Executive Director of Communications and Marketing as the official Spokesperson for the College. The Executive Director of Communications and Marketing will serve as the point person in all communications.

CRISIS

The term "crisis" frequently refers to the period immediately following a situation which has widespread interest among the local, regional, state, and/or national community, thus generating greater media focus and requiring Thiel's full attention for the duration of the situation.

When a crisis occurs, decisions may have to be made without examining every aspect of a situation. A crisis situation is defined as any circumstance or event identified by the President as having a real or potential major impact on the campus community as a whole.

I. WHAT TO EXPECT IN THE EVENT OF A CRISIS

- Surprise - Seldom does a crisis give any warning.
- Insufficient Information - The shock hits and all facts and information aren't available.
- Escalating Flow of Events - Typically, in a crisis, events escalate.
- Loss of Control - As the crisis escalates, control is lost to outside authorities.
- Rumors and Speculation - In the absence of current facts, people will discuss the incident with any available information.
- Increased Scrutiny - Everyone will have an opinion.

II. SITUATION

Each crisis or emergency will require a unique public information response. The extent and kind of response will depend on the nature of the crisis.

The person who becomes aware of the incident will report the situation to his/her Cabinet representative who will attempt to quickly determine basic details of who, what, where, when, and how, etc.; The Cabinet representative will immediately report this information to the President.

The President and/or Executive Director Communications and Marketing will inform the appropriate campus leader(s), and a plan of action is initiated.

The President and the Executive Director Communications and Marketing will quickly determine the magnitude of the incident and whether information needs to be communicated externally with the media, internally to the campus community, or handled confidentially because of the nature of the incident and sensitivity to the victims.

During a crisis, the Office of Communications and Marketing contacts will include print and broadcast media and, under the direction of the Executive Director Communications and Marketing, the Office will serve as liaison with other campus departments.



III. ASSUMPTIONS

In many cases, the only information the public receives about an emergency is through the media; therefore, media relations are an essential element of any crisis plan.

A crisis situation is “big news” and is likely to result in more public exposure for the College than hundreds of “good news” stories.

Crisis Questions to Ask Ourselves:

- Is there a good chance that the situation will, if left unattended, escalate in intensity?
- Could the situation foster unwanted attention by outsiders, such as the news media or some regulatory agency?
- Might the situation interfere with normal College operations in some manner?
- Could the situation negatively affect the image of the College and cause people (students, alumni) to lose confidence?
- What is the effect on the College’s bottom line?

IV. OPERATIONS

General

The Executive Director Communications and Marketing along with the Assistant Director Communications and Marketing will coordinate crisis communications with campus and off-campus media to ensure that the College’s public information response to an emergency or crisis situation is prompt, accurate, sensitive and responsible.

Key points of contact (Campus operator, Campus Safety personnel, administrative assistants, etc.) should have advance instruction about to whom they should direct reporters’ calls. They should be instructed not to comment on the incident, to get the reporter’s name, phone number, questions, and media outlet they represent, and to report inquiries immediately to the Office of Communications and Marketing. The key points of contact should immediately forward to the call to the Office of Communications and Marketing.

The Office of Communications and Marketing might— at the President’s request— set up a 24-hour Crisis Communications Center on campus for the duration of a crisis. If a 24-hour staffing situation becomes necessary, it will be important for affected campus offices to cooperate with timely approval of information releases pertinent to the situation to prevent news voids from developing that will be filled with speculation and potential misinformation.

During an emergency, the Executive Director Communications and Marketing, or designee appointed by the President, (see “Crisis Team”), will serve as the College spokesperson. The name and telephone number of the Spokesperson will be provided to all Office of Communications and Marketing staff and student workers for referral of media phone calls.

Phases of Response

At the start of the incident: Take immediate action to control the problem. Grasp the circumstances and take charge; move decisively. Nothing can or should take precedence over solving a crisis.



- The President's Office and the College spokesperson will determine if an official statement should be prepared and released. In some cases, this may require the advice of legal counsel.
- Spokesperson will brief all Office of Communications and Marketing staff who are assigned to answer the phone.
- The spokesperson will get basic information (type of emergency/crisis; time of incident; actions taken; areas and number of people involved; fatalities, injuries and extent of damage); S/he will prepare an official statement or news release. Office of Communications and Marketing staff members will be kept apprised of breaking news to enable them to help the Spokesperson formulate answers to media questions.
- The spokesperson will verify all sources of information.
- The spokesperson will clear any press release with the President's Office as quickly as possible before releasing it to the media.
- In cases involving employee or student injuries or deaths, families will be notified by appropriate personnel before the information is released to the public.
- The spokesperson will coordinate the release of factual information to local hospitals, the police and other agencies, providing information that is as prompt, accurate and complete as possible. ***Prior to the release of information***, the team will sync with Public Safety to identify any potentially proprietary information.
- If the crisis incident continues: longer-term steps are needed to eliminate the cause, remove the problem and prevent a recurrence.
- The Office of Communications and Marketing staff will:
 - Provide—via social and news media—the public and constituents with basic information about an emergency or potential emergency.
 - Keep the public, media and constituents informed of the situation and provide advice on what they should or should not do to prevent further damage or loss of life, panic or interference with emergency response efforts.
 - Keep the public, media and constituents informed of where to seek temporary housing, food, etc.
 - Instruct the public on how to obtain further advice or information.

Recovery Period: The Office of Communications and Marketing will issue media updates as long as necessary, then scale back activities as warranted.

V. Organization and Assignment of Responsibilities

Organization

The Executive Director Communications and Marketing or designee, appointed by the President, will supervise crisis communications with the media.

Office of Communications and Marketing staff members, as well as other campus departments and staff members, will be called upon for assistance when necessary.

Responsibilities

The Office of Communications and Marketing will assist in compiling and relaying official statements to print and broadcast media.



- Press Conferences: When a press conference is called, the Executive Director of Marketing and Communication and any other designee will attend. When deemed appropriate, the President will speak at a press conference when a major crisis needs to be addressed or when she/he wishes to issue updates on the situation. For consistency, there will be one spokesperson.
- Site: Dr. David Andrews Executive Conference Center, Howard Miller Student Center. (The Sawhill-Georgian Room might be a better room to accommodate a press conference) To reserve for press conferences, Office of Communications and Marketing will contact the President's administrative assistant.
- Contact Person: Richard Orr, Executive Director of Communications and Marketing – 724.589.2700.
- Time: Must be convenient to College personnel but also early enough for media to make their evening news deadlines (no later than 3:30 p.m. 10-11 a.m. for noon broadcasts). This is an important consideration for maintaining positive relationships with the media.
- Parking: Request that a Security Officer (or designated employee) be assigned to the HMSC parking lot or an alternate safe and convenient location to allow media with credentials to park in the lot near the HMSC.
- Contact person: Chief of Police, Director of Public Safety (724.589.2186).

C. Media Relations

- Interviews: Upon approval of the President, members of the Crisis Team (see Crisis Team) will be available for interviews related to their specific areas and may be interviewed at their posts or some central location to be determined by the President and the Executive Director Communications and Marketing. When a reporter contacts a member of the Crisis Team directly, only the designated spokesperson for that department may respond to questions in his/her area of expertise with prior approval. Immediately inform the Office of Communications and Marketing of the interview.
- **To encourage the media's confidence in and respect for College personnel, dealings with the media require prior approval and should always be honest and courteous. In addition, the College spokesperson's attitudes toward media reflect on the image of the College. Every effort will be made to maintain credibility with members of the media by being open and straightforward. However, all College personnel must take care not to step over legal lines or offend the parties or families of the parties involved in the incident.**

D. Crisis Team

Based upon the type of crisis, certain key people will work directly with the Office of Communications and Marketing and the President's Office to facilitate dissemination of information. The Crisis Team will meet in the President's office, when requested by the President/designee.

- President- 724.589.2100
- Executive Director Communications and Marketing- 724.589.2700
- Vice President for Student Life as events pertain to student affairs – 724.589.2600
- Campus Pastor as events pertain to mission and ministry – 724.589.2130
- Vice President for Academic Affairs as events pertain to academic affairs – 724.589.2200
- Senior Vice President for Finance and Management – 724.589.2102
- Director of Public Safety – 724.589.2186
- Director of Facilities – 724.589.2175



- Legal Counsel – Ekker, Kuster, McCall & Epstein, LLP – 724.981.2000

VI. Direction and Control

The President’s Office will direct and approve the work of the Office of Communications and Marketing.

The Crisis Team will make recommendations to the President.

VII. Office of Communications and Marketing Team Members

- Vice President for Institutional Advancement – 724.589.2024
- Executive Director Communications and Marketing, Secondary – 724.589.2700
- Director of Communications and Publications, Secondary – 724.589.2188

VIII. Constituencies and Community

President’s Cabinet	Alumni
Board of Trustees	Community Neighbors
Faculty	Media
Staff	Legislators
Students	Vendors/Suppliers
Parents	Friends of the College

X Channels of Communications

College Website	News Conferences
Email	Video News Releases
Teleconferences	Internal Memos
Telephone Calls and Text Messages	Interviews
Personal Visits	Internal Memos
Employee Meetings	Speeches
Speeches	Newsletters
Social Media	Advertisements

IX. Initial Response

At the bare minimum, an immediate alert should be disseminated to applicable audiences to alert them to the emergency situation, (possibly) instruct them to shelter in place, and point to the emergency website for further information.

Example text/Tomcat alert:

"Shots fired on campus. All students and employees lock down and shelter in place until further notice.

www.thiel.edu/shortlink



Notifying and Working with the Media

While many of Thiel's communication tools are effective at reaching key audiences, utilizing the media is one of the most effective ways to inform the general public about the crisis and the status of the crisis recovery and will be utilized heavily to assist the College with communicating relevant and accurate information.

The OCM will:

- Determine the best way to reach the media (press conference, news release, press room, social media, etc.).
- If holding a press conference determine location, time, speakers, and talking points.
- Arrange for information from news briefings to be captured in an audio or visual format for later use.
- Arrange for news coverage to be monitored for accuracy and arrange for significant inaccuracies to be corrected if needed.
- Welcome reporters and work with Public Safety to arrange for access if possible while maintaining the integrity of the incident scene and protecting privacy.
- Prepare and distribute materials throughout the crisis as needed for the media.
- Archive all stories and clips.
- Compile a list of all questions (and answers) asked at the news conference for future distribution.
- Assist with doing research on related items to provide as background material in communication messages.

Release of Information:

In the case of ANY emergency, Thiel will adhere to FERPA guidelines regarding the release of information. Only information that is classified as "directory information" may be released and checks must be performed with the Registrar's Office for privacy holds. No additional information should be released to the media or public. Confirmation that someone is NOT a student may be made. General confirmation of injuries is recommended (Example: 20 students and two faculty members suffered injuries).

After-Emergency Follow Up

It may be necessary to update audiences for days, weeks, even months after a crisis, depending upon its severity. Within a week of the incident, the Core Communications Team will meet for a debriefing.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Instructions for Information Dissemination

Appendix B: Best Practices

Appendix C: Pre-Approved Responses

Appendix D: Media Preparation Questions



Appendix A

Notification to the Thiel community about an Immediate Threat

In the event of a potential emergency or dangerous situation that poses an immediate threat to the health or safety of some or all members of the Thiel community, Public Safety and/or OCM will use some or all of the systems described below to communicate the threat to the Thiel community or to the appropriate segment of the community, if the threat is limited to a particular building or segment of the population. The entire campus community will be notified when there is at least the potential that a very large segment of the community will be affected by a situation, or when a situation threatens the operation of the campus as a whole. The situation will be continually assessed to determine if additional segments of the campus should be notified.

Examples of significant emergencies or dangerous situations are: active shooter, fire, outbreak of a serious illness, approaching extreme weather condition (i.e. tornado), gas leak, terrorist incident, armed intruder, bomb threat, civil unrest or rioting, explosion, etc.

Some or all of the following notification methods will be used:

Tomcat Alert emergency text messages and emails* (sign up for this service at www.thiel.edu/publicsafety).

Thiel campus-wide mass communications.

Thiel homepage (www.thiel.edu).

Campus Announcements in HUB portal.

Thiel Emergency Information Line (866-THIEL-63 [866.844.3563]).

WXTC 88.1 FM, the official radio source of Thiel.

Thiel social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, other channels deemed appropriate)

Members of the larger community outside campus will receive information about a campus emergency via many of the same methods listed above. In addition, the College will disseminate information via local news media (TV, radio and newspaper).

Those responsible for carrying out the actions above include:

Confirmation of an emergency: Thiel Public Safety

Content of message/segment of campus to be notified: Public Safety and/or OCM

Initiation of the notification system: Public Safety and/or OCM

*Note: Parents are added only by their student. Anticipate that an alternate mode of communication might be necessary.

Appendix B

Best practices for Social Media during a crisis

If you are aware of an emergency situation on campus, contact the Thiel Public Safety first 724.589.2222 and then the Marketing and Communications office (724.589.2188).



Do not post about the situation on social media until official messaging is released from the College.

During an emergency situation on campus, official posts regarding the crisis will come from four accounts:

- Thiel Facebook page or <https://www.facebook.com/thielcollege>
- Thiel Twitter account or <https://twitter.com/thielcollege>

In addition, during an emergency on campus, be sure to:

- Cancel scheduled posts to Thiel social media accounts until the end of the emergency.
- Refrain from posting to Thiel social media sites after directing people to the official messaging/posts.
- Refrain from engaging with followers during this time so that timelines do not get cluttered. This gives important updates more of a chance of being seen.
- If you receive private messages on your Thiel accounts, reply by referring the individual to the main Thiel sites.

Appendix C

Pre-approved messages that can be used in case of an emergency. Below are examples of **a few** scenarios. Sample messages below can be adapted to address weather-related, illness, severe campus accidents, et al.

TEXT MESSAGES

Threat Specific, i.e., Bomb Threat:

Specified building: A bomb threat has been received for <BUILDING>. Evacuate immediately to <LOCATION> until further notice. If safe to do so inform others.

Non-specified building: A bomb threat was received for the Campus. Evacuate immediately to <LOCATION> until further notice. If safe to do so inform others.

Threat Non-specific:

Specified building: A threat has been received for <BUILDING>. Evacuate immediately to <LOCATION> until further notice. If safe to do so inform others.

Non-specified building: A threat has been received for the Campus. Evacuate immediately to <LOCATION> until further notice. If safe to do so inform others.

EMAIL

Threat Specific - Specified building:

Subject: Emergency Situation - Evacuation

Text: Thiel College has received a bomb threat for <BUILDING>. An immediate evacuation of <BUILDING> to <LOCATION> has been ordered. More information will be provided as it becomes available. If safe to do so, please inform others of this message.



Threat Specific - Non-specified building:

Subject: Emergency Situation - Evacuation

Text: Thiel College has received a bomb threat for the Thiel Campus. An immediate evacuation of all campus buildings has been ordered. Please evacuate to <LOCATION>. More information will be provided as it becomes available. If safe to do so, please inform others of this message.

Threat Non-specific - Specified building:

Subject: Emergency Situation - Evacuation

Text: Thiel College has received a general threat for <BUILDING>. An immediate evacuation of BUILDING has been ordered to <LOCATION>. More information will be provided as it becomes available. If safe to do so, please inform others of this message.

Threat Non-Specific - Non-specified building:

Subject: Emergency Situation - Evacuation

Text: Thiel College has received a general threat for the Thiel Campus. An immediate evacuation of all campus buildings has been ordered. Please evacuate to <LOCATION>. More information will be provided as it becomes available. If safe to do so, please inform others of this message.

WEBSITE

Threat Specific - Specified building:

Text: Thiel College has received a bomb threat for <BUILDING>. An immediate evacuation of <BUILDING> has been ordered until further notice. The proper authorities have been notified. Additional information will be provided on this website as it becomes available.

Threat Specific - Non-specified building:

Text: Thiel College has received a bomb threat for the Thiel Campus. An immediate evacuation of all Campus buildings has been ordered until further notice. The proper authorities have been notified. Additional information will be provided on this website as it becomes available.

Threat Non-specific - Specified building:

Text: Thiel College has received a threat for <BUILDING>. An immediate evacuation of <BUILDING> has been ordered until further notice. The proper authorities have been notified. Additional information will be provided on this website as it becomes available.



Threat Non-specific - Non-specified building:

Text: Thiel College has received a general threat for the Thiel Campus. An immediate evacuation of all Campus buildings has been ordered until further notice. The proper authorities have been notified. Additional information will be provided on this website as it becomes available.

MEDIA FOLLOW-UP

Specified building:

At 00:00 today, Thiel College received a general bomb threat for <BUILDING>. An immediate evacuation of <BUILDING> has been conducted and will remain closed until it has been deemed safe. The proper authorities have been notified.

Thiel takes threats like these very seriously and will work with authorities to prosecute the individual(s) involved to the fullest extent of the law.

Non-specified building:

At 00:00 today, Thiel College received a general bomb threat for the Campus. Since no individual building was specified, an immediate evacuation of all campus buildings has been conducted. All buildings will remain closed until they have been deemed safe. The proper authorities have been notified.

Thiel takes threats like these very seriously and will work with authorities to prosecute the individual(s) involved to the fullest extent of the law.

ACTIVE SHOOTER/ARMED ASSAILANT

Text Messages:

Active shooter at <BUILDING/LOCATION>. Leave area if safe to do so or secure your location. Stay in secure area until all-clear is sounded.

Email:

Subject: Emergency Situation - Active Shooter

Text: An active shooter has been reported at <BUILDING/LOCATION>. Leave the area if it is safe to do so. If not, secure the room you are in by locking and/or barricading the door using any available object(s) (chairs, tables, desks, etc.). If you cannot secure the room, determine if there is a nearby location that you are able to reach safely and then secure or, if you can, safely exit the building. Stay in secure area until all-clear is sounded by the police.

Website:

Text: An active shooter has been reported at <BUILDING/LOCATION>. Individuals have been instructed to leave the area if it is safe to do so or if not to secure the room they are in by locking and/or barricading the door. The proper authorities have been notified. Additional information will be provided on this website as it becomes available.



DISEASE/PANDEMIC:

Strong likelihood that this will be an extended series of targeted communications to various stakeholder groups – students, parents, employees, trustees, and alumni. The extent of illness will dictate the level of communication. Reference communication plans: Norovirus (October 2017) and COVID-19 (March 2020).

Email: Subject: Important information

Website:

Homepage Banner:

Phase I: Acknowledge situation, set expectations and designate as a destination for information.

Phase II: Provide high level updates as necessary.

Phase III: Maintenance. Visit our Coronavirus Updates page for more information. Please continue to check back for updates.

Dedicated webpage for on-going communication and archive.

GENERIC/UNKNOWN EVENT

Text Messages: Emergency on campus ACTION.

Email: Subject: Emergency Situation

Text: There is an emergency on campus in the vicinity of <LOCATION>, <ACTION> until further notice.

Website:

Text: An emergency has been reported on campus in the vicinity of <LOCATION>. We are asking everyone to <ACTION> until further notice.

Appendix D

Media Coverage Prep

It's difficult to prepare for a crisis, particularly one that involves media coverage. Following is a list of the most commonly asked questions by the media to serve as a general guide. Anyone who might be placed in front of a journalist should be prepared to field questions with pre-authorized responses.

Big picture, journalists are likely to ask six primary questions in a crisis: who, what, where, when, why, and how. They will relate to five broad topics:

- What happened?



- What caused it to happen?
- What does it mean?
- Who is to blame?
- What are you doing to ensure it does not happen again?

Specific questions commonly asked by journalists during a crisis

- What is your name and title?
- What are your job responsibilities?
- What are your qualifications?
- Can you tell us what happened?
- When did it happen?
- Where did it happen?
- Who was harmed?
- How many people were harmed?
- Are those who were harmed getting help?
- How certain are you about this information?
- How are those who were harmed getting help?
- Is the situation under control?
- How certain are you that the situation is under control?
- Is there any immediate danger?
- What is being done in response to what happened?
- Who is in charge?
- What can we expect next?
- What are you advising people to do?
- How long will it be before the situation returns to normal?
- What help has been requested or offered from others?
- What responses have you received?
- Can you be specific about the types of harm that occurred?
- What are the names of those who were harmed?
- Can we talk to them?
- How much damage occurred?
- What other damage may have occurred?
- How certain are you about damages?
- How much damage do you expect?
- What are you doing now?
- Who else is involved in the response?
- Why did this happen?
- What was the cause?
- Did you have any forewarning that this might happen?
- Why wasn't this prevented from happening?
- What else can go wrong?
- If you are not sure of the cause, what is your best guess?



- Who caused this to happen?
- Who is to blame?
- Could this have been avoided?
- Do you think those involved handled the situation well enough?
- When did your response to this begin?
- When were you notified that something had happened?
- Who is conducting the investigation?
- What are you going to do after the investigation?
- What have you found out so far?
- Why was more not done to prevent this from happening?
- What is your personal opinion?
- Are all those involved in agreement?
- Are people overreacting?
- Which laws are applicable?
- Has anyone broken the law?
- How certain are you about whether laws have been broken?
- Has anyone made mistakes?
- How certain are you that mistakes have not been made?
- Have you told us everything you know?
- What are you not telling us?
- What effects will this have on the people involved?
- What precautionary measures were taken?
- Do you accept responsibility for what happened?
- Has this ever happened before?
- Can this happen elsewhere?
- What is the worst-case scenario?
- Were those lessons implemented?
- What can be done to prevent this from happening again?
- What would you like to say to those that have been harmed and to their families?
- Is there any continuing danger?
- Are people out of danger? Are people safe?
- Will there be inconvenience to employees or to the public?
- How much will all this cost?
- Are you able and willing to pay the costs?
- Who else will pay the costs?
- When will we find out more?
- What steps need to be taken to avoid a similar event?
- Have these steps already been taken? If not, why not?
- What does this all mean?