



Shoring Up Emergency Management Plans on College Campuses

BY MARILYN VILLALOBOS

When thinking about emergency preparedness, colleges and universities recognize the importance of having policies and procedures in place to prevent tragedies, minimize damages and ensure a safe environment for the students, faculty and staff who live, work and study on campus. Colleges and universities are located in a variety of geographical areas across the states, and they must have a plan to deal with multiple kinds of emergencies. These can range from natural disasters, such as fires, tornadoes, floods, hurricanes, earthquakes and pandemics, to man-made disasters, such as terrorism, bomb threats, active shooters and other emergencies.

According to the [Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Institutions of](#)

[Higher Education](#), emergency preparedness falls in five categories:

- **Prevention**, where colleges and universities must constantly take action to prevent an incident, threat or emergency from happening.
- **Protection**, which focuses on ongoing actions that protect students, teachers, staff, visitors, networks and property from a threat or hazard.
- **Mitigation**, which refers to institutional capacity to eliminate or reduce the loss of life and property damage by lessening the impact of an event or emergency. It also refers to reducing the likelihood that threats and hazards will happen.

Did You Know?

- More than 1,700 fires occurred in on-campus student housing facilities in 2018.
- Nearly three-quarters of college students reported that their academic performance declined and 36 % withdrew from classes following Hurricane Katrina in 2005.
- More than 35 colleges have reported at least 1,000 cases of COVID-19 over the course of the coronavirus pandemic, and more than 230 colleges have reported more than 100 cases.

- **Response**, which includes having the capabilities necessary to stabilize an emergency, establish a safe and secure environment, save lives and property, and facilitate transition to the final state of recovery.
- **Recovery**, when colleges and universities can restore the learning environment.

Currently, as the coronavirus pandemic affects students across the globe, colleges and universities are working around the clock to implement their emergency plans to reduce the damages and student disruptions. They are making decisions about closing campuses, transitioning to online education, canceling sporting events and restricting other activities based on the safety of their students. At the same time, they are balancing the potentially negative consequences that such decisions might incur, including decreased enrollment, admissions and finances, as well as the mental and physical health challenges facing their students. In fact, according to the [National Student Clearinghouse Research Center](#), undergraduate enrollment is running 4% below enrollment rates at the same time last year, while graduate enrollment is up 2.7 percent.

The United States [Ready Campaign](#) acknowledges the critical role that colleges and universities play in serving as key emergency management partners to federal, state, local, tribal, territory and private-sector organizations. “Effective emergency management planning and development of a higher education emergency operation plan are not done in isolation,” according to the campaign’s [Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Institutions of Higher Education](#). “It is critical that institutions of higher education work with their community partners including first responders, emergency managers, public health officials, and mental health officials as well as with other local governmental officials and community organizations during the planning process, as an effective higher education emergency operational plan is integrated with community, regional and state plans. This collaboration makes more resources available and helps to ensure the seamless integration of all responders.”

State Action

[Virginia enacted SB 931](#) in 2018, requiring each public institution of higher education to conduct a test or exercise annually in accordance with the

protocols established by the institution’s crisis and emergency management plan. The colleges must submit a written certification to the Department of Emergency Management that such a test or exercise was conducted.

[Arkansas enacted SB 85](#) in the 2020 legislative session. It allows an institution of higher education that experiences an emergency or disaster resulting in all or a significant portion of campus operations being interrupted to request disaster assistance through the Arkansas Department of Education’s Division of Higher Education. Upon the declaration of an emergency by the governor, the institution may request a grant from the Disaster Relief Fund to assist in returning that campus to operation and/or assist a sister campus providing services to the students from the affected campus. The request is subject to the recommendation of the Division of Higher Education director and approval by the governor. Certified law enforcement officers employed by an institution of higher education may be granted jurisdiction at the sister institution, upon agreement of both institutions.

Also in 2020, [Maryland enacted SB 329](#) requiring public institutions of higher education to submit an outbreak response plan. The plans must include processes to expediently notify students, families, faculty and staff of a contagious disease outbreak, provide guidance on protective measures and the availability of laboratory testing, and report contagious diseases to local and state health providers.

Federal Action

Signed into federal law in 1990, the [Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act](#) addresses emergency responses at colleges and universities. It requires every Title IV institution to have and disclose emergency response and evacuation procedures for a significant emergency or dangerous situation involving an immediate threat to the health or safety of students or employees occurring on the campus. It requires the plans to include current campus policies covering procedures and facilities for students in case of emergencies. It also requires a description of the type and frequency of programs designed to inform students and employees about campus security and evacuation procedures, along with other security-related policy statements.

Additional Resources

- [Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Institutions of Higher Education](#)
- [The Handbook for Campus Safety and Security Reporting, 2016 Edition](#)
- [Campus Emergency Management Resources, Federal Emergency Management Agency](#)
- [Presidential Policy Directive / PPD-8: National Preparedness](#)
- [National Student Clearinghouse Research Center’s Monthly Update on Higher Education Enrollment](#)

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