

Lessons Learned from UTMB Natural Disaster

The following is a combination of lessons learned and information we wish we would have had in place before the disaster hit.

PLANS AND CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE TEAM

- Establish an Emergency Operation Plan (EOP). If you have a plan make sure it includes up to date evacuation and emergency preparedness plans on campus. Establish a Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT), with key university individuals to include Academic and Student Affairs departments. Regularly scheduled meetings should occur to discuss key topics in emergency preparedness.
- Identify evacuation location and transportation, secure materials for protecting property, contact insurance company and FEMA in advance. Notify students, faculty, staff of closure of school. Give students plenty of time to evacuate campus (should be BEFORE local residents to ensure safe evacuation). Be sure all buildings and offices are secure.
- Have a HOUSING plan in place! Know where you plan on sending students, and know where they can stay in the case that campus housing is lost (hotel, apartment complex(s), other local/close universities and colleges.
- Having pre-existing mutual aid agreements with outside companies and other colleges and universities are a faster route to getting students the resources they need (supplies, equipment, housing, study space etc..) than waiting on government assistance (FEMA)

COMMAND AND COORDINATION

- VP of Student Affairs should be involved in the coordination of emergency preparedness at University level.
- If a command center is set up, make sure you have a representative in contact or in the Campus Command Center.
- Have a planned time to have daily meetings with your command staff via the 1800 number

COMMUNICATIONS

- It is recommended that a specific web page be developed prior to an emergency for student information only.
- Have updated information posted on a webpage made specific for emergencies.
- It is recommended setting up a plan to use e-mail messages regularly to students and it is suggested to operate a Twitter or Facebook account to give students up to date information as it happens.
- Set up a reverse -911 system (First Call) for students and staff. Automatically enroll students upon registration to campus (we cannot mandate but we give students contact information to opt out or change contact information)
- Have time set aside during orientation to direct students to website where information will be retrieved in case of an emergency. Send out semester/annual email to advise returning students where information is housed and what to do in case of an emergency.
- Be sure to have the ability to have access to the e-forms of communication (i.e. have a wireless card(s) set up for your department and/or leaders of your department), and make sure you have laptops available for checkout in case of an emergency.
- Set up a 1-800 number for employees to check in and set up a schedule in your planning phase for each group to call in (have business cards laminated with 1-800 contact information on it, given to all staff).
- Have a home and cell phone list made up with all employee contact information, update every 3 months!

- Be prepared for communication requests from local media.
- Prepare for possible departures in your departments or the possibility of a subsequent RIF process.

LOGISTICS AND EQUIPMENT

- Vital to have mutual aid agreements within the UT System. Must have agreements for library use, student wellness, recreation facilities. It would be good to have classroom services, food service, housing, remote access to enrollment services, financial aid and other services provided to students.
- Have cell phone access for students to both academic and wellness student counselors.
- Have a plan for Financial Aid. Know where you can implement/disperse funds from an off site location. Have key individuals set up plan for getting allocated funds to students.
- Work with Academic Affairs to have a plan for resuming classes off campus or online. Work with academic departments to make sure good lines of communication are going back and forth between Student and Academic Affairs to ensure ease of student return/continuing course work.
- Plans for sending and receiving mail/UPS or FEDEX shipments.
- Have up to date inventory of all equipment, furniture, and supplies and update regularly. Take pictures and video of valuable equipment at the beginning of each school year.

STAFF

- Have off site locations plan for staffing well in advance. For example have a locations set up for all your departments. Have a clinic sites set up off site near campus for Student Wellness. Have office space planned for setting up of Enrollment Services, contact local YMCA or other fitness facility to put plan in place for student activities.
- Have a plan/system to track employee hours worked during recovery, while campus is officially closed.
- Prepare for (limited) access to campus, who is considered essential and non essential (who should be on campus, who should not) Campus police is going to be on heightened alert.
- Arrangements for housing of key personnel (and families?) needed in recovery of campus.

ACADEMICS

- Many of our instructors had to develop an alternative environment for learning and subsequently offered online courses to our students.
- Be sure to have an online environment prepared to handle and increase in usage should on campus courses not be able to meet for an extended period of time.
- Instructors should have all forms of communication in case of an emergency posted on their syllabus or website.

It is important to note that while we had some written and non-written agreements in place for some of our students on a few UT campus' there were no system wide policies in place to allow one institution to assist another during the time of a disaster. Students who found themselves evacuated to another UT campus for a short time ran into some hurdles when dealing with various facilities, health care, food, housing, temporary ID's and having a point of contact.