Virginia Tech: From Tragedy to Recovery

Zenobia Lawrence Hikes, Vice President for Student Affairs
Edward F.D. Spencer, Associate Vice President for Student Affairs
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NASPA Conference, Boston, March 11, 2008
# The Historical Comparison (since 1965): An Unprecedented Challenge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># Casualties</th>
<th># Univ.</th>
<th>Casualties: Fatalities &amp; Injured</th>
<th>Fatalities</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt;50</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7/6/3/4</td>
<td>6/4/3/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>25 Total</td>
<td>44 Total</td>
<td>33 Total</td>
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Zenobia Lawrence Hikes
### April 16, 2007

A blustery morning with snow flurries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>About 7:15 a.m.</td>
<td>First shootings (Emily Hilscher and Ryan Clark) occur on the 4th floor of West Ambler Johnston residence hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:20 a.m.</td>
<td>First call to the VT Police (“fall from loft”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:21 a.m.</td>
<td>VT Rescue Squad dispatched</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:24 a.m.</td>
<td>First officer arrives, reports actual shootings, calls for more resources</td>
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Edward F.D. Spencer
April 16th (continued)

7:30 a.m. Spencer arrives at his office and is shortly thereafter notified through the housing housekeeping staff that “an R.A. has been shot in West AJ.”

7:55 a.m. Spencer arrives in West AJ and is directed to the 4th floor by VT police officers

8:02 a.m. Spencer notifies V.P. Hikes by cell phone
Roles Assumed

1. **Assisting police**
   a. obtaining emergency contact information for the families of the two students
   b. directing housekeeping staff not to empty any trash
   c. coordinating with the police all entries to and exits from the building
   d. Sending out instructions to staff and students

Edward F.D. Spencer
Roles Assumed (continued)

2. Informed of progress of investigation, prime suspect, etc.

3. After first call about Norris Hall shootings, remained on 4th floor of WAJ with some police and kept in contact with the VP and other staff

Roles Assumed (continued)

5. 1:30 p.m. meeting of DSA Leadership Team
   a. Checking and rechecking with each other
   b. Planning convocation for the next day
   c. Finalizing all arrangements and temporary centers for counseling service
Roles Assumed (continued)

6. The Inn at Virginia Tech
   a. Press
   b. Distressed families and friends
   c. Counselors and other volunteers
   d. Government agencies
   e. The Public

7. From that point forward
   a. Coordinating interaction with students and staff
   b. Press conferences and interviews
   c. Liaison to the family of Mary Karen Reed
   d. Commencement and Commencement Housing
   e. Committee and Task Force assignments
Advice from NASPA Colleague

The phone message from former NASPA President and long-time colleague, Jim Rhatigan.

The suggestions from the conversation:

1. Use top student leadership in the discussions
2. Hold a memorial gathering ASAP
3. Cancel classes for a while
4. Let students who want to, leave now and take the grade they have so far in the course

Edward F.D. Spencer
Suggestions (continued):

5. Watch out for the well-being of off-campus students who can too easily “be off by themselves”

6. Assign one professional staff member to each affected family (deceased and injured)

7. Give the injured and the families a direct hot line to the President (e-mail and phone) and contacts for each other (if willing)

8. Send University representatives to funerals
Suggestions (continued):

9. Develop compensation packages for families and for the injured

10. Gear up for the future (the one-month, six-month, one-year and annual anniversaries) and for the fact that unexpected things will prompt unexpected reactions at unexpected times.

11. Get ready for the “Are you O.K.?”, continual questions and your tendency to say “Yes” or “Sure”. But you will not be; that will come much later.
Debt Repaid/Passing It On

- Northern Illinois University
  - Dr. Chris Flynn spending the first week with NIU staff
  - Residence Life staff, Alison Malloy and Susan Sherbak spend a week working at NIU with Residence Life staff
  - VT fraternity and sorority members visit the NIU campus
  - Many VT staff talked with their counterparts
  - VT Vigil for NIU ("Hokies" for "Huskies")
Logistical Challenges of 4/16

Facts on the ground in the worst mass-casualty crisis in the history of higher education
Acts of the Virginia Tech Rescue Squad

- Foreshadowing at a mid-March meeting
- From a fallen bunk bed to the fallen
- Act of violence to acts of war
- Student as medic & hero
- Taking care of others; taking care of selves
Crisis Headquarters: The Inn at Virginia Tech

- Receiving parents and other family members
- Receiving professional help-givers
- Receiving volunteers
- Receiving the press
- The order of reception
- Tone and mood
Legal Interface

- Working with the medical examiner
- Coordinating with police
- Dealing with HIPAA
- Dealing with FERPA
- Dealing with professional ethics
- Dealing with state requirements
- Compassion and responsibility
Mental Health Challenges

- Psychological first-aid; longer-term assistance
- Dealing with the range of injured
- Place-related phobias
- Expansion (for response and prevention)
- Establishment of case managers
- Suicide prevention & family notification procedures
- Mandatory Assessment & Voluntary Counseling
- The Scope of the Counseling Center
Physical Health Demands

- Visiting the sick
- Wound-care treatment
- Temporary disabilities
- Heightened concerns follow: real & imagined
- Care of the temporarily disabled
Role of Dean of Students Office

- **EARLY RESPONSE**
  - Dispatch of staff members
  - “Command Center”
  - Point of contact for students/parents
    - 3 lines to 20 lines – Call Center
Role of Dean of Students Office

CONTINUED RESPONSE

- Return of possessions
- Funeral logistics
- Parent inquiry
Families of Deceased Students

- Notification and support
- Accommodations, immediate needs, travel arrangements, expenses, etc.
- Family liaisons – identification, training, support
Outpouring of Support

- Memorial gifts – 3 locations
- Management of gifts – database
- Volunteers
- University Development staff
- Liaisons – family wishes – scholarships
Financial Resources

- Hokie Spirit Memorial Fund
- Criminal Injuries Compensation Fund
- Victims Witness Assistance Program
- United Way
- Red Cross
- Etc.
Ripple Effects

- Heightened Awareness
  - Student and parent needs
  - Faculty/staff needs
- Departmental needs – additional staff
- Reminded of “normal” scenarios
- What remains, volume of needs
- Case management
“You probably feel like you’re running a sprint; but, let me assure you that you are at the beginning of a marathon”

Frank DeAngelis, Principal, Columbine High School
Injured Students

- Challenge: Getting their names
- Role of Liaisons
  - Response and assistance provided
  - Available resources and services
- Endurance
- “Injured helping injured”
Broaden Your Definitions

When considering “Injured” and “Victims”

THINK INCLUSIVELY

- Witness
- Emotionally injured
- Affected Parties
  - Students; faculty/staff; first responders; families; alumni; campus & community members

Donna Cassell Ratcliffe
Survey of Norris Hall Students

Purpose:

To make personal calls to all students (survivors) who were enrolled in classes in Norris Hall at the time of the April 16th shootings

1. Assure students of Virginia Tech’s concern.
2. Learn whether they were in class that day.
3. Identify the affects this event has had on them (injury, trauma, etc.)
4. Learn whether they plan to return to VT in the Fall (summer).
5. Determine any concerns they might have as they return to campus and attend classes.

6. Provide a list of campus services and programs and learn of their needs and interests.

7. Inform them of services (i.e., counseling, etc.) and resources (i.e., Criminal Injuries Compensation Fund and Victims Witness Assistance Programs) available to them this summer.
## Survey Results

### Services Desired Upon Return to Campus (Fall 2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>MAYBE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to meet with other Norris Hall students</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tour of Norris Hall</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Counseling (with other Norris Hall students)</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Counseling</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxation skills and classes (yoga, aerobics)</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced academic advising and support</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastoral Counseling</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special programming for classes and student groups</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability services (including difficulty concentrating)</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share email address with other Norris Hall students</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Donna Cassell Ratcliffe
Recovery & Support Office
http://www.recovery.vt.edu

Donna Cassell Ratcliffe
Recovery & Support Office (continued)

- **Established to**
  - support injured faculty, students and their families
  - support the families of those who died
  - streamline communications – internally and externally
Ever changing and additional roles

- Translate expressed needs
- Take “arrows” for the administration
- Write and implement grants (Department of Education – granted, and The Justice Department – pending)
- Receive all gifts, cards, mementos – record and store
- Government relations – represent VT-related causes
- Offer debriefing sessions for original liaisons
“Remembering Those We Lost” – individual sessions for each faculty member and student – for family, friends, students, and others to gather and share stories

Create a Resource Office for University employees – resources and a place to gather

Serve on anniversary committee and implementation of the program
Recovery & Support Office (continued)

- **Features:**
  - This office reports to the President
  - Director was identified outside of the University
  - 10 staff members, most of whom are “on loan” from other VT departments
  - Costs - This has been, thus far, a $1.5 million endeavor
    - Staff; Space; Furnishings; Phones, computers & support; Resources; Mailing to families (those things sent to campus for them); Receptions, meetings, events; Hotel accommodations for families coming to campus
Somos Virginia Tech!
Virginia Tech Alumni all over Latina America, Spain and Portugal are wearing Orange and Maroon to show their solidarity with their fellow Hokies in Blacksburg and the rest of the World. They have been lighting candles in memory of the victims specially two of their own: Juan Ortiz and Daniel Perez Cueva.
Daniel and Juan, like many Latin American before them, came to Blacksburg pursuing their dreams and left Blacksburg knowing that their fellow Hokies will keep their dreams alive and make them their own.
Somos Virginia Tech (We Are Virginia Tech).
When Peace
like a river
attends all my way
When sorrow is not like a sea, it rolls
who reads my line
This one
We are Virginia Tech

We are sad today, and we will be sad for quite awhile.
We are Virginia Tech.
We are strong enough to stand tall, tearless, we are brave enough to bend to cry, and we are sad enough to know we must laugh again. We are strong, and brave, and innocent, and unafraid. We will continue to invent the future through our blood and tears and through all our sadness. We are the Hokies.

We will prevail.
We will prevail.
We will prevail.

We are Virginia Tech.
Our thoughts and deepest condolences are extended to those affected by the horrific events of this unthinkable tragedy.

Our Sympathies,
South Dakota State University
Student Union Student Employees
OUR HEARTS ARE WITH YOU VT
WE HAVE HOKIE PRIDE
Guy A. Sims
Our Advice for Others

- Give immediate attention to all families coming to campus looking for their students.
- In addition to University Liaisons, have a victim advocate assigned to each victim/family.
- Grieving families expect early and frequent communication from the President.
- Create an opportunity for the campus to mourn together: Convocation.
Our Advice for Others (continued)

- Give students options for how to complete the semester.
- Media: they are going to come, set a location and offer the community guidelines.
- Expand your definition of “injured” and “victims”.
- Accept the help of others.
- Frequent and clear communication is critical – internally and externally.
Our Advice for Others (continued)

- Include representatives of affected populations in decisions where it is appropriate (memorials, buildings, ceremonies, etc.)
- Set up a fund and have external person (pro bono) to determine how the funds will be dispersed
- Recognize that providing support and assistance is not an admission of guilt
- Be prepared for great criticism
Questions?